The Historical Transformation of Media:
A Cultural Analysis of Musical Theatre Recordings and Professional Wrestling

Leighann C. Neilson*

Fiona A.E. McQuarrie**

***Contact Author**: Leighann Neilson is Assistant Professor, Marketing, Sprott School of Business, Carleton University, Ottawa, ON, Canada K1S 5B6. Email: leighann_neilson@carleton.ca. Dr. Neilson's research interests include: social and cultural influences on consumption; the intersection of family history, collective memory and touristic consumption; business history and consumer culture theory. In previous research, Dr. Neilson examined ethical decision making within the professional wrestling marketplace culture.

**Fiona McQuarrie is a professor of Human Resources and Organization Studies, Business Administration, University of the Fraser Valley, 33844 King Road, Abbotsford, BC, Canada V2S 7M8. Email: fiona.mcquarrie@ufv.ca. Dr. McQuarrie's research interests include the intersection of work and leisure, particularly for workers involved in "serious leisure" outside the workplace, and the business aspects of the professional wrestling industry.

Abstract

This paper employs Wendy Griswold's cultural analysis framework to examine how changes in media forms over time shape cultural products, using case studies of professional wrestling and soundtrack recordings of Broadway musicals. Griswold's method is premised on the argument that in order to understand the role or importance of a particular cultural object within a society, and the form which the object takes, we need to take into account not only the attributes of the cultural object, but also the intentions of its producers and its reception by consumers, as well as the social context in which the cultural object is produced and consumed, over time and space. In this paper, we focus our attention on the link between the producer and the cultural object, specifically identifying technological influences, such as changes within specific media channels, on the production process and form of the cultural object.

In attempting to reconstruct the influences of social forces on the production of cultural objects over time, we adopt an historical approach, seeking an explanation of the complex causes of change and a better understanding of how markets actually behave (as opposed to how management theories suggest they should behave). Our study of the evolution of soundtrack recordings of Broadway musicals demonstrates the applicability of Griswold's framework to business operations by tracing changes to the business model for these recordings. This analysis also builds on Griswold's model by suggesting several refinements. Tracing the history of professional wrestling in North America over substantially the same time frame allows us to identify how changes in industry structure, broadcast technologies, and media channels influenced the form of the cultural object. Utilizing two case studies highlights both strengths and deficiencies in the methodological framework.

Our analysis contributes to the discussion of how shifts in distribution and changes in media affect the stories we tell and the art forms we produce.

INTRODUCTION

Wendy Griswold (1987a, 1994) argues that, in order to understand and explain the importance of a particular cultural object within society, we need to take into account not only the attributes of the object, but also the actions and intentions of its creators/producers and receivers/consumers, and the social context in which the object is produced and consumed. Griswold's influential cultural methodology has been employed within the sociology of culture field, and has also been recommended to business researchers as a method for studying consumption phenomena sociologically (Holt, 1995). However, few instances of its application within business research can be found. Therefore, the purpose of this discussion is to assess the usefulness of Griswold's framework in exploring the creation and dissemination of cultural objects as commercial products. In doing so, we build on Innis' contention (Innis, 1951) that media form shapes trade, social structures and cultural products, by examining how changes in broadcast and information media over time have shaped two popular culture products: professional wrestling and soundtrack recordings of Broadway musicals.

Griswold defines 'cultural objects' as "shared significance embodied in form, [that is], an expression of social meanings that is tangible or can be put into words" (1987a, p. 4), and discusses the examples of a religious doctrine, a hairstyle, a sonnet, or a quilt. She contends that status as cultural objects is not an inherent property of objects, but rather results from an analytic decision made by the researcher to attend to the cultural significance, or meaning beyond itself, of the object (Griswold, 1994). Elite culture is not treated differently from popular culture, and intangible cultural objects, such as systems of beliefs, do not require different handling than tangible cultural objects (Griswold, 1987a). Hence, a wide variety of phenomena have been analyzed using this method, including country music (Hughes, 2000); music radio and television

programming (Ahlkvist, 2001; Bielby & Bielby, 1994); state-subsidized theatre in Fascist Italy (Berezin, 1994); war films (McGregor, 1993); novels (Griswold, 1992); sculpture (Dauber, 1992); commemoration practices (Vinitzky-Seroussi, 2002; Wagner-Pacifici & Schwartz, 1991) and cultural revivals (Altizer, 1992).

Griswold's framework focuses on the relationships between cultural objects and 'social agents'. 'Social agents' refers to individuals in their roles as creators and receivers, or in the business vernacular producers and consumers, of cultural objects, as well as to individuals more broadly in terms of social classes, groups of like-minded producers (e.g., cultures of production) or consumers (e.g., fan subcultures) and at the macro level to society itself.

There are four types of action that Griswold sees as occurring in the interaction space between an individual (whether a producer or consumer) and a cultural object: Intention, Reception, Comprehension and Explanation. Griswold combines these four actions into a framework for cultural analysis that starts with the cultural object and culminates in a socially and culturally embedded explanation of the object's meaning. Griswold suggests that we begin the cultural analysis process by paying close attention to the cultural object itself, in effect taking the cultural object as a first source of evidence (Griswold, 1994). Analysis starts with a classification of the object in terms of genre, and then proceeds to the description of formal structures inherent in the object, followed by the identification of symbols and patterns of symbols.

Attention then shifts to what Griswold calls the 'pivot' of the framework: the agent, which she identifies as the producer(s) and/or consumer(s). The analyst must endeavor to "know enough about the agent's social and historical context, and about his immediate productive or receptive conditions, to produce a justifiable reconstruction of his intentionality" (Griswold,

1987a, p. 25). The producer is understood to be influenced both by practical situation and by membership in specific social categories (e.g. class, gender, race, age, education, occupation) and different types of groups in society (e.g. membership groups such as academics, professional engineers) Baxandall (1985) suggests that the simplest way to get at the relationship between cultural object and producer is to ask why a particular object takes the form it does. "The maker of a picture or other historical artefact is a man addressing a problem of which his product is a finished and concrete solution. To understand it we try to reconstruct both the specific problem it was designed to solve [the charge] and the specific circumstances out of which he was addressing it [the brief]" (Baxandall, 1985, p. 14-15.) Griswold (1987a, p. 6) defines the charge as "a general and immediate prompt for an agent to act." The charge, which can be internally or externally generated, embodies a set of social expectations and particular concerns – a bridge should not fall down, a painting should provide intentional visual interest (Baxandall, 1985).

Along with identifying the charge, the analyst needs also to reconstruct the brief: "a list of constraints and influences, clustered by their sources and types" (Griswold, 1987a, p. 7). A typical brief might include: elements of the agent's biography including training and experience, group memberships and collegial influences; physical or legal constraints; local conditions, such as community expectations or standards; aesthetic forms and conventions, including those of the genre within which the object fits; immediate circumstances, such as financial resources, cultural resources or materials available; and institutional influences, represented by the actions of competitors or stability of market structure (Fine, 1977; Altizer, 1992). The goal of reconstructing the 'brief' is to use it "as a tool specifying important aspects of the context, which can be combined with some notion of a 'general condition of human rational actions' to relate the brief to the object" (Dauber, 1992, p. 587).

In the final analytical step, the influence of the more immediate spatial and temporal context is linked to the more remote context – society in general. Themes that arise from the focal analysis can be theoretically generalized to the broader societal context. For example, 'lessons learned' from an analysis of one type of cultural object may have implications for our understanding of the production and reception of other forms of cultural or commercial products.

In reconstructing the charge and brief of the producer, Griswold (1987b; 1992) and others (e.g. Altizer, 1992; Baxandall, 1985), favor a historical approach to explain the complex causes of change (Smith & Lux, 1993). Within the business literature as well, historical analysis has proven useful for revealing how industry structures change over time (Golder, 2000), providing a better understanding of how markets and competitors actually behave rather than how theories indicate they are supposed to behave (Savitt, 1980). In this discussion we link these two concepts by providing a historical analysis of two forms of commercial product – professional wrestling and Broadway musical soundtrack recordings – using Griswold's framework to examine how a commercial product is developed and marketed, and how the product/object may be altered by its experiences in the marketplace. The full analysis of all linkages is lengthy; we therefore constrain our discussion to the results of our analysis of the linkage between the producer's intention and the cultural object, and the social forces which impact on this linkage. We focus on the influence of production costs, changes in industry structure, shifts in products' perceived genre, and the influence of changing media forms. We do not propose that these are the only social forces which affect the linkage between the producer and object; however, our focus is intended to illustrate how strongly influential these particular factors can be.

THE FIRST EXAMPLE: BROADWAY MUSICAL SOUNDTRACK RECORDINGS

The first example that we will use to demonstrate the applicability of Griswold's model in a commercial context, and one which also demonstrates the model's limitations, is the evolution of the business model for original cast albums (also known as soundtrack albums) of Broadway musicals.

The Broadway musical first became recognized as a distinct art form in the first part of the 20th century (Knapp, 2005). Individual songs from musicals were often recorded and became hits outside the context of the show they were included in, but by the mid-1940s it was common practice to produce an original cast album for popular musicals "as a matter of course" (Mordden, 1976, p. 201). By the mid-1950s, recording techniques and record production technology had developed to the point where an original cast album was an economically feasible venture for a record company, and nearly every musical show on Broadway was recorded and the album released commercially (Mordden, 1976). The recording of an original cast album required some up-front investment on the part of the record company, because of the costs of studio time and the payments to cast members, which were regulated by collective agreements in the highly unionized performing arts. However, once an album was produced it had the potential of selling consistently over many years if the show became popular, and especially if the show reached an audience beyond New York, through such means as touring productions, radio or television broadcasts, or film adaptations. The potential for an ongoing stream of revenue from this source was such that several record companies took the step of co-producing new musicals; in exchange for this investment in the production a company would be guaranteed the right to record and distribute the original cast album.

However, by the mid-1990s, this business model was showing signs of becoming obsolete. The major concern for record companies was that in many cases the cost of producing an original cast album was no longer offset by the potential revenue stream from that product. There were multiple causes for this situation. One was that the cost of producing a musical on Broadway had increased substantially, due to such factors as increased property costs in New York, affecting the cost of performance and rehearsal space. Increases in staffing costs also occurred because of increased pay rates and because of collective agreement terms establishing such baselines as the minimum number of live musicians needed in a musical's orchestra (Walker, 1995). A production also needs ongoing funding once it opens; it is estimated that each week of performances can cost between $500,000 and $700,000 US (Bay, 1998) and that each individual performance costs approximately $60,000 US (Berfield, 2005). While these costs are, of course, offset by ticket sales, ticket prices must be set at a level where they are affordable or attractive to potential audience members. Since many theatres in New York are designated historical sites and thus are under restrictions affecting how much renovation or remodeling is permitted, the number of seats cannot be increased as a way to increase ticket revenue. In this situation, ticket pricing becomes critical in the financial success of a production. In many cases the difference between the costs of operating productions and the revenue from ticket sales is so miniscule that musicals must attract nearly-full houses at every performance for the show to be financially viable (Bay, 1998).

Another factor inflating the costs of producing musicals was the increasingly sophisticated technology needed to create the spectacles that audiences came to expect. Successful musicals such as *Les Miserables* and *The Phantom of the Opera*, with their elaborate sets and production design, have forced other productions to follow suit. The musical *Wicked*,

which opened on Broadway in 2004, was capitalized at $14 million US, of which $5 million US went into the physical production (Riedel, 2004). Musicals were also beginning to incur increasingly large development costs in out-of-town "tryout" performances, which allow the show to be performed outside New York and receive audience and critical feedback in hopes of being able to revise the show to improve its chances of success on Broadway. While "tryout" runs were quite common in even the earliest days of Broadway musicals, their importance increased as the cost of Broadway productions increased, because of the potentially huge losses that might be avoided by improving the show prior to its Broadway debut.

To give an example of the scale of these costs, producing a new musical is currently estimated to cost between $12 million and $14 million US (Reidel, 2004), and the potential for losses is equally huge. The musical *Taboo*, which played only 100 performances on Broadway in 2004, lost nearly $10 million US, most of which was money from an individual investor: talk-show host Rosie O'Donnell (Reidel, 2004). The 2006 Broadway production of *Lestat*, a musical by Elton John and Bernie Taupin based on Anne Rice's "vampire" novels, was somewhat more secure financially, since it was the first theatrical production of a subsidiary of the wealthy Time Warner Corporation. Nevertheless, *Lestat* incurred an estimated $14 million US in development costs before it opened in New York. It played 33 preview performances, received devastatingly bad reviews, and ran for another 36 performances before closing at an undisclosed loss (Broadway.com, 2006). In assessing the chances of a Broadway musical's being profitable, it is worth noting that the average rate of success for new musical productions ("success" being defined as returning the entire cost of investment) between 1945 and 1990 was 24%. In other words, 78% of musicals produced during that period were "flops" (Rosenberg & Harburg, 1993).

Logically, the possibility that a show will be successful enough to cover its costs decreases as production costs increase. So in many cases an original cast album was not recorded because the investment in a recording was deemed too risky if the show itself was perceived to have marginal chances of success. In the mid-1990s, the average original cast album cost approximately $400,000 US to produce (Lunden, 2006). Because of the increases in New York property costs and the increasing decentralization of the recording industry in the United States, many of the studios formerly used to record original cast albums from Broadway shows had closed. By the mid-1990s only a few recording studios in New York were physically capable of accommodating a musical's full cast and orchestra. Thus, another factor in the decision to produce an original cast album while the musical was still perceived to have commercial potential was the availability of adequate facilities (which were also servicing such clients as classical music recordings and advertising production).

A further challenge in producing and marketing original cast albums was the costs associated with using unionized performers. The collective agreements governing the work of these performers made such stipulations as performers being paid a flat sum for each solo and duet performed on a recording, and for any song lasting longer than three minutes and 10 seconds, the performer being paid one and a half times more than they would be for performing a shorter song. The net result of regulations such as these, while clearly intended to prevent exploitation of the performers' work, was that performers could often make more money from a single recording session than they could from a week of actual live performances of the show. Other costs were generated from contractual stipulations such as the specification that if album artwork used photographs from the actual production, the union representing the stagehands employed by the show had to receive a payment, since their members were working when the

photographs were taken. Many record companies pointed to costs such as these, and the relative inflexibility of the performing arts unions in negotiating exceptions to these regulations, as reasons why it was increasingly financially unfeasible to produce original cast albums (Portantiere, 2005).

A further complication to the situation was the changing expectations of the recording industry in general about returns on investments and the speed of those returns. In the opinion of many observers of the recording industry, when original cast albums became commercially popular in the mid-1950s, record companies had the financial resources, and possibly also the patience, to invest in the creation of a product that might not recover its costs for several years. However, as record companies increasingly came under the ownership of large conglomerates used to operating on a more rapid business model, these expectations were altered. By the mid-1990s, according to Bill Rosenfeld, a former senior vice president of show and soundtrack production at the record company Sony/BMG, records in any genre were expected to show a profit within six to 10 months of release, and it became much less likely that investments in products would be made if revenues would probably not recover production costs that quickly (quoted in Portantiere, 2005). This business model clearly did not support the traditional long-term return on investment that original cast albums usually generated.

The end result of the interrelationship between these factors was that many new musicals did not have original cast albums recorded, meaning that those who were unable to see the show in New York or on tour were not able to experience the show, and that the music would remain largely inaccessible unless written sheet music for the show was created (and in many cases, even this form of preservation was lost if producers did not want to invest in creating a folio of sheet music from the show). This situation was perceived by many performers and musical

theatre fans as being detrimental to the future vitality of what is considered an uniquely North American art form, and which has a passionately devoted audience. However, as long as the major record companies continued to expect quick returns on investments, and as long as the costs of recording original cast albums continued at their existing levels, there seemed very little possibility that the situation would change.

The two factors that reversed this trend and revitalized the original cast album industry were (1) changes in recording production technology and distribution, and (2) the creation of independent record companies, in many cases run by individuals with little or no experience in the record industry but with extensive experience in musical theatre. The major technological change was the introduction of compact discs (CDs) as a format for recorded music. Recordings on CD can be produced in much greater volume and at lower cost than recordings on vinyl or cassette, and the sound quality of a CD is at least comparable to that of a vinyl record. Although an original cast recording might cost the same as before to record, it could now be produced and distributed much less expensively, making entry into this market much easier for producers lacking the resources of a major record company. A related factor was the development of online music distribution systems, which made it possible to sell music without using a physical medium such as a CD to transmit the product from creator to purchaser.

The growth of independent record companies in the original cast album business partially came about because of the increased access to the market afforded by changes in technology, but also because individuals involved in the theatre industry were concerned that music from interesting and well-reviewed musicals was going unrecorded. These individuals were familiar with the operations of the theatre industry, and thus realized that there were markets for these recordings that the major record companies had not explored, such as community theatre groups

or college and university musical theatre programs looking for new musicals to produce, or performers seeking relatively unknown material to use at auditions. From their experience in the industry, these individuals also believed that there were cross-marketing opportunities which the major record companies had also not completely explored, such as promoting an original cast recording as a souvenir of the show and having it on sale at the theatre.

The first individual who took advantage of these opportunities is Kurt Deutsch, a former stage, film and TV actor who now runs Sh-K-Boom/Ghostlight Records. The critical and commercial success of Deutsch's company is indicated by the fact that three out of the five 2006 Grammy nominations for best original cast recording were for records released by his label (Lunden, 2006). Deutsch explains that he knew very little about the music business when he and his wife, Sherie Rene Scott, started the company in 2000. Scott was starring in the Broadway musical *Aida* and was offered a recording contract to do an album of "Broadway show tunes". She felt that this was not the sort of record she was interested in making; she instead wanted to create an album of songs by composers she had worked with in the past, and to sell it through her website, which would be cross-promoted in her biography in the *Aida* program distributed to all theatre-goers at the show (Deutsch, n.d.). Deutsch and Scott financed the record themselves, avoiding the production costs of an original cast album because Scott was not singing songs from the show she was working in, and hired an experienced producer to oversee the project. Although the "office" of the record company was the second bedroom of their apartment, Deutsch and Scott were able to make a small profit on Scott's record, and soon produced similar albums for other Broadway musical performers who wanted to work with material other than show tunes or songs from the musicals they were working in.

By his own account, this experience led Deutsch to wonder if this model of doing business could be applied to original cast albums as well. The push that led him to actually attempt this idea came from a musical called *The Last Five Years* which Scott was performing in. "No other label wanted to record [the show] which I personally think is a masterpiece. I couldn't believe it. So I talked to the producers of the show about becoming financial partners in the cast album the same way they are partners in the show. And we made the album. I believe that the recording contributed to the fact that *The Last Five Years* has had over 200 productions around the world….[w]ithout the album, chances are the show would have only lived in the memory of those who saw it" (Deutsch, n.d.) Interestingly, unlike major record companies assessing recordings mostly in terms of their potential financial returns, Deutsch looks at recordings of Broadway musicals as contributions to an ongoing legacy, recalling his own childhood in St. Louis where an original cast album was often his only opportunity to hear a show produced in New York. "I think that there are thousands of people just like me that never get the chance to come to New York to see a show…. I feel a tremendous responsibility and honor that the company Sherie and I started will continue to provide kids with dreams – and the music they can dream to. I truly believe that if we were to stop making these records, a big part of Broadway would be lost" (Deutsch, n.d.)

Sh-K-Boom/Ghostlight Records' success has led to other companies entering the original cast album market: some independents, and, intriguingly, some independents working in tandem with established record companies. Philip Chaffin and Tommy Krasker, two musical theatre fans, run PS Classics from their home in New York State; their entry into the market came in 2003 when they secured the opportunity to produce the original cast album of the successful musical *Nine*. Their success has been sustained since then by, among other ventures, their

securing an alliance with the famous musical composer Stephen Sondheim, which has led to PS Classics releasing original cast albums from both new Sondheim productions and revivals of existing shows. Additionally, PS Classics has produced original cast albums of Broadway revivals of older shows such as *Fiddler on the Roof* (Lunden, 2006). Perhaps inspired by the high prices collectors will pay for rare original cast albums, another company, DRG Records, has embarked on a series of CD reissues of out-of-print original cast albums. The record companies that own the rights to the original recording produce the CD and license the recording to DRG; according to DRG's owner, Hugh Fordin, the only real cost his company incurs is creating the CD packaging, which may be based on the original album artwork or which may be enhanced or expanded for the CD format (Portaniere, 2005).

A further indication of the success of this new model of producing original cast albums is that, as the visionaries in the field originally believed to be possible, music from shows is now being recognized and used as a marketing tool for the show. The marketing of the musical *The Color Purple*, which opened on Broadway in early 2006, provides several examples of how this can be done. The musical was perceived as being a risky investment because of the "serious" issues in its storyline, and its appeal to African-Americans, who do not form a large part of the Broadway musical audience (Berfield, 2005~~6~~). The show's producer, Scott Sanders, attempted to counteract these perceived problems by recording a three-song CD of music from the show several months before the show's official opening and mailing the CD to 500,000 regular theatre goers. When Oprah Winfrey became an investor in the show in late 2005, the full cast of the show appeared on her television program to perform two of the show's songs. Sanders also contracted with a subsidiary of EMI Records not only to record the original cast album with the Broadway cast, but also to have two songs from the show recorded as singles by big-name

performers (Berfield, 2005). Along similar lines, the producers of the musical *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels* recorded their show in advance of its opening (in partnership with Sh-K-Boom/Ghostlight Records) and factored the cost of the CD into ticket prices for the show, so they were able to distribute 50,000 "free" CDs to audience members (The Situation, 2006). In the future, music may be used as a marketing tool in such ways as having banner ads on ticket sale sites which would allow visitors to the site to hear songs from the show, or distributing CD-ROMs with music from the show which would also contain links to ticketing sites or other sites promoting the show (The Situation, 2006). In Kurt Deutsch's words, "For so long, the show producers and the record labels didn't work together [and] there were many missed opportunities. Our business model is very different….We work in partnership with the producers to try to make the music more available to them to sell the show" (quoted in The Situation, 2006).

Applicability of Griswold's Framework

To relate this history to Griswold's framework, we will first review the underlying premises of the framework. These are:

- The producing agent is the creator of the cultural object, and has intentions which may be constrained by conditions at the time of the object's creation
- The recipient of the cultural object creates an "interpretation" for the object which connects it to the recipient's external social world The processes of producing and receiving cultural objects may be diffused across time and space, and such diffusion may affect both processes

In applying this model to the situation of original cast recordings, we can see that many of the premises of Griswold's model hold true. The collectivity of the musical's creators and performers, along with the record company, serves as the producer of the cultural object – the original cast recording - while the purchasers of the record serve as the recipient. The premise

of the recipient creating an "interpretation" for the object is particularly pertinent for those purchasers who may not have actually seen a live performance of the show, since their conceptualization of the cultural object would be different from someone who had attended the show (as demonstrated e.g. by Deutsch's comment about original cast albums allowing people who could never travel to New York to have some part of the experience of seeing the show). Griswold also uses the terms "charge" and "brief" to identify elements of the cultural agent's intentions, with "charge" being the prompt for an agent to act, and "brief" being the list of constraints and influences affecting the cultural agent's choice of activities in producing the object. In the case of original cast recordings, the "charge" would likely encompass the perception that a recording would be profitable for the record company and/or the show's producers (and, generously, might also include the less commercially motivated desire to immortalize a fine set of songs or an outstanding musical score). Among the constraints and influences forming the "brief" might be the technological limitations of transferring a complete show possibly lasting more than two hours in performance onto a medium with a shorter playing time; the perceived cost of the investment in the recorded medium in comparison to the perceived return; the difficulty of replicating elements creating the visual and structural "feel" of a musical show into an audio-only format; and possible issues around copyright, royalties, and remuneration for the creators and performers involved.

The diffusion of the cultural product across time and space is a particularly relevant consideration in this situation, since original cast albums are often available long after the musical itself is no longer being performed live. Also, as mentioned, these recordings are often consumed as cultural objects by recipients who have no experience of seeing the show performed live. Thus, their interpretation of the cultural object is influenced not by the live experience, but

by their own framework of understanding, which may be shaped not only by artifacts related to the cultural object (e.g. photographs of the production on the album cover) but also by their individual experience with similar cultural objects or phenomena (e.g. someone with formal musical education may perceive a recording of a musical differently than someone without such background). It should also be noted that the diffusion of the cultural object through time and space can lead to changes in the object which are not generated by the producing agent. For example, some of the original song lyrics in the 1927 musical *Show Boat* – a show which has several African-American characters – have been altered over time by individuals other than the original creators to reflect more enlightened social attitudes towards African-Americans.

However, some aspects of Griswold's model fail to explain the changes which have occurred in how original cast albums are produced and consumed. Griswold's model implies a separation between producer and consumer. In the case of the production of original cast albums, the recipient/consumer, or at least a specific part of the audience constituting the collective recipient, evolved into the producer, in taking over the production of the cultural object when the original producing agent ceased to perform that action. Griswold's model implies an interaction between producer and consumer in which the producing agent will respond to the reaction of the consumer/recipient toward the cultural object and alter it accordingly; for example, if the recipient rejects the cultural object or consumes it in a manner quite different from that intended by the producer, the producer may alter the cultural object to more closely match the perceived needs or wants of the recipient. In the case of original cast albums, it could be argued that the needs or wants of the consumer (the record buyers) did not change, in that there were still recipients for the cultural object (the albums); however, the intention and the brief of the producer (the record company/musical producers) changed due to constraints (the increasing cost

of staging or recording musical productions) so that they were no longer able or willing to produce the cultural object. Griswold's model does not explicitly discuss under what circumstances the relationship between producing agent and recipient may cease to exist – which may be because in some cases, the relationship is indefinite even if the specific participants change (e.g. a 21st century gallery-goer viewing a painting created in the 15th century). But it is possible that the immediate relationship between specific producing agents and recipients may end if the cultural object connecting them ceases to exist or to be produced.

While Griswold's model makes some reference to the general context in which the production and reception of cultural objects occurs, primarily around the individual or cultural frameworks and skill sets of participants in the process, Griswold does not spend much time analyzing larger social events which may influence the process. The case of original cast albums, however, is an excellent example of how contextual forces may affect the process of production and reception, regardless of the characteristics of the individuals involved. If changes in technology, such as the development of the CD format for recordings and digital means of distribution, had not occurred, the phenomenon of recipients becoming producing agents (record consumers becoming record producers) likely would not have been able to happen. The overlap between production and consumption that subsequently developed also changed how the cultural product was delivered and consumed; for example, the heads of independent record companies, because of their personal expertise in musical theatre, recognized and exploited markets which the larger record companies had ignored (e.g. amateur theatres and performers seeking audition material). Griswold's model does not fully account for this type of adjustment to the cultural object or its dissemination.

A SECOND EXAMPLE: PROFESSIONAL WRESTLING

In his examination of the development of country music, a cultural product often likened to professional wrestling, Peterson (1997) demonstrates how it took almost two decades of active collaboration between performers, record companies and the movie industry to create and establish country music as a genre of popular culture (Hirsch & Fiss, 2000). To emphasize that the emergence of the industry was not a natural evolution, and especially how the 'back stories' of the artists were purposefully altered or constructed and then came to be accepted, the expression 'fabricating authenticity' is used to refer to "the process by which collective representations of the past come to be accepted as genuine and authentic" (Hirsch & Fiss, 2000, p.103). This phrase could quite correctly be applied to professional wrestling, a cultural object whose historical development has been subject to much accidental and/or purposeful misconstruction (Stone & Oldenburg, 1967; Craven & Moseley, 1972; Freedman, 1983; Dawson et al., 1996; Dawson, 2003). Thus, in the analysis which follows, we tell *a* story of professional wrestling in North America, recognizing that none of the sources available can be considered 'true', in the sense of relating what 'really happened'. Regardless, the history of wrestling as it continues to be told and re-told provides the context within which producers of wrestling have been obliged to operate.

Although some writers credit Irish immigrants with the introduction of wrestling to the New England area of the United States in the 1830s (Greenberg, 2000), and others trace its lineage back further, to the middle of the 18th century (Fleischer, 1936), it is the post-World War II era with which this investigation is most concerned. Many chroniclers of wrestling history have linked wrestling's rise in popularity after World War II to the increasing diffusion of television (Greenberg, 2000; Hart, 2002; Hunter, 1999; Liebling, 1954; Lucas, 2000; Morton,

1986). The conditions of production of this new medium imposed certain constraints on and created opportunities for wrestling's producers. The television networks were in need of programming, and wrestling promoters began providing them with tapes of matches in an effort to attract audiences to live events. Boxing and wrestling became mainstays of television programming partly because cumbersome early TV cameras could readily cover action that was restricted to the space of the ring (Rutherford, 1990). Television cameras could provide close-up shots of individual, indoor sports, like wrestling, in a way they couldn't with outdoor sports performed over larger spaces, like baseball or football (Lucas, 2000).

As new television stations appeared, they often started producing their own wrestling shows in conjunction with the local promotion. Lou Thesz, whose St. Louis promotion signed a contract with a local TV station in 1947, commented, "It was almost the perfect show for those primitive times – it had action, melodrama, comedy, colorful personalities, and beefcake, and all that was required to broadcast it was an announcer and a single TV camera focused on a 20-by-20 ring" (Thesz, 2000, p. 101). While television made stars of some wrestlers, like Gorgeous George, it killed the careers of others because they would freeze under the camera's glare. The ability of a wrestler to project a persona on camera became critically important (Assael & Mooneyham, 2002; Thesz, 2000). "Actors had to face the camera, and notably, a director had to make the decision as to what action to cover. With television also came the moderator or announcer who could interpret the action for the television audience... Instead of being separate from the action, announcers were a part of the act which could save the match for the television audience" (Ball, 1990, p. 53).

Because televised shows drew large audiences, almost every wrestling show had a local sponsor. The fabricated nature of wrestling made it less risky for the advertiser than boxing.

“You’re always sure of a good show which will almost always go on for the specified period of time” (Business Week, 1950, p. 26), rather than ending in a quick first round victory which would not allow the advertiser time for his commercials. Wrestling also reached a ‘family audience’ and was less expensive than advertising on large network shows (Business Week, 1950; Liebling, 1954).

In 1951, fans in Los Angeles could not only watch wrestling every weeknight, and on Saturday afternoons, but could also tune in to watch wrestlers’ workouts on Sunday mornings (Greenberg, 2000). But by the late 1950s, television’s love affair with wrestling seemed to be ending, and wrestling was largely dropped from network TV. Over-exposure, declining ratings, and technological advances that made it possible for television to broadcast other events were contributing factors (Assael & Mooneyham, 2002; Thesz, 2000). Although the accepted wisdom is that wrestling suffered as a result, Thesz (2000) instead suggests that promoters learned how to use television as a promotional tool. “If you could get your TV program on a station in a rival promoter’s hometown, you might be able to attract his audience, which meant you could start running live matches there yourself and maybe take over the guy’s territory” (Thesz, 2000, p. 103). Rather than being paid to provide wrestling programming, promoters paid the television stations to air their products, just to keep rivals from getting the air time. One of the savviest exploiters of the wrestling television show as ‘infomercial’ was Vincent James McMahon, father of current WWE chairman Vincent K. McMahon (Assael & Mooneyham, 2002). Promoter and wrestler Verne Gagne became another pioneer by tailoring tapes of wrestling matches for specific markets. Gagne would send tapes of his American Wrestling Association matches free of charge to any television station that would air them. The tapes included commercials

advertising shows he planned to hold in that area in the coming months (Assael & Mooneyham, 2002).

As television technology developed, wrestling promoters continued to investigate and pursue the newly created advantages provided by these developments. As early as 1965, Toots Mondt, Vince McMahon Sr. and Frank Tunney proposed a match between Bruno Sammartino and Lou Thesz that would have been broadcast from Madison Square Garden on closed circuit television to another arena in New York City and to other cities across North America (Thesz, 2000). Closed circuit television had been used to televise heavyweight boxing matches, and wrestling promoters sought to adapt it to their business as well.

Vince McMahon Sr. wired a former theatre in Washington, D.C., for televised wrestling broadcasts, and when the DuMont Network ceased operations, he convinced the DuMont affiliate in Washington to carry his matches (Assael & Mooneyham, 2002). By the time Vince McMahon, Jr. entered the family business in 1971, WWF shows were airing in 30 cities in 14 states across the American east coast. McMahon, Jr. made changes to the way television events were produced by adding effects seen on other sports programs, such as slow motion. He also began experimenting with the format of matches – asking wrestlers to leave the confines of the ring and take the action out into the parking lots (Assael & Mooneyham, 2002). By 1983, when Vince Jr. and his wife, Linda, took over the WWF, the WWF was reportedly the most lucrative wrestling promotion in the United States (Thesz, 2000).

Much as the advent of television had occasioned the rise in popularity of wrestling in the 1950s, another technological innovation—cable television—provided the opportunity to promote professional wrestling in the 1980s (Hunter, 1999; Thesz, 2000). In 1984, 41 percent of American households, or 83.8 million homes, were wired for cable television. One American

cable TV company, USA Network, reached 29 percent of that market, meaning that a single broadcast had the potential of reaching 24 million homes – an extraordinary opportunity (Assael & Mooneyham, 2002). Morton (1986) argues that the situation paralleled the introduction of television in the 1950s, because there was a "large number of cable channels with cost-effective prime time slots and a need for original programming" (p. 4)

One of the shows broadcast by USA Network was *Southwestern Championship Wrestling*, based in San Antonio, Texas. In October 1983, during one of its broadcasts, two wrestlers hurled pig manure at each other. It was a public relations disaster for Southwestern and USA Network, but an opportunity for the WWF as they replaced Southwestern to become USA Network's new provider of professional wrestling programming. McMahon Jr. was so convinced that access to cable television was the way to demolish the competition that he approached television entrepreneur Ted Turner to propose taking over the provision of wrestling programming for Turner's Atlanta-based station, WTBS. When he didn't hear back from Turner promptly, McMahon Jr. arranged to buy 90 percent of the shares of Georgia Championship Wrestling, which broadcast two hours of wrestling every week on WTBS, a 'superstation' carried on many cable networks across the US (Assael & Mooneyham, 2002). After these two strategic moves, the WWF enjoyed a "virtual monopoly" on cable TV wrestling broadcasts Thesz, 2000).

Soon McMahon Jr. was producing five wrestling shows for cable television. At first, other promoters sent him tapes of their top talent, to be featured on his USA Network show *All American Wrestling*. But McMahon offered many of these performers lucrative deals to join his WWF, leaving other promoters without their superstars. McMahon started paying television stations to play his show at the same time as locally produced shows on other channels. Ignoring

the gentlemen's agreement to stay out of each other's territory that had existed between his father and other promoters, McMahon would also put on live WWF shows in other promoters' territories, featuring the wrestlers that he had persuaded to leave the promotions in that region.

McMahon also began aggressively buying up older established promotions and extending his influence in the wrestling world—but not without opposition. The National Wrestling Alliance competed head-on with the WWF, staging a match in New York City, the home base of the WWF, in 1984. Also in 1984, *Pro Wrestling USA* began appearing on New York television, featuring wrestlers from both the NWA and another promotion, the American Wrestling Association (Greenberg, 2000). The NWA positioned itself to appeal to more traditional wrestling fans, de-emphasizing the 'show business' aspects that were the WWF's stock in trade.

Nevertheless, by 1985 the WWF was promoting an average of three shows a night from coast to coast, and was expected to gross $100 million from all its products that year. *TNT*, the Tuesday night WWF talk show, was one of the top ten shows in the upscale cable-television market (Leerhsen et al., 1985). In fact, four of the top ten cable television programs in 1985 were wrestling broadcasts, and over 10 million people attended live events (Mondak, 1989). Wrestling was definitely on an upswing.

Perhaps the most important change that McMahon engineered occurred in 1989. WWF CEO Linda McMahon testified at a hearing in the New Jersey state legislature that WWF events were not sporting events but were instead 'sports entertainment' – in effect, publicly admitting that wrestling matches were scripted (McQuarrie, 2003b). Winners and losers were determined before the match began, and the wrestlers' real skills were in 'selling' their actions without causing serious injury to one another. This event marked the first time that a wrestler or promoter had publicly admitted that wrestling was 'fixed.'

The obsessive secrecy that previously surrounded the scripted nature of wrestling performances reflected producers' concentrated efforts, over a considerable portion of wrestling's history, to represent the product as part of the sport genre. Producers employed the symbols of professional sports in general, and boxing in particular – e.g. matches introduced by announcers and conducted in rings, attendance of doctors and trainers at ringside, ringing a bell to indicate the end of the match – to give their product the appearance of belonging to the sports genre. Linda McMahon's testimony marked the WWF's determination to reposition its offering as a new genre – sports entertainment.

Some of the old time wrestlers disapproved of this new approach, but Vince McMahon was quoted as saying, "It really doesn't matter to me whether someone believes it's real or fake. It matters that they enjoy what we do, the performance inside and outside the ring" (Scanlon et al., 1986, p. 36). Fan reaction seemed to support McMahon, as in the months afterward "the company enjoyed its best business ever" (Greenberg, 2000, p. 57.)

In 1988, Jim Crockett, the major American promoter in the NWA, sold his interest to Ted Turner, who renamed the promotion World Championship Wrestling (WCW) and placed responsibility for its operation in the hands of a number of executives, including Eric Bischoff, formerly a television announcer with the AWA (Greenberg, 2000). With the introduction in 1995 of the WCW's *Monday Nitro* on Turner's TNT cable network, programmed opposite WWF's *Monday Night RAW* on the USA Network, the two major wrestling organizations slugged it out toe-to-toe for fans' attention. By playing up storylines that featured defections of popular wrestlers from the WWF, and by introducing seeming threats from within posed by various factions, *Nitro* outdrew *RAW* for more than a year and a half (Greenberg, 2000). Commentators attributed WCW's appeal "to a postmodern audience who were not only wise to wrestling's

fakery, but reveled in it," and to its ability "to maintain at least three different realities at once: the action in the ring; the backstage pummelings and powwows; and the brilliant location sequences that ostensibly take place without even the ring announcers' knowledge" (Baldwin & Flaherty, 1999, p. 21).

Meanwhile, a third contender was entering the lucrative sports entertainment market. Extreme Championship Wrestling (ECW) started promoting matches in Philadelphia in 1992. They offered a form of entertainment that neither the WWF nor WCW had attempted, positioned on the idea of 'extreme'. Their matches featured excessive displays of acrobatics, bloody brawls, rings surrounded by barbed wire or fire, and the infamous TLC (tables, ladders and chairs) matches. Although ECW was not as successful at gaining national TV exposure as WCW or WWF, they had a profound effect on the content of professional wrestling by shaping fans' conceptions of what was considered entertainment in the ring. Eventually, many of their top stars were lured to the larger organizations, bringing with them the exciting stunts first conceived in ECW.

Both WCW and the WWF learned from the upstart ECW. They realized that fans wanted more than the traditional "good guy versus bad guy" storyline; fans loved to cheer the upstart, the rebel, the outsider, the antihero (Greenberg, 2000; Hunter, 1999). With its television ratings at their lowest point, the WWF introduced new storylines. McMahon took a page from WCW's play book and began framing matches with behind-the-scenes scenarios which elaborated on the story of his own family. McMahon began competing in wrestling matches himself, playing a character, Mr. McMahon, based loosely on his position as head of the WWF. "[F]ull of sex and intrigue, and starring the McMahons themselves... [these scenes] added a second layer of

unreality, creating ironic distance from the first. You could take it straight, or with a twist. Here was something to believe in: the candidly, honestly fake" (Leland, 2000).

While the 1980s upswing in wrestling's popularity had been based on traditional good-beats-evil story lines, the 1990s rebirth was perhaps best described as "bad-bashes-badder" (Feschuk, 2000, p. A19). No longer was there an obvious difference between good and evil – almost all of the characters were portrayed as lying, cheating and violating the rules (Maguire, 2000). As the new form of wrestling based on the projection of 'attitude' became popular, critics were quick to point out that its glorification of violence and its racist and sexist plot lines were inappropriate for young audiences (Levin, 1999; Mandel, 2002; Spencer, 2001; Varsallone, 1999). What Toronto promoter Jack Tunney had once labeled a 'harmless release for aggression' (Scanlon et al., 1986) was now being blamed for the violent deaths of four children, killed by other children using "moves they supposedly learned by watching televised wrestling" (Chunovic, 2001, p. 16). MCI pulled its advertising from the WWF show *SmackDown!* after the Parents Television Council appeared at an MCI shareholder meeting in 2000 and declared that it would hold the company responsible for further deaths of children (Chunovic, 2001)[1].

Wrestlers who had risen to fame in earlier times condemned the new "attitude" approach (Leland, 2000), but wrestling's popularity soared—especially with upscale audiences. According to USA Network, broadcasters of WWF's *SmackDown!*, "Between 1997 and 1998, the WWF... experienced a 156 percent increase in ratings among viewers with four or more years of college, while the ratings among households with incomes of $50,000 or more [were] up 111 percent" (Baldwin & Flaherty, 1999, p. 16). A reported 35 million viewers tuned in to the average fifteen

[1] The WWF filed a lawsuit against the Parents Television Council for defamation. In 2002, PTC president Brent Bozell admitted that he falsely blamed children's deaths on the WWF, and the PTC paid $3.5 million US in a pre-trial settlement (Higgins, 2002). Coca-Cola also pulled its ads at the same time as MCI because of 'objectionable content,' although it is not clear that this was due to the PTC's influence (Lavoie, 2000).

hours of wrestling broadcasts each week, and buys of televised pay-per-view events doubled (Baldwin &Flaherty, 1999; Stanley, 1999). In April 2000, seventeen years after WWF debuted on USA Networks, *Advertising Age* declared that, “wrestling is bigger than ever... [it] continues to prove unbeatable in cable TV’s ratings race” (Fine, 2000, p. S20).

Live wrestling events also enjoyed an increase in popularity. For the fiscal year ending April 30, 1999, attendance at WWF live events doubled, increasing from just over 1 million to 2.3 million (Stanley, 1999). With annual revenue of $1.1 billion (U.S.), professional wrestling ranked fourth among sports businesses, in 1998, just behind major league baseball (Mitchell, 1999). However, following years of steady growth, attendance at WWF events leveled off at 2.5 million in 2001. Ratings for *SmackDown!*, the WWF’s most popular television show, fell by 5%, and sales of WWF toys and videos fell as well (Grover & Lowry, 2001). WCW had not fared any better, and in March 2001, McMahon bought out the rival company for less than $5 million US (Goetzl, 2001).

In the face of financial decline, the WWF continued to diversify and explore new distribution channels. The WWF has since pioneered the use of new media to promote its brand, create a community experience for fans, and market and distribute its merchandise (Leland, 2000; WWE, 2002). Its website was one of the first Internet sites (other than pornography sites) to turn streaming video into profit, providing 8.5 million videostreams each month in 200l (Desmond, 2001; Leland, 2000). By April 2002, WWE Internet sites were generating over 330 million page views per month to serve approximately 7.3 million unique visitors, whose visits averaged 45 minutes in length (WWE, 2002). The company’s primary website, WWE.com, now attracts nearly 18 million unique users worldwide each month and generates an average of 35

million streams per month (WWE, 2007). It also includes Web-only content which is promoted during but not included in WWE television broadcasts.

Another component of WWE's multi-platform business strategy is its acquisition of the assets of its former competitors. From 2001 to 2004, WWE acquired the libraries of World Championship Wrestling, Extreme Championship Wrestling, American Wrestling Association, and Smokey Mountain Wrestling. It now owns an archive of over 75,000 hours of programming content, only 25,000 hours of which have been previously aired or released. This archive has been converted into digital format to support *WWE 24/7*, a subscription video-on-demand (SVOD) service (WWE, 2004). Net revenues from this service have grown from $0.1 million in 2005, *24/7*'s first year of operation, to $4.9 million in fiscal 2007 (WWE, 2007). WWE has been able to use this digital resource to pursue its goal of becoming a market-maker in SVOD, much as it did when it pioneered wrestling pay-per-view events on cable television (WWE, 2005). The digital archive also provides the raw materials necessary to create new products, such as 'best of' videos for current performers, and documentaries featuring historical stars such as Ric Flair and Hulk Hogan. But, perhaps most importantly, this strategic move on the part of WWE poses an almost insurmountable barrier to the re-entry of any of these organizations into televised wrestling, since WWE now owns their history.

Currently, WWE is not the only promoter of professional wrestling. There are a number of small independent wrestling promotions both in Canada and the US, operating along the lines of the old 'territories' and presenting live events in smaller markets within specific geographic regions (McQuarrie, 2003b). WWE's major television competition at present is TNA (Total Nonstop Action) Wrestling, which presents its two-hour *iMPACT!* show weekly on Spike TV in the US and cable networks in Canada, Mexico, Australia, Europe, the Middle East/Asia, and

Africa, along with monthly PPV events (Nashville Business Journal, 2008; TNAWrestling, 2009). TNA has also recently begun expanding its market presence by increasing its number of live events, in cities across North America and also to a limited extent in Europe, thus expanding its geographic reach beyond its television taping location in Orlando, Florida.

Applicability of Griswold's Framework

In the analysis of our first example, we evaluated the usefulness of Griswold's framework as an analytical tool by returning to the framework's underlying premises. With our second example, we focus on the efficacy of the 'charge' and 'brief' as tools for gaining a better understanding of changes in cultural objects over time and space.

The primary 'charge' for all producers of professional wrestling, including the owners of various promotions (WWF, NWA, AWA, WCW), the wrestlers and other performers (e.g., announcers) who enacted the scripts, and the network broadcasters who facilitated distribution of the cultural object to consumers, was to make a profit. But this charge included a set of social expectations: the product should be entertaining, it should appeal to a large enough and broad enough target audience to attract advertising dollars, and it should conform to socially and legally mandated standards in terms of its content. The framework's inclusion of social expectations related to the charge serves as a useful reminder that profit-seeking corporations cannot or should not continue to exist or to be profitable if they defy or ignore their societal responsibilities and society's expectations (Donaldson, 1982; Donaldson, 1989; Dunfee et al., 1999).

Griswold identifies some typical elements that might be included in a discussion of the producer's 'brief', such as the social agent's training and experience; local conditions, including

community expectations or standards; immediate circumstances, such as financial resources, cultural resources or materials available; and institutional influences, represented by the actions of competitors or the stability of the relevant market structure (Griswold, 1987a). While we can identify similar influences on the producers of professional wrestling - for example, as a novice announcer, Vince McMahon patterned himself after successful sports announcers of the time, such as Howard Cosell (Assael & Mooneyham 2002) - we focus primarily on influences related to technological changes in media forms.

The emergence of network television and then cable, pay-per-view, and Internet technology has had a profound influence on wrestling, shaping both the form and content of the cultural object as well as affecting distribution channels and audience size. Network television provided producers with a new distribution channel, allowing them to reach much larger and more geographically dispersed audiences. It also caused a shift with respect to the relative importance of televised and untelevised shows. Television was initially used to promote live shows, but then became the primary means of distribution, with untelevised live events taking a secondary role. Today, television is WWE's primary distribution channel, and the success of its broadcast offerings underlies the success of WWE's other key business drivers. "We develop compelling storylines...This content drives television ratings, which, in turn, drive pay-per-view buys, live event attendance and branded merchandise sales" (WWE, 2004).

The form of wrestling matches was initially constrained by what the television cameras could do, restricting the action to the ring since cameras were usually fixed in place and too bulky to easily move. Continued improvements in camera technology have made out-of-the-ring shots possible, and today's more mobile cameras follow wrestlers down corridors and into backstage areas of arenas, making different kinds of storylines and actions possible. Television

also influenced the ability of wrestlers to portray a range of different characters. Ethnicity is one of the most frequently used characteristics to signal and attract large ethnic audiences to professional wrestling. In the past a wrestler's ethnicity might be changed to suit the audience for the night – Italian for predominantly Italian communities, Polish within Polish communities – since audiences in different regions would be unaware of what occurred elsewhere (Thesz, 2000). With the advent of national television networks that is no longer possible (Gresson, 1998; Henricks, 1974). In addition, with the advent of televised wrestling, some performers (producers) found themselves unable to continue, as wrestling skills became less important than the ability to act and to be convincing on the microphone. Actual wrestling now makes up only one component of most broadcast shows.

Once wrestling events began to be broadcast, they were subject to the broadcast standards set by the television networks (Twitchell, 1992). Each network typically had a Standards and Practices department, which vetted scripts for network programs to ensure they met network standards (Roman, 1996). These standards included what language could and could not be used, and what images could or could not be shown. For example, at one time network broadcast standards departments would not allow images of glass being smashed, weapons being pointed at a human head, or the impact of a bullet to be broadcast (Twitchell, 1992). Similarly, Standards and Practices departments censored nudity, and discouraged plot themes connected with incest, homosexuality, interracial marriage, and religious satire (Roman, 1996).

The influence of such departments peaked between 1975 and 1980. By the end of the 1980s these departments had generally either been dismantled or suffered great reductions in staff numbers, lessening their influence (Twitchell, 1992). This reduced the constraints on what actions were deemed acceptable. However, network policies do still exist. For example, various

networks have limits on how much physical violence against women they will allow to be broadcast, and will cut to a commercial if actions in the ring exceed those standards. State-sponsored regulatory bodies, like the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission, also respond to viewer complaints regarding allegedly offensive broadcast content and continue to act as a constraint on producers.

Although WWE voluntarily rates each of its television shows, using the industry's standard ratings such as PG and TV 14, groups such as the Winnipeg Teachers' Association have demanded that additional steps be taken, petitioning TSN (Canada's largest national cable sports channel) to stop airing professional wrestling in the late afternoon when children are watching (Hulsman, 1999). Their concerns surfaced after they noticed young students mimicking sexual gestures and repeating phrases made popular by professional wrestlers. TSN has indicated that they receive more requests *not* to edit shows than complaints about the shows' content, placing them in a tenuous position. They preview all materials before they go to air, and edit as appropriate to meet their own standards and Canadian broadcast industry standards; they also monitor live broadcasts which cannot be previewed. All of these actions indicate that the public's value system, along with industry standards, continues to act as a constraint on producers.

As a form of popular culture, television programming is shaped by its production routines (Strinati, 2000). The 'popular' nature of television programming requires producers to come up with a product that has mass appeal; otherwise they will not be able to sell their advertising spots. Wrestling is no exception. The charge to 'make a profit' requires wrestling producers to hold their costs down and, like many serials, keep their sets, characters, costumes and other props fairly constant, so that they can reap the economic benefits of re-use. The weekly structure of wrestling shows, plus the 'live' nature of *RAW* in particular, puts added pressures on

producers – promoters and performers alike. The storyline must be kept fresh, interesting, and moving forward (even if only minimally) but the nature of the production schedule means that the shows must also be produced quickly and performers must 'get it right' the first time.

Cable television not only provided new distribution channels and allowed producers to reach even larger audiences, but also influenced what the product could be. The launch of WWE's subscription video-on-demand service allows its wrestling product to now include live performances, live-to-tape performances, and past performances, some featuring long dead wrestlers, that have been 'revived' through digital technologies. Control over the archives of its former competitors' product also allows WWE to retell the history of wrestling from its own perspective, perpetuating the tradition of fabricated authenticity.

The emergence of the Internet as a publicly available information source opened up the possibility of the World Wide Web as a distribution channel. WWE capitalized on this possibility, first with streaming video, and then with digital cable and subscription-on-demand video services. WWE has also instituted Web-only content on its website, such as interviews, discussions of wrestling news, and comedy skits – none of which are included in television broadcasts or live events. As attendance at live events continues to fluctuate (WWE, 2007), the pursuit and exploitation of new distribution channels takes on increasing importance to the continued viability of the cultural object.

Beyond the influence of communication and information technologies, we can also examine the influence of the use of language as a technology within production cultures. An essential part of both promoters' and performers' socialization within the wrestling industry was their acceptance of 'kayfabe'. The term, an adaptation of language used by carnival workers, represents a shared understanding that helped wrestlers guard the secrets of their profession.

Many researchers have noted the extreme reluctance of wrestling producers to talk openly about the production side of wrestling (Stone & Oldenburg, 1967; Craven & Moseley, 1972; Freedman, 1983; Ball, 1990). Lou Thesz (2000, p. 14), a professional wrestler for five decades, admits:

> [W]hen professional wresting was presented as competitive sport; we protected it because we believed it would collapse if we ever so much as implied publicly it was something other than what it appeared to be... 'protecting the image' in the face of criticism and skepticism was the first and most important rule a professional wrestler learned. No matter how aggressive or informed the questioner, you never admitted professional wrestling was anything but a competitive sport.

When an outsider appeared, wrestlers would whisper 'kayfabe' to quiet each other. Eventually the word became a metaphor for the conspiracy of silence surrounding professional wrestling and the need to protect the business. Norms related to keeping quiet about wrestling's secrets were so strict that, in some cases, members of wrestlers' families were not aware that the results of matches were pre-determined (Hart 2002), and wrestlers who broke the rules of secrecy were sometimes 'disciplined' (McQuarrie 2003a, b). Producers who publicly admit that wrestling is scripted are said to be 'breaking kayfabe' (Assael &Mooneyham 2002). It is against this backdrop that the WWF's public admission of professional wrestling being scripted can be understood as a radical departure from accepted industry constraints.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

We began with the objective of employing Griswold's cultural analysis framework to examine the ways in which changes in media forms over time shape cultural products, utilizing case studies of professional wrestling and soundtrack recordings of Broadway musicals. Because reporting on the complete cultural analysis would have been too lengthy, we focused on

examining linkages between the producer's intention and the cultural object, and some of the social forces which impact on this linkage, emphasizing the effect of technological change on each of these relationships.

We found that many of the basic premises of Griswold's model hold true. We could clearly identify producers and consumers, as well as influences and constraints on production, for both cultural objects examined. The framework was responsive to situations where multiple producers co-exist, as in the case of professional wrestling. The premise of the receiver/consumer creating an interpretation for the object seemed particularly pertinent to contexts where not all consumers can be present for an original or real-time performance, as in the form and content of soundtracks of Broadway musicals. Technological change has permitted new forms of relationships between producer and receiver/consumer, not only in creating new forms of communication between producer and receiver/consumer (e.g. Internet-based interaction as well as television broadcasts and live performances), but also in facilitating role exchanges and overlaps, including the possibility of receiver/consumers becoming producers. Paying attention to diffusion of the cultural product across time and space is also relevant for understanding reception, and highlights how diffusion can lead to changes in the object which are not generated by the producer.

Use of the 'charge' and 'brief' constructs as analysis tools was productive in that it served to highlight influences and constraints on the producer. However, Griswold's framework does not seem to allow for change in cultural production through radical innovation or the repudiation of constraints: for example, the WWF 'breaking kayfabe'.

Although our primary focus was on the producer—cultural object link, we did observe the need to update the model's producer—consumer link in keeping with the postmodern trend

toward productive consumption, which is also facilitated by technological changes and developments. While Griswold's model incorporates interaction between producer and consumer, it appears to rest on the assumption that the producer will adapt the cultural object to meet the perceived needs or wants of the consumer. This assumption, in fact, follows the basic 'marketing concept' principle. However, the framework is silent about the necessity for change in cultural products that result not from consumers' changing needs but rather from changes in the constraints under which the producer operates. Further, Griswold's model implies a separation between producer and consumer; in the case of Broadway soundtrack recordings, the consumer became the producer.

Griswold's framework also does not completely address the development of situations in which consumers (fans) may interpret or use the cultural object in ways the producer did not intend. For example, the website wrestlecrap.com ("THE definitive source for all the worst of professional wrestling") celebrates moments in professional wrestling that were intended seriously by the producers (promoters or performers) but which were perceived as ridiculous or incompetent by the receivers/consumers. The re-interpretation of the cultural object in this situation operates on two levels: first, in challenging the producer's original intention, and secondly, in presenting the receiver/consumers' interpretation as a valid reading of the object. Technology also facilitates this process; in this specific example, the creators of Wrestlecrap not only make textual comments on events, but can also include photographs, audio and video of the events they are commenting on. Presenting this material on a website also allows them to reach a much wider audience than they could otherwise, and also permits others to contribute their own comments on or readings of the events and discussion.

In summary, this analysis has demonstrated, using Griswold's analytical framework, how changes in media over time have influenced the form and content of cultural products. We illustrated this process using the examples of Broadway musical soundtracks and professional wrestling; however, we believe that the basic principles of Griswold's framework are applicable to many other types of cultural products. As both of the cultural products we have analyzed are also commercial products, we also suggest that there is great potential for the applicability of Griswold's framework to business research into consumption patterns – a usage which has been suggested but which to date is largely unexplored. We have also focused on how technological developments have influenced not only the forms of cultural productions but also the relationships between producers and consumer/receivers which Griswold identifies. There is much future research potential in examinations of ongoing technological evolution and how it may in turn shape the evolution of these relationships.

References

Ahlkvist, J. A. (2001). “Programming philosophies and the rationalization of music radio,” *Media, Culture and Society*, 23, 339-358.

Altizer, B. R.W. (1992). “Scholarly Authority and Community Formation in the Social Reconstruction of the Origins of Polyphony: A Case Study of Machaut and His Critics,” Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, Pittsburgh, PA.

Assael, S. and M. Mooneyham (2002). *Sex, Lies, and Headlocks*. New York: Crown Publishers.

Baldwin, K. and M. Flaherty (1999). “35,000,000 Wrestling Fans can't be Wrong (or, How We Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Pile Driver),” *Entertainment Weekly*, (April 16), 14-21.

Ball, M. R. (1990). *Professional Wrestling as Ritual Drama in American Popular Culture*. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press.

Baxandall, M. (1985). *Patterns of Intention*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Bay, W. (1998). Broadway blues: much of Great White Way singing in the red. CNN.com, September 23, 1998. Available at http://www.cnn.com/SHOWBIZ/Music/9809/23/broadway. Retrieved September 15, 2006.

Berezin, M. (1994). “Cultural Form and Political Meaning – State-Subsidized Theater, Ideology, and the Language of Style in Fascist Italy,” *American Journal of Sociology*, 99 (5), 1237-1286.

Berfield, S. (2005). The making of The Color Purple: Behind the scenes as a masterpiece becomes a musical. *BusinessWeek Online*, November 21, 2005. Available at http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/05_47/b3960093.htm. Retrieved September 12, 2006.

Bielby, W. T., and D. D. Bielby (1994). “All Hits are Flukes – Institutionalized Decision-making and the Rhetoric of Network Prime-Time Program-Development,” *American Journal of Sociology*, 99 (5), 1287-1313.

Broadway.com (2006). Lestat closes at Palace Theatre on May 28 after 39 performances. May 20, 2006. Available at http://www.broadway.com/gen/Buzz_Print.aspx?ci=530092. Retrieved September 21, 2006.

Business Week (1950). “It Pays to Sponsor Television Corn,” October 7, 25-26.

Chunovic, L. (2001). “WWF, TV Council go to mat in court,” *Electronic Media*, (June 11), 16, 40.

Craven, G. and R. Moseley (1972). “Actors on the Canvas Stage: The Dramatic Conventions of Professional Wrestling,” *Journal of Popular Culture*, 6 (2), 327-336.

Dauber, K. (1992). “Object, genre, and Buddhist sculpture,” *Theory and Society*, 21, 561-592.

Dawson, D. A. (2003) Personal Interview.

-----, P. J. Maurin and K. S. G. Phillips (1996). *It’s Only Wrestling: Everyone’s Guide to Professional Grunt and Groan*. St. Catherines, ON: Shooting Star Press.

Desmond, P. (2001). “WWF New Media’s Gerry Louw and his team use video to keep wrestling fans in the fold,” *Network World*, (July 23), 64-65.

Deutsch, K., n.d. The last five years….of musical theatre legacies. Broadway.com, Available at http://www.broadway.com/gen/Buzz_Print.aspx?ci=524826. Retrieved August 7, 2006.

Donaldson, T. (1982). *Corporations and Morality*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

----- (1989). *The Ethics of International Business*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Dunfee, T. W., N. C. Smith, and W. T. Ross, Jr. (1999). “Social Contracts and Marketing Ethics,” *Journal of Marketing*, 63 (July), 14-32.

Feschuk, D. (2000). “X-panding his empire,” *National Post*, (February 5), A19.

Fine, G. A. (1977). “Popular Culture and Social Interaction: Production, Consumption, and Usage,” *Journal of Popular Culture*, 11 (2), 453-466.

Fine, J. (2000). “Wrestling has choke-hold on cable fans,” *Advertising Age*, (April 10), S20, S22.

Fleischer, N. (1936). *From Milo to Londos: The story of wrestling through the ages*. New York: C. J. O’Brien, Inc.

Freedman, J. (1983). “Will the Sheik Use His Blinding Fireball? The Ideology of Professional Wrestling,” in *The Celebration of Society: Perspectives on Contemporary Cultural Performance*, Frank E. Manning, ed., 67-79. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Popular Press.

Goetzl, D. (2001). “Smacked Down,” *Advertising Age,* (July 16), 3, 44.

Golder, P. N. (2000). “Historical Method in Marketing Research with New Evidence on Long-Term Market Share Stability,” *Journal of Marketing Research*, 37 (May), 156-172.

Greenberg, K. E. (2000). *Pro Wrestling: From Carnivals to Cable TV*. Minneapolis: Learner Publishing.

Gresson, A. D., III (1998). “Professional Wrestling and Youth Culture: Teasing, Taunting and the Containment of Civility,” in *Kinderculture: The corporate construction of childhood*, S. R. Steinberg & J. L. Kincheloe, eds., 165-179. Boulder, CO: Westview.

Griswold, W. (1987a). "A Methodological Framework for the Sociology of Culture," *Sociological Methodology*, 17, 1-35.

---- (1987b). "The Fabrication of Meaning: Literary Interpretation in the United States, Great Britain, and the West Indies," *The American Journal of Sociology*, 92 (5), 1077-1117.

---- (1992). "The Writing on the Mud Wall – Nigerian Novels and the Imaginary Village," *American Sociological Review*, 57 (6), 709-724.

---- (1994). *Cultures and Societies in a Changing World*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press/Sage.

Grover, R. and T. Lowry (2001). "Those Smackdowns Are Taking Their Toll," *Business Week*, September 3, 40.

Hart, M., with E. Francis (2002). *Broken Harts: The Life and Death of Owen Hart*. Toronto: Key Porter Books.

Henricks, T. (1974). "Professional Wrestling as Moral Order," *Sociological Inquiry*, 44 (3), 177-188.

Higgins, J. M. (2002). "Bozell's $3.5 M apology," *Broadcasting & Cable*, (July 15), 36.

Hirsch, P. M. and P. C. Fiss (2000). "Doing sociology and culture: Richard Peterson's quest and contribution," *Poetics*, 28, 97-105.

Holt, D. B. (1995). "Review of 'Inside Culture: Art and Class in the American Home' by David Halle; Claims to Fame: Celebrity in Contemporary America' by Joshua Gamson;' and 'Xuxa: the Mega-Marketing of Gender, Race, and Modernity,' by Amelia Simpson," *Journal of Marketing Research*, 32 (4), 487-494.

Hughes, M. (2000). "Country music as impression management: A meditation on fabricating authenticity," *Poetics*, 28, 185-205

Hulsman, N. (1999). "Fake blood, real money," *Financial Post Magazine*, (July), 18-24.

Hunter, M. (1999). *Wrestling Madness: A Ringside Look at Wrestling Superstars*. NY: Smithmark Publishers.

Innis, H.A. (1951). The bias of Communication. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Knapp, R. (2005). *The American musical and the formation of national identity*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Lavoie, D. (2000), "Money rolls in, but WWF lack respect," *Marketing News*, (April 24), 17.

Leerhsen, C., V. Coppola and D. I. Friendly (1985). “Rasslin’ Redux,” *Newsweek*, March 11, 84-85.

Leland, J. (2000). “Why America’s hooked on wrestling,” *Newsweek*, (February 7), 46-54.

Levin, B. (1999). "A groin-grab for ratings," *Maclean's*, (July 26), 52.

Liebling, A. J. (1954), “A Reporter at Large: From Sarah Bernhardt to Yukon Eric,” *New Yorker*, 30 (November 13), 132, 135-142, 145-149.

Lucas, S. (2000). “Wrestling: the mania is back,” *New Statesman*, May 8, 39-41

Lunden, J. (2006). Indie labels take a risk, and win, with musicals. National Public Radio, June 20, 2006. Available at http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5187068. Retrieved August 20, 2006.

Maguire, B. (2000). “Defining deviancy down: a research note regarding professional wrestling,” *Deviant Behavior*, 21, 551-565.

Mandel, M. (2002). “Canuck’s luck,” *Toronto Sun*, (March 16), 5.

McGregor, G. (1993). “Cultural studies and social change: The war film as men’s magic, and other fictions about fictions,” *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 18 (3), 271-302.

McQuarrie, F. A. E. (2003a). “Breaking Kayfabe: An Exploration of ‘The History of the History’,” Paper presented the Academy of Management meeting, Management History Division, Seattle, Washington.

----- (2003b). “Does Isomorphism Affect Distinctive Organizations,” Paper presented at the Administrative Sciences Association of Canada Conference, Halifax, NS.

Mitchell, A. (1999). “The Harts: a dynasty down for the count,” *The [Toronto] Globe & Mail*, (May 26), A1, A8.

Mondak, J. J. (1989). “The Politics of Professional Wrestling,” *Journal of Popular Culture*, 23 (2), 139-149.

Mordden, E. (1976). Better foot forward: the history of American musical theatre. New York: Grossman Publishers/Viking Press.

Morton, G. W. (1986). “Professional Wrestling: Sport or Spectacle?” Paper presented at the Sixteenth Annual Meeting of the Popular Cultural Association/Eighth Annual Meeting of the American Culture Association, April 2-6, Atlanta Georgia.

Nashville Business Journal (2008), “Nashville-Based TNA Wrestling starts worldwide push for more viewers,” Nashville Business Journal, April 23. Available at: www/bizjournals/com/nashville/stories/2008/04/21/daily21.html. Retrieved February 17, 2009.

Peterson, R. A. (1997). *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Portantiere, M. (2005). What’s up with cast albums?: Five record company executives talk about the past, present and future of musical theatre recordings. TheaterMania.com, November 2, 2005. Available at: http://www.theatermania.com/content/news.cfm/story/6631? Retrieved May 16, 2006.

Riedel, M. (2004). Curtain call. MBAjungle.com, July 8. Available at http://www.mbajungle.com/main.cfm?inc=inc_article.cfm&chid=7&schid=0&WT=70artid=32108template=0. Retrieved September 21, 2006.

Roman, J. (1996). *Love, Light and a Dream. Television’s Past, Present, and Future*. Westport, Connecticut: Praegar.

Rosenberg, B., and E. Harburg (1993). *The Broadway musical: collaboration in commerce and art*. New York: New York University Press.

Rutherford, P. (1990). *When Television was Young: Prime Time Canada 1952-1967*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Savitt, R. (1980). “Historical Research in Marketing,” *Journal of Marketing*, 44 (Fall), 52-58.

Scanlon, K., A. Steacy, S. D. Driedger, N. Morris, and D. Burke (1986). “Wrestling’s Hard Sell,” *Maclean’s*, (May 19), 34-39.

Smith, R. A., and D. S. Lux (1993). “Historical Method in Consumer Research: Developing Causal Explanations of Change,” *Journal of Consumer Research*, 19 (March), 595-610.

Spencer, T. (2001). “Teen faces life in jail for killing little girl,” *The [Toronto] Globe & Mail*, (March 10), A21.

Stanley, T. L. (1999), “Marketers of the Year: Vince McMahon, Life During War Time,” *AdWeek*, 40 (41), M28, 32, 34, 36. (Also printed in *BrandWeek*, 40 (38), M28, 32,34,36).

Stone, G. P. and R. A. Oldenburg (1967). “Wrestling,” in *Motivations in Play, Games and Sports*, Ralph Slovenko and James A. Knight, eds., 503-532. Springfield, Illinois: Charles C. Thomas Publishers.

Strinati, D. (2000). *An Introduction to Studying Popular Culture*. London and New York: Routledge.

The Situation: Broadway's digital journal (2006). The current state of the Broadway cast album. May 31, 2006. Available at http://www.situationmarketing.com/thesituation/articles/561/the_current_state_of_the_broadway_cast_album. Retrieved September 21, 2006.

Thesz, L. with K. Bauman (2000). *Hooker: An Authentic Wrestler's Adventures Inside the Bizarre World of Professional Wrestling*, revised edition, Mike Chapman, ed. Seattle, WA: The Wrestling Channel Press.

Total Nonstop Action Wrestling (2009). "Television." Accessed February 17, 2009 from: www.tnawrestling.com

Twitchell, J. B. (1992). *Carnival Culture: The Trashing of Taste in America*. NY: Columbia University Press.

Varsallone, J. (1999). "It's Monday night: Do you know what your kids are watching?" *The Ottawa Citizen*, (April 1), A11.

Vinitzky-Seroussi, V. (2002). "Commemorating a Difficult past: Yitzhak Rabin's Memorials," *American Sociological Review*, 67 (Feb), 30-51.

Wagner-Pacifici, R. and B. Schwartz (1991). "The Vietnam Veterans Memorial – Commemorating a Difficult Past," *American Journal of Sociology*, 97 (2), 376-420.

Walker, R.V. (1995). Minimum employment guarantees in musical theatre orchestras. *Journal of Arts Management, Law & Society*, 25(2), 141-157.

World Wrestling Entertainment, Inc. (2002), "Annual Report 2002," [available online at: http://www.wwecorporate.com]

----- (2004) *Annual Report 2004*. (accessed September 15, 2004), [available online at: http://www.shareholder.com/Common/Edgar/1091907/1206774-04-684/04-00.pdf].

----- (2005), World Wrestling Entertainment Launches WWE 24/7 SVOD Service with Cox Communications, Blue Ridge, RCN and Three Other Leading Regional Systems. (News release accessed May 11, 2005), [available online at: http://corporate.wwe.com/news/2005/2005_03_07_02.jsp].

----- (2007), *Taking Off Worldwide. 2007 Annual Report*. Accessed February 17, 2007 from http://ww3.ics.adp.com/streetlink_data/dirWWE/annual/HTML1/default.htm