Review article
She Said, He Said:
Denise Scott Brown and Kenneth Frampton on Popular Taste
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The definition of art, and through it the art of living, is an object of struggle among the classes.
Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*[1]

Deeply embedded in the discussions of post-war Western architecture were the intertwined issues of popular culture, popular taste, and the relationship of both of these to architecture. From Bernard Rudofsky's *Architecture without Architects*, which claimed that the folk structures of Greek island and Chinese underground villages had much to teach modern architects about how to make liveable environments, to the Smithsons's 'streets-in-the-air', which proposed working-class London as the paradigm for neighbourhood 'patterns of association', to Archigram's Plug-In City, which created an open framework into which consumers could insert the latest products of consumer society, many architects and theorists took as the object of their research and practice some version of 'the people' and popular culture. Complicating this impulse was its relationship to modernism's fascination with vernacular building forms, as well as to history as a source for architectural meaning. This repair to various kinds of vernacular or popular culture to revitalize architecture had its critics, but discussion among the various points of view took place with some frequency.

A basic disagreement about the nature of popular or consumer culture stood behind one such important debate in the December 1971 issue of *Casabella*, devoted to a discussion of the American city on the part of the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies. Denise Scott Brown's 'Learning from Pop', a defence of her investigation, with Robert Venturi, of the cultural landscapes of Las Vegas and Levittown, was challenged in Kenneth Frampton's 'America 1960-1970 Notes on Urban Images and Theory'. Scott Brown's 'Pop Off: Reply to Kenneth Frampton' rebutted some of Frampton's criticisms. This serial spat revealed differing attitudes towards the identity of 'the people' and popular culture, disclosing opposing anthropologies derived from conflicting theories of society. Whereas Scott Brown drew her ideas from the empirical researches of post-war American sociology and communications theory, Frampton was steeped in European and American left social theory. Their discussion took place against a background of debate between these two groups, whose activities and areas of study overlapped in the period immediately following World War Two. Deeper than their divergent political positions, however, was an underlying aesthetic and philosophical dispute regarding the nature and role of popular taste.

In the opening sentences of 'Learning from Pop', Scott Brown declares the contemporary cultural environment fertile ground for architectural exploration: 'Las Vegas, Los Angeles, Levittown, the swinging singles on the Westheimer Strip, golf resorts, boating communities, Co-op City, the residential backgrounds to soap operas, TV commercials and mass mag ads, billboards, and Route 66 are

sources for a changing architectural sensibility.' Defining 'the people' in terms of a 'pluralism of need' that can best be understood by examining the existing urban environment, she asks:

If high-style architects are not producing what people want or need, who is, and what can we learn from them? […] Sensitivity to needs is a first reason for going to the existing city. Once there, the first lesson for architects is the pluralism of need. No builder-developer in his right mind would announce: I am building for Man. He is building for a market, for a group of people defined by income range, age, family composition, and life style. Levittowns, Leisureworlds, Georgian-styled town houses grow from someone's estimation of the needs of the groups who will be their markets. The city can be seen as the built artifacts of a set of subcultures. At the moment, those subcultures which willingly resort to architects are few.[2]

Polemically declaring that the market is an expression of a set of 'subcultures', diverse groups of persons with relatively uniform sets of behaviours, values, attitudes, and preferences, all coexisting together in a society, Scott Brown acknowledges that choice is constrained by economics, but points out that advertisements and media representations are 'at least another bias' to counter the high-art sensibilities and training of architects. She also claims that the largely symbolic additions made to homes by their owners can be seen as a source of information about these values, attitudes, and preferences.

This reference to the market exercises Frampton, who takes issue with both Scott Brown's definition of 'the people' and the character of their desires. In his wide-ranging discussion of her intellectual and artistic sources in planning, pop art, and architecture, he demands:

Do designers really need elaborate sociological ratification […] to tell them that what the people want is what they already have? No doubt Levittown could be brought to yield an equally affirmative consensus in regard to current American repressive policies, both domestic and foreign. Should designers like politicians wait upon the dictates of a silent majority, and if so, how are they to interpret them? Is it really the task of under-employed design talent to suggest to the constrained masses of Levittown - or elsewhere - that they might prefer the extravagant confines of the West Coast nouveau-riche; […] In this respect there is now surely little left of our much vaunted pluralism that has not already been overlaid with the engineered fantasies of mass taste […]

[Venturi Scott Brown's] *overt use of outsized Pop imagery that may be read by the initiated as some comic cutout reference to a piece of out-dated American folklore* [testifies] *to a 'popular' wit that is ultimately conservative.* […] *Venturi's* [sic] *work adopts a marginally tolerant attitude towards those values which are already desecrating large tracts of our physical environment. It flirts with an industrially brutalized folk culture in order to engender* […] *the 'dumb and the ordinary'. The ordinary, of course, constitutes the basis of any true vernacular and from this suburbia cannot be excepted. However,* […] *to canonize, from a quasi-townscape standpoint, the mid-cult kitsch of Las Vegas as a general model of urbanity is hardly a progressive level of response. Despite the declared value free demonstration of method involved, the implicit divorce between form and content is culturally invalid.*[3]

Scott Brown retorts:

Why must architects continue to believe that when 'the masses' are 'educated' they'll want what the architects want? Why do we turn to exotic folk cultures, as interpreted by other architects […] *rather than learning directly from the cultures around us?* […] *Advice to socially concerned architects: keep*

your ire for social evil, not the 'degradation' of taste of the 'masses', and your energy for the difficult task of finding ways to put your skills where your heart is.[4]

The shifts in the terminology Scott Brown and Frampton use for 'the people' and 'popular culture' are indicative of the intensity of their effort to make sense of novel circumstances. Although both authors make reference to 'the people' as the contemporary subject of architecture, they mean rather different things by the term. For the most part, they agree that 'the folk', a group defined by its opposition to the elite, unified by a culture and a history and tied to a locale, is at least endangered if not extinct. They diverge, however, on the homogeneity of the American populace. Although Scott Brown refers to 'the public' and 'the majority of the population', she dislikes universalizing words such as 'Man' and 'mass', insisting that 'the people' are plural, and that the only real way to find out what they want is to ask them. Frampton, on the other hand, sees these universals as characteristic of post-war American society; his favoured terms are 'the silent majority' and 'the constrained masses', expressions indicative of mind-deadening limitation and apathy.

Both authors also agree that 'folk art', autochthonous cultural products created by an organic group of persons, is no longer a useful concept, and both employ 'vernacular' and 'popular' as less nostalgic formulations for the cultural products of an industrialized age. Scott Brown's terms for the urban environment include the 'existing city' and the 'built artifacts of a set of subcultures'. She also refers to '"popular" culture', 'pop culture', the 'popular environment', and the '"popular" landscape', thus calling out popular taste as a vital force still operative within the dynamics of consumer capitalism. Scott Brown conceptualizes this vitality in terms of an active consumption composed of several activities: choosing among alternatives in the market place,

customizing those choices through often cosmetic but highly symbolic and communicative alterations, and reading the landscape in this symbolic fashion. Scott Brown reaffirms the connection between form, what she calls forces (social institutions), and function, programme, or content, through these symbolic means.

Frampton takes issue with Scott Brown's use of the term 'pop', pointing out that pop art is not the same as 'consumer folk culture as now industrially mass-produced and marketed', and that Las Vegas, although meeting Richard Hamilton's 1957 criteria for pop - 'popular, transient, expendable, low cost, mass-produced, young, witty, sexy, gimmicky, glamorous and big business' - is not, in fact, an example of pop art. He sees Scott Brown as confusing the 'mass administration of the visual forms of American culture' with a truly popular culture. Frampton acknowledges that the contemporary American urban environment, 'however industrialized,' is in some sense still a vernacular. But he considers the only alternative available to the people to be 'engineered fantasies of mass taste' since 'establishment hypocrisy, in the form of economic sanction amid affluence, has neatly disposed of any hope that advocacy planning would be able to meet the real needs of the American poor on the basis of participatory consensus'. This leaves only 'the alienated environment' of 'decultured forms', a 'repressed consensus' of 'mid-cult kitsch'.

The two writers also disagree about the architect's proper response to this new urban environment. Sharply critical of much of the urban theory of the period, Frampton aims to propose an alternative to almost all of the methods he discusses. Torn between a jaundiced view of mass culture and a desire to create urban places that will elevate and uplift the masses who inhabit the spaces of this mass culture, he sees the people both as the folk and as 'the mass', and the products they consume, rather than create, both as 'industrially brutalized

folk culture' and as the lineaments of a 'true vernacular'.

Frampton is concerned about the connection of form to content, something that he says Venturi Scott Brown's 'townscape' perspective fails to do. After first damning Kevin Lynch's 1960 study of Boston in *Image of the City* as 'picturesque pluralism' designed to disguise the dismantling of that city's fabric, Frampton declares that Venturi and Scott Brown are using similar townscape principles to extol Las Vegas as a vernacular environment when it is in fact designed not by 'the people' but by 'the "holding interests"'.[5] He poses three possible approaches to urban design - first, the townscape approach, in which form is considered picturesquely, apart from social content; second, the semiotic position, in which form and content are related; and third, the 'motopia' of planner Melvin Webber in which 'space and form […] tend to be voided of all cultural significance'.[6] The urbanism of Team 10 member Shadrach Woods is a fourth possibility in which physical form deliberately exerts a 'critical influence' on 'life style and culture'. For Frampton, the first and third are completely inappropriate: one is mere picturesqueness without even the implied quaintness of the fifties original, and the other glorifies an auto-city that is without question negative, with particularly destructive effects on the poor. The second option, Frampton intimates, is Venturi and Scott Brown's approach in their 1969 design of a New York subway stop, but he disagrees with their conclusion that low, enclosed, air-conditioned spaces are appropriate public gathering places. The last option is not developed further.

Scott Brown is less systematic in her assessment of the options available to architects. She argues that modernism has done violence to the urban environment by imposing sanitized environments on people who do not want them, thereby destroying vital and valid - if to architects' eyes unlovely - neighbourhoods. Instead, the appropriate attitude of the architect towards the building forms produced by consumer culture is to respect them and study them. Modernism's reform of the popular 'for its own good' is patronizing and, in any case, ineffective: 'There is a social need for architectural high art to learn from and relate to folk and pop traditions if it is to serve its real clients and do no further harm in the city.' Architects should look at existing environments, and also at the backdrops to TV commercials and magazine ads, to find out what 'the people' might want if they had the money and choices available to them. Scott Brown's main point, however, is that architects and other members of high culture have equated immorality and bad taste. Rather than educating the taste of the people, she believes the goal of architects should be to 'produce buildings and environments that others [besides architects] will need and like. […] Try to help people live in houses and cities the way they want to live. Try to do what will satisfy you and them'.[7]

Frampton criticizes Scott Brown's belief that architecture can be regenerated by 'greater conformity to the sacrosanct "populist" goals of our affluent society'. He points out that Venturi and Scott Brown's attitude towards the popular is not as detached and ironic as that of the pop artists, whose deadpan stance he sees as critical. He fears that their supposedly value-free observation and description actually equals acceptance, that architects will be 'transfixed before the success of Western Neo-Capitalism; inhibited by a mass consensus, […] entranced by the so-called democratization of consumption and by the inevitability of […] the "instant Utopia" of Los Angeles.' He agrees that studying Las Vegas might yield 'useful operational and aesthetic data, in respect of kino-graphic communication vis-à-vis visibility, reaction time, etc.' But he worries that analysis of the products of mass culture will result in their proliferation: '[L]ike Trajan's Column, the Stardust Sign is imperially destined to be codified and then disseminated throughout the world.'

Frampton ends by asking:

Is it that the inevitability of kitsch is only to be transcended through such a perverse exultation of our industrial capacity to induce and satisfy mass taste in the endless promotion and repetition of kitsch? or is it that the present triumph of kitsch is testament in itself, without the illuminations of Pop Art, that our urban society is organized towards self defeating ends, on a sociopolitical basis that is totally invalid?[8]

The disagreement between Frampton and Scott Brown, then, comes down to three issues. The first two, concerning the nature of 'the people' and the character of popular culture, are interwoven: are 'the people' an alienated, 'administered' mass, unable to express their own proper desires because so-called popular culture is manufactured and distributed from above, or are they groups of agents with more-or-less articulated goals, navigating a system that responds, albeit imperfectly, to their desires? The third issue, the role of architects in relation to popular culture - whether to analyse and incorporate, or attempt to remedy and restore, the built environment - stems from the assessment of the first two. And underlying this last issue is the question, not explicitly raised by Frampton and Scott Brown, of taste: whether popular taste in industrialized society is a debased devolution from that of the educated and cultured classes, or whether it embodies its own intrinsic principles.

Hilar Stadler and Martino Stierli's recent exhibition of photographs from Venturi Scott Brown's Las Vegas studio gives a fresh sense of that city's exuberant exploration of new media and new social behaviours during the post-war period.[9] However, a fresh understanding of the culture debates of those years is difficult, overlaid as it is by our own use of similar concepts for different circumstances. Thus, to understand the dispute between Frampton and Scott Brown, it is helpful to return to its intellectual background. Their stand-off in the realm of architecture is built upon the complex discussion of popular or mass culture that took place in the post-war United States. On the one hand, it was studied by an emerging discipline of communications research, represented by journals such as *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *Quarterly of Film*, *Radio and Television*, and the *International Journal of Opinion and Attitude Research*. The subject was also treated in sociology textbooks and in compilations such as the 1957 volume *Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America*, edited by Bernard Rosenberg and David Manning White. On the other hand, it was theorized by various left social theorists and critics, including a group of American left intellectuals clustered around *The Partisan Review* and other little magazines published in the forties and fifties, and the Critical Theorists, a group of German intellectuals whose theories of mass society and state capitalism applied Marxian political and economic theory to cultural phenomena. These points of view were debated in conferences such as 'Culture for the Millions: Mass Media in Modern Society', held by *Daedalus* in 1959, and 'Our Country and Our Culture', hosted by *Partisan Review* in 1952. The discussion also entered the popular vocabulary through such volumes as William H. Whyte's 1956 *Organization Man*, Vance Packard's 1957 *The Hidden Persuaders*, C. Wright Mills's 1951 *White Collar* and 1956 *The Power Elite*, and David Riesman's 1954 *Individualism Reconsidered* and 1950 *The Lonely Crowd*, the latter written in collaboration with Reuel Denny and Nathan Glazer. This post-war discussion formed the background for the debates on the role of popular culture and popular taste in architecture during the 1960s and 1970s.

Although his writings contain many specific evocations of the ideas of the German political philosopher Hannah Arendt, in this essay Frampton's conceptualization of the people and popular culture takes inspiration from a variety of sources on popular culture. Frampton's fluid and declamatory rhetorical style weaves into the strand of its

argument multiple conceptual frameworks that are not explicitly elaborated, as his reference to 'midcult kitsch' shows. A compound of two related ideas, the first term is taken from journalist and cultural critic Dwight Macdonald's 1960 essay, 'Masscult and Midcult', published in *Partisan Review*, while the second is derived from a long-ranging discourse, starting from the mid-nineteenth century, on the cheap reproduction of art objects for the mass market, the most well-known formulation of which is Clement Greenberg's seminal 1939 *Partisan Review* article 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch'.[10]

Frampton defines Las Vegas as mind-deadening kitsch: 'Consciousness is the last quality to be designed for in Las Vegas, while surveyance [*sic*], of course, is to be consistently maintained. […] Las Vegas is the "manipulative" city of kitsch.' He quotes Hermann Broch, who defines kitsch as a perversion of the values and goals of romantic individualism into mass-produced sentimentality exploitable for profit. According to Gillo Dorfles, from whose popular 1969 collection *Kitsch: The World of Bad Taste* the Broch essay is taken, the development of kitsch coincides with the development of machine production and reproduction of works of art:[11]

[T]*he easy (if not inferior) reproduction and the quick distribution of art (or pseudo-art) objects has made it possible for one of the factors we are interested in to come to the surface,* […] *cultural industrialization; the fact, that is, that even culture - both in its creation and in its consumption - is affected by some of the methods which now influence the whole, or almost the whole of our production and organizational system.*[12]

Rehearsing Theodor Adorno's more extensive arguments on the topic of music, Dorfles emphasizes the issue of taste and the contrast between mass and high cultural approaches to the experience of art:

[N]*othing could be further away from a piece of 'consumer music,' enjoyed and adored by the masses, than a piece of the new modern music, enjoyed and enjoyable for only a few initiated individuals.* […] *Some people believe that in a modern environment the very concept of taste no longer performs any function at all, given the modern 'pluralistic' kind of musical culture which is therefore divided into various classes.* […] [T]*he field in which music will be a greater help - a greater comfort - in our search for kitsch elements is in the attitudes of the user rather than that of the composers,* […] *the attitude of the individual when confronted with artistic and natural phenomena, which are observed from that particular point of view which immediately transforms them into something inferior, false, sentimental and no longer genuine.*[13]

In 'Kitsch and Architecture', Vittorio Gregotti elaborates on this dichotomy between the critical nature of serious art and the acceptance of the status quo by mass art. He notes that kitsch fails in 'the use of the critical faculty to ensure the integrity of the finished project', so that 'that negative aspect of thought which is present in every valid project which sets out to dissociate itself from what already exists or has been used before, and aspires to fresh levels of perception' is lost.[14]

Echoing the Critical Theorists' studies of the authoritarian personality type as dominant in late capitalist society, Dorfles makes the connection between kitsch and a kind of personality he calls, following Broch and Ludwig Giesz, the 'kitsch-man'. Here, Dorfles generalizes from an attitude towards art to a character type:

Quite different is the case of the kitsch-man and of that sector of the public whose attitude towards works of art is […] *usually a matter of deliberate obtuseness which concerns modern art alone, or possibly 'difficult' art of the past i.e. the most serious type of work; it is a problem of individuals*

*who believe that art should only produce pleas-
ant, sugary feelings; or even that art should form
a kind of 'condiment', a kind of 'background music',
a decoration, a status symbol even, as a way of
shining in one's social circle; in no case should it be
a serious matter, a tiring exercise, an involved and
critical activity.*[15]

In 'Phenomenology of Kitsch', Giesz, on whom both
Broch and Dorfles rely, goes further, connecting the
cultural object, the producers of the object, and the
consumers of the object under a single principle
structuring and controlling a unified system:

*Kitsch and mass psychology have the same struc-
ture. Today's producers of kitsch are not naïve
thinkers but astute mass psychologists, that is,
persons who undoubtedly possess a conscious-
ness of kitsch, who even go so far as to investigate
systematically the techniques to produce the specific
lived experiences of kitsch.*[16]

In support of his thesis, Dorfles cites Rosenberg and
White's collection on mass culture, which includes
essays by Theodor Adorno and another Critical
Theorist, Leo Lowenthal, as well as by Riesman
and his student Herbert Gans.[17] Adorno's essay, in
particular, discusses the conformity induced by the
consumption of mass media:

[T]*oday's frame of mind transforms the traditional
values into the norms of an increasingly hierarchi-
cal and authoritarian social structure.* [...] [T]*he
'message' of adjustment and unreflecting obedience
seems to be dominant and allpervasive today.* [...]
The ideals of conformity and conventionalism [...]
*have been translated into rather clear-cut prescrip-
tions of what to do and what not to do. The outcome
of conflicts is pre-established, and all conflicts are
mere sham. Society is always the winner, and the
individual is only a puppet manipulated through
social rules.* [...] *The stories teach their readers
that one has to be 'realistic,' that one has to give*

*up romantic ideas, that one has to adjust oneself at
any price, and that nothing more can be expected of
any individual. The perennial middle-class conflict
between individuality and society has been reduced
to a dim memory, and the message is invariably that
of identification with the status quo.*[18]

Despite his pessimism about the kitsch qualities of
the contemporary urban environment, Frampton's
direct citations of the Critical Theorists are from
Walter Benjamin's 'The Work of Art in the Age of
Mechanical Reproduction', a more positive view of
the possibilities for media that proposes a revolu-
tionary potential for film and photography, and from
Herbert Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization*, a book
whose powerful influence on the culture of the
sixties raised hope for a newly integrated 'eros', or
pleasure principle, to revolutionize capitalist society.

Marcuse shares the other Critical Theorists' posi-
tion that the personality of the individual has been
altered by the social and political matrix of capital-
ism, and that the arts, which ought to hold out a
promesse de bonheur, have instead been co-opted
by the administrative forces of capitalism to function
as part of a total system of alienation in both work
and 'leisure'. Frampton invokes Marcuse's concept
of the 'performance principle', capitalism's under-
lying logic of growth and expansion according to
which 'society is stratified according to the competi-
tive economic performances of its members'. Based
on instrumental rationality, rather than the higher
faculty of reason, the performance principle leads to
the repression of society's members:

*The argument that makes liberation conditional
upon an ever higher standard of living all too easily
serves to justify the perpetuation of repression. The
definition of the standard of living in terms of auto-
mobiles, television sets, airplanes, and tractors is
that of the performance principle itself.*[19]

Frampton's allusion to a 'repressed consensus' also finds its source in Marcuse's extensive discussion of capitalist society's alienation and repression of its members:

At the present stage, the personality tends toward a standardized reaction pattern established by the hierarchy of power and functions and by its technical, intellectual, and cultural apparatus. […] *to be sure, personality has not disappeared: it continues to flower and is even fostered and educated - but in such a way that the expressions of personality fit and sustain perfectly the socially desired pattern of behavior and thought. They thus tend to cancel individuality. This process, which has been completed in the 'mass culture' of late industrial civilization, vitiates the concept of interpersonal relations.*[20]

The idea of instrumental rationality underlies Frampton's negative assessment of Edward Ruscha's, and, by extension, Venturi Scott Brown's, deadpan, value-free method of analysing Las Vegas.

[I]*s not the objectivity of an Eduard* [sic] *Ruscha say, very comparable to the objectivity of a 'value free' scientist? The essence of Ruscha's photo folders is surely that of the alienated environment augmented by subsequent alienation through dead pan photographic record. Although the vernacular is by common definition, however industrialized, the art of the people, a sophisticated Pop record of its meaningless yet varied vacuity* […] *displays little warmth for the life styles that these deculturated forms no doubt serve to support.*[21]

Despite Marcuse's pessimistic analysis of capitalist culture, however, *Eros and Civilization* points to the hope that individuals and society can evolve beyond the performance principle toward freedom and happiness - a hope represented, in the present situation, by art. In architecture and urbanism, Frampton sees this hope in terms of the reunification of form and content, so that the physical

environment might represent values and experiences capable of redeeming the degradation of both popular identity and popular culture.

In contrast to Frampton's eclectic references, Scott Brown's argument grows fairly directly out of the work of the American sociologists and communications researchers, particularly that of Herbert Gans. In the mid-sixties, Gans engaged in 'participant observation' of Levittown (living in a house bought for him by the Ford Foundation) and documented his findings in the book *The Levittowners*.[22] His theories about the role of the media in American society are contained in his 1966 article 'Popular Culture in America: Social Problem in a Mass Society or Social Asset in a Pluralist Society?' - later expanded into *Popular Culture and High Culture*.[23] These texts show that, more or less simultaneously with the left critique of mass society and culture, American sociology and communications research were also developing a theory of the character and functioning of modern American society, and the nature of the individual within that society.

This American view developed from studies of the behaviour of individuals in relation to the new mass media of radio, film, and later, television. These studies found that 'opinion leaders', influential individuals who acted as mediators between the mass media and 'individuals in the mass', sifted and filtered the available media material, passing judgement on how these were to be interpreted, and communicating these judgements to the groups of which they were a part.[24] A study of the 1940 presidential election campaigns, for example, found that, despite intensive attempts by the media to influence voting, small groups such as families, work cohorts, clubs, and church societies intervened between the mass media and individual choice. Individuals tended to vote in families, persons who were uncertain followed those who had made up their minds early, and those who changed their minds did so on the basis of personal contacts, not on the

basis of information gained from the mass media.[25] Another study described a large-scale attempt to influence the people of Cincinnati in favour of the United Nations with what would now be called a 'media blitz', reaching them through schools, PTAs, churches, women's clubs, radio, films, and newspapers. Teachers were given special training, students were inundated with information in classes as well as given leaflets to take home, a city-wide church organization held a World Community Day in which 14,000 children participated, church women and women's clubs were trained and lectured, one radio station (among many others participating) broadcast 150 spots a week about the UN. Films were shown, speeches were given in clubs, posters were mounted, UN slogans were printed on matchbooks and blotters. The results were disappointing for advocates of the theory of the administered nature of mass society: no change in public opinion was found, at least in the short term, in the before-and-after study done by the National Opinion Research Council.[26]

In this line of investigation, David Riesman's 1950 article 'Listening to Popular Music' constitutes a direct challenge to European and American left intellectuals' pessimistic views of the effects of the media on individuals and popular culture. Written in answer to Adorno's analyses of jazz, the article provides empirical data regarding the effects of popular music on individuals and groups. After discussing the contributions of the 'gifted Europeans, horrified by the alleged vulgarization of taste brought about by industrialization', Riesman states that what actually matters in the study of popular culture is not its level of bad taste, but 'who says what to whom with what effect' - that is, how information is communicated from one person to another.[27]

After conducting relatively unstructured interviews with fifteen teenagers of the white middle-class South Side of Chicago to test Adorno's hypotheses concerning the atomization of experiences in modern industrial society, as well as several others of his own, Riesman finds that the teens' perceptions of the mass media are framed by their peer groups. Group pressure to conform compels them to have recourse to the media to learn what the group expects; they also identify with the group by using music as a common focus for attention and talk.[28] At the end of the study, Riesman makes several remarks indicating that he is closer theoretically to Adorno than might be suspected from his exposition. Like Adorno, he sees the individual's relationship to popular culture as arising out of his or her character structure:

[O]*ne cannot hope to understand the influence of any one medium, say music, without an understanding of the total character structure of the person. In turn, an understanding of his musical tastes, and his use of them for purposes of social conformity, advance, or rebellion, provides revealing clues to his character, to be confirmed and modified by a knowledge of his behavior and outlook in many other spheres of life.*[29]

But whereas Adorno and the Critical Theorists lament the loss of the autonomous individual subject, Riesman finds that, within the structure of the group, the individual still possesses some power of choice and action.

A student of Riesman's, Gans sets the problem of popular culture in the form of a response to the left critique of mass culture. He makes it clear from the outset that he believes strongly that 'the people' possess freedom of choice:

This chapter is about the criteria of choice, primarily in the conduct of life outside the workplace. Advocates of high culture believe that people ought to spend their free hours in self-realization and self-expression through the pursuit of the fine arts. They reject people's preferences for mass culture - mass-produced art, entertainment, and related consumer

goods - because they believe this preference to harm both the society as a whole and people as individuals. For this reason, mass culture is thought of as a social problem. This chapter will consider the critics' argument. I should warn the reader that I do not approach my task from a disinterested or neutral perspective. Although many intellectuals and critics view mass culture as a social problem that requires urgent public action, I believe that mass culture is, rather, another manifestation of pluralism and democracy in American society.[30]

Gans derives the idea of mass culture from its European, and specifically German, origins in *Kultur*, 'the art, music, literature, and other symbolic products that were and are preferred by the well-educated elite of that society but also […] the styles of thought and feelings of those who choose these products - those who are "cultured"'. The mass 'is or was the nonaristocratic, uneducated portion of European society, especially the people who today might be described as lower-middle class, working class, and lower class'. Calling the term 'mass culture' pejorative, he proposes to substitute for it the term 'popular culture'.

The article examines the evidence for contemporary critiques of mass or popular culture, finding that most studies contradict the claims of 'administered control' made by the left critics. Gans's most important point is that there are actually a number of different popular cultures, or 'taste cultures' in the United States. He describes six of these taste cultures: creator high culture, consumer high culture, upper-middle culture, lower-middle culture, lower culture, and lower-lower culture. Each has its own art, music, literature, magazines, films, TV programmes, furnishings, architecture, foods, and cars, each has its own institutions for meeting its own aesthetic needs, and each has its own distinct 'taste public'. Individuals can choose products from more than one taste culture and can be mobile with respect to the taste public they inhabit, taste cultures

can and do borrow from other taste cultures, and some products are shared by all taste cultures. However, the various publics act like interest groups that compete with each other for the creation of the products they prefer.

Teasing apart the differing attitudes of these taste cultures provides an alternative explanation for what the left cultural theorists see as the death of autonomous art. Creator high culture, the province of the serious artist, the scholar, and the critic, exemplified by original art distributed in galleries, books published by subsidized presses, the 'little magazines', off-Broadway theatre, European and underground cinema, public radio and television stations, judges works of art on the basis of standards such as the relationship between method and content, the subtlety of content, depiction of mood and feeling, and the expression of the personal values of the creator. It is appreciated by a small taste public that values exclusiveness. Consumer high culture makes use of the same kinds of cultural products as creator high culture, but selection is based on consumption rather than production - for instance, the status and fashionableness of the products. It thus gives higher status to performance than does creator high culture. Upper-middle culture is the taste culture of professionals, executives, managers, well-educated but not trained as creators or intellectuals. Critical analysis and participation in the milieu of the creators are not desired. Substance is valued more highly than method. Since this public values being cultured, it uses some high-culture products, although most of its products are created by members of its own public. Lower-middle culture, created for lower-status professions and other white-collar jobs, is traditional, rejecting the sophistication of upper-middle culture, emphasizing content and subordinating form to it. Cultural products uphold lower-middle-class values, resolving conflicts with these values within the art form. Dominant by reason of numbers, the lower-middle taste public is the major audience for the mass media, but

it pays little attention to critics, relying instead, as the communications theorists found, on the judgements of family and friends. Thus the various taste cultures have differing and incompatible standards of excellence, as well as differing and incompatible preferences for cultural products.

In the line of the American empirical examination of the effects of the media on individuals, Gans thus concludes that 'the people', rather than being reducible to 'kitsch-men', are plural. Being plural, they are to at least some degree independent of the capitalist market system in their judgements of taste, making use of cultural products in relationship to values specific to class position and rejecting those that do not conform to those values. While seeing the acquisition of high art and high culture as a progressive goal, he emphasizes the essential pluralism and self-referentiality of 'culture' in contrast to traditional hierarchies of taste.

The idea of distinct, equally valid taste cultures and taste publics is basic to Scott Brown's conception of 'the people' and popular culture - which are, for her, Gans's 'lower-middle' taste public and taste culture. This intellectual background predisposes her to see Frampton's kitsch as 'agonized beauty'; learning from Las Vegas is also, despite the architect's position as a member of the creator high taste culture, learning to 'love what you hate'. Within this framework, the architectural task becomes, not renewing a degraded social system by improving its physical and cultural environment, but sensitizing a basically functional system to its members' needs and desired ends. In this pursuit, rationality is not an enemy but a friend, and the relationship of form to content will take care of itself.

Frampton's and Scott Brown's in-print debate thus represents one endpoint of a long discussion as to the identity of 'the people' and the status of popular culture in American society. While Gans's categories of taste subcultures and taste publics

serve in part to explain why the two seem to be arguing at cross-purposes, the more difficult problem to resolve is the one of values raised by Frampton. He criticizes Venturi and Scott Brown both for their lack of a value stance and for having, or at any rate advocating, bad taste. In *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Pierre Bourdieu's delineation of a class-based structure of taste preferences in the French society of the 1970s - a situation remarkably similar to that described by Gans in the American society of the 1960s - Bourdieu comments:

Everything takes places as if the 'popular aesthetic' were based on the affirmation of continuity between art and life, which implies the subordination of form to function, or, one might say, on a refusal of the refusal which is the starting point of the high aesthetic, i.e., the clear-cut separation of ordinary dispositions from the specifically aesthetic disposition. The hostility of the working class and of the middle-class fractions least rich in cultural capital towards every kind of formal experimentation […] *springs not just from lack of familiarity but from a deep-rooted demand for participation, which formal experiment systematically disappoints.*[31]

Bourdieu's formulation recasts the argument about taste into one about values - high culture 'disinterest' and detachment versus popular participation. Although their assessment of the people, popular culture, and popular taste dramatically differs, both Frampton and Scott Brown subscribe to this value of reuniting 'the people' with their own culture. In different ways, both would agree with Marcuse's assessment of the relationship of the aesthetic and the political: 'Schiller states that, in order to solve the political problem, "one must pass through the aesthetic, since it is beauty that leads to freedom." The play impulse is the vehicle of this liberation.'[32] Whether in 'the people's' play within the forms given to them by mass culture, making their own meaning from manufactured aesthetics, or in the creation of

new 'spaces of appearance', both authors hold out hope for an amelioration of the conditions of late capitalism. In this, they differ from most architects today.

Notes

1. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 48.

2. Denise Scott Brown, 'Learning from Pop', *Casabella* 35, nos. 359-60 (December 1971), p. 15.

3. Kenneth Frampton, 'America 1960-1970: Notes on Urban Images and Theory', *Casabella* 35, nos. 359-60 (December 1971), pp. 31-33.

4. Denise Scott Brown, 'Pop Off: Reply to Kenneth Frampton', *Casabella* 35, nos. 359-60 (December 1971), pp. 41-45.

5. 'Townscape' refers to Gordon Cullen's popular book by the same name, which codified the principles of the experience of English villages and other traditional urban environments.

6. In fact, the term 'motopia' was coined by Cullen.

7. Interestingly, both Frampton and Scott Brown themselves participated in planning efforts to help impoverished clients. Frampton's Marcus Garvey Housing Project in Brownsville, Brooklyn, represented in 1973 an early American example of low-rise, high-density public housing. Its careful attention to opportunities for neighbourliness and oversight of public space provided in the front stoops, decks, and patios could not succeed, however, in reducing the barrenness of the environment or the destructive social atmosphere that dominated the surrounding area. Scott Brown's South Street Philadelphia project of 1968 had better short-term success in stopping the city of Philadelphia from covering over a lower-class commercial street with a freeway. Her small-scale alterations and careful cultivation of local initiative were exemplary for their involvement of users in the design process. Yet in the long term, this success was mitigated by the inevitable take-over of an 'interesting' neighbourhood by middle-class commerce.

8. Kenneth Frampton, 'America 1960-1970', p. 36.

9. Hilar Stadler and Martino Stierli (eds) *Las Vegas Studio: Images from the Archives of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown* (Zurich: Speidegger and Spiess, 2008).

10. Dwight Macdonald, 'Masscult and Midcult I', *Partisan Review* 27, no. 2 (Spring 1960) and 'Masscult and Midcult II', *Partisan Review* 27, no. 4 (Fall 1960); Clement Greenberg, 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch', *Partisan Review* 6, no. 5 (1939). Macdonald asserts that 'highbrow culture', like authentic lowbrow culture, is almost nonexistent in a market economy; instead, mass culture, or 'masscult', replaces it with manufactured imitations aimed to 'please the crowd by any means'. 'Midcult' is even worse; it 'pretends to respect the standards of high culture while in fact it waters them down and vulgarizes them' into products designed to pacify and induce conformance. Under these conditions, 'a pluralistic culture cannot exist', and the consumers of this homogenous culture also become homogenized. Macdonald had not only read the Critical Theorists, but had corresponded with Adorno and tried to publish their work, which they refused. His essays echo the ideas of authoritarian conformance, state capitalism, and the commoditization of high-cultural objects developed by the Frankfurt School. Thomas Wheatland, *The Frankfurt School in Exile* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2009), 174-86, 372 n. 101.

11. Hermann Broch, 'Notes on the Problem of Kitsch', in Gillo Dorfles (ed.) *Kitsch: The World of Bad Taste*, (London: Studio Vista, 1969), p. 35. The volume also includes Clement Greenberg's 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch', Vittorio Gregotti's 'Kitsch and Architecture', Ludwig Giesz's 'Phenomenology of Kitsch' and his 'Kitsch-Man as Tourist', as well as Dorfles's own essay 'Kitsch'.

12. Gillo Dorfles, 'Kitsch', p. 29.

13. Gillo Dorfles, 'Kitsch', pp. 26-29.

14. Vittorio Gregotti, 'Kitsch and Architecture', p. 260.

15. Gillo Dorfles, 'Kitsch', pp. 15-16.

16. Ludwig Giesz, 'Phenomenology of Kitsch'.

17. Leo Lowenthal, 'Historical Perspectives of Popular Culture', T. W. Adorno, 'Television and the Patterns of Mass Culture', David Riesman, 'Listening to Popular Music', and Herbert Gans, 'The Creator-Audience Relationship in the Mass Media: An Analysis of Movie Making', in *Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America*, Bernard Rosenberg and David Manning White (eds) (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1957).

18. T. W. Adorno, 'How to Look at Television', *The Quarterly of Film Radio and Television*, vol. 8, no. 3 (Spring, 1954): pp. 219, 221; republished as 'Television and the Patterns of Mass Culture' in *Mass Culture*.

19. Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), pp. 152-53, quoted in Frampton, 'The City of Dialectic', *Architectural Design* 10 (1969), p. 541.

20. Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, p. 253.

21. Kenneth Frampton, 'America 1960-1970', p. 36.

22. Herbert J. Gans, *The Levittowners: Ways of Life and Politics in a New Suburban Community* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1967).

23. Herbert J. Gans, *Popular Culture and High Culture: An Analysis and Evaluation of Taste* (New York: Basic Books, 1974); Herbert J. Gans, 'Popular Culture in America: Social Problem in a Mass Society or Social Asset in a Pluralist Society?', in *Social Problems: A Modern Approach*, Howard S. Becker, ed. (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1966).

24. Robert Merton, 'Patterns of Influence: A Study of Interpersonal Influence and of Communications Behavior in a Social Community', in *Communications Research, 1948-1949*, ed. by Paul Lazarsfeld and Frank Stanton.

25. Paul Felix Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, and Hazel Gaudet, *The People's Choice: How the Voter Makes Up His Mind in a Presidential Campaign* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1948).

26. Shirley A. Star and Helen MacGill Hughes, 'Report on an Educational Campaign: The Cincinnati Plan for the United Nations', *American Journal of Sociology* 55, no. 4 (1950). An analysis by Herbert Hyman and Paul B. Sheatsley in 1947, 'Some Reasons Why Information Campaigns Fail', in *Public Opinion Quarterly*, showed that 'self-selection' had occurred - the campaign had reached persons already convinced of the value of the UN, but had not reached those who were not previously convinced or were uninterested. Cited in Leon Bramson, *The Political Context of Sociology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), pp. 110-11.

27. Harold Lasswell, cited in David Riesman, 'Listening to Popular Music', American Quarterly 2 (1950): 408. Lasswell's articles included 'Collective Autism as a Consequence of Culture Contact', Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung IV, no. 2 (1935), and 'Radio as an Instrument of Reducing Personal Insecurity', *Studies in Philosophy and Social Sciences* IX, no. 1 (1941).

28. Riesman notes that music can also be used by minority listening groups to express alienation or rebellion against the culture. However, much of the new content of popular music is taken from just these minority forms, undergoing significant changes in the process. And even the protest of listening to a minority music might merely mean that one identifies with another peer group whose approval one must meet.

29. David Riesman, 'Radio Music', p. 416.

30. Herbert J. Gans, 'Popular Culture', pp. 549-50.

31. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*, p. 32.

32. Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, p. 187.

Biography

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