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Boundaries and Early Jazz: Defining a New Music

Scott Appelrouth
California State University, Northridge, USA

ABSTRACT

The diffusion of jazz into the musical mainstream during the 1920s served as a site for the struggle to define ongoing changes both in the arts and in the broader society. I analyze the discursive themes that framed the contention over the music by connecting the notion of boundary-work to fields of cultural production. In doing so, I demonstrate that the content of boundary-work is shaped by the field in which a speaker is positioned. 'High' and popular artists, civic and political leaders, and general cultural critics defined differently the alleged impact of jazz. These differences in content fueled the dynamism of the contention by giving expression to the different interests at stake, interests that reflect the specific authority to name the truth generated by a given field.

KEY WORDS

boundaries / boundary-work / discourse / fields / music / legitimation

Introduction

Over the past two decades the notion of boundaries has been a central focus of inquiry within the social sciences (Lamont and Molnár, 2002). For cultural sociologists this focus has often led to an examination of discourse as a means by which symbolic boundaries are constructed, maintained, and contested. This emphasis has been applied to a range of matters including political culture (Alexander and Smith, 1993), science (Gaziano, 1996; Gieryn, 1983, 1999), the gastronomic field (Ferguson, 1998), film (Baumann, 2001), photography (Battani, 1999), morality (Biesel, 1992, 1993; Lamont, 1992), music (Appelrouth, 2003, 2005; Binder, 1993; Hennion, 1997; Regev, 1994, Santoro, 2002), and social reproduction (Bourdieu, 1984, 1993). In what follows, my aim is to extend this line of inquiry through an analysis of the discursive themes

used to frame competing meanings of jazz and its alleged impact on social boundaries as it penetrated the cultural mainstream during the 1920s.

The movement of jazz from the margins to the mainstream prompted the appraisals not only of musicians, composers, and critics positioned within the field of music. It also sparked commentary from those whose expertise would not seem credible with regards to matters of music; namely civic and political leaders, and general cultural critics. That the opinions of speakers positioned within different fields were given public currency underscores the point that music is not only something to listen to. A similar dynamic occurs within cultural production more generally. One need reflect only momentarily on disputes surrounding art exhibits,[1] explicit lyrics in songs and the music industry's adoption of warning labels (in response to the drive spearheaded by the Parents' Music Resource Center), or even recent controversies over the place of science in public education and the pursuit of particular lines of scientific research (e.g. stem cell research), to realize that art, music, and science mean not only what artists, musicians, and scientists claim.

Such flashpoints underscore the reality that the autonomy of a given field is never absolute. While experts or practitioners positioned within a field seek to monopolize the power to proclaim what is 'true' in matters relevant to the domain of their authority, their efforts to do so are always contested (Bourdieu, 1990, 1993). Indeed, involvement of non-professionals or non-specialists in developments taking place in an 'external' cultural field signals that field's larger social impact (Ferguson, 1998). This impact, and the struggles over the legitimation of forms of cultural expression, are defined through the boundary-work (Gieryn, 1983) of social actors who may or may not be positioned within the contested field. The effects of boundary-work thus can extend beyond the parameters of a given field to demarcate broader cultural tastes and the social groups associated with them. In this way, boundary-work plays a fundamental role in the struggle to create and recreate the cultural distinctions that sustain social hierarchies, particularly those based on class and status (Beisel, 1992, 1993; DiMaggio, 1982, 1992; Gans, 1974).

A vital form of boundary-work that serves to insulate (albeit imperfectly) a field's occupants from 'outsiders' and better secure their autonomy from external pressures is the development of a legitimating ideology that capitalizes on the cultural and symbolic capital valued within that field (Bourdieu, 1993). This discourse functions in two ways. In the first instance it assists in creating an emerging field by establishing boundaries between it and extant related practices. Second, it works to structure a field by establishing internal hierarchies of worth and credibility. In the case of the arts (pictorial, film, theater, music, dance) this has meant detaching its production from the control of religious and political institutions and the development of autonomous standards by which works are either exalted as 'artistic' or deprecated as 'folk,' 'popular' or 'commercial' (Battani, 1999; Baumann, 2001; Becker, 1982; Bourdieu, 1993; Peterson, 1972; Regev, 1994). Aesthetic judgments become the purview of trained professionals who alone possess the expertise necessary to render informed, 'legitimate' evaluations.

At the time of jazz's diffusion into the mainstream, the institutional and musical boundaries separating highbrow culture from popular entertainment

had been in existence only for some 50 years. This was accomplished in important measure through the establishment of non-profit symphonies maintained by the largess of city elites (DiMaggio, 1982; Levine, 1988). The legitimacy of this distinction and the value of music were symbolically reinforced through the decorum of audiences as well as the settings in which performances took place (McConachie, 1990; Rosenzweig, 1983; Small, 1987). 'Real' music was to be performed in concert halls for educated audiences that passively comprehended the 'sacred' texts written by European composers. Moreover, it was to produce a spiritual 'uplift' within the listener (Biocca, 1990), as the music, composed and performed without regard for crude considerations of profit, sounded the 'inner truth' of gifted genius (Regev, 1994). In a word, this was 'classical' music, a form of music rooted in the 'educated European tradition' of the late 18th and early 19th centuries and conventionally defined as 'balanced', 'elegant', 'restrained', and 'refined' (*American Heritage Dictionary*). A form of music that by its very name – 'classical' – denoted its rank and significance.

While the production and meanings associated with classical music enjoyed a degree of autonomy from concerns associated with other fields, particularly those of an economic nature, jazz in the 1920s was not so positioned. Instead, jazz was viewed as commercial, dance music played to entertain, not educate, listeners. As a popular music, it possessed all those qualities not attributed to classical music. Jazz was 'spontaneous,' 'vulgar,' 'discordant,' and 'participatory' (Levine, 1989; Ogren, 1989), characteristics shared with popular culture expressions more generally (Firth, 1996; Fiske, 1989; Gans, 1974; Mercer, 1986). Moreover, without a legitimating ideology to insulate it, the opinions of those positioned outside the field of music were especially critical to the struggle to frame its meaning. The contention over early jazz was thus animated by the boundary-work of multiple speakers, employing multiple frames that reflected multiple interests. It is to this environment that I turn my attention. Examining newspaper and magazine articles, I explore the relationship between particular modes of boundary-work and the position of the speakers who employed them.

Methods

This study is based on a content analysis of newspaper and magazine articles appearing in the mainstream media during the period 1917–30. The articles were compiled from *The Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature* and the *New York Times Index*. The *Readers' Guide* indexes both generalist and specialist publications aimed at 'middlebrow' and 'highbrow' readerships. The time period was established as a function of the frequency of articles. The first article to appear in either index under the jazz or jazz music heading was published in 1917. Meanwhile, by 1930 the frequency of articles dedicated to a discussion of jazz had dropped precipitously as only five articles were published during that year.

Together, the indexes listed a total of 319 articles under the headings 'jazz' or 'jazz music.' Arranged chronologically, every other entry was then sampled. Within each article all paragraphs with the word 'jazz' ($N = 698$) or a derivative

(for example, 'jazzing' or 'jazzed') were coded on two dimensions: (1) the speaker's field, and (2) the boundary theme(s) invoked to define the music and thus the basis for the contention.

The analysis of the articles yielded the following categories for speakers' fields:

1. *'High' art musicians, composers, and critics* – included in this category are the American composers, Daniel Gregory Mason and John Alden Carpenter, the French composer, Darius Milhaud, music critics for *The New York Times*, and conductors, Walter Damrosch and Leopold Stokowski.
2. *'Popular' musicians* – included in this category are performers such as the 'King of Jazz,' Paul Whiteman, Vincent Lopez, and Irving Berlin, the 'King of Ragtime'.
3. *Civic or political leaders* – this category includes clergy, school superintendents, judges, and political officials. Civic organizations such as the Salvation Army and the National Recreation Congress are also represented in this category.
4. *General cultural critics or intellectuals* – while structurally invested with high degrees of cultural capital, this category is comprised of persons whose cultural authority and legitimacy were not derived principally from the field of music. Instead, this category included authors, university professors, contributors to 'highbrow' publications, and various social commentators such as Gilbert Seldes, J. A. Rogers, and H. L. Mencken.

Methodologically centered on the two issues noted above, the present study does not offer a history of the development of jazz or its rise to the status of high art (see Lopes, 2002). These developments involved numerous processes, an examination of which exceeds the parameters of the current study. Instead, my primary interest here lies in analyzing the boundary-work undertaken to construct different meanings of jazz during the time of its initial diffusion into the musical mainstream, and how these efforts were related to the positions of various speakers.

Findings: Frames and Fields

Paragraphs were analyzed for the discursive themes that informed the boundary-work of speakers. Like the analysis of speakers' fields, coding was 'open-ended' as no particular theme(s) was pre-determined for inclusion or exclusion. However, given the musical links between early jazz and African-American culture, the range of academic writing on the subject, and the intensity of racism and prejudice in America during this period, I anticipated that explicit connections between jazz and race in the print media would be common. Yet, as I discuss more fully at the end of this article, this did not prove to be the case. As Figure 1 reveals, the themes resorted to most frequently were artistic, class/status, and the body.

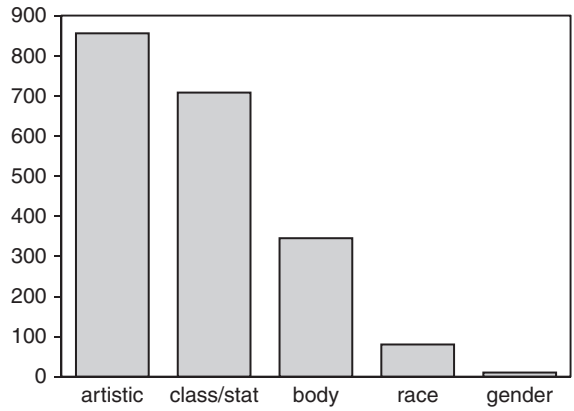

Figure 1 Weighted frequencies of boundary references

For its part, Figure 2 sheds light on the relationship between the discursive themes and the boundary-work ushering from each field. With their basis of legitimacy, credentials, and cultural capital derived from distinct institutional sources, we might expect speakers to have adopted different discursive strategies. Indeed, this is what we find and it is to a discussion of this relationship that I now turn.

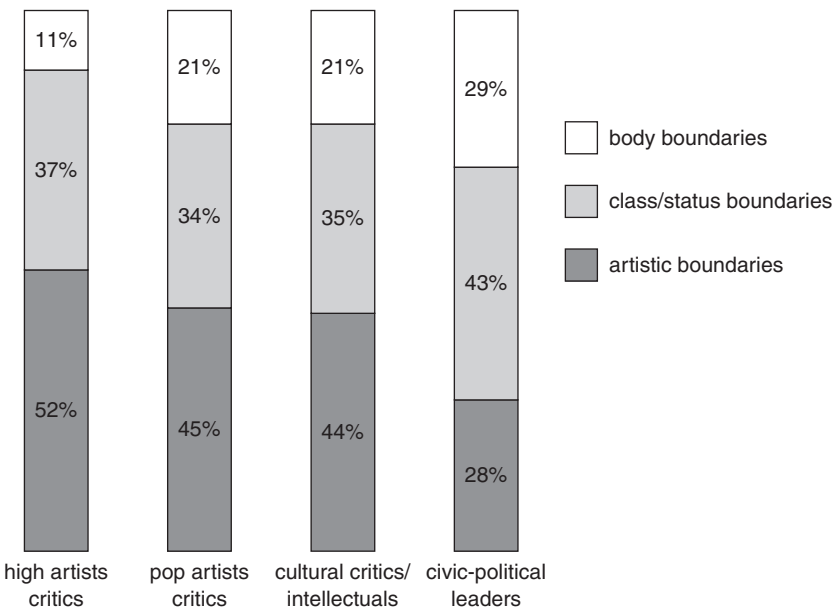

Figure 2 Weighted boundary references by fields[2]

'Highbrow' Composers and Critics

Highbrow composers, conductors, and critics adopted a discourse that emphasized jazz's artistic implications with the greatest frequency (52%), while voicing a position on the music's impact on the body the least (11%) of any of the fields in question. As guardians of the standards that mark 'legitimate' music, the struggle to define jazz's impact on these standards bore most directly on those positioned within the high arts. Thus, we find Richard Aldrich, music critic for *The New York Times*, informing his readers that

> Jazz draws the line nowhere. Nothing is safe from its devastating touch. The jazz blacksmiths soon came to the end of their own stock of ideas, such as they were, and then their only resource was to lay violent hands upon music that musicians have always approached with respect and even reverence. (*The New York Times*, 10 December 1922)

Frank Damrosch, a conductor and director of the Institute of Musical Art (which would later become part of the Juilliard School of Music), remarked similarly on the growing popularity of jazz – particularly the 'symphonic' variety championed by Paul Whiteman – and the music's 'stealing' of elements 'owned' by the classical tradition. In an ideal discursive strategy for defending the boundaries of the field and his position within it, Damrosch cast jazz as nothing short of a profanation of a sublime aesthetic heritage:

> Attempts have been made to 'elevate' jazz by stealing phrases from the classical composers and vulgarizing them by the rhythms and devices used in jazz. This is not only an outrage on beautiful music, but also a confession of poverty, of inability to compose music of any value on the part of jazz writers. (*Etude*, August 1924)

The saliency of this challenge to the classical canon was accentuated during the first decades of the 20th century as the import of solidifying the boundaries of 'serious' music was coupled with calls to develop a uniquely American music (Moore, 1985). Composers, music critics, and other defenders of 'refined' culture were committed to nurturing a musical form able to enter into the European-dominated musical pantheon. Americans had long looked to the European tradition for models of 'art' music; thus, when calls for the creation of an American art music gained momentum, many turned to the classical canon for inspiration (Levine, 1988, 1989; Moore, 1985). Produced by incompetent, creatively bankrupt musicians, jazz was an inauthentic music based not on the artistic spirit of its composers and performers, but, rather, on the tortured theft from real geniuses. To the degree that jazz, a 'lowbrow' form of popular dance music, incorporated elements from the classical tradition or served as an inspiration for classical composers it threatened the purity of European art music and the nascent attempt to develop an American counterpart. If jazz was recognized as possessing artistic value, then the boundaries separating high and popular culture would be blurred, thus compromising

efforts to cultivate the nation's artistic tastes through the aesthetic superiority of 'legitimate' music (Appelrouth, 2003).

Popular Musicians and Critics

Like their highbrow brethren, popular musicians and critics framed the meaning of jazz most often in terms of its impact on artistic boundaries (45% of boundary references). Contrary to the composers and critics noted earlier, however, this discursive strategy can be understood here as a style of boundary-work intended to construct the position of jazz as a legitimate form of musical expression. Certainly, for those 'jazz' musicians who played popular music for their living, convincing the public that the music was 'safe,' if not salubrious, for listeners was of utmost importance to generating a sustained audience.[3] Additionally, we can anticipate that with a material, if not ideological, stake in the acceptance of jazz, speakers positioned within this field would have been structurally committed to supporting the music and, thus, discounting, if not applauding, its alleged musical transgressions. In turn, extolling such transgressions symbolically aligned popular musicians with the broader transformations that accompanied the diffusion of the music and for which jazz served as a particularly visible marker. It is in this vein that we find the likes of Paul Whiteman noting the authenticity of expression, and thus artistic merits, of jazz:

> the spirit and sophistication of jazz are far more virile, colorful, striking and significant than the sterile intellectual products in the more serious forms of modern music... Like the country it reflects, it is crude, blatant, vulgar, at once barbarous and sophisticated. (*The New York Times*, 13 March 1927)

However, not all popular music performers viewed jazz's impact on artistic boundaries in a favorable light. Indeed, some attempted to distance themselves from the 'jazz' label. Seeking to disassociate their careers from the stigma attached to jazz, some opted to brand their music 'modern' or 'syncopated' dance music, or, in the case of Paul Specht, the leader of a popular dance band, 'rhythmic symphonic syncopation'. For others, the endorsement of jazz was conditioned on the music abandoning its earlier, 'grotesque' tendencies. This latter form of boundary-work is revealed in the remarks of Vincent Lopez, leader of one of the most popular dance bands of the era. Interestingly, Lopez, in a subtle attempt to elevate jazz's 'class' standing, injects his comments with a monetary imagery intended to separate *his* brand of jazz from past, tawdry forms of the music. Unlike earlier 'jazz bands', his 'orchestra' performs formally sophisticated music that possesses the aesthetic sensibilities found in classical compositions:

> At the very beginning 'jaz' [sic] meant 'without music' or 'contrary to music,' but a great change has taken place in it… There was a time not long ago when anything odd and fantastical in music was labeled 'jaz'. The musicians became affected with the glamour of syncopation . . . It became a clamor, an uproar. The clarinet whined

> and whistled; the trombone guffawed grotesquely; the trumpets blared and fluttered, the pianist gyrated.
>
> The violinist caught the germ and debased his instrument through the most flagrant musical indecencies. We had for orchestras a bunch of acrobatic maniacs to whom music was entirely secondary and mummery was the word . . . And that was 'jazz'.
>
> It is certainly a misdemeanor to call my orchestra, or any other good dance organization, a 'jazz band', if taken in the sense of what a 'jazz band' used to be. Present day dance music is as different from 'jazz' as day from night; yet the word remains with us and we do stress syncopation, but we do it musically. It is now combined with the finest arrangements money can buy, the richest chords and modulations that gifted musical minds can conceive and the total elimination of all instruments and effects not of proven musical worth. (*The New York Times*, 1 June 1924)

It is important to point out, however, that speakers within each of the four fields referenced artistic boundaries with a high degree of frequency, including the field comprised of civic and political leaders whose authority to name the 'truth' would seem inadequate in the arena of musical aesthetics. On the one hand, this finding is not unexpected given that jazz was, after all, an innovative form of *music*. Nevertheless, that speakers positioned in fields that lack either credentialed expertise or a direct stake in its development qua music also framed jazz in terms of its impact on artistic boundaries suggests that the absence of a developed legitimating ideology left jazz vulnerable to the aesthetic criticisms of 'untrained' persons. It also reinforces the notion that the aesthetic features of jazz were understood to carry not only musical implications.

Civic and Political Leaders

For civic leaders and reformers with an interest in checking the alleged dangers immanent in lowbrow popular culture, the aesthetic features of jazz portended broader social repercussions. Attempting to protect the nation's moral standards through 'genteel' recreational practices, music, as a vital force for realizing these educational ambitions, was endowed with heightened social significance. Concerted efforts were undertaken to civilize the nation's populace through the spiritual enlightenment allegedly offered through classical music. Jazz, on the other hand, was 'retrograde': it marked the negation of conventions of propriety and decorum. In turn, the music's alleged assault on aesthetic standards was nothing less than an attack on the moral code of those who sought to legitimate existing social hierarchies.

This shift in focus is highlighted by a style of boundary-work that moves from accenting the production of jazz to accenting its consumption. Such extramusical meanings are captured in discourses that emphasized jazz's impact on the listener's body (Appelrouth, 2005). Discursively controlling the individual body is a potent means for establishing 'normality' and the range of acceptable behavioral practices (Foucault, 1978). As such, the body is a predominant site

of cultural conflicts (e.g. Douglas, 1966, 1982; Smith-Rosenberg, 1978; Stallybrass and White, 1986). In calling attention to the purported physical effects of jazz, supporters and detractors of the new music were participating in a recurring social struggle over the power to establish both the meanings and limits of behaviors.

Invested with the cultural and symbolic capital, and thus the authority, to most directly control the individual body, and through it the body politic, this boundary dimension was referenced with the greatest proportionate frequency (29%) by those positioned within the field of civic and political leaders. For instance, the Reverend Dr Christian F. Reisner warned that jazz 'tends to unseat reason and set the passions free' (*The New York Times*, 11 January 1926), while a New Jersey state supreme court judge asserted that 'in response to its call there ensues a series of snakelike gyrations and weird contortions of seemingly agonized bodies and limbs' (*The New York Times*, 14 April 1926). Jazz, defined as a sensuous, unrestrained music, provoked behaviors that corrupted the prevailing standards of propriety. With their own legitimacy as moral gatekeepers dependent on controlling the behavioral conventions that defined the social order, the struggle to authoritatively establish the meaning of jazz's effects on bodily boundaries represented an important stake in the contention for speakers positioned in this field.

A similar dynamic is expressed through references to class and status boundaries. Here again, civic and political leaders referenced this boundary dimension with the greatest proportionate frequency (43%). As the principal defenders of the social order, the structural position of these speakers made recourse to class and status boundaries an integral part of their discursive strategy. Essential to the legitimacy of this field is the preservation of class and status-based standards of decorum and propriety. Allegedly transgressing class and status boundaries, the diffusion of jazz was particularly threatening to civic and political leaders whose public authority depended on insuring the inviolability of 'civilizing manners' (Elias, 1978). An article appearing in the *New York American* (22 January 1922) captures well the concerns emanating from this field regarding both the alleged body and class/status implications of jazz. Under the headline, 'Jazz Ruining Girls, Declares Reformer: Degrading Music Even Common in "Society Circles"', readers were warned by Rev. Phillip Yarrow, superintendent of the Illinois Vigilance Association, that

> Moral disaster is coming to hundreds of young American girls through the pathological, nerve-irritating, sex-exciting music of jazz orchestras . . . In Chicago alone the association's representatives have traced the fall of 1,000 girls in the last two years to jazz music. Girls in small towns, as well as big cities, in poor homes and rich homes, are victims of the weird, insidious, neurotic music that accompanies modern dancing. The degrading music is common not only to disorderly places, but often to high school affairs, to expensive hotels and so-called society circles.

Described as 'pathological,' 'nerve-irritating,' and 'sex-exciting,' jazz is deemed responsible for wreaking bodily harm. Additionally, by citing the 'degrading' music's migration from 'poor homes' to 'rich homes', from 'disorderly

places . . . to expensive hotels and so-called society circles', jazz's transgression of class and status boundaries is marked as an 'insidious' threat to the morality of the nation. Despite the 'disproportionate' rhetoric, however, Yarrow's anxieties did indeed reflect ongoing challenges to existing social arrangements. The nation was witnessing dramatic social changes that introduced new and, more importantly, *different* cultural practices into the mainstream. And the diffusion of jazz, a once marginalized music performed in dance halls, nightclubs, and cabarets, vividly symbolized the boundary transgressions that marked broader societal transformations.

The fusion of class/status based anxieties with efforts to control the individual body likewise was expressed through the regulation of places closely associated with jazz, most notably the dance hall (Erenberg, 1981; Nasaw, 1993; Nye, 1973; Peiss, 1986). Seen as a leading cause of society's moral decline, by the end of the 1930s, 28 states and 100 cities had passed laws regulating the licensing and physical condition of dance halls, as well as the physical expressiveness of dances (Gardner, 1929). Some 60 communities had passed regulations specifically prohibiting the performance of jazz in public dance halls (Leonard, 1970). Media reports at times directly linked promiscuity and dangers of the dance hall to jazz. For instance, the widely read purveyor of middlebrow taste, *The Literary Digest*, informed its readership that

> . . . unsupervised in promiscuous public gatherings, [dancing] is said to be one of America's gravest problems. This verdict . . . is borne out by the various reports of vice commissions, Senate investigations, and city recreation surveys. The government campaign against social diseases 'led again and again to the unregulated dance-hall as a source of danger. (26 February 1921)

The article goes on to claim that jazz was primarily responsible for perpetuating the nefarious conditions prevalent in dance halls. In his commentary the writer advised that before the 'growing menace' of the dance hall can be remedied through municipal regulation, reformers must first 'restrain "jazz" orchestras and promoters from inoculating a promiscuous assemblage with their poisonous virus'.

The construction of class identities demands that specific behavioral styles be attributable to specific segments of the population. Carefully restricted to the lower-class, the loss of bodily inhibition accompanying physically expressive forms of popular culture presents less of a threat to the integrity of class boundaries. Once the containment of 'grotesque' cultural practices within lower-class boundaries is endangered by the participation of members of the middle and upper classes, however, such practices become a more potent threat to the purity of class identity and a force for polluting the social order (Beisel, 1992, 1993; Fiske, 1989; Stallybrass and White, 1986). The 'revolution in morals' (Ostrander, 1968) that occurred during the 1920s was a result of the younger generation of the 'respectable' classes violating the behavioral and normative standards prescribed by their position (Collier, 1991). By indulging in leisure activities ordinarily confined to the lower classes, the younger generation of the

middle and upper classes threatened to corrupt the refinement that serves as the cultural basis for class privilege.

Cultural Critics

Despite the alarm sounded by civic and political leaders, reactions emanating from the field of cultural critics often presented jazz's boundary transgressions in a favorable light. Interestingly, this boundary-work often was based on the same terms used to decry jazz's allegedly harmful effects. In the case of the music's impact on class and status boundaries, Gilbert Seldes, editor and critic for the *Dial* and author of *The Seven Lively Arts*,[4] offered a characteristic view of jazz's transgressions ushering from this field:

> Jazz is roaring and stamping and vulgar, you may say; but you cannot say that is pale and polite and dying . . . The strength, the touch upon common things, the hold upon common emotions, the almost rapturous freedom, the carelessness, the lack of dignity, the very vulgarity . . . of jazz are treasures beyond price in a world which is busy with business and a society corrupted by false ideas of politeness and gentility in the arts. (1924: 21)

In championing jazz, Seldes portrays the music as a corrective to the puritanism of 'polite' society. Jazz is 'vulgar,' careless, undignified, and is thus defined by traits that mark it as the negative or inverse of respectable cultural pursuits. Yet, it is these very features of jazz that distinguish it as priceless. In turn, jazz is more than just a music to listen or dance to. Its subversiveness offers an antidote to the rigid and 'false' conventions of the dominant culture by providing an avenue for authentic experience. And for Seldes, as well as those who shared his views, this was *the* struggle that was being waged – the struggle over the legitimacy of prevailing normative conventions.

Class and Status: A Common Theme

Like references to artistic boundaries, the frequency with which each field adopted a class or status-based discursive theme suggests that concern over these social boundaries played a key role in spurring the contention. Indeed, the aesthetic and status implications of the music were often fused into a single discourse. For instance, the following remarks of the concert pianist Ashley Pettis clearly illustrate a wedding of the musical and the social:

> Jazz is nothing more or less than a distortion of every aesthetic principle. It is all right in its place – the cabaret and the dance hall – but it should not be allowed to invade the sacred precincts of our concert halls. (*The New York Times*, 14 November 1924)

At its root, the pianist takes issue with jazz not only because of its aesthetically inferior quality, but also because it is 'invading' the musical geography of the educated classes. Jazz may 'distort' aesthetic principles, but equally threatening

is its transgression of class and status-based boundaries. If jazz's aesthetic 'distortions' – its syncopated rhythms, basis in collective improvisation, and fusing of distinct musical traditions – transgressed the *spaces* of the cultured classes, music would not be all that was jeopardized. Also at risk is a particular view of the social order whose values are symbolized through a particular musical style (Cohen, 1998). Confined to its 'place' the threats posed by jazz could be contained. Once it penetrated the 'higher circles' of the concert hall, however, jazz would undermine the spatial distinctions that reflected and legitimated class divisions.

To fully understand the resonance of this discourse, then, we must locate jazz's class and status boundary implications within the broader historical context accompanying the music's diffusion into the cultural mainstream. As controversy over forms of artistic expression (and cultural conflicts more generally) involves attempts to subvert or protect social distinctions, they embody struggles over the boundaries on which such divisions are based – divisions that often become blurred, and therefore more crucial to define, during periods of significant social change. America during the 1920s was witness to just such a period. Scholars have described this era in American history as a period of 'crisis' (Susman, 1985), 'unreality' (Lears, 1983), and 'nervousness' (Nash, 1970); a conclusion that has been drawn by numerous historians and social commentators (e.g. Allen, 1931; Baritz, 1970; Carter, 1968; Douglas, 1995; Sullivan, 1935). Industrialization and the growth of cities in turn-of-the century America represented a challenge to the dominance of Victorian moral codes. A burgeoning leisure industry that promoted collective physical and emotional release represented a threat to those members of the middle and upper classes whose position was reflected in and effected through the continued legitimacy of a behavioral code that demanded constant internal vigilance over physical and emotional public displays. Cultural guardians and progressive-minded social scientists concerned about the destruction of community bonds and the instability of the 'modern' family wrought by urbanization, pointed to the coupling of technological progress with 'commercialized amusements' as responsible for producing 'a nation of onlookers and listeners'. Consumption, not production, was becoming the center of social life, leading some contemporary observers to suggest that the 'present tendency is stunting normal life and giving rise to social unrest and social degeneracy' (Gillin et al., 1928: 35–6). For such critics, crowded cities and the amusements they offered were sites of poorly regulated public mixing where the continuous exposure to cultural differences posed a threat to the stability of the nation's moral well-being.

For many observers, jazz was seen as both an outgrowth and promoter of this new, 'modern' social order – the 'Jazz Age' – based on consumption and personal indulgence. Indeed, the connection was often made explicit such as in the remarks of the conductor Leopold Stokowski who noted that '"Jazz" . . . is an expression of the times, of the breathless, energetic super-active times in which we are living, and it is useless to fight against it' (1924: 595). A similar equation (albeit with a different interpretation) is found in the comments of

Dr John Roach Straton, pastor of the Calvary Baptist Church in New York City, who likens jazz to a 'spirit' that has polluted virtually every facet of life:

> I have no patience with this modern jazz tendency, whether it be in music, science, social life or religion. It is part of the lawless spirit which is being manifested in many departments of life, endangering our civilization in its general revolt against authority and established order. (*The New York Times*, 7 May 1926)

Symbolically linked to shifting behavioral and ethical conventions, preoccupation with jazz's impact on social boundaries transcended any particular field. With such transformations altering the nation's cultural landscape, jazz was commonly viewed, regardless of the field in which speakers were positioned, as transgressing the behavioral and moral prescriptions that produced and reinforced class and status boundaries – either for the better or the worse.

Jazz and Race

Surprisingly, given the well-documented connection between jazz and African-American culture and performers (e.g. Berger, 1947; Collier, 1988, 1993; Hennessey, 1994; Kenney, 1993; Lax, 1974; Leonard, 1970; Ogren, 1989; Peretti, 1992; Schuller, 1968), the music was seldom linked in the media to the major changes in race relations taking place during the 1920s. (Explicit references to racial boundaries appeared in 5.8% of the paragraphs.) Those references that did appear included concerns over jazz's impact, as a 'Negro' music, on the state of American music and classical music more generally; as well as concerns over the music's effect on the 'prestige' of the white race. For example, *The New York Times* (27 September 1927) under the headline 'Warns White Races They Must Drop Jazz: English Musician Says It Is a Primitive Method and a Menace to Prestige', quoted Sir Henry Coward averring that 'the popularization of jazz and the attendant immodest dances are lowering the prestige of the white races'. Yet such commentaries appeared relatively infrequently.

How can we makes sense of the relative infrequency with which this frame was adopted, particularly when considering the turbulent racial climate accompanying the music's diffusion into the wider culture? A number of answers can be posited. One explanation is that references to racial boundaries may have been encompassed by a separate, but related, boundary discourse. In particular, references to the 'body' at times may have served as a silent trope for a racialized 'Other,' just as literal references to jazz's transgressing of class and status boundaries may have connoted a 'Negroidization' of the middle and upper classes. From this perspective, the infrequency of references to racial boundaries should not be taken to suggest that race related issues were of little salience in the struggle to define jazz.

Though possible, this explanation suggests that a form of 'political correctness' regarding racial issues was operating during the 1920s. However, while

our own political climate has produced a 'coded' discourse with regard to racial issues we must be careful in imputing such motives backwards to the 1920s. At the very least, the notion that speakers were reticent to adopt overtly racial discursive frames is compromised not only by the example cited earlier, but also by the frequency with which news stories and commentaries concerning the 'Negro Problem' appeared in the press.

A second explanation can be drawn from a musical standpoint that argues that the commercialization of jazz led to an association of the music with white dance bands and songwriters (e.g. Garofalo, 1997; Leonard, 1970; Ogren, 1989; Sudhatler, 1999). Dominant record companies opted to abandon recording improvised 'hot' jazz played primarily by black musicians in favor of recording 'sweet' or symphonic jazz played primarily by classically trained white musicians. This decision was a product of the technical difficulties the firms faced when attempting to record improvised jazz as well as the reluctance to offend elite customers by distributing an 'illegitimate' music performed by black musicians (Phillips and Owens, 2004; see also Dowd, 2003). The latter concern was amplified given the recent institutionalization of the boundaries associating class position and taste. As a result, with the growing popularity of 'jazz' and its dissemination through the radio and phonograph, writers like George Gershwin, Aaron Copeland, and Irving Berlin were hailed as the nation's pre-eminent jazz composers. Meanwhile, the white dance band leader, Paul Whiteman, was crowned 'King of Jazz.' Thus, the popularization of jazz in the form of 'symphonic syncopation' performed by jazz 'orchestras' may have produced an image of the music that suppressed its connection to African American culture.[5]

A third explanation, the one most in keeping with the argument regarding boundary-work, lies in accounting for the field in which the speakers were positioned. Actors situated in the field of music, whether 'highbrow' or 'popular', appeared in the press with the greatest frequency (57 percent of the sample paragraphs). Such figures, structurally invested with the (contested) legitimacy to 'name' jazz musically, adopted a discursive strategy that enabled them to symbolically capitalize on their expertise, in other words, defining jazz's artistic implications. This aesthetic authority certainly would not have been lost on the educated, middle and highbrow readerships of the mass media publications I examined. Nor would it have been lost on the owners or managers of these publications. Thus, whether the speakers examined here harbored general racist views or a racialized view of jazz were matters of peripheral concern, a finding that connects to the forms of capital that structure the field.

This study, then, examines the boundary-work of 'tastemakers' and moral entrepreneurs in their efforts to frame the meaning of jazz *for* the general public. How jazz was defined *by* the general public is not revealed by the articles examined here. However, in analyzing print media primarily intended for audiences that formed an important segment of the emerging urban mass culture, this study captures a crucial sector in the battle to shape public discourse concerning jazz and the boundaries that mark 'legitimate' public taste.

Conclusion

Like the controversies that often surround artistic expression, the contention over jazz was as much a struggle to legitimate competing worldviews as it was a contest to assign an aesthetic meaning to the music. As a challenge to existing musical conventions and an expression of the broader social changes taking place, the emergence of jazz into the cultural mainstream signaled distinct intrusions into the authority of each of the fields examined here. The stakes in the struggle to define jazz, and the discursive frames adopted to express them, were in turn shaped by the social positions of the participants whose voices informed the contention. The availability of discursive repertoires is thus not open-ended, nor is the selection of one repertoire over another strictly a matter of 'effectiveness' (Gieryn, 1983). Instead, speakers, marshalling the credentials on which their particular fields were organized, emphasized those boundary dimensions about which they could legitimately claim to pronounce the 'truth'.

For those positioned within the field of music, this entailed a form of boundary-work that focused on the production of jazz and its alleged impact on artistic boundaries. High-art musicians and critics, aiming to monopolize authority and resources, sought to expulse their 'rivals' – jazz musicians – within the field of music by adopting a discourse that disparaged the creativity and skill of jazz musicians and thus the authenticity of jazz as a form of musical expression. The issue of authenticity likewise was an important feature of the discourse of popular musicians that, at times, led to paradoxical claims. In attempting to legitimate their music and expand into the musical territory controlled by high artists and critics, popular musicians, on one hand, defined jazz as authentic, compared to the 'sterile' classical music produced by their rivals, for in capturing the 'virility' and 'vulgarity' of the national mood it fulfilled the essential purpose of art. On the other hand, some popular musicians, instead of accentuating the differences between jazz and classical music, contended that, like classical music, jazz was refined and thus of 'proven musical worth.' Here, the quest for authenticity was pursued through an attempt to protect the autonomy of jazz musicians. Yet, unlike the 'credibility contests' waged within the sciences, pursuit of this goal did not entail attributing 'blame to outside scapegoats' but, rather, efforts to align the qualities of jazz with musical practices already possessing legitimacy (Gieryn, 1983: 791–2; 1999: 16–18). For these jazz performers, resisting outside intrusions or 'blame', particularly of the sort ushering from civic and political leaders, first required that the protection afforded by the mantle of artistic authenticity be internally secured.

For their part, civic and political leaders, without the institutionally derived credibility to impose their view on matters of aesthetics, introduced a different set of stakes by turning to a form of boundary-work emphasizing the alleged effects stemming from the consumption of jazz. Seeking to expand their authority into the field of music, such concerns were framed through a discourse highlighting the music's impact on the listener's body and on the class/status order. For it is precisely over matters of behavioral propriety and morality, and

their repercussion for the broader social order, that civic and political leaders possess the greatest legitimacy for imposing their version of reality.

Beyond the conflict over jazz, this analysis provides insight into the structuring of boundary-work. In their attempts to construct the meanings of cultural innovations and their impact, actors are not free to fashion a limitless range of discursive strategies, nor are they inclined to do so. Instead of being a random or arbitrary affair, efforts to legitimate particular definitions of reality are grounded in the institutional and discursive resources accessible within a given field. These resources reflect the distribution of various forms of capital that hierarchically structure all fields. Thus, depending on the basis of their authority to speak the truth, actors will have recourse to a homologous, but finite, set of meanings through which symbolic struggles can be waged. Boundary themes provide an effective discourse for demarcating cultural tastes and the social groups associated with them. As a pivotal element in the struggle to produce, reproduce, and challenge cultural distinctions that sustain social hierarchies, they do not spontaneously emerge within sites of contention. In order more fully to understand the making of meanings, whether it be in the arts or any other cultural arena, sociologists must attend to the importance of boundary-work as a practice, the role of boundary themes as a discursive device, and the structuring impact of the relevant fields.

Notes

1. For example, Robert Mapplethorpe's 1990 Cincinnati exhibit, or the 1999 'Sensation' exhibit at the Brooklyn Museum.
2. Cross-tabulating each of the three boundary dimensions by fields yielded chi-square values significant at the .00 level in all three cases.
3. During the 1920s 'jazz' was often used as a generic term for popular dance music. By today's standards not all of this music would be labeled 'jazz' (see Collier, 1993). The newspaper and journal articles analyzed here encompass reports on what would be considered today both the broader and more restrictive sense of the music. Nevertheless, because I am interested in examining the discourses adopted by speakers during the 1920s, (and thus their use of the term), the fact that the categorization of musical styles has shifted since then has negligible bearing on the results presented here.
4. Written in 1924, Seldes's *The Seven Lively Arts* offers the first systematic argument for elevating popular culture to the status of art, and thus deserving of critical analysis. See also Kammen (1996).
5. It is unlikely, however, that listeners were completely unaware of jazz's roots in African-American culture. While the discrimination faced by black musicians enabled white musicians to record and broadcast more frequently (and with more lucrative contracts), at least three factors mitigate against a total 'whitewashing' of jazz. First, black jazz musicians did record and broadcast frequently enough to prevent their complete marginalization within the mass music industry. Second, phonographs and radio broadcasts share an important 'colorblindness' that renders classifying the racial identities of unfamiliar or

unidentified performers problematic. Third, because jazz performances often took place in establishments in black communities such as Harlem and Chicago's South Side, live audiences had first-hand exposure to the music's association with African-American culture. Likewise, at least some of the listeners who did not venture to urban vice districts must, nevertheless, have been aware of jazz's presence in black neighborhoods.

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Scott Appelrouth

Scott Appelrouth is Associate Professor of Sociology at California State University, Northridge. In addition to his research into music, his general interests are in cultural sociology, social theory, and social movements. He is also co-author (with Laura Edles) of a three volume series in social theory for Sage Publications/Pine Forge Press.
Address: Department of Sociology, California State University, Northridge, CA 91330-8318, USA.
Email: saa@csun.edu