

Elective Affiliations: Marginal Urban Characters Negotiating Legitimacy and Autonomy in Urban Culture

*Jonathan Wynn***

ABSTRACT

'Elective Affiliations' examines how walking tour guides manage to transmit cultural information, engage in the public imagination, and impart a method of urban investigation their participants while still occupying a place in-between formal institutions, social networks, and labor markets. Drawing from five-years of ethnographic data, guides are presented as living and succeeding in the 'interstitial' areas of cities, and are forced to negotiate the tension between structural autonomy and the legitimations arising from affiliation with cultural institutions. Walking guides are successful at their endeavors because of their ever-changing set of inter-relationships, not in spite of them. 'Elective Affiliations' brings empirical evidence from the intersection of urbanism, tourism, and culture, and recent work on social capital and networks to recent issues of urban cultural policy.

Keywords: Elective affiliation, urbanism, tourism, culture

INTRODUCTION: URBAN CULTURE, IN BROAD STROKES AND IN BETWEEN

Everything is big in New York. Big buildings, big sports teams. When Christo provides big saffron gates in Central Park there are seven thousand of them. When an event is desired, it is the Olympics. "We're a town with a tradition of putting on big events," announced Mayor Bloomberg in a news conference on February 21st 2005 designed to kick off the International Olympic Committee's visit. "We hope to show the IOC how well we would put on the biggest event of all. The big thing this selection committee is going to see is that New York is ready."

The artistic tool of choice for painting contemporary urban culture is the same wide brush. In his examinations of urban culture German urbanist Hartmut Häussermann claims that cities will increasingly move towards the *festivalization* of urban centers, with 'Expos,' World Fairs, Olympic Games, World Cups, municipal anniversaries, and film festivals (Häussermann and Siebel, 1993). These are what urbanists are dubbing 'mega' or 'hallmark' events (Hall, 2000; Hiller, 2000; Jafar, 1988; Roche, 1992). Unlike more organically originated events like Carnivale and Mardi Gras (Gotham, 2007), new festivals are created, packaged and commodified. For those who are interested in generating profits from culture, the economic problem with older versions of festivals is that they were temporally finite. A more commodified urban culture, on the other hand, has a greater chance to continually generate profit. Places themselves have become a product of the "speculative construction of space" (Harvey, 1989: 8), and urban culture itself has been constructed and commodified at the neighborhood level as well: the Las Vegas Fremont Street Experience, Boston's Faneuil Hall, Berlin's Potsdamer Platz, Baltimore's Harborplace, London's Canary Wharf, and New York's Times Square (*inter alia* Harvey, 1991; Zukin, 1995; Mullins, 1991; Ley & Olds, 1988; Hannigan, 1998; Kirshenblatt-Gimblatt, 1998; Urry, 1990). In the latter case, forces of government deregulation, gentrification, and spatial domination (Davis, 1992; Low, 2003; Smith, 1996) mollified the urban environment—with its fringe culture, featuring adult bookstores, drug dealers, and peepshows—for a wave of commodification through the commitment of big-name stores like Disney, Virgin, and Toys 'R Us (Delany, 1999). Paired with new commercial urbanism is an increased interest in heritage and cultural diversity (*inter alia* Boniface & Fowler, 1993; Lash & Urry, 1997; Hayden, 1996; Kearns & Philo, 1993), the city becomes an amalgam of "premixed design packages that reproduce preexisting urban forms," exploiting or manufacturing the historical and cultural forms (Boyer, 1992: 184).

High up in office buildings sit the big players of the tourism and culture, dubbed members of the 'growth machines' or 'entertainment machines': the venture capitalists, the entertainment executives, the real estate developers, the public-private partnerships each vying for their manipulations of the symbolic structure of the city with big events, big projects, and big budgets (see Logan and Molotch, 1989; Zukin, 1998; Lloyd and Clark, 2001). Despite research that calls into question the economic benefits of tourism and the arts (Stanziola, 1999; see also Guetzkow, 2002), they are still seen as important parts of the urban growth machine (Whitt and Lammers, 1991), or the 'urban power structure' (Friedland and Palmer, 1984).

There are other workers in urban culture. The sphere that this research is drawn from, tourism, is a vast industry that has existed in relative obscurity in the study of cities, largely marginalized to journals like *Tourist Studies*, *Annals of Tourism Research*, and the *Journal of Tourism Studies*. And yet, tourism plays a powerful role in the economic health of cities, and offers myriad sources of employment. Tourism industry jobs have increased at a rate greater than any other sector (Gladstone and Feinstein, 2003: 90), while lagging behind all other sectors in wages and wage increases (Gladstone and Feinstein, 2001). According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (2007), today's tourism trade is expected to surpass seven trillion dollars of economic activity, producing over 10% of the world's economic output and 8.3% of global employment (one out of 12 jobs in the world market, approximately 231 million people). The tourism and travel industry accounts for over 15 million U.S. jobs (one out of 9.2 jobs), and contributes \$518.3 billion to the nation's economy (or 3.9%) (WTTC 2006).¹ New York is a pivotal node, with an estimated 44 million visitors who spent \$24 billion in 2006 and—due to a weak dollar—46 million visitors spending \$28 billion in 2007 supporting approximately 300,000 of the city's jobs (Fernandez, 2006; Rauh, 2008).

The subjects of my research—which focuses upon the social networks within which the walking tour guides of New York operate and the cultural reproduction that they participate in—stand within this larger labor market, but quite in opposition to the larger trends. Rather than participating

¹ Since the impact of tourism reaches other sectors of the U.S. economy, the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) separates the 'U.S. Travel and Tourism Economy' from the 'U.S. Travel and Tourism Industry.' If the numbers were strictly confined to the industry itself, there are 6,561,620 jobs (4.7% of total employment) and accounts for \$482.7 billion, or 4.1% of the GNP. The WTTC's numbers are based upon the "industrial activity defined by the diverse collection of products (durables and non-durables) and services (transportation, accommodations, food and beverage, entertainment, government services, etc) that are *delivered to visitors* [italics added]" (WTTC 2004: 11).

directly in the urban culture writ large, New York City's over 1,600 licensed sightseeing guides use stories, walks, and micro-, street-level investigations that connect big themes of culture and history to the quotidian. Conducting over 70 interviews with subjects in and around the *walking* sector of this industry and over 150 hours of participant-observation on the city streets, I found a different culture of the city at the margins of the tourism juggernaut. Walking guides are small actors in terms of relative power, with little consecration and economic capital at their disposal. An ethnographic, rather than theoretical, perspective provides a different vision, and different issues, at work in urban culture.

But why study such characters, and what can they tell us about urban culture and its relation to policy? For that we can draw from Richard Florida's best-selling paean to creative workers, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, in which he not only states that "everything interesting is happening at the fringes of culture" (2002: 184), but that there is a whole class hiding in between the threads of the urban fabric, that needs nurturing and encouragement. Such thoughts remind me of Fredric Thrasher's study of gangs, wherein he wrote of the importance of studying groups that sit between social organizations, groups that are 'interstitial':

pertaining to spaces that intervene between one thing and another. In nature foreign matter tends to collect and cake in every crack, crevice, and cranny – interstices. There are also fissures and breaks in the structure of social organization. The gang may be regarded as an interstitial element in the framework of society, and gangland as an interstitial region in the layout of the city (1927/1963:20).

Thrasher claims this emphasis was "probably the most significant concept of the study" (ibid.), and such theoretical weight is found in contemporary studies of organizations as well. In his analysis of the social networks Ronald Burt finds that those social actors who are closer to the institutional gaps in organizations – places that rub up against other social worlds – benefit from better 'vision,' and are "at a higher risk of having good ideas." In the words of business-seminar-guru Tom Peters, we should "either get used to thinking about the subtle processes of learning and sharing knowledge in dispersed, transient networks, or we perish" (1994: 174). In the world of urban culture ecology, however, such emphasis has been entirely absent. Elsewhere (author, forthcoming), I argue that there is a strata of 'urban alchemists' – green guerillas, graffiti artists, street poets, buskers,

political activists, etc. – that are studied, but not theorized in the logic of city culture. According to Jack Katz:

[Urban Alchemists'] work and lives attest to the hidden treasures that city life incidentally produces, the unpriced resources that are readily available in urban scenes to all, and that require little more than a turn of perspective and persistence to develop a significant contribution both to the marketplace and to personal biography (personal communication, June 7, 2008).

As such, tour guides provide a compelling thread to the literature as individuals on the margins of 'organized' urban culture and tourism (Urry, 1997) – Ethnographic work can provide data attuned to issues of a subtle, dispersed, and transient form of meaning making for these characters. Drawing from a five year study of the ways in which walking tour guides manage to be 'cultural intermediaries' who transmit cultural information, engage in the public imagination, and impart a method of urban investigation their participants while still occupying a place in-between formal institutions, social networks, and labor markets. The case must be made for thinking about the small and the in between. Not because it is equal to these large-scale trends, but because they take our conventional frameworks of urban culture and, as Bourdieu would famously quote Chairman Mao, 'twist the stick in the other direction.'

If the primary focus has been on economic growth and the major institutions, the research might be squeezing out the ways in which local, unconsecrated creative workers and unconventional intellectuals can and do participate in the urban culture. While providing a version of 'everybody's history' (Hayden, 1995) in the in between places of urban culture, my respondents' elective affiliations with the formal pillars of the local urban growth machine requires that they negotiate autonomy and legitimacy in struggles over *connectivity* on the fringe. Because the connectivity of networks, it is theorized, operates upon the same principles regardless of scale, what physicist Barabasi calls 'scale-free' (2003: 68), this article will focus upon the area of my research that might contribute to this discourse, as well as to issues of policy. Evidence that large institutions affiliate with each other in the same fashion as individuals is undoubtedly beyond the scope of this project, but could proceed with a similar hypothesis.

There are then, three interrelated goals of this paper. First, to briefly introduce the notion of walking guides as Bourdieuan 'cultural intermediaries' on the edges of culture, urbanism, and tourism and the two

particular axes I see as crucial to understanding them for this aspect of the overall study. Second, to discuss issues of affiliation, and primarily the tension between autonomy and legitimacy, in relationship to this social field by providing the qualitative data lacking in most studies of social capital. Third, to postulate that guiding as a cultural practice has become an integral part of several major cultural institutions in New York City, establishing a novel framework for how these particular marginal characters can be understood within urban cultural policy.

URBAN CHARACTERS AND THE SOCIAL FIELD OF TOUR GUIDING

Florida's study is filled with particular characters—authors, web designers, freelance journalists, artists, architects, actors, poets, and musicians—in a way, reminiscent of the gallery of urban characters Robert Park used as analytical devices for understand the tensions of the city, and the ways in which that they developed a particular 'marginal' disposition—perhaps best evidenced by his essay on 'The Hobo' (1925). In an era of post-industrial capitalism, a booming tourism trade, commodified culture, and a rising 'creative class,' walking tour guides can serve as an archetype of interest in the post-industrial economy. Guides have been around since antiquity, and are omitted at best, and derided at worst (Perrotett, 2002; Sante, 1992). In this slice of the academic literature—at the intersection of culture, urbanism, and tourism—the dominance of studies on 'organized tourism' (Lash and Urry, 1994), the 'production of culture' perspective (Peterson and Anand, 2004), and Logan and Molotch's 'growth machine' theory (1987), all demonstrate a preoccupation with large-scale consumer productions and experiences. All with obvious merit, these studies, however, pass over the rich variation at street level. This was such a strong emphasis in urban sociology that Gerald Suttles was prompted to write an entire book as a reminder of the importance of interpersonal relations in addition to the more structural and theoretical arguments of the production of urban culture (1990).

Walking guides are continually studying facts, modifying tales, changing experiences, questioning truths, searching for clues, and uncovering histories. They arrange, organize, and frame cultural symbols and meanings, and can be analytically linked to the rising 'creative class' has become of interest to those who study shifts in global labor and economic markets, highlighting the 'new economy' and 'informal labor' (Portes et al., 1989, Reich, 1992, Sassen, 2000). Collectively, these workers are involved with the "presentation and representation... providing symbolic goods and services," and could be called *cultural intermediaries* (Bourdieu, 1984: 359). There has been a good deal of theoretical work—from Bourdieu's *Distinction* (1984) to a

special issue of *Cultural Studies* (Negus, 2002)—but with little research on the *ways* through which these social actors present and manipulate knowledge and information (and, research to date has found few efforts to bring this analytical concept in dialogue with the sociology of culture literature).

Guides *inhabit, mitigate, and exploit* the disconnections in the tourism industry, between New Yorker ingénues, visitors, and cultural groups and institutions, between guides and the visitors, and between guides themselves. A necessity for ancient modes of travel, for guides brought with them proficiency in language and local custom, guides today still exist due to an asymmetry of knowledge: visitors and locals use them for their knowledge in a particular geographic, cultural, or historical area as well as for entertainment. Guides occupy a social space within the urban environment wherein these connections, good and bad, can be made. The term for such connections is *social capital*—roughly, “resources stored in human relationships, whether causal or close” (Briggs, 1997: 112)—a concept that has become vital to studies with similar concerns over urban labor markets and cultural production.² There are those who valorize it (Putnam, 2000), those who warn of the negatives (Anderson, 1990; Portes and Landolt, 1996; Portes and Zhou, 1992; Wilson, 1987), and those like Florida who believe in the power of ‘creative capital’ over social capital (2002: 223). From this vantage point, urban cultural policy can be conceptualized as based upon *connectivity* (i.e., between public and private, institutions and individuals, etc.).

In this regard, tour guiding is a relatively ‘open’ field in New York City, requiring three letters of recommendation, a passing grade on a difficult exam administered by New York City’s Department of Consumer Affairs, and two passport-sized photos. License in hand, a guide is free to become a kind of street intellectual, striking out to make a living—poking in and out of buildings, affiliating oneself with institutions, pitching their craft in the dailies, selling their intellectual wares, usually for ten or fifteen dollars a tour. Put simply, the diffuse tourism and culture industries are filled with holes to be bridged. There are holes in history. There are holes in the collective representations of the city. There are holes between cultural institutions and the public. There are holes between ‘local’ and visitor’s knowledge and historical information. There are holes in the ecology of

² Through its ascension in sociologist’s conceptual toolkit, ‘social capital’ has gained prominence and possible bastardization. Bourdieu describes it as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition” (1985: 248). There is serious debate on the value and character of this concept (*inter alia* Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Portes, 1998; Burt, 1992; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 1993; Lin, 1998 and 2001).

social forms and institutions that comprise what Gerald Suttles called the “vast, heritable genome of the city” (1984). In these ways, New York City’s walking guides comprise a group that is similar to Hannerz’s foreign news correspondents, who seek out each other as a support network, but also distance themselves due to competition (2004: 156).

As an analytic framework for this paper, two major axes that cut across the field need to be identified. The first is a division that is based upon whether or not guides are independent workers or if they are employed by a company. Independent guides patch together freelance work, and around 200 are a part of a guild called the Guides Association of New York City (GANYC). (Many U.S. cities have such groups, and the National Federation of Tourist Guides Associations has 12 such groups as members (totaling 2,200 guides), including GANYC’s membership. This organization has a rotating and voluntary board of directors, organizes events and education, and operates a website where any member can post their name, a picture, tours, and contact information to advertise their services. These guides are incredibly heterogeneous: they are teachers, public servants, actors, writers, retirees, and full-time guides. Additionally, GANYC organizes events wherein members have access to sites that the public isn’t normally privy to (i.e., ‘Behind the scenes’ at St. John’s Cathedral, Macy’s, Temple Emmanuel, the Steinway piano factory, etc.), and has served as a vehicle for advocacy: ‘professionalizing’ the industry, educating guides, and protecting them from out-of-town competition by lobbying City Council.

On the other hand, there are a small number of bus (Gray Line, Apple Tours, etc.) and several small walking tour companies, the most prominent being Big Onion Walking Tours (BOWT). The latter group, founded and led by Seth Kamil, exclusively hires students pursuing advanced academic degrees to conduct its tours, while Seth himself handles the business side—dealing with the press, promotions, organization, and payroll. Big Onion and other tour companies like his have a vested interest in the professionalization and legitimation of the field—which leads to the second distinction.

The second orienting axis polarizes the field into those who are academically trained and those who are self-taught, which may or may not correlate to the above definition of ‘independent’ and ‘company’ guides. It is obvious that Big Onion is weighted heavily on the scholarly side, fancying itself as an academic department without the university, but there are also many academics who have found themselves on the street corner, if you will (i.e., Jack Eichenbaum is a professor of Urban Geography at Hunter College, and has been conducting tours for the last two and a half years). Conversely,

research abilities are not the sole purview of academics—there are many guides who possess the research abilities to conduct careful analyses of historical topics. More than ‘history buffs,’ they see such activities as public history or community service. Many members of this group have come upon their tour information on their own. They are autodidactic: using public lectures, the Internet, libraries, and their own collections to slowly build up a wealth of knowledge and information on New York.

These two axes shape guides’ dispositions in the Bourdieuan sense,³ and the following section demonstrates how they frame guides’ particular connections with local institutions, providing some qualitative data to the issue of social networks in urban culture.

THE CORE CONCERN: ON CONNECTIVITY AND ORGANIZATIONS, AUTONOMY AND LEGITIMACY

In line with the literature on the reasons people shift away from the formal economy in the broader labor market, many independent guides are attracted to the business because it allows them independence from bureaucratic structure, freedom of labor, and intellectual autonomy, while on the other hand guides often hope to affiliate themselves with institutions to lend credibility to their practices. And like many cultural intermediaries, guides are able to cobble together elective affiliations to practice their craft. They feel, in fact, that they are more effective if they have the widest possible dispersal of connections. Ronald Burt calls this position ‘structural autonomy,’ wherein the individual’s time and energy have a greater rate of return and can potentially generate more social capital (1992: 44-5)—the more autonomous individuals are, the more able they are to bridge and exploit relations. While these individuals seem socially isolated on the street corner—teaching on the sidewalk without the warm, legitimating comfort of a university surrounding them, or a lectern before them—guides and other cultural intermediaries are rarely completely autonomous. They not only are intermediaries to production and consumption, but also between social structures, gaining legitimation by affiliating themselves with particular cultural institutions.

This is, then, the flip side of autonomy. The tension is real: One of the strongest rationales for escaping the bureaucratic structures of previous employment is to move into an open field wherein their amorphous and

³ For Bourdieu, a ‘disposition’ is learned vis-à-vis social experience, as a.) an organizing action that creates structure; b.) a way of living; and c.) a “predisposition, tendency, propensity, or inclination” (1972: 214).

multifaceted talents can flourish. The informal and ‘non-standard’ nature of cultural work can potentially elude the legitimating touch organizations consecrate social actors with. According to Bourdieu, there are three versions of legitimacy (1993: 50-51): recognition by one’s peers (‘specific legitimacy’), by the larger public of ordinary consumers (‘popular legitimacy’), and from those who have power outside the field (‘bourgeois legitimacy’). As they travel further away from the centers of culture, guides draw from each level, attempting to gain what Bourdieu, elsewhere, called “legitimation by contagion” (1988: 259). Guides certainly look for legitimation from their own community of guides (the ‘specific legitimacy’ gained from GANYC, Big Onion, and perhaps, bus companies like Gray Line) as well as from their participants (the happy customers who can give ‘popular legitimacy’), but, as per the topic at hand, public policy, I will focus upon the last form, what Bourdieu called ‘bourgeois legitimacy.’

Yet, the question remains: Autonomy and legitimacy from what? And here, the literature to draw from is rich, providing the orienting guideposts of urban culture (*inter alia* Logan and Molotch, 1987; Gittell and Videl, 1998; Hannigan, 1998; Hoffman, 2000; Lloyd and Clark, 2001; Zukin, 1991 and 1995). One can identify five within this social field: Business Improvement Districts (i.e., Grand Central Partnership), private groups (i.e., the Central Park Conservancy), cultural institutions (i.e., Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian, the Brooklyn Historical Society, and 92nd Street YMCA), colleges and universities (i.e., Cooper Union, the City University of New York), and governmental agencies (i.e., Department of Consumer Affairs).

Walking tour guides, in general, like to announce their credentials pretty early in an interaction. They, after all, are faced with a group of curious—perhaps even suspicious—strangers in front of them who think that all it takes to get a tour is to list it in the *New York Times* ‘Spare Times’ section. Some will wear their red and white NYC Tour Guiding License around their neck, some will announce that they are a graduate student at Columbia writing a dissertation on 18th Century colonial history, and some of those will adjust their research topics to make them more harmonious with the tour topic. Their brochures and websites are loaded down with accolades. One independent guide’s materials assert that he is AAA’s ‘New York’s Best Walking Tour,’ and has a quote from New York Governor George Pataki saying that he is the ‘Most engaged tour guide.’ Jane Marx’s ‘Tour Goddess’ website has a list of ‘delighted clients’ which include Fortune 500 companies and universities, the YMCAs and the Young Presidents’ Organization. The desired effect is clear: If a tour is good enough for Ford Motor Company, it’s certainly good enough for your family from Buffalo.

As the most established walking tour company (perhaps in the country), Big Onion, has a brochure that illustrates the importance of legitimation via affiliation: the first two pages mention *New York Magazine's* 'Best Walking Tour,' their partnership with the New York Historical Society, their membership to 'NYC & Company' (New York City's Convention and Visitors Bureau), and inside, of course, are the university affiliations of their guides. BOWT functions upon a symbiotic relation of legitimacy: the guides gain organizational and material support, and in return BOWT gains cachet via their academic credentials.⁴

Autonomy is not something, however, to simply overcome. For those guides who are loosely connected and independent, greater autonomy allows for diverse opportunities of legitimacy. Negus notes that distance is something that cultural intermediaries are "prone to encourage" (2002: 507), and as we turn to the second, independent group of guides, anti-establishment, and activist themes become recognizable as negations of distance. Two guides with more counter-cultural themed tours come to mind: one who gives 'radical left' history tours and another who gives tours of privately-owned public spaces.

Bruce Kayton, the self-proclaimed 'radical tour guide,' feels that affiliations need to be eschewed entirely in order to claim 'freedom of content.' (In contrast to the tours that are conducted by the Central Park Conservancy, his tours are very critical of New York icon Robert Moses and the conservancy itself for only being interested in protecting real estate investments.) Affiliation with a particular organization can bring new participants but also new conflicts of interest. For Bruce's radical tours, any connectivity represents a potential compromise on his message, and in order to not 'sell out' he remains highly vigilant about keeping his social and organizational networks free from potential influence. Still, necessity requires of him a modicum of ambivalence on this point—he needs to work in the formal labor market to pay bills and for the health care, needs to maintain social relationships for camaraderie, needs to publish his book somewhere (published with the small, independent Seven Stories Press, but also offered on the internet juggernaut bookstore, Amazon.com), and is often a guest on the local commercial-free radio station, WBAI.

A second guide, Will Holly, focuses his tours on the privately-owned public spaces in New York City and began a relationship with New York's

⁴ The website, for example, profiles several guides, their collegiate affiliations, prominent in their biographic information, their advanced degrees, and the minimum of two years of teaching experience.

Municipal Arts Society (MAS). At first, he was enthused with the connection, but after several meetings, Will found that the MAS and their experts, specifically a Harvard professor, just wanted him to do a great deal of legwork under them, rather than in conjunction. Will had to weigh the legitimacy of the institution against his interests and intellectual freedom. The potential for giving up his decision-making ability on routes and content, but also to have to tone down his political view, gave him pause, and eventually he stayed on his own:

Sometimes, I think that we would have done better with [the Harvard professor but] I thought our project was fun and interesting and I didn't want to hand it over to someone else (...) I knew that they wanted to take a more legal route, which is fine and effective, it's just not what I wanted to do.

In these two instances, both guides know that closer affiliations with these organizations meant a curbing of their content (the Central Park Conservancy, for example, is particularly promotional, but so too are Business Improvement Districts). Even the director of programming at the Municipal Art Society—a 100 year old organization focused on the architecture, historical preservation, and urban planning which runs a 50 year old program of over 300 public and private walking tours—told me that:

These are freelance guides. These are not members of our staff. How do you control the message? If they worked for you they'd be imbued with a point of view, and that can really be a dangerous situation.

For independent guides to maintain a handful of relationships with institutions exposes benefits: a wider clientele, freedom of content and choice, varied sources of information and support, sources of advertising, and the legitimacy that comes from sponsorship of a tour or series of tours by a cultural institution, teaching a history course at a local continuing education program, or curating an exhibit.

DISCUSSION: ON BRIDGING AND CLOSING STRUCTURAL HOLES

'Structural holes'—gaps within networks that serve as a potential opportunity for connectivity—can be seen as Burt's companion concept to structural autonomy (1992). Access to information determines such bridges over them, and to do so is always beneficial to tertiary individuals and groups, regardless of the strength of the ties (1992: 30-6). I have recorded

dozens upon dozens of affiliations that independent guides have made. As one guide who does ‘food’ themed tours makes contacts with individual cheese shops and restaurants, another who conducts literary pub crawl-walking tours makes agreements with local haunts of Ginsberg, Kerouac, and Dylan Thomas. Eric Washington, an independent guide whose tour included a chat with a Harlem pastor, and ended with an installation he curated at City College, drew from the deep well of his social network. Such entrepreneurial connections have obvious benefits—participants get to see ‘backstage,’ they get access and entry to spaces that they might not make an effort to otherwise, not to mention the excitement of not knowing where it is that the tour will take them next. Research on other cultural intermediaries finds there to be “clear evidence that employees engaged in intermediary activities—knowledge workers, those working with information and symbols—are involved in attempting to plug gaps” (Negus, 2002: 508).

Individual guides, however, aren’t the only ones negotiating affiliations, and another two examples come to mind. The first is the New York’s Department of Consumer Affairs and Visitors Bureau’s attempt to professionalize the industry in early 2003. The DCA revoked existing guiding licenses, attempted to restrict the licensing procedures and rules, and required that all guides pass a revamped and more rigorous examination (which only held a 33% pass rate). These changes culminated in a raucous hearing in front of the City Council of New York in June 2003. The DCA Commissioner, Gretchen Dykstra, went on record at the hearing to say that guides were the “ambassadors of New York City,” and that very public change in the licensing procedure was intended to reflect that importance. The new policies were attempts at validating the legitimacy of guides, but by having a single exam for hundreds of guides the challenged the autonomy of their practices. By offering 150 questions, the test could not encapsulate, and therefore not evaluate, the myriad topics, themes, and histories of their tours (e.g., most guides complained that only two questions were on topics outside of Manhattan). The attempt by the government to provide legitimacy as well as to restrict the social field to a smaller group of guides—in essence restricting a structural hole—collided with guides’ sense of autonomy: guides both wanted the government consecration yet bristled at the legitimation of only a slice of their field. (This was to be expected when a standardized test arises within a field that nurtures an idiosyncratic fringe body of knowledge.)

The second instance involves Big Onion. BOWT guides, at the individual level, don’t care about making such connections at all—as they are merely passing through the industry on their way to academic positions once they have earned their PhDs—although a few expressed surprise and perhaps a

tinge of jealousy when I described how independent guides interact with restaurants, churches, businesses, and locals. The owner takes care of all connections, weak and strong. Their website includes quotes from law offices and universities, and 32 citations from local, national, and international media. Big Onion plays the Leviathan, adept at making connections to the exclusion of competing groups and individuals. A case in point is the *exclusive* relationship—they call it a ‘programming partnership’—between Big Onion and the New York Historical Society. The move effectively closes a hole, and denies independent guides an opportunity to work with that particular cultural institution.

Freelance guides at the individual level are invested in the business and connected to the practices of guiding to greater degrees, and show a marked affinity for connectivity—always on the lookout for more ties, weak or strong, which add to the heterogeneity of the tour content and experiences. For Burt, establishing “entrepreneurial opportunities depends on having numerous structural holes around your contacts and none attached to yourself” (1992: 45), and without the umbrella of support provided by a company like Big Onion, independent guides spend a great deal of time and effort on establishing supporting relationships, while individual Big Onion guides have little to no interest or investment in an external social network. Because BOWT is set up so that individual guides are not competing against one another and are not invested in the social field as a vocation, their guides do not find it necessary to maintain the varied social network that independent guides strive for.

In Bourdieu’s conception, social capital provides an affirming quality via increased solidarity and a kind of enforceable trust (1985: 249). As BOWT’s exclusive brokering would indicate, bridging structural holes is only affirming for some. Key to these theories (and drawn from Simmel) is the tension between competition and cohesion, a nuance that can tarnish any community. In fact, many guides admit sadly that they have a hard time seeing anything more than a field of self-interest roiled in jealousy and petty concerns. Thinking of her own touring company, which negates competition internally but is fiercely competitive externally, another company owner describes the industry as,

disgusting, unethical, pathetic business. I mean, most of these people have no ethics. They have varying backgrounds. But we prefer to take the high road, we really do.

Without parsing out the veracity of such claims, such a comment makes sense in that, as an open community with turbulent flows of social capital, the potential for negative usages abounds. In a post September 11th, 2001 era of constricted tourist dollars flowing into New York City, the urge towards professionalization, the resulting uproar, and pointedly, the restriction of out-of-town guides coming in with a tour group, makes more sense: resource constraint and an increased number of participants in a particular social field decreases the affectivity of social capital (Burt, 1997). Drawing from his research on urban communities, Briggs (1997) shows that one set of connections that is beneficial for some might be disastrous for others—the negative side to social capital.⁵ While autonomy was what most independent guides strived for, they became quite vulnerable in the face of adversity—only a few managed to navigate the government bureaucracy after September 11th in order to receive relief afforded to other formal businesses.

The field of guiding certainly evinces both the positive and negative aspects of social capital, but it also opens up discussions about *other* holes—in culture, organizational structures, labor markets, and information—as well as some closures—of academics and legitimating organizations. The guide’s abilities to make multiple connections, to develop a varied and rich experience, is vital to his or her success. The more holes, the more weak ties, the greater the breadth of contacts—the greater the chances for incorporating varied material. However, the disconnected legitimacy between the guide and the group spurs a social context wherein a participant can directly challenge the validity of the guide, or tensions between guides who are otherwise tightly connected arise due to competition.

The overall picture that can be drawn from the data of this social field indicates an inverse relationship between autonomy and legitimacy: the least legitimated guides tend to have the most structural holes, the most legitimated guides have the least. Guides who are the most independent draw from the widest swath of social contacts (and cultural capital). Guides who are more closely tied to a corporate entity are less likely to need multiple personal and institutional connections. (Big Onion guides, in fact, are strictly forbidden to affiliate themselves with any external group other than those that the owner has established himself—save for, of course, the attribute most coveted: their university membership.) Significant parts of this picture, the cultural institutions themselves, are still obscured; and the following section turns to them.

⁵ Portes gives four negative components: exclusion of outsiders, social control, decreased freedoms of insiders and a degradation of social norms (1998: 15).

CULTURAL POLICY, KEY TENSIONS AND ORGANIZATIONS

As we return to the five larger organizations at play in this social field, the public policy question becomes: Which ones *get it*? Which institutions use guides for making broader connections in the public sphere in this particular fashion? For the programming director at the MAS, the feeling that the public sphere is wrought with contestation isn't lost on her organization:

The city streets have their own managers and agents of change now. You think that that's a public street? It's really not. Sometimes it's in a BID area. Sometimes it's within a historic district. Sometimes it's in a cultural district. And everybody thinks that they own it. And so when you as an organization go to give a tour (...) Who speaks for these streets? People have vested interests, and it gets confusing.

As organizations become aware of these struggles, which are investing in the subtle, dispersed, and transient forms of urban culture that guides provide? These final paragraphs, again, focus upon the affiliations outside of guiding groups—in the words of Bourdieu, those groups who provide legitimation from outside of the field of guiding itself (what was referred to earlier as 'bourgeois legitimacy').

1.) *Publications and media?* As discussed above, guides proudly display their accolades from the press. The *New York Times* lists walking tours every Friday, *Time Out New York* sought me out for an article, *New York Magazine* and the *Village Voice* offer annual 'Best of' lists that often include walking tours. The overwhelming spotlight placed upon the change was due, in part, to a media blitz by the Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA) in local radio, television, and print. The particular sources, expectedly, bring different kinds of clients. A guide who gives tours on 'Radical Left' history claims that, "*Time Out New York* brings in the foreigners, and they are much more knowledgeable about this radical history," and that "shapes the content."

2.) *Government agencies?* According to the Commissioner of the DCA, tour guides are the "ambassadors of New York," and while the City of New York has been licensing tour guides since 1937 there was a recent effort to revamp a horrid licensing test in 2003. The careful attention that the exam received by the City Council, Business Improvement Districts, DCA, NYC & Co. (the city's Visitors Bureau) and guiding groups, reflects the importance of guiding within the tourism and postindustrial economy—an effort, not without tumult, to help 'professionalize' the industry's 1,267 licensed guides

(as of March 8th, 2005). Guides need to correctly answer 97 questions out of 150, and those who earn a score of 120 or higher receive a 'special commendation.'

3.) *Cultural Institutions?* As New York's New Museum moved to the Bowery area of Manhattan, they ran a series of walking tours of site specific artwork to 'integrate' themselves into the community, and to introduce the community to them, calling the series, 'Counter Culture.' The New York Historical Society affiliated itself with Big Onion, and the Smithsonian Museum of the Native American and the Museum of African Art both use walking tours as a part of their programming (the latter even has a handout on 'Training for Tour Guides'). In an effort to promote urban culture off the beaten tourist path, particularly in low-income ethnic neighborhoods The Conference Board has developed an initiative called the Business Enterprises for Sustainable Travel (supported by the New York Community Trust and the Rockefeller Brothers Fund), which focuses upon local culture. The MAS operates its 300 walking tours at a loss because they've found that a tour is "inevitably the first step [for people] coming into the organization," but also because it can be "highly effective" in "the link between the public and the organization."

4.) *Business Improvement Districts?* According to the Tourism Director of the 34th Street BID, which runs two free tours, it is increasingly the case that BIDs have someone dedicated to tourism. Grand Central Partnership president & CEO, Fred Cerullo posted on their website that, "As one of the nation's largest business improvement districts, we run a localized tourism program that assisted more than one million neighborhood visitors in 2002. We recognize the importance of equipping the citywide tour guides with the knowledge to answer any reasonable question, cite relevant facts, and serve as a general expert on our ever-changing city." The Grand Central Partnership (GCP) joined the Times Square BID, NYC & Co., and the DCA to pay for the guiding exam. At the forefront of the GCP's campaign is Justin Ferate's weekly, free walking tour, but also the 34th Street BID runs tours, the Union Square BID runs a free 90 minute tour each Saturday, and the Times Square DMB runs one every Friday. Additionally, each of the major Manhattan BIDs maintain a tourism director on their staff and budget.

5.) *Academic institutions?* Here, I will speak cautiously. There appears to be a great many connections guides have with academic institutions, and many connections academics have with guiding: CUNY's Honors College each year focuses upon a neighborhood study wherein a walking tour serves as a central component, several guides teach courses for local Continuing

Education programs or as adjuncts, and again, the guides of Big Onion are Ph.D. students. Seth is convinced that his guides get “job training” to be academics, stating many of his guides who have gone to tenure-track positions have continued to use walking tours, and at another level, grade school student tours are one of the largest sources of income for guides. While guides gain a great deal of legitimation by citing degrees and connections with colleges and universities, such affiliations are not without tension. There is a strong thread within tourism towards the educational and academic, but these are mostly unrequited feelings. Academia is hindered by what Bourdieu called the ‘academic fallacy’ wherein there has been a great gulf constructed between forms of ‘scholarly knowledge’ and ‘experiential knowledge’ (2000).

For those who are so inclined to look at this corner of urban culture in terms of policy, Griffiths offers four major dilemmas in recent cultural policy models: that they either aim for an audience of *locals* or *visitors*; that they focus upon *downtown areas* or *outlying neighborhoods*; that they emphasize either the *production* or *consumption* of cultural goods; and that they labor for creating and funding either *buildings and spaces* or *programs and performances* (1995: 255). If we were to conceptualize these dilemmas as holes to be bridged rather than mutually exclusive dichotomies, ethnographic evidence indicates that walking guides are a cheap and “highly effective” resource that serves to address each level of policy—as a practice for both visitors and locals, as an activity from the central to the peripheral areas of the city, that is both a form of consumption and production, and uses urban spaces as much as it is a performance—and urban cultural organizations would concur.

Xavier de Souza Briggs warns that, in the validation of social capital, when thinking about particular actors (he uses the term ‘change agents’), we must be careful as to what kinds of social capital we strive for (1997). Guides and other cultural intermediaries who engage in public culture are valuable because they bridge one final structural hole: between the everyday folk and the large scale urban forces closer together through storytelling. In his studies on what he dubs ‘neo-bohemia,’ Richard Lloyd writes to a similar end: the emphasis on the economic and political elite elides the practices of the quotidian (2002: 519). It can best be summed up by an organizer in another cultural institution, who believes that guides serve as the public face of his institution: “tours are—and I think that every organization does this, including BIDs—a way to introduce your organization, your area, your mission to a public at a very small price point.”

CONCLUSIONS: INVESTING IN THE EVERYDAY SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

“Guided by their anti-institutional temperament and the concern to escape everything redolent of competitions, hierarchies and classifications and, above all, of scholastic classifications, hierarchies of knowledge, theoretical abstractions or technical competences, these new intellectuals are inventing an art of living which provides them with the gratifications and prestige of the intellectual at the least cost” (Bourdieu, 1984: 370).

The extraordinary emphasis on venture capitalists and corporate culture is not without merit and is assuredly of significance, but this study’s focus upon the furthest edges of cultural production and reproduction both fills out the literature, and speaks to the wider array of cultural labors. If one agrees with Tom Peters—that we should “get used to thinking about the subtle processes of learning and sharing knowledge in dispersed, transient networks” (1994: 174)—then this ring of unconsecrated (Bourdieu, 2000), unconventional (Shils, 1972) intellectuals that studies on urban culture seems to be of import.

Unconsecrated culture brokers, perhaps none more so than the independent guides, operate within a challenging context on the fringe. To focus on those individuals who work in the interstitial spaces of urban culture, a different picture has emerged than the homogenized and commodified, ‘themed’ culture (see DiMaggio and Stenberg, 1985; Heilbrun, 2001; Gottdiener 2001): one of heterogeneity, diffusion, and multivalency. The least legitimated guides have the largest array of structural holes, but the most legitimated have the power to close them. If it is true that things are most interesting on the fringes, that ‘good ideas’ come from those areas with the most structural holes (Burt, 2004), then organizations with the power to grant affiliation ought not offer exclusive rights—particularly museums that draw from public funding. Certainly access to the museum is free, but affiliation ought to be as well. In Goethe’s 1809 novel that challenges the institution of marriage from which I have riffed this article’s title, one of the characters believes that affinities between forms and objects can be problematic, and “are only really interesting when they bring about separations.” Here, the contention must be that affinities and affiliations are only really interesting when they are bridged.

My research magnifies the analysis down one more scale, and proposes investment in micro-, street-level cultural forms: public art, ephemeral

events, neighborhood based exhibits, and walking tours. I will hold up the example of the work done at the Business Enterprises for Sustainable Travel (BEST), which, rather than focusing on the broad stroke areas, seeks to bring consumer dollars, instill civic pride, and environmental sensitivity in low-income ethnic communities around New York City. Projects include a Community Improvement Association for the Mt. Morris Park in Harlem, the Lower East Side Tenement Museum's focus on immigration, and Staten Island's historic Richmond Town, each of which use walking tours as a central component of their activities.

As government agencies like 'Big Apple Greeters' and Business Improvement Districts like the Grand Central Partnership recognize that investing in tour guides serves the purpose of translating their vision of urban culture into the public sphere, I believe that the academic sphere must be sensitive to such practices as well. Guides add to what Gerald Suttles called the 'cumulative texture' of local urban culture, but they also seek out connections between the large scale and the small, the broad strokes and the quotidian. While Hayden's influential *Power of Place* makes a claim for places to assist 'everybody's history,' guides offer, in a way, everybody's sociological imagination. In particular, I would hope for a sociology that encourages unconventional intellectuals, is attuned to their techniques, is sensitive to their needs, and seeks to create ties with them rather than obsessing over its own forays into 'public intellectualism.'

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