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The Arena and Stadium Experience: The Individual, the Venue and the Culture Industry

by

Anthony P. Sparacino

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, the City University of New York

2014

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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## Abstract

The Arena and Stadium Experience: The Individual, the Venue and the Culture Industry

By

Anthony Sparacino

Advisor: Dr. William Kornblum

This paper explores arenas and stadia, specifically Madison Square Garden and Citi Field in New York City, through the prism of Theodor Adorno's conception of the culture industry, the notion that cultural artifacts are consciously created in order to reify the values of the existing social system, especially those of elites. Rather than focusing solely on media culture, this essay proposes that understandings of mass culture can be enhanced by focusing on the context of the consumption of mass-cultural artifacts, namely the development of a conception of place within the mind of the consumer, who has an active role in interpreting said artifacts. Hence, these venues are explored through the mind of a consumer as well as through the presentation of these venues by the corporate entities that manage these spaces. Ultimately, a critique of the culture industry is developed by focusing on culture as a lived, albeit guided, experience. The physical and virtual spaces of these venues are explored, from the contemplation of attending an event at the venue to the generation of memories of the event, over the course of several months from the vantage point of both a visitor and employee of these venues. The paper incorporates personal experiences in these places with how these spaces are depicted by the mass media. This paper highlights the dialectic between consumption and production in the development of mass culture.

## Acknowledgements

This paper would not be possible without the intellectual achievements of Theodor Adorno, Stuart Hall, and Douglas Kellner. I wish to acknowledge Dr. William Kornblum, who guided me throughout the course of this project. I also want to mention Dr. Jack Jacobs, who first introduced me to the scholarship of Adorno and the Frankfurt School, and Dr. Elizabeth Macaulay-Lewis, in whose class I first explored Madison Square Garden as a student of cultural studies as opposed to simply as a patron and an employee. I wish to dedicate this text to the brothers and sisters of Local 176, Licensed Ushers and Ticket-takers, who staff the venues which are the subjects of this study. I am lucky to have these men and women as coworkers and friends.

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## 1. Introduction

On top of Pennsylvania Plaza, between 31<sup>st</sup> and 34<sup>th</sup> Street and 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue in the heart of Midtown Manhattan, above the sprawling underground Penn Station, resides the drum-like structure Madison Square Garden, the “world’s most famous arena.” Across the East River in the borough of Queens, just up the road from the site of the 1964 World’s Fair, sits the cozy Citi Field, the new home of the New York Mets baseball team. Another great ballpark, Yankee Stadium, the home of possibly the most storied and celebrated sports franchise in American history, resides in the Bronx. The onetime city of Brooklyn now houses the magnificent, almost lunar, structure that is the Barclays Center, the home of the New York Nets and soon to be Brooklyn Islanders. These four buildings form the core, though certainly not the entirety, of mass entertainment venues in New York City and have themselves become destinations for tourists and locals alike. These spaces, though at heart business enterprises, are also places of culture. More specifically, these venues offer a medium through which mass culture, in the form of sporting events and concerts, is brought to fans, the consumers of mass-cultural artifacts. These venues offer an illustration of the culture industry, a theoretical construct developed by Theodor Adorno that is part of media culture but also one that allows for the spectacle of “the show” or “the game” to be experienced firsthand. The experience of these venues, and their counterparts across the country and the world for that matter, allows one to join a crowd, making the experience a social one. However, the social aspect of the venue experience does not simply include interaction between human individuals but also involves a developing relationship between the patron, namely the consumer, and the venue itself, its staff, its amenities, and its physical space.



This paper analyzes the relationship between venue and consumer through the prism of the culture industry, albeit a modified interpretation of said construct. Specifically, two venues, namely Madison Square Garden (MSG) and Citi Field, will be explored through the lens of a participant-observer, the author, in this reification of the culture industry. The choice of these venues is not by chance but rather practical. I have worked at Citi Field as an usher since June of 2009, the inaugural season at the new ballpark. I have also been employed in the same capacity at the Garden since October of 2013. Thus, while I will attempt to engage Adorno's concept critically in its application to these venues, I will incorporate a number of personal experiences which I have had in these spaces, both as a patron and as someone who has to represent the corporate entities that are The Madison Square Garden Company and Sterling Mets (the owners and operators of Citi Field and the baseball club). At heart, my central critique of the notion of the culture industry is simple; that is, one must not only consider but rather focus on the role of the individual in the process that is the production of mass culture. The individual is more than a consumer. The fan attending the event is central to maintaining the financial success of the venue and the popularity of the teams and artists that play in these spaces and is thus in a position of power. In other words, the consumer has a productive capacity in terms of the culture that makes for the experience of these venues. In short, I approach a critique of the culture industry not as a production process but as a lived experience stemming from the relationship between venue and patron. The spectator, and the staff employed by the venue for that matter, is not just a consumer but an active participant in the creation of mass culture.

Below, I will overview, and thus attempt to illustrate my own understanding of, the culture industry as originally proposed by Theodor Adorno and the Frankfurt School.<sup>1</sup> This

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<sup>1</sup> I must note here that this discussion must be limited for purposes of space. I will merely touch on, for instance, the contributions of Walter Benjamin to this discussion.

discussion will ultimately lead to a distinction between the context in which Adorno was writing and the one in which this paper was written. This explication will include alternative views of mass culture, such as the development of cultural studies at the Birmingham Centre in England during the 1960s, in particular the work of Stuart Hall and the study of modern media culture by Douglas Kellner, with an emphasis on the historical development of such thought, which will ultimately allow me to build off of these theories while distinguishing my own view of these spaces, and mass culture, from those of these scholars. This endeavor is not meant as a venture in historicizing the entirety of the field of cultural studies but rather to situate my own analyses of the topic at hand.

After laying the theoretical groundwork of this essay, I will move to a discussion of the experience of these venues. I use the term experience broadly here. There is far more to the arena than the game or the show that one sees there. Thus, I include in this discussion the contemplation of seeing an event, the purchasing of tickets, the experience of the physical space of the venue, the interaction with staff and other guests while on site, and the development of memories after attending these events. I also emphasize the role of the arena in an urban social setting as well as a historical one for the purpose of developing a sense of the culture in which the experiences I describe are occurring. I must admit here that while I will attempt to delineate and bracket different aspects of one's visit to these spaces for the sake of clarity, the "steps" that I discuss below should not be taken as strict steps in the way one reads an instruction manual. Rather, the experience of these venues and the feelings of the consumer are built continuously and can depend on something as instantaneous as one unpleasant interaction with a staff member, or a single confiscation of a pack of cigarettes. In sum, I look at how the venue attempts

to present itself but also those moments in which confrontations of values between the venue and the patron can arise and how culture is shaped in these moments.

This discussion will ultimately lead to a consideration of how the values and societal expectations that are discussed by Adorno are sorted out on a practical level, namely in the behavior of the patrons of these venues as well as the behavior of the venues as it concerns their patrons. Thus, the final section of this paper will examine, critically, the relationship between theory and practice, in other words, between the topics discussed in the preceding two sections of this essay. In sum, I hope to cast light on how one's experience in these venues is occurring in a broad social context and how cultural norms and values are reified, challenged and ultimately produced in these spaces.

## **2. The Evolving Study of Mass Culture**

### **Adorno's Culture Industry**

Henry Nash Smith offers "the way in which subjective experience is organized" as a simple definition of culture (1957: 197). This quote denotes the idea that the individual is not autonomous over the realm in which culture meshes with personal experience. Put another way, popular understandings of what constitutes culture are often taken for granted, at face value. We associate certain foods, books and shows with cultural traditions because of the historical circumstances in which these artifacts were developed. Baseball, for instance, was developed in the United States, has remained popular in the country, and has become "America's past-time." Jazz music has strong connections with black urban neighborhoods, particularly in New Orleans, and has become understood within this historical frame, thus giving the city a certain flavor that it may have not otherwise developed. In short, understandings of culture are not accidental but crafted. The artifacts which are recognized as cultural are experienced by the senses but these

experiences lead to the development of cultural images and symbols which define these artifacts in the minds of the masses to a point at which certain meanings take on a collective meaning.

Theodor Adorno would ultimately agree with the idea put forth by Nash but would find this definition inadequate. Adorno believed that culture in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was about far more than merely “organizing” subjective experience. Adorno’s basic view of mass culture was profoundly pessimistic, as was his worldview in general. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment* Max Horkheimer and Adorno write that “knowledge, which is power, knows no limits, either in its enslavement of creation or in its deference to worldly masters. Just as it serves all the purposes of the bourgeois economy both in factories and on the battlefield, it is at the disposal of entrepreneurs regardless of their origins” (1947: 2). Adorno felt that an individual’s ability to learn and grow was stymied by the organization of and access to knowledge, which could be used to either enlighten or enslave. Horkheimer and Adorno felt that the very concept of enlightenment had been hijacked by the bourgeoisie, thus detracting from “enlightenment’s program” namely “the disenchantment of the world” (1947: 1) for “reason itself has become merely an aid to the all encompassing economic apparatus” (1947: 23). In this sense even the development of the scientific method which seeks objective knowledge above all else has been co-opted by a program of materialist deception. In brief, the powerful can exercise much more than physical force on the powerless. Those in power have the ability to frame subjective, and even that which is understood as objective, experience through the presentation and reification of culture, particularly the “low” as opposed to “high” art that is at the center of mass culture in the modern era.

Before moving on to Adorno’s view of culture specifically, his views on enlightenment and myth must be expounded upon in order to better comprehend the role of mass culture in

society, for enlightenment and myth play a role in organizing knowledge both at the individual or cognitive level as well as on the societal or cultural level.<sup>2</sup> Horkheimer and Adorno are responding to not just the current state of human affairs but its historical development, with Marxism forming the basis for their understanding of the passage of time. In doing so, the authors reflect on enlightenment's positivistic responses to "myths" of the past, particularly religious myths. Myths have had vast influence on the thought patterns and behavior of society precisely because they play on human emotions, particularly fear, especially concerning the unknown, for instance the afterlife. However, "Enlightenment's mythic terror springs from the terror of myth," in other words, Enlightenment has taken the place of myth in enslaving the mind as opposed to liberating the individual from fear of nature and the unknown (1947: 22). The individual remains alienated both in the context of the economic apparatus of capitalism, which provides for a division, and separation, of labor, as well as in the sense of alienation from that which can liberate him, true enlightenment.

The process through which the enslavement and alienation of the individual is executed is routed in the culture industry for "the countless agencies of mass production and its culture impress standardized behavior on the individual as the only natural, decent, and rational one" (1947: 21). According to this theory, film studios, television networks, radio stations and their products "form a system" in which "the mentality of the public, which allegedly and actually favors the system of the culture industry, is part of the system, not an excuse for it" (1947: 94, 96). In this dialectic, a pattern emerges in which the culture industry produces a set of values which are consumed by the masses only to be further reified by the creation of further demand

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<sup>2</sup> The focus on unity within the framework of the Frankfurt School ultimately leads to a refutation of this split between an individual and societal level of analysis. Myths offer meaning and a sense of cultural value, such as those offered by religion. These stories have the potential to organize value systems with regard to faith and nationalism.

for new cultural artifacts. Hence, the pattern is circular with the same schema of mass culture being continuously reinforced. Twenty years after the publication of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno offered a similar conception of a schema of mass culture noting:

The culture industry fuses the old and familiar into a new quality. In all its branches, products which are tailored for consumption by masses, and which to a great extent determine the nature of that consumption, are manufactured more or less according to plan. The individual branches are similar in structure or at least fit into each other, ordering themselves into a system almost without a gap. This is made possible by contemporary technical capabilities as well as by economic and administrative concentration. The culture industry intentionally integrates its consumers from above. (Bronner and Kellner 1989: 128).

The above excerpt captures several key facets of the culture industry theory that warrant further discussion. For one, Adorno criticizes what he sees as a “sameness” that is recognizable within various cultural artifacts. The products of popular culture, according to Adorno, are alike in form and presentation, at least in a general sense. Walter Benjamin notes that “in principle a work of art has always been reproducible. Man made artifacts could always be imitated by men. Replicas were made by pupils in practice of their craft, by masters for diffusing their works, and, finally, by third parties in pursuit of gain” (1936: 217). These replicas, which can now be produced and disseminated by machine, are lacking in “authenticity” for “its presence in time and space” is based on the “presence of the original” (Benjamin 1936: 218). Beyond the notion that any one work or art can be replicated, it must also be noted that many such works, in the field of music for instance, often borrow heavily on other works in the same genre. In his critique of jazz music, Adorno notes that “what jazz has to offer rhythmically is extremely limited” and is standardized leading to “the strengthening of the lasting domination of the listening public and of their conditioned reflexes” (Bronner and Kellner 1989: 201-2).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Similar critiques were made by Adorno and other scholars associated with the Frankfurt School which concerned a number of areas that can be included in the realm of popular culture. Adorno himself wrote several pieces on television (“How to Look at Television”, “Television and the Patterns of Mass Culture”), film

Another concept which is integral to the culture industry is the development of “contemporary technical capabilities” which came about due to the technological innovations of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This, of course, concerns the development and spread of radio, film, and television, the mediums of the culture industry. Writing in the 1950s, Adorno noted that “the commercial production of cultural goods has become streamlined, and the impact of popular culture upon the individual has concomitantly increased” (1957: 474). These new cultural mediums highlight Adorno’s concern that art in the modern era was devolving, losing its meaning in favor of mass popularity and commercial success.<sup>4</sup> There is no doubt that this is true to a large extent. The forms of art transformed into forms of entertainment. Mass culture evolved through its adaptations of new mass mediums, allowing for image, movement and sound to be captured and revisited time and again. However, this transformation came with art having a new, very different audience than that of the past. The working class now had access to this mass culture, and this new audience could now receive attention as art became a new type of commodity. Adorno notes that “many of the cultural products bearing the anti-commercial trademark ‘art for art’s sake’ show traces of commercialism in their appeal to the sensational or in the conspicuous display of material wealth and sensuous stimuli at the expense of the meaningfulness of the work” (1957: 475). While Adorno has been criticized for having an elitist view of “true” art his analysis is based on technological development and the ever expanding capitalist market.

This understanding of the role of mass culture in society must be put into a historical contextual frame. For one, it may already be apparent that Adorno’s concept of a culture industry

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(“Transparencies on Film”), poetry (“Lyric Poetry and Society”) and music (“Perennial Fashion- Jazz”). Leo Lowenthal contributed to this literature in “The Sociology of Literature.” This list is hardly exhaustive.

<sup>4</sup> This criticism of new art has been reprimanded because Adorno’s remarks can be interpreted here as highly elitist.

has a totalitarian feel as well as a Marxist interpretation of the world. That is no accident. Adorno and the other members of the Frankfurt School were writing in Germany during the 1930s and were well aware of the rise of the fascist Nazi Party and its charismatic leader Adolf Hitler. Moreover, many of the members of the Institute for Social Research were Jewish, including Adorno and Horkheimer, and thus had every reason to be fearful of the rise of Nazism and its totalitarian message.<sup>5</sup> The Frankfurt School would temporarily be moved to New York and be housed at Columbia University. Horkheimer and his cohorts would continue to publish extensively while in the United States. One particularly noteworthy piece with bearings on the present discussion is “The Jews and Europe” which is about far more than the title reveals. This piece makes strong connections between the fascist regimes of Europe and the development of capitalism, even in an American context as “we have really reached the point where the harmony of capitalist society along with the opportunities to reform it have been exposed as the very illusions always denounced by the critique of the free market economy” (Bronner and Kellner 1989: 77). Horkheimer, and his close associate Adorno, felt that the history of capitalistic development led, not accidentally, to the current war in Europe. The procession of history had an inherent logic, as Marx had argued decades earlier.

While in the United States, Adorno observed similarities between the fascist regimes of Europe and the entertainment industry in the United States. During World War II, for instance, the film industry developed an extensive, and conscious, effort to rally support for the war effort. Advertisements of all kinds, ranging from “Uncle Sam Wants You” posters to short films, called on men to enlist and women to work in factories to maintain a strong wartime production. Even feature films actively demonized the Nazi regime and developed a new sense of American

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<sup>5</sup> For a more direct discussion of fascism, and the role of propaganda in affecting individual thought patterns, see “Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda.”



exceptionalism and national identity. Considered one of the greatest films in American cinema, *Casablanca* featured a reluctant American hero finding himself in a situation in which the Nazis were on the move in unoccupied French territory.<sup>6</sup> In short, the overwhelming success of wartime propaganda in the United States did not go unnoticed by the Frankfurt School. In sum, Adorno and his cohorts combined Marxist understandings of history and bourgeois culture with a fear of the centralizing tendencies of totalitarianism and the monopolistic qualities of American entertainment industries, specifically the similarities between the two. This, in turn, led to a holistic, and inherently pessimistic, interpretation of mass culture even within a supposedly liberating and democratic American society.

### **British Cultural Studies: Conflict and Competition**

An alternative method of cultural analysis was developed in Great Britain, specifically but not solely at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. While the approach developed here would, like that of the Frankfurt School allow for multidisciplinary critiques, this model was not as pessimistic as its predecessor. Kellner notes that “British cultural studies situates culture within a theory of social production and reproduction, specifying the ways that cultural forms served either to further social domination, or to enable people to resist and struggle against domination” (1995: 31). Stuart Hall, who headed the Centre in the 1960s, developed his eminent “encoding-decoding” theory in an effort to foster an understanding of how culture develops. The basis of this theory lies in the notion that cultural artifacts are “encoded” with certain meanings. In this sense the notion that there is a “production” process of cultural artifacts clearly mirrors Adorno’s culture industry. However, Hall’s model differs from that of the Frankfurt School when it comes to how audiences receive and use the codes within

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<sup>6</sup> In this film the American, Rick Blaine, played by Humphrey Bogart, rediscovers not only his long lost love Ilsa Lund, played by Ingrid Bergman, who has fallen in love with another man, but his national identity. Again, cultural artifacts have power in (re)enforcing notions of nationalistic value structures.

the products of culture. The process outlined by Hall has four basic stages; namely, production, circulation, use, and reproduction. The consumers of said artifacts have a much more significant role in the latter stages of the process. The audience's ability to interpret the text based on an individual's specific social situation allows for discrepancies to develop in how certain texts, films, etc., are evaluated and therefore how society receives these artifacts, although the possible response to said artifacts is bounded. The audience, then, can accept or reject these artifacts, or perhaps even some combination of both.

In order to comprehend Hall's model, one must recognize that his analysis is predicated on the idea that the four steps listed above are distinct from each other. Hall notes that:

The process requires, at the production end, its material instruments- its means- as well as its own sets of social (production) relations- the organization and combination of practices within media apparatuses. But it is in the *discursive* form that the circulation of the product takes place, as well as its distribution to different audiences. Once accomplished, the discourse must then be translated- transformed, again- into social practices if the circuit is to be completed and effective. (Hall 1980: 91)

Hence the process, as discussed by Hall can be understood in a linear fashion. The success of the "encoded" message being carried into the minds of consumers can meet resistance along each step of the process. Hence, "we must recognize that the discursive form of the message has a privileged position in the communicative exchange (from the viewpoint of circulation), and that the moments of 'encoding' and 'decoding', though only 'relatively autonomous' in relation to the communicative process as a whole, are *determinate* moments" (Hall 1980: 91). With regard to autonomy, once the process moves past the circulation stage, the producers of culture effectively decrease in importance, however; if the message was "encoded" well, the possibility scope for the decoding process will be sufficiently narrowed.

Inherent in this model of cultural studies is Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony as well as Marxist notions of class domination. Kellner notes that "classically, cultural studies has

seen society as a system of domination in which institutions like the family, schooling, church, workplace, media, and the state, control individuals and provide structures of domination against which individuals striving for more freedom and power must struggle” (1995: 32). This quote highlights the evolution of cultural studies up to the 1970s, but it also illustrates the ways in which the encoding-decoding model allows for individuals to arrive at different, even starkly dissimilar, attitudes toward cultural artifacts. Individual family situations, especially concerning home life, can vary tremendously, for instance. This uniqueness of individual social situation can lead one who lives in a single parent home to interpret a text much differently than one who lives in a home with both parents. This allows for a much different understanding of culture than that of the Frankfurt School. Hall, analyzing Raymond Williams seminal text *Culture and Society*, notes that “‘culture’ is those patterns of organization, those characteristic forms of human energy which can be discovered as revealing themselves- in ‘unexpected identities and correspondences’ as well as in ‘discontinuities of an unexpected kind’- within or underlying *all* social practices” (Hall 1980: 60).

It must be noted here that the scholarship coming out of the Birmingham Centre did borrow a great deal from the Frankfurt School’s multidisciplinary approach, however; the historical circumstances in which this scholarship was originally produced was fundamentally different than the early works of the Frankfurt School. Hall even goes as far as saying that “Cultural Studies, as a distinctive problematic” starts “in the mid-1950s” (Hall 1980: 57). For Hall:

Cultural Studies really begins with the debate about the nature of social and cultural change in postwar Britain. An attempt to address the manifest breakup of traditional culture, especially traditional class cultures, it set about registering the impact of new forms of affluence and consumer society on the very hierarchical and pyramidal structure of British society. (Hall 1990: 12)

This approach to the study of culture has relevance with regard to the culture wars of the 1960s, specifically the rise of the Civil Rights movement, the Great Society programs of the Johnson Administration in the United States, and anti-Vietnam War activism, just to name a few areas in which the political and social environment had been altered on a global level. This scholarship was also written in the midst of a Cold War, in which two superpowers were vying for political and ideological hegemony. Conflict and competition defined this era, both in terms of the geopolitical climate as well as domestic economic relations. In addition, popular culture was undergoing a metamorphosis of its own. Rock and roll was taking over. Elvis' wild gyrations replaced older more conservative notions of what dance should look like. The Beatles would play Shea Stadium and Woodstock would become perhaps one of the most definitive cultural moments of the 1960s. Thus, there was a connection between socio-economic change and cultural change in this postwar era.

### **Multiperspectival Media Studies**

For our purposes, the field of cultural studies has moved into an era which may not be easily defined by the socio-historical situations in which the two prior schools of thought emerged.<sup>7</sup> Over the past three decades, the Western world has seen a rise of conservatism, both politically and socially, for instance in the rise of Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher, and Herbert Kohl to political leadership in the United States, France and Germany respectively. We have also seen some endurance on the part of reforms achieved during the 1960s and 1970s, not just politically, but socially, although these programs are the targets of conservative agendas on a number of fronts. However, if one could put a label on the current age it may be appropriate to call it the neoliberal era. In addition to changes in the political realm, the past thirty years have seen technological breakthroughs that have expanded the realm of mass culture like never before.

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<sup>7</sup> Although, it is always difficult to define the era in which one lives.

Cable television, satellite technology, and the internet have paved the way for a nearly limitless dissemination of culture artifacts. The internet especially has allowed for consumers of culture to become producers. It also intensifies the role of consumers in responding to cultural artifacts. Therefore, it no longer seems appropriate to define culture as either a breeding ground for propaganda or as a simple competition-based model. The means of individual identification have exploded, and this has had an impact on both the social situation in which we all find ourselves as well as the field of cultural studies.

Douglas Kellner, a Professor of Philosophy at the University of Texas, Austin, argues, given this technological explosion, that the above methodologies alone may not be suitable to the analysis of culture in today's world. Kellner notes that approaches to cultural studies should be "open, flexible, and critical, refusing to fix any orthodoxies, or to close off the field in any premature way" (1995: 55). The field of cultural studies, he argues, has become more expansive in the wake of new methodologies and interpretive methods being incorporated from feminism, critical race theory, queer theory, ethnic studies, etc. In short, the field of cultural studies has blossomed thanks to a proliferation of methodologies that can be used to interpret cultural artifacts and practices. For his part, Kellner focuses his scholarship on media studies, arguing that "a media culture has emerged in which images, sounds, and spectacles help produce the fabric of everyday life, dominating leisure time, shaping political views and social behavior, and providing materials out of which people forge their very identities" (1995: 1). In this statement, Kellner expounds the point that culture is not merely about identification with a set of values but about creating and discovering individual identities. Perhaps more poignantly for our purposes, Kellner notes that interactions with such cultural artifacts often occur during "leisure time."<sup>8</sup> For

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<sup>8</sup> I wish to point out here that while this statement fits with the topic of this essay, I do not agree with the notion that media culture is something that is solely leisurely. Interactions with media culture can occur at home,

the vast majority of those in attendance at any event at the venues discussed below these experiences occur during leisure time. While I do note the experiences of those working in these venues, the experience of these venues is meant primarily as a leisurely one, something that is consumable for the purpose of enjoyment. This allows for a degree of freedom that is not present when one is at work or in school. While social control is not absent, far from it, the individual at these venues has choice and the choices made help to determine the individual's identity.

Before moving forward, I wish to bring this discussion into perspective. I have outlined these visions of culture in order to provide a framework in which a critique of these ideas can be developed. Specifically, I have focused on how these theories can, and have, come out of unique historical circumstances. Below, I will add another concept to this discussion, specifically the role of place, both in a socio-historic context as well as with regard to the organization of physical space. Moreover, I wish to focus on the notion of the spectacle, discussed at length by French filmmaker and founding member of the Situationist International Guy Debord. Debord's notion of the spectacle bears many similarities to Adorno's culture industry, being partially defined as "the concrete inversion of life" (Debord: 1983: 2). I focus, below, on the spectacle as a commodity, and even perhaps as having a unique ideology, but primarily as simply a show. It is my hope that the following discussion will lead to a contemplation of how these theories can be applied to the study of culture at the sites in which it is being produced, in literal arenas.

### **3. Mass Entertainment Venues as Social Places**

Soja notes that "the organization of space is a social product" and that this product "arises from purposeful social practice" (1989: 80). Lefebvre, taking this notion a step further "argues that an epochal shift has occurred within capitalism: production no longer occurs merely in

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in school, at work, or anywhere for that matter. I focus on leisure here because it is in that time during which individuals have their choice of cultural artifacts with which to engage.

space; instead, space is itself now being produced in and through the process of capitalist development” (Lefebvre and Elden 2009: 185). With regard to the topic at hand, it is imperative that we note that the space in which the arena or stadium exists has been manipulated in order to serve both an economic and a social function, if these two functionalities can be distinct from one another. However, the entity also exists within a broader socio-spatial framework, in this case an urban environment. Thus, in order to understand the effect of the production of mass culture within these spaces, one should not omit the fact that these spaces are products themselves and that larger social forces are at work in terms of how these spaces present themselves and to an extent how these spaces, and the corporate structures that manage them, must compete to exist, and thrive, in a competitive capitalistic society.

With regard to the urban environment surrounding these venues, it should be noted that the very words “New York City” conjure an impressive image in the minds of tourists. The city boasts a multitude of iconic landmarks including the towering Empire State Building, the spacious and serene Central Park, and the innovative Brooklyn Bridge just to name a few. The city has become a destination for tourists, even American visitors. More importantly, the city has become a “place.” The images associated with the city have granted the entities that inhabit this space an aura of significance. This is true in two distinct ways. First, the economic value of the physical space in the five boroughs is at a premium. It is no accident that the cost of living in New York City is higher than that of many other North American cities, let alone more suburban and rural areas. Secondly, the meaning and importance of New York City gives certain entities, such as the two discussed below, a narrative to employ to suit economic purposes. The corporate entities that are MSG and Sterling Mets have evolved along with the broader urban landscape of which they are a part. Thus, just as the historical settings of Adorno and Hall were momentous in

the development of their visions of culture, the historical circumstances of these spaces were paramount to how these sports-entertainment venues became places in their own right.

### **Madison Square Garden- Evolution of a Venue in an Urban Social Setting**

What New Yorkers know as Madison Square Garden, the “world’s most famous arena,” is actually the fourth incarnation of the venue. The first MSG was built in 1879 on 26<sup>th</sup> Street and Madison Avenue and was not a commercial success. However, the venue hosted a number of spectacles, most notably boxing matches and the circus. The “grimy, drafty structure” was demolished in 1889 after just ten years in existence to be replaced by a more modern building which housed a separate theater and concert hall (Jackson 2010: 780). Attendance capacity was expanded to what was at the time the largest in the country at over 8000 (Jackson 2010: 780). For a short while, MSG was the second tallest building in the city. New types of events were added to a packed schedule including horse shows and the Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show, which still returns to the arena annually. The 1924 Democratic National Convention was held at the arena, lasting 17 days. The building’s multipurpose usage illustrates the notion that the venue was adapting to the ever expanding urban environment in which it existed. Different audiences were consciously sought out in order to enhance the financial viability of the venue. While the dog shows drew more affluent audiences, who had leisure time to spend on their pets, the circus and other sporting events continued to draw the masses, which remained a vital and populous part of the city. Despite this, the arena was on a consistently shaky financial ground until the “booming” 1920s.

The third incarnation of the venue, which would be housed on 50<sup>th</sup> Street, was erected in 1925. Perhaps the biggest innovations that occurred at the new building were the establishment of major sports franchises, specifically the New York Knickerbockers basketball team and the



New York Rangers hockey team. The rise in popularity of college athletics also led to a contract for the arena to host games played by what is now the “Red Storm” basketball team of St. John’s University, a Division 1 team of the NCAA (The National Collegiate Athletic Association). Several basketball tournaments, including the National Invitation Tournament, the Big East Tournament, and even the NCAA Eastern Regionals have also become mainstays of the Garden’s annual schedule. The third arena, despite its financial success, would give way to a fourth arena, in part due to feelings that the building “had poor sightlines and lacked modern amenities,” features that detracted from the social stature of the world’s most famous arena (Jackson 2010: 781). The new building, which is housed above Penn Station and was erected at a cost of over \$100 million in 1968 dollars, offered a dramatic improvement over its predecessor. It houses a nearly 20,000 seat arena as well as a smaller theater of over 4000 seats.<sup>9</sup> In part, I argue that this desire for a “modern” building, one which can boast the latest and greatest technologies and amenities, is part of the current culture, reflecting both the technological innovations of the last several decades but also the demand for these products in the public mind.<sup>10</sup>

More recently, the idea that up-to-date features are in high demand has become the reasoning, or at least a selling point, of a \$1 billion renovation project which took place over three summers, starting in 2009.<sup>11</sup> While I discuss several of the features of the building below with regard to how individuals can experience the physical space of the venue, it should be noted here that the management of this venue is reacting to, and perhaps encouraging, certain feelings

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<sup>9</sup> The theater is currently called the Theater at MSG, but was at one point known as the Felt Forum.

<sup>10</sup> It is also worth noting that technology in this sense is a commodity in and of itself. Technology is demanded in almost every aspect of modern life and the mass entertainment venue is no exception.

<sup>11</sup> It should be noted that this is not the first major renovation project to occur at the current arena. Another round of renovations took place in the early 1990s. Also, Madison Square Garden Company has over the last few decades invested tens of millions of dollars to renovate its other venues, including the Beacon Theater, Radio City Music Hall, the Chicago Theater, and the Los Angeles Forum.

of what the experience of these venues should feel like. They are responding to thoughts that the building has fallen into a state of disrepair, but also utilizing “newness” as an attraction which can be commodified for their financial benefit. Thus, without even considering the features provided by the renovations, it can be observed that the venue is both responding to and shaping notions of what is expected of it by the public. It is certainly true that technology has exploded, particularly in urban centers, but the venues have actively engaged with these technologies and have turned them into marketable commodities, often at great expense but with the potential for great profit.

More broadly, the physical venue itself has not been the only aspect of the company that has undergone change. The Madison Square Garden Company has expanded over the last few decades to include the management of other venues in New York City and elsewhere, including the Beacon Theater, Radio City Music Hall, the Chicago Theatre, and the Forum in Los Angeles. In addition, this publicly traded company also encompasses cable networks, MSG Network and MSG Plus, which broadcast many live sporting events that occur in the arena.<sup>12</sup> These television networks allow people at home to keep up with their favorite sports teams but also to catch glimpses of the arena itself. While watching a Knicks game, for instance, one cannot help but notice the crowd in the background. Late in a tight game, one can clearly see the desperation of the crowd as they yell, clap, and wave towels in the hopes of distracting an opposing team’s player from making an important foul shot. The emotional attachment of the fans to the team is in full view, and this is not inadvertent. The audience watching at home is perhaps as emotionally tied to the state of the game as those sitting courtside.

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<sup>12</sup> This, of course, is the rule rather than the exception in terms of sports franchises across the country. SNY is owned, in part, by Sterling Sports and Entertainment and broadcasts the majority of New York Mets baseball games during the season. The Yankees own the YES Network, which broadcasts Yankee games and, due to a partnership with the Brooklyn Nets, a number of basketball games as well.

Emotional attachments to place can, and in this case have, also work to the detriment of sports entertainment venues. In the case of MSG, its location atop Penn Station has become contentious in that the historic value of the space has become a reason for some to call for the arena to be moved to a new location. The Garden has been granted a special permit, granting them the ability to operate atop the station. The twenty year term of use expired last year, amidst the massive renovation process. Architectural critic Michael Kimmelman, who is syndicated with the New York Times and is also a strong advocate for the Moynihan Plan which would have moved MSG across 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue taking place of the post office building in order to erect a modern, more aesthetic, station, has called MSG “a flimsy, aging eyesore” which was “erected to serve real estate interests” (2012). The New York City Council did grant an extension to MSG, but the term was shortened to ten years over the protests of the arena’s ownership as well as former mayor Michael Bloomberg. It remains to be seen what will become of the current space after the current permit expires, particularly if the Council is willing to come up with the funding to renovate Pennsylvania Plaza. While I believe this fight to be far from over, the public debate over the significance of Penn Station perhaps validates Hall’s notion that cultural artifacts, even public spaces such as a train station, can be approached in a way that allows for change and pushback against the value of profit-making in capitalist culture, in this case in the commercialization of physical space.

### **Citi Field: A New Venue but a Long History**

Up until 1964, Queens had never had a baseball franchise to call its own. In fact, just a few years earlier, Brooklyn had lost the Dodgers to Los Angeles and Manhattan had lost the Giants to San Francisco.<sup>13</sup> This left a void in the hearts of many National League diehards who could not bring themselves to root for the Bronx Bombers, who had historic rivalries with their

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<sup>13</sup> The iconic Ebbets Field was also demolished.

Brooklyn and Manhattan based counterparts. Thus the creation of a new franchise in 1962, and their move to Queens in 1964 from the Polo Grounds to Shea Stadium, Robert Moses' "Coliseum," gave an army of baseball fans something to cheer about, despite the team's poor performance through the mid-to-late 1960s. These fans, which would include my father, now had a place to call their own.

While the Mets have certainly had a roller coaster history, the state of Shea Stadium, particularly by the 2000s, was nothing to brag about. I personally have heard the place called a "dump" on many occasions, both by guests in attendance as well as by members of the staff. While I loved the ballpark personally, it was "our dump" after all; this characterization is not without a degree of truth. The upper deck provided views in need of binoculars. At the last game I attended in September of 2008 I noticed that the paint on the hinges that held my seat in place had almost completely peeled off. In the background, past the center field wall, stood a brand new structure, which would, admittedly reluctantly at first on my part, become home. Citi Field would open in 2009 with the Mets in need of a new beginning after two consecutive end-of-season collapses, which had left the fan-base disheartened. That feeling would seemingly continue throughout the season as the nation fell deeper into a severe economic recession, culminating in a banking crisis, spiking unemployment, and a stock market crash shortly after the Mets ended another season in disappointing fashion.

One of the changes made between the old ballpark and its replacement was in its name. Shea Stadium was a colossal building, built at a time which saw Robert Moses also attending to another pet project just down the road, the 1964 World's Fair. The stadium was named after William A. Shea, a lawyer who chaired a commission proposed by Mayor Robert Wagner, who wished to bring National League Baseball back to New York City. The naming of the 50000 plus

seat ballpark, which for a time would also be home to the New York Jets Football team before its move to New Jersey, illustrates just how significant it was to the city to have a National League team. Why not, for instance, name the ballpark after Robert Moses, who was the chief architect and who had originally offered the Flushing Meadows location as a potential new home of the Dodgers? Perhaps the reason was that Shea was not as controversial figure as Moses, who is considered by some to be one of the most powerful men in the country during his long career in state and local bureaucracy. Regardless of the reason for the naming of the stadium, the title of “Shea” Stadium offers a stark contrast to its replacement Citi Field. Citi Bank, one of the largest companies in the world, and one who was deeply involved in the financial crisis of 2009, was granted the naming rights of the venue for 20 years. The cost of this venture was \$20 million a year, totaling \$400 million.

While Citi Bank has taken some heat for spending such a lucrative sum during such an economically unsteady time, the Mets have also come under scrutiny for not using the title of the new ballpark to highlight a former player, or at least somehow play into the history of the franchise.<sup>14</sup> I raise this point to highlight a potential cultural conflict in which these corporate entities are operating. On the one hand, capitalist enterprise has often built on history as a means of financial gain. Tourism itself brings billions of dollars to New York City each year. In this sense, history is “usable” in order to further current capitalistic goals. The past can become culturally significant and can therefore be commodified. On the other hand, advertising has also intruded upon social spaces, both private and public. The naming rights of the ballpark offer exposure to Citi Bank on the physical structure of the venue, which can be seen from a distance,

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<sup>14</sup> The Yankees, for example, did not go down the same route in terms of picking a name for their new stadium, which was built at the same time as Citi Field. The Yankees have kept Yankee Stadium as the name of their new home. However it must also be noted that Barclays Center is named after a British bank, which brings the franchise a lucrative sum.

a particularly good view along the Van Wyck Expressway, for instance. “Citi” is also printed on every ticket, is mentioned by broadcasters during each game, and the logo is displayed on television during each broadcast, not to mention the Mets website.<sup>15</sup> Hence, while the name of the stadium may detract from furthering the Mets brand in one way, it does bring economic gains to the team, which has suffered due to the ownership’s connections to the Ponzi scheme organized by Bernie Madoff, the former NASDAQ chairman.

### **The Political and Economic Ramifications of Stadium Development**

It has been illustrated that these venues are, at least at heart, economic enterprises and that these spaces exist in a competitive environment, not simply in terms of competition with one another, but also in terms of competing notions of how the physical space in which these venues exist should be utilized. Before proceeding, it should be noted that the debate over the building of mass entertainment venues can be a grueling and sometimes contentious endeavor. Brooklyn’s Barclay’s Center provides an illustration of the controversy of arena development. The venue was originally proposed by a firm headed by real estate mogul Bruce Ratner as part of a broader Atlantic Yards redevelopment project. The arena sat at the centerpiece of the project, which also included low-income housing which has not materialized quickly, although a large 2250 house complex is still being planned for an area several blocks from the venue (Blau 2014). The building of the venue has affected real estate prices in the area and has also seen a spike in commuter and foot traffic. One element of venue usage that has led to some headaches concerns the noise that emanates from the building, particularly during hard rock and rap concerts. Reuven Blau noted that “arena officials” have “installed 1,800 so called acoustic baffles, or insulated ceiling panels, to improve sound levels inside” the arena while reducing the volume that escapes the structure. Again, these venues exist in a broader social setting and residents of these areas

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<sup>15</sup> On a side note, some fans have gotten their hands on t-shirts that read “I’m still calling it Shea.”

should not be assumed to be silent for these development projects can have drastic effects on their lives.

Moreover, the taking on of such a project usually encompasses the need to interact with government. The case of MSG has already been illustrative of this point concerning the special permit the arena requires in its leasing Pennsylvania Plaza. However, the very construction of such arenas and stadia often require a mix of public and private funding. Siegfried and Zimbalist note that “private investors and team owners have rarely found a new stadium to be an attractive investment. Since revenues from the existing facility are largely spoken for (player salaries, organizational expenses, and so on), new stadiums would have to generate incremental revenues over and above those of the facilities they replace” (2000: 98).<sup>16</sup> While this contradicts the notion, discussed above, that there is a cultural valuation of “newness,” the financial benefits garnered from additional revenues need to offset the costs of building the new “improved” venue.

Thus, one of the points of contention over building of new sports facilities concerns the need for taxpayer money to be used to get these projects underway, as was the case in the building of the new Yankee Stadium and Citi Field. An argument that must be confronted by the sponsors of such ventures is that the money could be used for better purposes. This of course is a battle often waged. Each year’s budget is scrutinized by various interests and activist groups. One might argue, convincingly, that the money spent on a new sports facility might be more meaningfully spent on education, health care, or law enforcement. Even if the money is to be spent on the construction of new facilities one might make the case that public money should be

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<sup>16</sup> Both the new Citi Field and the new Yankee Stadium received funding from municipal government. One of the results of this in Queens has been a revenue-sharing deal between the Mets and New York City with regard to parking at the venue, which as of the 2013 season stood at \$20 per car per event. The cost of parking at special events was even higher, particularly during the All Star events, which were held at Citi Field in July.

spent on housing. The major response to this argument is that such projects can, and do, lead to a boon in employment. For one, such projects require large numbers of construction workers, engineers, and architects. Sports-venue managers will also be quick to point out that after the facility is built, a number of jobs will be created in terms of staffing the building. The new facility will doubtlessly need a large numbers of personnel for cleaning and building maintenance, security, ushers, ticket salespeople, etc., in order to keep the facility operating efficiently and effectively. A counterargument to this logic is that a number of these jobs will be part-time and that these types of jobs do not offer important benefits to employees, particularly health benefits and retirement savings plans.<sup>17</sup>

More broadly, there are serious questions concerning the economic impact that these facilities have on the city. Coates and Humphries, who looked at sports facility development over a 35 year period from 1969 to 1994, found that:

While there is no evidence that either the level or the growth rate of real per capita personal income is enhanced by construction of a sports arena or stadium, attracting a franchise from any professional sport, or providing incentives for current sports teams to remain in the SMSA [standard metropolitan statistical areas], our results do not invalidate the contributions of sports to the sense of community and overall satisfaction enjoyed by the residents of metropolitan areas. (1999: 622)

These findings deserve some discussion in that it raises a number of issues that should be taken into consideration as to the impact of building these venues have on urban environments. With regard to economics, it should be noted that one must look to what preceded the arena or stadium. For instance, if the stadium simply replaced another stadium, as was the case of Citi Field, then the overall economic impact on the area would be significantly lower than if a new

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<sup>17</sup> I must note here that this argument holds a great deal of weight. For instance, ushers and ticket takers at Citi Field are considered seasonal employees. While MSG runs year round and there are many instances in which there are multiple events on the same day, most event staff-members are hired on a part-time basis. The basic shift for ushers, for example, is only four and a half hours. Ushers and security staff are, however, allowed to participate in a 401k savings plan through MSG.



stadium were built in a previously barren area. One must also consider the need for the arena to have a sufficient number of days with events scheduled to maintain a sizable event staff. This is not typically a problem in New York as it is one of the largest media markets in the country. However, smaller markets often have trouble drawing musical acts to their city because they cannot necessarily guarantee that there will be sufficient demand to justify the cost of putting on the show. Shows can, and have, been cancelled due to poor ticket sales, even for major artists who could sell out football and soccer stadiums globally.<sup>18</sup> This is especially true in cities that do not have a major sports franchise because having a professional hockey or basketball team call an arena home helps fill the schedule considerably, at least for the duration of a season. In short, a number of issues must be taken into consideration when grappling with whether or not an arena would be successful in any given metropolitan area and, more generally, what the economic impact, in terms of economic growth, would be felt by that area.

Secondly, the question whether or not “a sense of community and satisfaction” is achieved by these areas must be considered. I argue that this effect is most definitely felt but also that this effect is not at all accidental but is integral to the business of the venue as a commercial enterprise. In fact I would take the argument a step further. The arena is consciously crafting a place for itself in terms of popular culture but also within the infrastructure of the city. Management of these venues wants their buildings to be economically profitable but also places with which people feel a deep connection. Moreover, the intimacy of this connection reifies the mass-cultural significance of this type of entertainment enterprise with the venues, and especially sports teams, representing localized brands. In sum, the localization of these places serves a

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<sup>18</sup> Such was the case for Bon Jovi in Cleveland in 2013. The hard-rock band grossed the most money in ticket sales for the year by any musical act. The show in Cleveland was cancelled, however, due to poor ticket sales. One could possibly point to the fact that the band had already performed a show there earlier in the year, or to a lackluster marketing campaign; however, the band did gross incredible sums of money at other stadiums in the Mid-West including Soldier Field in Chicago.

purpose in the reification of the system in addition to the commercial success of any one arena, which in itself is expendable to the system as a whole. Shropshire notes that “the decision to pursue a franchise or a major event, despite the influence of economic impact studies [which are highly contradictory based on the sample analyzed] is largely subjective” (1995: 61).

#### **4. The Venue Experience**

##### **Before the Event**

Our interaction with mass entertainment venues can begin well before one steps foot in the venue physically. The first question that must be answered is: Should I go to one of these venues and why? In this preliminary step, one can explore the various events taking place at these venues and which of these would be suitable. In other words, which events spark one’s interests? In the case of MSG, the official calendar of the arena lists 43 events that are scheduled between February 27<sup>th</sup> and Jan 9<sup>th</sup>, 2015 (as of March 1<sup>st</sup>). Many of these listed shows are NY Ranger hockey and NY Knick basketball games. There are other options available however. There are, for example, collegial sporting events, concerts, in addition to professional bull riding. One must first be made aware that such events are taking place. This is done in a number of ways. For instance, each local sports team lists their schedules on their official web-pages. Local sporting events are also listed in local newspapers’ sports sections. Most teams, and a number of players, now have social media accounts which they utilize to reach out to their fans. Musical acts also use social media to let their fans know that they will be going on tour, not to mention email notifications. Entertainers of various sorts also utilize social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, as well as television appearances, to promote new albums and let fans know that they will be performing “at a venue near you.” In short, there are a number of options to choose from,

but one must make a conscious decision that one wishes to go to the arena as opposed to using that time for some other purpose.

If one decides that they do wish to attend an event one must then consider some practical questions. One inquiry that deserves some discussion is: can I afford to attend the event? This is a subject that has been discussed frequently by the public simply because many events, particularly at MSG, are quite costly.<sup>19</sup> On ticketmaster.com for instance, the lowest priced tickets for February 27<sup>th</sup>'s Ranger game started at \$80.55, including service charges.<sup>20</sup> In many cases the lowest-cost tickets sell out fairly quickly, thus the average price paid by attendees can easily top \$100. In this case, I checked tickets for the above mentioned event on February 26<sup>th</sup>. The lowest priced ticket still available online directly from the venue was \$211.55, and only one ticket was available at that price. For popular events a lack of ticket availability, particularly as the event nears, is often the case. Another example of this is the March 4<sup>th</sup> concert of Sting and Paul Simon, two classic rock legends associated with the Police and Simon and Garfunkel respectively, at MSG. Ticket prices on Ticketmaster range from \$64.10 to \$286.80 (\$50 to \$255 before service fees) and the lowest priced ticket available was \$181.10.<sup>21</sup>

The ticket market has adapted over the last two decades to reflect major improvements in technology. In effect, the ability to purchase tickets by phone and online has allowed venues to sell tickets in record time. Thus, the market for such purchases has been somewhat distorted. It

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<sup>19</sup> The same is true even at Citi Field and Yankee Stadium, even though baseball is considered "America's pastime" and a more family-oriented sporting event. Tickets for Met home games at Citi Field for instance went for well more than tickets at Shea Stadium. The most expensive tickets at Citi Field in 2009, the inaugural season at the ballpark, went for over \$800. Tickets for the inaugural season at Yankee Stadium went for over \$1000. Tickets at Citi Field have since come down with tickets topping out at \$535 for individual games before fees for opening day of the 2014 season.

<sup>20</sup> Online ticket retailers, including Ticketmaster, which now owns LiveNation, have been criticized due to the level of fees attached to the purchase. In the case of the event discussed above, the face value of the ticket was \$60, leaving \$20.55 in services charges, over 33% of the face value. Even performers have railed against these ticket outlets, including Kid Rock and Mick Jagger.

<sup>21</sup> This was as of February 26<sup>th</sup>.

should be noted that such technologies have made ticket purchasing much more convenient. No longer does one have to trek to the venue and wait in long lines in order to get tickets to see a concert. One can now buy tickets from the comfort of one's home, or even on a mobile device as Ticketmaster, LiveNation and StubHub now have "apps." However, while the convenience of online ticket retail is without question it cannot always be said that buying tickets is easy, or stress free. Purchasing tickets for Paul McCartney's June 10<sup>th</sup> concert at the Barclays Center was not an easy task, at least at first. Tickets went on sale several weeks before the show, and special "presales" were available to select groups, including members of Paul McCartney's website. A limited number of tickets were made available a few days before tickets went on sale to the general public. The tickets were gone within minutes. Even though I logged on to the website the second the presale was supposed to begin I came up empty-handed. The same was true for the general on sale time. Except for a few tickets in the higher price ranges, in excess of \$200, the show sold out in minutes. In the case of the former Beatle, not to mention dozens of other performers, there is an incredibly high demand, and this demand comes in a rush during the times at which tickets for these performances go on sale. While one can be on the computer the second tickets go on sale this does not always translate into a successful purchase. One may obtain tickets but not for seats with a particularly good view. Others may also wait for some time staring hopefully at a screen with the message "Please wait... searching for tickets" only to be led to another screen which basically says "Better luck next time."

Many fans have vented their frustration with the fact that tickets have sold out so quickly. One of the causes of frustration is the fact that just as technology has made the purchase of tickets easier it has allowed "scalpers" to quickly buy tickets for a show, which they have no

desire to attend, and sell them on the secondary market for a profit.<sup>22</sup> The secondary ticket market has proliferated over the past decade with dozens of websites having been created offering people the ability to resell tickets they have purchased, led by StubHub.<sup>23</sup> While these websites offer ticketholders the capability to sell their seat in the case that they fall ill, or some other reason in which they cannot attend the event, for popular shows thousands of tickets find their way onto the resale market, often within minutes of tickets becoming available on the primary retail market, and the only explanation for this is scalpers.

The impact that internet scalping has on ticket pricing can be quite substantial. For example, tickets on the Chase Bridge at MSG, two small seating areas that runs above the general seating bowls and were the product of the arena's recent renovations, for the March 4<sup>th</sup> Paul Simon and Sting concert retailed for \$64.10 on Ticketmaster, but as of February 28<sup>th</sup> tickets on the secondary market began at \$81. While the prices of these tickets can vary, and on some occasions actually drop below face value, as I was happy to discover a single \$124.50 Billy Joel ticket for floor seating sell for \$114 after fees for his January show at the Garden, on average the secondary market adds to the cost of the ticket, especially when fees are included. Even for the second Billy Joel show on February 3<sup>rd</sup>, the average ticket price on the secondary market was recorded at \$258 the day before the event (Lawrence 2014). The secondary market allows the economic conception of supply and demand and its effect on price to play out in real time. The price-setters are no longer simply the merchants of these tickets, but the ticket holders

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<sup>22</sup> In certain cases, high demand for shows has actually caused Ticketmaster to have technical problems with their servers. This has been the case repeatedly when tickets for Bruce Springsteen concerts have gone on sale. Part of the problem is that scalpers have developed "bots" which allow them to navigate the website very quickly without having to do so manually. While security devices, for instance asking one to retype the text of a cryptic message before the purchase can be completed, have been developed in order to curtail the use of such bots, these programs have become more and more sophisticated. This issue needs to be continually readdressed as technology continually evolves.

<sup>23</sup> The secondary ticket market has often been criticized for being insecure. However, many sites, particularly StubHub have become reputable companies. These sites are far more secure than the purchasing of tickets from a scalper standing outside the arena.

themselves. Consumers can now quite easily become sellers, and it is perfectly legal in the state of New York.<sup>24</sup>

The merchants, the New York Mets for example, have taken certain steps to counter perceived losses on ticket revenue due to the emergence of a successful secondary market. Team owners have reasoned that if a ticket originally priced at \$15 is worth \$25 to the consumer, why not develop a mechanism that would allow the seller to measure demand for tickets in real time and have that knowledge reflected in real time on the primary ticket market. Beginning in the 2013 season, the New York Mets instituted what is referred to as “dynamic pricing.” Basically, the system works by measuring the demand for tickets by analyzing how much people have previously paid for tickets, the traffic to the websites that sell tickets, as well as the supply of seats at certain price points. The result is that the cost of seating could vary for people sitting in the same section at the same game based on how demand for those tickets played out in real time. Even before this system was put in place, pricing schemes for baseball games had been introduced that attempted to judge demand for certain games. For instance, according to the old system, tickets for the Mets vs. the Yankees at Shea Stadium, “subway series games,” were listed as “platinum” games and were sold at a premium. Tickets for teams within the same division, such as the Atlanta Braves or Philadelphia Phillies, were often listed as “gold” or “silver” games while teams from outside the division, who were not considered “rival” teams, often were listed as “bronze” or “value” games. These pricing mechanisms reflect more than economic demand and the desires of business owners to obtain profits however. These schemes illustrate the investment of sports fans to their teams and how individual games can be hyped in ways that can draw attendees to the stands, in this case by the tens of thousands. Hence, the sophistication of

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<sup>24</sup> There are some exceptions to this law however. For one, employees of the venues at which the shows are taking place are not allowed to profit from sales of tickets for each show. Electronic record keeping by companies like StubHub makes this information fairly easy to track if suspicions are aroused.

pricing mechanisms is illustrative of just how embedded emotional investment in professional sports is in our culture.

One final note on this topic concerns how pricing mechanisms such as those discussed above have the potential to make live entertainment a middle-to-upper class leisure activity as opposed to something that is open to the mass public. Siegfried and Peterson analyzed this topic in connection with the development of new, more modern, arenas and stadia during the 1990s. They note that “architects of the 1960s and 1970s who built the old-style arenas and stadiums did not anticipate how many wealthy individuals and corporations would be willing to pay for the status, exclusivity, and amenities of club seats and luxury boxes” (Siegfried and Peterson 2000: 51). They conclude that “consumers of sporting event tickets enjoy incomes substantially above the average. Although consumers who watch games on television appear to have lower incomes, they too are affluent in comparison with the nation’s overall average income” (2000: 71). Hence, according to this study, attention and enjoyment of sporting events is tied to social class and one’s participation in the capitalist economic structure.<sup>25</sup>

These findings reflect several elements of the American social structure. For one, the enjoyment of sporting events seems to be at least somewhat connected with leisure time, that is, with some association with a middle class lifestyle. While Siegfried and Peterson conclude that income levels are reflected in the enjoyment of sporting events in general, I find this to be the case especially in terms of attendance at the event in question, particularly when looking at who is sitting in the “good,” more expensive seats. Over this past summer, during one Friday evening at Citi Field, I was stationed at the entrance to the “ownership suites,” the most exclusive areas in

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<sup>25</sup> Zinser’s article concerning the Garden’s renovations mentions, for instance, the reconfiguration of the suites at the venue. The renovations brought most of the suites in the venue closer to the action. These spaces provide group hospitality at a premium. As noted below, businesses utilize these facilities quite often.

the ballpark.<sup>26</sup> Unlike the other suite levels, these suites are typically, but not always, reserved for guests of Fred and Jeff Wilpon and Saul Katz, who have owned the ballclub since the 1980s.<sup>27</sup> On this evening Suite 5 on the Sterling Level, which is an exclusive area complete with a bar, lounge and restaurant, was rented by a small group of about ten middle-aged men. While I did not get a chance to talk to them a great deal, I could not help but notice their attire. Most of them were dressed in suits or sport jackets, and ones of good quality to boot. They all had black or brown shoes, polished, and appeared to have just come from the office. This experience reflects the point made above, that income seems to be related not just to attendance of events, but also where one sits in the ballpark, and what areas to which one's ticket grants access.

Second, the nature of sports facilities has evolved to reflect the corporatization of American industry as well as the prestige of wealth. Several suites at Citi Field, for instance, are rented out to corporations, some for the entire season. Another suite, for the cost of \$1 million dollars a season, is rented to comedian Jerry Seinfeld, who is perhaps the most famous Met fan. Similar arrangements have become the norm elsewhere, including at Madison Square Garden. The very fact that such lavish accommodations have become the norm in sports facilities demonstrates more than the successful exploitation of a market by sports franchises. These amenities' very existence denotes how far-reaching corporate wealth really is. Being an important client of a firm can earn one special privileges, including tickets to a game and all the privileges that come with it. The exclusivity of these spaces grants access to private food, staff and even restrooms. In one sense, those who pay less for tickets can be thought to be paying to

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<sup>26</sup> Over the past two years this has become my usual post. We typically call areas that are assigned to the same individual one's "spot." Typically, more senior staff members have steady posts, while the newer employees receive different assignments, allowing them to become more familiar with the ballpark.

<sup>27</sup> The ownership suites have a special guest list for each event. On different occasions I have recognized some of the names on the list including Governor Chris Christie, Congressman Peter King, Baseball Commissioner Bud Selig and filmmaker Michael Moore. During the opening week of the 2014 season, I also met Congressman Eliot Engel who represents a district that is based partly in the Bronx.



experience only a small part of what the arena has to offer. Wealth is not just buying one a night out but access to space. One's overall interaction with these spaces can be drastically limited by one's ability to pay.

### **Experiences at the Venue**

Once one has tickets in hand one has purchased access to the venue itself. Upon arriving at the arena or stadium one will interact with both physical space as well as individual staff members. Interactions between guests and staff members have become the subject of facility management training programs that cover everything from sexual harassment to security procedures to personal grooming to staff usage of certain areas within the venue itself.<sup>28</sup> Madison Square Garden Company provides what is called "Circle of Service" training to all of its employees. According to the most recent supplement to the MSG Employee handbook, the "mission" of this program is "excellent service, cherished memories and loyalty" (MSG 2013: 19). Excellent service makes the customer happy. They will leave the arena with "cherished" memories if said service is provided. These positive experiences will cause patrons to be loyal and want to return to the venue in hopes of similar experiences. The logic is simple but also reasonable. This training program covers everything from the patron's entrance into the venue to the moment they are gone.

Upon one's arrival at Madison Square Garden, one is funneled through one of two hallways on either side of 2 Penn Plaza. Directly ahead is a large team of security guards. These staff members are sectioned off into two lines. The first line is a bag check. The second line is a wand (metal detector) search. Going through this entrance can be an experience in and of itself as acknowledged by the following occurrence:

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<sup>28</sup> For example, at MSG employees are not supposed to walk through the Madison Club unless one is specifically staffed in that area.

Upon arriving at MSG for the January 27<sup>th</sup> Billy Joel concert [which I attended as a fan], I made my way through the crowded concourse surrounding 2 Penn Plaza. As I approached the entrance of the arena the crowd became more and more dense. It would not have surprised me if there were over a thousand people waiting in line to get into the building and more seemed to arrive on scene every minute. I could feel people being pushed into me from behind causing me to get closer and closer to those in front of me. People were eager to finally get inside, not just to see the show but also to finally have some personal space once again. That crowded, almost smothered, feeling instigated a yearning to get inside the building, eerily building the excitement caused by the opportunity to see the show by one of my favorite artists.

The security guards at the venue are often the first interaction ticketholders have with event staff. While this interaction can seem intrusive, as the security procedures set in place require pockets to be emptied, and purses to be looked through, these processes are a sign that the event one is attending will take place in a secure environment.<sup>29</sup>

The greeting by event staff is crucial to leaving a lasting impression on the guest. This was a topic discussed during my first training session at MSG, a session which was entitled “Circle of Service and Post Procedures.” In fact, several phrases were listed in a PowerPoint presentation as appropriate to use in interacting with guests. One point that I took away from this presentation was that several of the prescribed greetings mentioned the venue explicitly. I wondered at why this was the case. Clearly the patron knows where they are and why they are there. However, I believe the inclusion of the name in the greeting is about more than making the guest feel welcome; it is about connecting that feeling of “welcome” with the brand of the venue. This idea was reinforced when I received my uniform. The words “Madison Square Garden” were stitched into the fabric. The wearing of a small pin with the words “Garden of Dreams” which happens to be the name of the Garden’s charity foundation was made mandatory. New

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<sup>29</sup> On a related note, security procedures at Major League Baseball Stadiums are becoming more intense, and some would argue intrusive. At the beginning of the 2014 season, the New York Mets began to install metal detectors, similar to those one sees at airports, at the entrances to the stadium. Even event staff must adhere to these new rules.

optional parts of the uniform include buttons with the Rangers and Knicks logos. Thus, the greeting is a subtle form of advertising for the venue.

Another key component of the annual training sessions that event staff-members attend concerns the attitude employees are meant to have when interacting with guests. Courtesy and a “smile” are meant as a representation of the arena. This is meant to begin with the first interaction between guest and staff. The ticket-takers at Citi Field, for instance, stand at the gates and offer one of the first opportunities for a staff member to offer help to the fan:

On one sunny afternoon, I was stationed in the Jackie Robinson Rotunda [the main entrance at Citi Field] close to but not at the ticket-turnstiles. The ticket-takers are stationed at every other turnstile. An elderly woman had gone through security and was having difficulty getting the scanner to read her ticket. The light flashed red several times before a ticket-taker noticed her difficulty and approached her. With his help, she got her ticket scanned and was able to walk through the turnstile, a flash of green illustrating that her ticket had been read successfully. She thanked my co-worker with a smile.

These occurrences may seem trivial but they establish the basis of the relationship between the arena and the patron; at least this is what the relationship is supposed to look like. The interaction between any individual staff member and the patron may be momentary and fleeting but these experiences add up to the experience of the venue as a whole, and hopefully, but not necessarily, a positive one.

It should be noted that even the experience of entering the arena can differ based on one’s ability to pay. Citi Field, for instance, has three separate VIP entrances, named after Tom Seaver, Gil Hodges and Casey Stengel respectively. These entrances are smaller than the public entrances, but they are much more exclusive and offer a much different way to experience the ballpark. The turnstiles, for one, are indoors and are thus protected from the elements. Once past the turnstiles one walks through a tiled, somewhat dimly lit hallway, the walls decorated with pictures of Mets legends, team posters, and covers of past Mets yearbooks. Each entrance has a

set of elevators that take the guests to wherever their seats may be. These entrances are but one example of levels of exclusiveness within these venues.

Beyond the turnstiles of the Jackie Robinson Rotunda at Citi Field lies a grand entrance, open that is open to all ticketholders.<sup>30</sup> Pictures of Robinson, a statue of his iconic number 42, and a famous quote by the legend, “A life is not important except in the impact it has on other lives” decorate the space. However the entrance does more than simply celebrate one of baseball’s most legendary and beloved figures, it also serves the purposes of Mets branding and revenue generation. On the far right of the rotunda is the Mets Museum and Hall of Fame.<sup>31</sup> The museum holds a host of memorabilia as well as the World Series Championship trophies from 1969 and 1986. One of my favorite exhibits is footage of the infamous Mookie Wilson ground ball that went through the legs of Red Sox first baseman Bill Buckner, perhaps the most memorable World Series moment ever, which plays on a loop. Immediately next to the museum is the main team store.<sup>32</sup> Besides being a hub for Mets related merchandise, the team store is often used as a site to promote the products of Met legends, including books. During the 2013 season, both Dwight Gooden, a former Mets All Star pitcher, and Howie Rose, the Mets radio play-by-play announcer, had book signings before select home games. These events were often very well attended, the line sometimes spanning nearly the entire length of the rotunda, particularly for “Doc” Gooden. The catch was that fans had to buy the books in the team store if they wished to receive an autograph. Thus, the rotunda not only is an entryway into the ballpark

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<sup>30</sup> The naming of the Rotunda after Jackie Robinson, who never played for the Mets but rather the Brooklyn Dodgers, left many Met die-hards perplexed. Did the Mets not have any legends whose name could have graced the Rotunda? Arguably, Jackie Robinson’s legacy far outweighs any of these legends impact on MLB (and I say that as a loyal Mets fan. However, the naming of the Rotunda highlights both a throwback to another era in the sport as well as a key piece of New York history. The first African American Major League Baseball player played for a New York team.

<sup>31</sup> The Hall of Fame at Citi Field was not an original feature of the ballpark. It was added after the new ballpark for the new ballpark not being “Mets” enough.

<sup>32</sup> MSG also has a team store in the main entrance of the arena.

but a place which blends history and merchandising. The space is welcoming but also commodified.

The concourses of the venue also illustrate the purpose of commerce as well as team and venue branding. The concourses are lined with concession stands, which now offer quite a variety of cultural cuisines in addition to venue standards such as hot dogs and popcorn. Merchandising stations also sell team merchandise, and on evenings when there are concerts, t-shirts and other merchandise promoting whatever artist is performing that night are readily available. One of the special features of the Madison Concourse, the main seating level of MSG, is “On this Date in MSG History” which features a different event for each day of the year. Photographs of various events line the walls along the entire concourse, one for each day of the year. Fans are often told to try to find their birthday and discover what “special memory” occurred on that day. On September 23<sup>rd</sup>, my birthday for instance, Elton John performed on one of his first solo-headlining tours of the United States. Other iconic images include the Republican National Convention of 2004, the 12-12-12 charity concert, which raised money for victims of Hurricane Sandy, as well as a slew of famous sports moments, including the “fight of the century” between legendary boxers Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier. This feature allows patrons to make a personal connection with the venue. Somehow, the idea that something special happened on their birthday and that it happened at MSG is meant to build the relationship between the venue and the patron. In this case, the visual displays of the concourse offer the opportunity to establish the notion of a personalized connection between the patron and the venue through the manufactured significance of entertainment history.

The concourses are accessible to everyone, but there are certain areas, beyond the VIP suites, of the venue that are only accessible to the privileged few. This is especially true at Citi

Field which has six club areas that are only accessible to select ticket holders. Club access is a commodity in and of itself, and it comes at a price. My typical spot at Citi Field is not only the entryway to the ownership suites but also one of the entrances to the seating area directly behind home plate. In order to arrive at these seats (which consist of only the first 8 rows of the Sterling Level, in other words, the seats behind home plate) one must walk to the back of the Rotunda, have their tickets checked by me at the door and then make their way through a short hallway. In the middle of the hallway, which also grants access to the “tunnel” where one can find employee and player locker rooms, the police room, and the players’ family room, is the Delta Sky 360 Lounge, an intimate room accessible to only those sitting in the seating area noted above.<sup>33</sup> Access to this room grants ticketholders complimentary food and soft drinks, buffet style. The buffet is not limited to hot dogs and burgers, but typically offers a fairly generous spread. On one occasion I noticed that one of the dishes was a tray filled with empanadas. At the end of the game, cookies and sometimes even pastries are brought out of the kitchen for fans to enjoy.<sup>34</sup> The lounge also features a small bar. While alcohol is not included in the price of the ticket, the line at this bar is never long precisely because access to the room is so limited. This is true even on days, such as Opening Day, when the ballpark is sold out.

The other club areas are less exclusive, but also come at a premium. The Hyundai Club, situated just above the Rotunda on the Field Level behind home plate, offers a buffet of its own. The Delta Sky 360 Club (not to be confused with the above described lounge) as well as the Acela Club, include full service bars as well as sit-down restaurants, which sometimes require reservations, particularly on days when attendance is high. The Caesar’s Club, situated on the Excelsior Level, boasts a view of the city skyline as well as the largest bar in the ballpark. This

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<sup>33</sup> These seats start at over \$400 a piece.

<sup>34</sup> The policy of the New York Mets is that these refreshments are for guests only. That does not mean however that event staff, and even supervisors, has not “sneaked” a cookie or soda out of the lounge.

club is one of the less exclusive areas in the ballpark and is open to patrons sitting in the Sterling and Excelsior levels as well as most of the Field and part of the Promenade levels. The higher the price of the ticket, the more access one has purchased.

These club areas deserve discussion on two fronts. The first concerns the naming of the club areas. Currently at Citi Field, only one club, the Promenade Club is not named after a corporate sponsor.<sup>35</sup> Delta Airlines has the naming rights of two areas at the ballpark, and also has similar arrangements at other venues. There is a Delta Sky 360 Club at the Beacon Theatre, for instance. These areas typically feature some form of advertisements for the corporate sponsor. Posters of casino gaming experiences line the walls of the Caesar's Club. The naming of these areas illustrates, yet again, the corporate nature of ballpark operations. These corporate partnerships allow for companies to brand themselves in a certain way. These sponsorships not only allow advertisement within the physical space of the venue but also receive airplay on radio and television broadcasts. In addition, they allow the franchise to add revenue in addition to ticket, concession and merchandise sales. More poignantly, these sponsorships reify the advertisements themselves in that the titles of these clubs are repeatedly used in conversation at the ballpark. Fans can tell their friends to meet them there, thus the name of both the club area and its corporate sponsor sticks.

The second point I wish to make concerns denial of access to these areas. Technically only those who have paid for access are allowed into these spaces. However, the policy is not always adhered to wholeheartedly by staff, even management in certain instances. An experience from one of my first games worked at Citi Field can illustrate this point:

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<sup>35</sup> It should be noted that the Hyundai Club was, in previous seasons, entitled the Champions Club, and even before that the Ebbets Club, a throwback to Ebbets Field. The original name change occurred after clamoring by fans that there was too much homage paid to the Brooklyn Dodgers at the Stadium.

I was stationed at one of the entrances to the Excelsior Level. The entire level is considered club seating, which is only accessible to those whose tickets read "Caesar's Club." However, a number of people, hundreds by the end of the evening, attempted to walk through the level without having the proper access. I was continually telling people that they could not walk through the seating area, and received loathing for having to do so. In some situations I genuinely felt bad for having to turn people away. In one instance, an elderly woman, who walked slowly and with a cane, had seats on the Pepsi Porch, a seating area on the other side of the ballpark. While technically on the same level as the Caesar's Club, these seats were not considered club seats. In short, I had to tell the woman that she had to go upstairs and walk along the Promenade level only to take another elevator back down.

While in this case, I applied the rules strictly, perhaps especially since I was new on the job, by the end of the season I had become much more lenient. The amount of traffic was overwhelming at times as the ballpark was brand new and many people had come to see the ballpark and not just the team. Also, many people did not take kindly to having to take a roundabout route to their seats. Others complained that they too had paid a pretty penny for their tickets and were upset that they did not have access to a bar, a sentiment with which I sympathized. Still more patrons were frustrated that hard liquor was only served in club areas, to which they did not have access. These complaints added up quickly, and I must admit wore on my temper. However, the commoditization of club access and the exclusiveness of this commoditization illustrate the valuation of the dollar in these semi-public spaces as well as the demand for access, which does not necessarily show itself in one's ability to pay. People can, and sometimes do, attempt to see if the rules can be bent in their favor and one may find their effort successful, particularly if one knows a staff member working in one of these areas.

Eventually, one will presumably make their way to one's seat. The experience at one's seat can differ depending on where one's seat is located. For one, the better view is typically that of seats closest to the court, field, rink, or stage. Again, the closer one is to the action, the higher the cost of the ticket. However, the rule that staff members, particularly ushers have to enforce is



that everyone in these venues has their own place. This is especially true when events are sold out. An illustration of enforcement of this rule at a recent concert, in which Enrique Iglesias performed at MSG, illustrates that this rule is not always met with obedience:

At one point in the evening, about twenty minutes or so into the main set, a fairly young couple approached me and asked me to escort them to their seats. They were in Section 201, row 4, seats 1 and 2, right on the aisle. This was supposed to be easy. Two middle aged Hispanic women were sitting in their seats. I asked them to show me their tickets and they were slow to get them out of their purses. They were in the wrong seats, but not far off. They had seats in the same section, even the same row. They claimed that I had sat them in those seats, which I did not remember doing, but it is possible that I had brought them to that row without seating them in their specified seats, especially if there were people already sitting in the row that I would have had to climb over. It was also dark in the arena bowl as the lights had gone out at the beginning of the performance. The volume of the show also added to the difficulty of communicating effectively. In this case, while the women I unfortunately had to relocate did speak English they did have thick accents, which perhaps, though not necessarily, could have represented a language barrier.

This instance is illustrative of the point that while everyone is meant to have their place in the arena bowl, not everyone is going to wind up in that location, some because of a simple mistake, others because they were not given proper information, and still others because they wish to have a better seat. I found that similar issues occurred during a performance by Anthony Santos, another Hispanic artist as well as during a WWE wrestling “house show.” During the wrestling event, for example, there were a number of guests in the audience who had special needs. Some had difficulty finding their seats while others were in no conditions to climb twenty stairs in order to sit in the seats that had been purchased for them. In order to make the seating arrangement work supervisors had to find other seats, particularly those that were accessible to patrons in wheelchairs, which were still available. In short, while everyone has their place, this does not mean everyone is content, nor physically able to remain there.

Even before the event commences, there is typically action on the floor, something to grab one’s attention. Batting practice precedes most baseball games, and even on such occasions

where there is no batting practice, on early day games for instance, players can typically be seen playing catch and signing autographs. The Mets allow fans to go down to the field, in select areas, to try to obtain autographs, or just relax and watch the action. Before the start of Rangers hockey games fans are allowed to view player warm-ups from the Madison level, even if they have seats in the upper levels. Before Knick games the center scoreboard, an impressive fixture sitting above the court, displays the “gotcha cam.” A cameraman browses the audience, which is still light at this point, to find someone who is texting, snoozing, or for some reason is distracted from their surroundings. A timer keeps track of how long the fan goes without realizing that they are being watched. While this can be viewed as a silly game, it does denote that the venue is meant to garner and maintain the attention and interest of its patrons, in this case through a simple practical joke.

The presentation of the event itself goes well beyond the game being played. Even though the event is being performed live in front of you, the experience encompasses media technologies. During sporting events, the public address system often blasts music intended to rally the crowd to chant “Let’s go Mets (Rangers of Knicks)” and “Defense.” The audience often develops a common voice. When the home team scores, they cheer. When the home team gives up points, goals or runs, they boo. The audience speaks, in a sense, throughout the duration of the event. Sometimes people in the audience act of their own accord, without the encouragement of those operating the public address system. For instance:

Before Billy Joel’s warm-up act took to the stage [during his January 27<sup>th</sup> performance at MSG, the first night of the Piano Man’s monthly residency] the upper bowl of the crowd began to do the wave. I had never seen the wave executed by the crowd at a concert. In fact I thought that the wave was a “baseball thing.” The arena was dimly lit so I could not quite see who was leading the charge but the cheer began in small bursts. The first few times the wave began it only carried for a few sections. It progressively built until it made its way around the entire upper bowl. The next thing I knew, the wave engulfed the entire arena, with even some patrons on the floor participating.

These instances, of which there are many, in which the members of the audience become active participants in the spectacle depicts what can be considered the ultimate success of the system. The emotions of the audience have been rallied. They are not realistically participating in the game, but they have been consumed by the spectacle. Their existence in that moment has transformed them from observers into participants. They have taken up an emotional investment in the outcome of the show.

Sometimes the audience can ““make their voices heard”” in protest to what is occurring in the venue (O’Keefe 2014). Recent reports have suggested that Knicks fans, who have not been happy over the past several years with the direction the team has taken, have scheduled a protest outside of the arena, even after it was announced that the organization was in talks to hire legendary coach Phil Jackson who has won multiple basketball championships with Michael Jordan’s Chicago Bulls and Kobe Bryant’s Los Angeles Lakers. One of the protester’s organizers was quoted as saying ““we don’t trust [team owner Jim] Dolan. This has nothing to do with the players. It’s about the interference from Dolan. He doesn’t let the basketball people do their jobs”” (O’Keefe 2014). Similar sentiments have often been shared during Met games, and at my own dinner table, by both fans and staff alike. Even when the team performs poorly, or in the case of the Mets the team may even be losing money on a yearly basis, fans illustrate their love of the team, in these cases by venting their frustration with recent losses.

While the structure of the game is always the same, in that the game is played with a set of rules that are meant to be upheld by officials, umpires and referees specifically, each game played is unique. Some games will be declared memorable, while others will be nights the patron wishes to forget. Musical performers too, while operating within a similar framework, must find some way to distinguish themselves. Their survival in the industry lies in their ability to leave a

mark on the mind of the patron. They must do something that will be remembered, something that will provide a “wow” factor. In one sense, each performer will be playing some original material. For instance, Elton John, during his two December shows, played a near three hour set, with almost all of the songs performed being written by Sir Elton and Bernie Taupin, his longtime lyricist. Sir Elton, who was knighted by the Queen of England, is known for his flashy costumes. On the evening of December 3<sup>rd</sup>, he performed in a rather elegant suit with the words “Madman across the Water,” the title of one of his albums and songs, glittering across his back. In February, during the second half of his set, pop singer Justin Timberlake utilized a moving stage. A long, and not very wide, platform carried him and a few dancers from the main stage, above the arena floor where a few thousand fans sat, to the far end of the arena. I, for one, found the stage design to be one of the most unique I have ever seen. The stage design for Kanye West’s November performances was also impressive. It featured what appeared to be a mountain rising well above the stage, at the top of which an actor portraying Jesus would appear near the end of the show. Mr. West wore a mask for most of the performance. The stage design, costume choices, and even the construction of the set-list, allow the artist to establish their individuality and relate to their audiences.

Even when the game is not being played there is something being done to entertain the audience. One special feature of Ranger Games at the Garden, for example, is that a season ticket holder, named Larry, dances during the last commercial break of the third period. Larry, who is quite entertaining I might add, has become something of a celebrity in his own right because of his ritual performances, to the extent to which he has garnered a large number of “friends” on Facebook because of his perceived connection to the team. During the first intermission of the hockey game, two children’s hockey teams are allowed to play on the famed MSG rink. During

the middle of the 7<sup>th</sup> inning of all Met home games, the 7<sup>th</sup> inning stretch, the song “Take Me Out to the Ball Game” is broadcast over the PA system along with a video of Mr. Met, perhaps the most beloved mascot in baseball, acting as a choir director. While the main event might not be taking place, there is always something for guests to gaze upon.

### **Maintaining Order at the Venue**

While one’s experience at the arena is guided in the sense that rules are established to maintain a secure and enjoyable atmosphere, there remains the potentiality for some to break these rules and thus risk being subject to unpleasant consequences, including ejection from the venue, or possibly arrest. Two of the biggest problems in this regard is the overconsumption of alcohol and the use of illegal drugs at the venue, usually, but not limited to, smoking marijuana. With regard to the former, it must be noted that the competitive nature of sporting events can act as a conduit for alcohol consumption and the overzealous behavior that can result from intoxication. In these situations it is critical that staff respond quickly, but on certain occasions we (and I include myself in this regard) do not act swiftly enough. On one occasion during a Ranger game which saw the team take on the Toronto Maple Leafs I found myself caught off guard:

During the 3<sup>rd</sup> period I was surprised to see my supervisor quickly walk past me and up the aisle. Peter, a friendly man who typically is fairly reserved, picked up speed as he ascended the stairs. When he reached his destination, I saw why he was in such a hurry. A young woman wearing a Toronto Maple Leafs jersey was verbally lambasting a few girls, who were sporting Rangers gear. Within seconds, several security guards were on the scene. They escorted the Toronto fan out of the section. Even as she was being escorted down the aisle she shouted some obscenities back in the direction from which she came. As security took her down to the concourse, some in the audience began applauding, and it was obvious that this cheering was directed at the fact that this woman was gone.

Although I was caught off guard during this little episode, what surprised me the most is that I was not the one who first saw tension begin to build and call security. I was oblivious to the whole thing until Peter arrived on the scene. It did not take me long to

figure out why. The game was close and rather than paying attention to what may be occurring in the stands, my focus was that of a fan, centered on the action in the ring.

I remember, during this experience, feeling that I had let my guard down. I was even worried that I would be interrogated by my supervisor as to why I had not noticed what could have potentially become a dangerous situation, as intoxication can have that effect among fans of competing teams. I also wondered how my supervisor had found out about the situation before I did. While it turned out that a security guard stationed above the stands had seen the episode escalate and called in reinforcements via radio, I could not help but feel that I had shirked my responsibilities. More importantly for current purposes, this episode illustrates the possibility that certain events do not always run smoothly. If the situation had escalated further it could have resulted in negative press for the venue, and it most definitely would have not been an experience that certain fans would remember fondly, particularly if they were the fans who were being taunted by the Toronto fan.<sup>36</sup>

Concerts also see a great deal of alcohol consumption. This is true even for events that as a staff member I would have assumed would be fairly tame. One such event was a performance by country-rocker Keith Urban. The audience for this particular event was generally white but fairly mixed in terms of age. A fair percentage of people sitting in my section that night were young couples, mostly in the mid-twenties to early thirties. While such judgments may be unfair, I have become accustomed to expecting certain types of experiences on certain nights. For instance, during certain shows, such as the recent Anthony Santos concert which featured Latin American music, I knew that there was the potential for problems because of a language barrier.

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<sup>36</sup> I should note here that all such instances in which an ejection occurs, or even when a guest slips and falls, written documentation is submitted to management. The venue must be careful to document the incident in the event that legal charges are made against the venue. While I was not asked to describe my view of the event in this instance, my supervisor and the security guards involved in the ejection most definitely did. In addition, video footage of the incident was also saved. There are cameras viewing every inch of the arena, except inside restrooms and staff changing rooms. These technologies can be used to cast light and provide evidence in such cases.

I do not speak Spanish so I expected that I may have difficulty in getting my points across in certain instances if the guests in attendance did not speak English. I did not have this sort of expectation during the Keith Urban show; in fact I thought I was in for an easy night. That changed midway through the show however:

A young man, probably in his late twenties, came into the vom and stood there. Technically I am supposed to keep the area clear but I typically do not really care if someone wants to stand there, in fact on occasion it leads to friendly conversation. However, on this occasion I did not like that this man was standing there. I asked him where he was sitting. He had a seat two sections down, but it took him a while to get his answer out. I did not smell alcohol on his breath but I was led to believe that he may have had too much to drink. He could not seem to stand up straight. He leaned against the wall and stumbled a bit when he turned to face me when I first approached him. I saw a security guard on patrol walking in the concourse area. I flagged him down and told him that I thought the man was drunk. The guard asked the man to return to his seat. The man responded, in slurred speech that he “had no desire.” However, after some insistence, the man left, but not for long. Within about ten minutes, he was back. The same security guard again walked by and this time he had help. The man was escorted away, and this time he did not come back.

I should note here that consuming alcohol is a part of our culture. The number of bars in the neighborhood surrounding MSG, from the restaurant Stout to the Irish pub “Paddy’s,” illustrates this notion quite clearly. However, the rules established in arenas again illustrate that one experience in these spaces is guided, and this includes one’s consumption of alcohol. For one, the venue is operating within an established legal framework, and it is vulnerable to lawsuits if certain statutes are not upheld strictly. In accordance with these legal policies, the venue institutes its own practices concerning alcohol, and it is very careful in its execution of these regulations. One of these policies at MSG is a required TEAM (Techniques for Effective Alcohol Management) training session. This session is required for all event staff, not simply those who serve alcohol. The training manual states that the employee (meaning myself and my coworkers) “are the eyes and ears of the facility and it is your [our] professionalism throughout the course of the event that is critical to the success of the guests’ experience” (TEAM 2011: 1).

What is of note here concerns the law's expectation of a "reasonable effort to prevent impairment" and intervention "if a guest does become impaired" (TEAM 2011: 6). Culture, again, allows for the consumption of alcohol. In fact, many would argue that such consumption actually leads to an increase in one's ability to enjoy the event. However, the law is set up in a way that still, I believe, allows for excess to occur. It is only when excess can be recognized and stopped so that it does not become problematic for the arena that alcohol consumption is dealt with in a systemized manner.<sup>37</sup> Hence, the arena is not making a moral statement about alcohol but is rather endorsing the commercialism of consumption but in a way that minimizes the risk of having to deal with the problems that can potentially arise from overconsumption. The "reasonableness" of both the venue and the individual employee is documented for legal purposes, a small price to pay for safety from legal resort on the part of a disgruntled patron. While some fans complain that certain rules are unfair, for instance the policy that sales of alcoholic beverages end at the start of the final period in hockey and the final quarter in basketball at MSG (and in the 7<sup>th</sup> inning at Mets games), the policies are crafted in a way that allows fans to obtain the tipsy feeling one gets after a few drinks. It is only excessive consumption that is at issue, for, as noted above, this can lead to legal problems, as well as reduced enjoyment on the part of some in the audience.

Drug use, while not as common as alcohol related incidents, is also a problem that arises in a crowd setting. I have noticed that this is especially true during concerts. The New York Post reported, for instance, that on December 27<sup>th</sup>, 38 people were arrested for possession and

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<sup>37</sup> Some would argue about this claim, with some merit. One of the policies put in place at MSG, for instance, limits the number of alcoholic beverages one can purchase in a single transaction. The rule is that one can purchase only two drinks per person per time. If, for example, a man and woman approach the stand together and order four Miller Lites, they can make that purchase. However, this only slows alcoholic consumption, and it does not necessarily slow it down to a meaningful extent. As long as one can "reasonably" assume that the customer is still sober, one can continue to sell that person alcohol.



distribution of drugs on their way into the arena for the first night of a four show run by Vermont-based “hippie rock band” Phish (Prendergast and Piccoli 2013). One fan, who boasted having successfully snuck something into the arena, was quoted as saying ““I stuffed a bottle of Jager in my waistband last night”” (Prendergast and Piccoli 2013). The band has become known for these New Year’s runs at the Garden. These shows occur at a time during the year that is celebratory. New Year’s Eve in Midtown Manhattan can be quite a party, and being at MSG when the clock strikes midnight is no exception. However, parties are not all good clean fun:

Before the ushers’ 6:30 roll call, I decided it would be a good idea to sit down for a few minutes in the employee cafeteria, a decent enough sized room situated on the 7<sup>th</sup> floor of the building. One of my friends, also an usher, had arrived a bit earlier than myself and had already taken a seat at a table in the center of the room. After exchanging New Year’s salutations, I inquired about the past several shows. (I had been away on a pleasure trip for the performances on the 28<sup>th</sup>, 29<sup>th</sup>, and 30<sup>th</sup>.) My friend said that the crowds had typically been pleasant, although “they do whatever they feel like.” Another young usher, took a seat across from us and agreed that the crowds were generally “cool” but that they seemed to ignore, or at least disregard, a number of the rules that we, as ushers, often had the pleasure to enforce.

As it turned out, the members of the audience that I came across were pretty “cool.” Two young men, who had seen the band thirty and ninety times respectively, were very friendly and answered some questions I had about the band and their music. One girl, during the final set of the show, told me that I looked bored and offered to dance with me in the aisle, which was always crowded, for no one seemed to want to sit for this show. However, the takeaway of the night for me was the almost unimaginable amount of drug use in the arena:

The show began at around 8:30, and so did the drug use, some form of dancing (if you want to call it that) and the “cos-play” (short for the wearing of costumes by many people in the audience). Early in the show I tried, half-heartedly, to keep the drug use to a minimum. A young woman, wearing a tight black skirt and black sweater was smoking a cigarette and was sitting right on the aisle, right next to where I was standing. I couldn’t help but notice what she was doing. I went over to her and told her “I don’t care what you do with that [the cigarette] but don’t let me see it.” I know, not the company line, but it was effective. She put out the cigarette and nodded at me. Then she continued to dance playfully along to an upbeat tune blasting from the speakers.

When I turned around to go back to the “vom,” the entrance to each seating area, there were at least three others smoking something, not all of them tobacco based products. I approached them and they too agreed to put out their stuff. At this point however, more and more people seemed to have something, and these others were not standing near me. Nor was I able to get into contact with them as the arena had become packed and there was barely any room to stand in the aisles. Clearly, many people chose to vacate their seats in favor of being close to their friends and having a bit more space to groove and dance.

The tell tale sign that drug use was going to be a predominant feature of the evening was the air quality throughout the arena. There was a noticeable haze across the room. The lights from the stage had an unusually glossy appearance. The air quality in the room was nearly abhorrent at times. I had to, on multiple occasions, leave my post to get some water or just walk away from the crowds. As I write these notes I still have a bit of a scratch in my throat.

One other note about drug use came to me during my break. I took my dinner break at 10:20 just as the second set by the band was commencing. My supervisor had instructed us not to take our breaks during the intermission because that was “when we would notice if anyone had passed out” and could contact them in order to get medical assistance if need be. That, fortunately, did not happen. I did however see one 20 something year-old, and quite attractive blonde, vomiting profusely into a garbage-can on the concourse. A bit of puke was also on the floor but a member of the cleaning staff was on hand quickly to mop it up. The girl’s boyfriend (at least he appeared to be her boyfriend from the kisses to the head he gave her as she sat down after the episode) told me that they were going to be fine after I inquired if they wanted me to do anything for them.

When I arrived in the cafeteria I saw my cousin, who works as a security guard at MSG as well as Citi Field, sitting alone at a table and I immediately joined him. My cousin is 60 years old and is something of a workaholic. He is retired after working for a phone company for many years but still puts in a fair share of hours for his “part time” job. He rarely ever misses a game at the Mets. He also does over 150 events annually at MSG. He is quick with a joke and never fails to engage me whenever I come into his line of vision. He also is a fantastic storyteller. Apparently, my cousin was working on the floor for the show and had seen quite a bit tonight. One woman was taken out of the arena, forcefully, and strapped to a gurney. She would be taken to a medical facility after telling a security guard that she had tried “experimental acid” (a term which still gives be goose bumps). While this was on the extreme side of the drug use from that night, there was clearly a carefree attitude about this crowd.

The drug use, while against the law, was so widespread that for that night it was as if the law was different. But, the night was a special occasion. The New Year’s atmosphere consumed the arena

and for that night, and perhaps even the three preceding ones, the culture of the arena shifted to reflect the carefree nature of the audience.

## **5. Conclusion- Analysis and Discussion**

In the above discussion I have attempted to provide a theoretical framework with which one can apply to the arena experience as well as a walkthrough, from my vantage-point of participant-observer, of said experience. I have also included a socio-cultural context within which any of the venues discussed above operate. I wish to draw several conclusions from this discussion. First, I wish to move past the authoritarian, top-down notion of Adorno's culture industry not just by allowing for new types of media, as discussed by Kellner, or the ability of the consumer to reject certain aspects of culture, the "decoding" discussed by Hall, but by placing the individual consumer in a specific context in which their individual actions and decisions can be observed. In this sense, I am pushing for multiplicity in the study of mass culture, but not in the same sense as Kellner advocates for media studies. I wish to move beyond looking at a bipolar system in which the consumer and the producer are the sole players in the system as well as the distinctness of their roles in the process. One mode of analysis is to allow for a distinction between the staff of the arena and the venue itself. For instance, as I have noted before, the specific policies of the arena and their enforcement can often diverge. With particular reference to the Phish concert discussed above, even when the behavior of the audience is criminal it is very easy to look the other way, particularly when said behavior is widespread. While staff does represent the arena, they are independent actors and they too have the ability to drift from proscribed methods of behavior. This does not mean that they are simply "looking out for themselves." Members of the staff can be caught up in the atmosphere of the spectacle, they can be fans, and can thus be sympathetic to those who have paid to experience the event.

Another method is to view a concert as an event with multiple producers brought together for the shared interest of profit-making. One must admit, for instance, that the performer onstage be it Lady Gaga, Paul Simon, Enrique Iglesias or Elton John is not a part of the venue itself. This can also be said, to a degree, of those staffing the venue. The artist is him or herself a human being with a set of beliefs and values that do not necessarily coincide with that of the venue, and these views are sometimes discussed by the artist during the performance. This can be done through speeches in between songs, or expressed through the music itself. Elton John, for example, recently performed in Russia, just after his performances at MSG, and caught the attention of many in the press when he criticized the Russian government's policies concerning the gay and lesbian community. In fact, there was talk at one point that the shows were going to be cancelled even though Elton has performed in the country numerous times, and even has a performance scheduled there in 2014. There are, however, enough shared values for a relationship to form between the artist, the promoter and the venue, and they have to do with the need to make money in a capitalist society. Hence, one could look at these shows as having multiple producers, albeit ones that are in partnerships with one another.

Sometimes, a "special" relationship exists between the artist and the venue, beyond, but not disassociated from, the desire to acquire capital. This brings me to my second point: a more sophisticated methodology for the study of mass culture should highlight the significance of the transformation of space into place. In a related point, one must recognize how capitalism allows for certain places to be crafted by creating a historically based narrative. It is through this practice that Citi Field and Madison Square Garden take on a great deal of social significance. For example, the first concerts held at Citi Field were by former Beatle Paul McCartney. The concerts were booked as a historic return. The Beatles did play at Shea Stadium, not once but

twice, during the 1960s. Sir Paul McCartney was, in a sense, bringing the legacy of one of, if not the most, celebrated catalogues in music not just to a new stadium but to a new generation. In fact, the Citi Field shows by the former Beatle were made into a concert DVD.<sup>38</sup> The performances even featured the performance of the song “I’m Down” which was performed by the Beatles during their first appearance at the old ballpark.

Another example of this phenomenon is the ongoing “residency” of Billy Joel at Madison Square Garden, already noted above. The term residency is not new in terms of the music industry. For instance, many performers are contracted to play a given number of shows over the course of several weeks to several years at various casinos in Las Vegas. Currently, Elton John, Shania Twain, Celine Dion, and Rod Stewart are all “residents” of Caesar’s Palace on the Strip. Pop queen Britney Spears, country legend Garth Brooks and even the rock opera singer Meatloaf have similar arrangements in the gambling capital of the world. However, Billy Joel’s run at MSG is somewhat unique in that while the number of performances is limited to one per month, the size of the venue goes well beyond that with which a typical residency entails. The Colosseum at Caesar’s holds about 4000 patrons for a concert. The Garden holds nearly five times that figure. Also noteworthy in this instance is that the connection between the city and the venue specifically is being highlighted in the show’s advertising and marketing campaign. The Garden went so far as to create a special webpage for the singer’s residency, [billyjoelmsg.com](http://billyjoelmsg.com), which highlights the singer’s catalogue with illustrations of the singer as well as quotes from some of his songs, including his hit “New York State of Mind.” The enfranchisement of the

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<sup>38</sup> It should be noted here that Paul McCartney was among the special guests to perform alongside Billy Joel at the last concert at Shea Stadium. This performance was also made into a concert DVD as well as a documentary, *The Last Play at Shea*, which centered on Billy Joel’s connection with New York City. Billy himself noted that having Paul perform the last song of the night, “Let It Be,” brought the end of Shea “full circle” in that the legacy of the Beatles was once again center-stage. I was in the audience for this final concert at the old ballpark.

singer in the heart of Midtown reifies the notion that Billy Joel is the quintessential New Yorker. It also establishes the potential for a longstanding business relationship between the singer's touring company and the venue.

A third point that I wish to make concerns what the cultural impact of the event is on the consumers themselves, namely the formation of cultural memory. Mayor Michael Bloomberg, in a 2004 letter, notes that "Madison Square Garden represents not only the best in sports and entertainment, but more importantly, a place where people can spend quality time together, taking away memories that they can treasure for a lifetime" (Garden on Dreams 2004: 5). This letter was published in a collection of photographs and essays entitled *Garden of Dreams* which celebrates the arena's long history. Specifically, it looks at moments considered significant to sports and entertainment culture. The key word here is "dreams." The phenomenon that I have been discussing is the creation of memories within the mind of the patron, but; this process is marketed to churn emotion, making the experience as if one's fantasies could be lived, visually, on the arena floor. These moments, such as the Thanksgiving Day appearance of John Lennon at one of Elton John's sixty-four shows at the arena, the winning of the Stanley Cup by the NY Rangers, and even the appearance of Pope John Paul II, are all real historical moments. They actually happened. However, these moments are iconic, taking on dreamlike quality perhaps, because they resonate with some element of culture. These images are therefore memories on a cultural level as opposed to on an individual level, although the two cannot be dissociated. These are the moments that make for an inspired story. For instance, when one of my brother's elementary school teachers told me she was in the audience for the Beatles' concert at Shea Stadium, I was awed and jealous, even though the moment occurred long before I was born. I wanted nothing more than to be there for that moment in time. Hence, the image of four young

men playing to a capacity crowd, mostly of screaming young women, was etched perhaps just as much in my memory as in those who had experienced the concert firsthand.

In a related point, the interplay between new media and technology and the production and reproduction of cultural artifacts, particularly cultural memories, must be addressed. As I have illustrated above, the arena is not simply a building. It is both a social space and a technological space. Televisions can be found in almost every vom of MSG and at the top of almost every aisle at Citi Field, all showing footage of whatever game or show happens to be going on at the venue. The scoreboards even egg the audience to clap, cheer, or even utilize some form of social media. This technology cannot be viewed merely as the innovation of our times but as a tool which can be utilized by the venue as well as the patron, and one that binds the two together in an unprecedented way. While social media can be utilized by the patron to criticize the show or venue publicly, there does remain a new point at which the two can interact with the patron offering a glimpse into their lives with every post, not simply in terms of where they are or what they are doing but also in terms of what they value.

Throughout the above discussion I have noted how the emotions of the patrons are expressed throughout the course of the event, even at the stage of purchasing tickets. This ties into Adorno's notions of deception and enlightenment in that it can be argued that mass culture plays upon these features of the human self in order to build and reify itself. I would argue, however, that human emotions can be dangerous when played upon and there may be a fine line to walk when hate and frustration are the targets of the "encoding" of cultural production. Just as Adorno and Hall's views of cultural production stemmed from significant historical events, the world's in which these scholars found themselves and to which they were reacting, the consumer of cultural artifacts is also operating in a world that is going through significant change. Cultural

diffusion is taking place more rapidly than ever, largely thanks to continued advances in technology. Texts are being translated. Stories are being shared across national borders that are becoming more and more permeable. The ability of mass culture to be deceiving, at least in terms of Adorno's writing, may be becoming increasingly hampered by the proliferation of new cultural artifacts and the unlimited possibilities of cultural synthesis. The possible producers of cultural artifacts are multiplying as well. The consumer now has a much wider market from which one can make one's choice, at least as long as capitalism continues to value innovation.

In conclusion, I wish to bring up a point made by Guy Debord. He notes that "the spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images" (1967: 4). I believe that I have illustrated this statement most clearly. Moreover, I have attempted to juggle formations of memory, understandings of history and space, interactions among individuals and groups, within the context of the formation of culture. I have attempted to do this through the crafting of visualizations of specific venues that I have defined as arenas of mass culture. I have also included myself, my experiences and even my understandings of how social relations in these spaces occur. I do not believe that this point should be utilized as a catapult for a critique of this essay. I admit freely that I am a participant observer in the research I have conducted. I have approached my work and study at these venues as a student of mass culture but also a product and producer of said culture, and in many instances an admirer of, many of the "producers" of said culture. Moreover, I admit that even my understandings of appropriate behavior on the part of consumers of these venues need to be understood by my role in the venue as well as within the historical moment in which I am writing.

I will bluntly state that I do not believe that one can study arena culture without somehow being a participant observer. The act of consuming the spectacle, to use the term of Debord, is, I



believe, more than reification. The consumption of the spectacle, be it a sporting event, concert or comedy act, is the engagement in the production of said artifact. This is how the “mass” in mass culture enters into the equation. Hence, Hall’s steps of circulation, use, and reproduction, can be understood as not just unique steps in a process, but occurring within the same moment. The interaction of all of the “moving parts” of this production is the basis for the consumption of mass culture and is thus the heart of production of that culture, as well as individual identification with said culture. The “deceit” of enlightenment, which is the cornerstone of Adorno’s understanding of mass culture, may not lie within the falseness of the spectacle, its likeness of human life, but in that the spectacle is human existence. The show requires an audience. The audience is what makes the spectacle work. Without an audience, and an invested one at that, the ends of production are nothing more than relics.

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