Strategies of Rebellion in the Heroic Age of the American Comic Book

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Abstract: This article addresses Pierre Bourdieu’s idea of heroic ages in art and the American comic book. Bourdieu characterized the French literary field in the mid nineteenth century as a heroic age. During this age writers and critics generated criteria of judgment that were autonomous from market forces and elite patronage. I argue that in the 1970s a similar heroic age began in American comic books where principles of autonomy and independent criteria of judgment appeared. I present a number of basic strategies during the heroic age of comic books that articulated these emerging principles of autonomy; yet show how several of these strategies were distinctly different than those found during the heroic age of French literature. I show how this difference reflected a structure in the comic book field markedly different from the structure in the field of French literature in the nineteenth century. I conclude by arguing that the case of American comic books shows how popular art fields can express the same heroic rebellion attributed to only high art fields in the work of Bourdieu.

Keywords: Cultural Studies, Comic Books, Visual Culture, Media Studies, Art Worlds

Introduction

In The Rules of Art Pierre Bourdieu details how the field of French literature in the mid nineteenth century generated principles of autonomy and independent criteria of judgment. This artistic rebellion was against the external demand of both market forces as well as elite consecration. He celebrates this period as a “heroic” age since writers and critics were creating a new social space for artists to freely express themselves and to develop French literature in new and innovative directions. I argue that since the 1980s, a similar “heroic” age has been occurring in the field of comic books in North America. Both principles of autonomy and independent criteria of judgment have appeared in this field among artists, critics and fans who are all attempting to develop the American comic book in new and innovative ways. I will show, however, how this heroic age is unique in relation to Bourdieu’s case in French literature. I will show how the distinct structure of the comic book field in America led to unique strategies of rebellion against the orthodoxy, or rules of art, of the field. I also will show that while Bourdieu’s model is wedded to a high art framework, where heroic ages are not possible in popular art, the case of American comic books shows that popular artists and their allies can be equally as heroic as Baudelaire, Gautier, Flaubert, or Zola.

A Brief History of American Comic Books

From the late 1930s to the mid 1950s comic books served a vibrant and lucrative mass market. The most popular comic books sold 1,000,000 or more copies of single issues during this “golden age.” Comic books gave us such icons as Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, Archie, and Alfred E. Neuman. Originally introduced in a newspaper comic strip, Donald Duck would become one of the most successful comic book characters behind the genius of artist Carl Barks. Both young and old enjoyed this new medium that featured funny-animal, superhero, western, adventure, romance, war, horror, crime and other genres. In the early 1950s, the future of comic books looked bright indeed, with monthly circulation reaching 70 to 100 million copies.

Comic books’ popularity, however, was equally matched by a deep suspicion of its cultural value and social impact. The very popularity of comic books among children and adolescents – what seemed an addictive habit – proved to many the dangers of what they considered a low brow art form. Critics accused...
comic books of everything from promoting illiteracy, damaging children’s eyesight, carrying latent homosexual content, to promoting juvenile delinquency. An anti-comic book crusade grew in momentum in the late 1940s and early 1950s, leading to book banning, government hearings, and even a few book burnings. This crusade forced the comic book industry into self-censorship with the introduction of its own Comics Code in 1954. The impact of the crusade and code had a devastating effect on the comic book industry, leading to the demise of many successful genres and publishing houses.  

After the comic book industry surrendered to its critics in the late 1950s, it suddenly faced new challenges. Changing economics in the newsprint market made cheap ten-cent comic books less viable products for retailers. At the same time the rise in popularity of television was believed to be eroding comic book readership. The industry confronted what was to be a long decline of the comic book as a mass medium. After the initial blow to the comic book market in the late 1950s, most comic book series between 1960 and 1970 saw their sales cut in half, while others simply disappeared.  

Things were quite dire for the comic book industry in the 1970s. A miracle, however, appeared in the 1980s, when a “direct market” of specialty comic book shops stopped the complete demise of the comic book. In this direct market, readers ordered comic books through their local comic book shop, solving retailers’ problems with overstocking and publishers’ problems with large returns of unsold comics. The market seemed to stabilize. In the 1980s there would be a brief uplift when speculators entered the market to buy comic books as investments. But then the “comic book crisis” of 1994-1995 hit hard, reducing the number of comic book shops by approximately fifty percent. Now the comic book is facing once again the possibility of extinction as a viable commercial product.  

Today the American comic book survives as an art form mostly within a small subculture of specialty shops, publishers, conventions and fanzines. Most Americans’ experience of comic books is in their local movie theater watching Hollywood’s latest version of Batman, Superman or Elektra. It’s easier to find Spiderman figurines, lunch boxes and other novelty items than an actual Spiderman comic book. The comic book certainly remains in our popular imagination, but very few North Americans still read American contemporary comic books, and most have never seen one. Possible signs of better times ahead can be seen in the recent rise of the graphic novel: a book-length hardbound or paperbound edition of comics. Trade publishers as well as comic book publishers are producing these graphic novels which now have their own section in chain bookstores like Barnes & Noble. Meanwhile Japanese comic books – manga – have captured the imagination of a new generation of comic book readers. Manga is one of the fastest growing publishing markets in the United States. Yet the future of comic books in America still remains unclear.  

The Heroic Age of Comic Books  

When comic books faced their decline as a popular mass medium, they also entered into a new stage of development as an art world. It was in the 1960s that an organized comic book fandom emerged. This fandom developed an appreciation beyond the mere consumption of comic books. Fandom created an appreciation based on expert knowledge of and affective identification with the art form itself – its history, its artists, its publishers, its aesthetics, and most importantly, its value as a unique art. A few members of this fandom would eventually form part of another development in comic books – a rebellion against commercial mainstream comic books. In the late 1960s artists and fans of “underground” comic books initiated and supported a new movement that rejected commercial success as the only measure of achievement; and that featured artists committed to creating comics for sophisticated young and adult audiences.  

Early fandom and underground comics set the stage for what I call the “heroic age” of comic books – the 1980s to the present. I borrow this term from the French scholar Pierre Bourdieu and his analysis of the “heroic age” of French literature in the late nineteenth century. This was a period when writers and critics of French literature generated “principles
of autonomy:” to be judged not by market forces or patronage, but by criteria established by writers’ and critics’ peers. In the heroic age of comic books a similar interpretive community of artists, critics, publishers and fans emerged with their own set of criteria to judge and appreciate comic books. Also like nineteenth century French literature, principles of autonomy that emerged in the world of comic books influenced this field as a whole. Comic book culture generated principles of autonomy related to how comic book artists’ individual talents and unique visions could be expressed and recognized in the world of comic books.

The period before the heroic age is what I call the “industrial age” of comic books. It coincides with what fans call the “golden,” “silver” and “bronze” ages of the comic book. From the mid 1930s through the 1970s comic books were created under a different context than the heroic age. While it was a period of ingenuity, creativity, and risk-taking that produced a cultural legacy that we continue to enjoy today, the comic book field was driven by one simple overriding rule: if it sells, keep selling it, and find as many ways to sell it in slightly different packaging. Such a rule has been applied during the heroic age, but in the industrial age this was the only rule with no equally compelling ones. It was an age in which the mass market seemed to have an insatiable demand for comic books. An assembly line process was essential to produce comics for an ever-expanding market, and to generate profits. During this age there were no principles of autonomy in the field and no interpretive community to apply criteria of judgment to comic books as an art form beyond commercial success. Certainly artists during this age had criteria to judge their craft of writing and illustrating. But with no principles of autonomy in the field of comic books, they remained mostly as craftsmen producing a mass product, and they were judged by a very different set of criteria than during the heroic age.

Besides the emergence of principles of autonomy and a new set of criteria of judgment, the period of the 1980s to the present is heroic for another important reason. While French writers and critics in the late nineteenth century felt that the best and most authentic literature was besieged by market and other external forces, those in comic book culture have felt the medium itself was under siege and wholly unappreciated. The 1980s to the present is a heroic age in comic books because artists, publishers, critics and fans have fought heroically against the possible disappearance of the comic book. And they also have fought heroically for the respect for and appreciation of an art form they believe is as unique, imaginative and engaging as any of the more popular arts, and as serious and sophisticated as any of the more respectable arts.

Pierre Bourdieu also argues that heroic ages in art are chaotic because the rules of art are undergoing radical transformation. The “social space” of an art form, like literature in late nineteenth century France, is no longer occupied with “ready-made” positions for authors to create their work, publishers to promote their books, critics to judge a work of art, or audiences to apply their likes and dislikes. Even the ready-made positions before a heroic age are subject to the chaos that prevails in this new social space. Positions are extremely “elastic” and “undemanding” with futures “uncertain” and “dispersed.” Such chaotic fields of art invite individuals of different social backgrounds and dispositions to join what Bourdieu describes as “a sort of well-regulated ballet in which individuals and groups dance their own steps, always contrasting themselves with each other, sometimes clashing, sometimes dancing the same tune, then turning their backs on each other in often explosive separations, and so on…”

So it is with the heroic age of comic books. Ironically the end of the industrial age in some ways opened up the social space of the comic book field, since major commercial success on the mass market was no longer very viable. Only three old publishing houses, Marvel, DC, and Archie survived beyond the industrial age. And since the 1970s, these publishers have relied mostly on characters created during the golden and silver ages with greater profits accruing from licensing than actual comic book sales. Positions in this new social space were to “be made” as artists and publishers created an array of comic books, diverse in style and content. Small independent publishers appeared as well as a self-publishing movement, while artists created comics based on old genres, new genres, combinations of genres, or supposedly genre-free comics with styles ranging from the traditional mainstream American style to the avant-garde. Debates on the future of the comic book, the role of mainstream and alternative comics, sexism, artistic integrity, etc. ensued as artists, publishers, editors, critics and fans danced about the constantly changing positions in the chaotic field.

The old publishing houses Marvel and DC were as much a part of the heroic age as the newcomers. These publishing houses responded in their own commercial fashion to the emerging principles of autonomy and criteria of judgment. Artists suddenly became marquee names; specialty publishing lines ushered in new genres and new styles. Even the mainstream line of comic books would occasionally open to other styles outside the traditional style developed during the industrial age. For some, however, Marvel and DC epitomized the problems
troubling the world of comic books. These publishing houses seemed committed to the old commercial ethic and aesthetics of the industrial age, and therefore, in their critics' eyes worked as conservative forces in the field. But in their way Marvel and DC responded to the new heroic era. Given the transformation of the field, their actions made commercial sense.

A Different Type of Heroism

The heroic ages of French literature and the American comic book share similarities in their creation of new social spaces, their chaotic position-making, and their general “rebellion” against forces viewed as anathema to their principles of autonomy. Yet these periods also expressed a different set of strategies of rebellion. In the simplest of terms, rebel French authors and critics turned their backs on market forces and institutional consecration, including everything from mass print to salons and state patronage. Many American comic book rebels, however, aimed their position-making at potential mass or bourgeois art markets, as well as institutions of consecration. This can be explained by looking at Bourdieu’s conceptualization of the basic structure of art fields in his analysis of French literature, and then applying his conceptual framework to the field of American comic books in the last quarter of the twentieth century.

Bourdieu paints a picture of the mid-nineteenth century field of French literature as one of abundance: burgeoning markets, powerful salons, influential state patronage, and a wealth of aspiring writers. For Bourdieu, it was the over-determinant power of markets and patronage that drove certain writers to develop their own principles of autonomy and create their own social spaces. It was such a drive that created what he termed a “restricted” subfield of art where success was located in the “charismatic consecration” bestowed upon a writer by fellow writers and critics in the subfield. Be damned the writers who curried the favor of commercial publishers or patrons! The abundance of aspiring writers helped to successfully develop this new social space to such an extent that eventually all writers in some fashion had to acknowledge its principles, i.e. justify their market success or institutional consecration such as national literary prizes. And for Bourdieu this was truly heroic in the sense that writers and others created an autonomous space of the “intellectual” from which to view society critically. This heroism was best exemplified in the case of Émile Zola’s “J’accuse” in 1898. Chart 1 presents a graphic representation of this field.

During its heroic age, from the 1980s to the present, the field of comic books was quite different in structure from the comparable heroic age of French literature. Artists, publishers, critics or fans of comic books would not use the term “abundance” to describe this field. Comic books never entailed a bourgeois art market and the only attention they
received from cultural and political institutions was their condemnation as sub-literate popular art with the potential of harming children and adolescents. By the nineteen seventies, the mass market for comic books also collapsed, leaving only a marginal direct market and subculture of comic books. Furthermore, artists were not flocking to the world of comic books. It was not an over-determinant power of markets and patronage that burdened this field of art, but an in-determinant, virtual absence of such power or recognition. Certainly the marginal direct market dominated by Marvel and DC exerted an over-determinant power within this subculture; and the principles of autonomy that emerged during the heroic age ran against this particular orthodoxy. But the marginality of the comic book field meant that neither major markets nor major institutions recognized or legitimated this art form. In a basic sense the quest for legitimacy in comic books was not only a matter of principles of autonomy with distinct criteria of judgment, but was also a matter of garnering market and institutional recognition as well.

Given the specific state of the comic book field during the heroic age the space of possible strategies of rebellion differed from that of the heroic age of French literature. Chart 2 presents a graphic representation of the comic book field during its heroic age. The dotted-lined box immediately surrounding a solid-lined comic book field shows the initial new social space created within comic book culture, with strategies of rebellion seeking to move beyond this marginal subculture or art world. The outer dotted-lined box shows the space of possible strategies of rebellion, with the arrows showing artists’ and publishers’ possible rebellious strategies of position-making. Unlike the French literary field in the nineteenth century (Chart 1), where only the restricted subfield of art was a new social space of possible rebellion in the position-making of artists and publishers, in the American comic book field, new social spaces could be made by artists and publishers beyond the restricted subfield of comic book art – the subculture of comic books (lower half of Chart 2). New social spaces also could be “consecrated” by either mass market forces and their gatekeepers or institutional forces and their gatekeepers (top half of Chart 2). It was this unique structure of the field that generated equally unique strategies of rebellion, legitimacy and autonomy in comic books.

Chart 2: Heroic Age American Comic Book Field Late Twentieth Century

In the years leading into the heroic age, when the first articulation of principles of autonomy appeared, the rebellion was similar to the French literary rebellion. “Underground” comic artists like R. Crumb, Gilbert Shelton and Trina Robbins, in the late nineteen sixties and early nineteen seventies, rejected what they called “straight” or “mainstream” comic books and commercial market culture. They set out to create autonomous criteria of judgment within a restricted subfield of art. Underground comics’ narratives and graphics meshed well with the general counter-culture movement of the period and these comic books reflected the politics of resistance of the period. This initial rebellion was crucial for showing the possibilities of challenging the still reigning industrial age orthodoxy of the comic book field. It also was important in generating the first new social space from where new position-making

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9 The 1960’s pop art movement was a form of cooptation, not recognition. Comic book artists did not have their art displayed in art museums or galleries; only Roy Lichtenstein and other artists located in the high art world did.
10 Estren, History of Underground Comics and Skin, Comix.
could span outwards to expand the art field even further. Once the underground comic book movement petered out in the mid nineteen seventies, both artists and publishers from the underground generation and a younger generation of artists and publishers adopted a new set of strategies.

The uniqueness of the comic book field is best exemplified in what I call the “pulp” strategy of rebellion: one of the main second-wave strategies that followed the first-wave underground comic book rebellion. This strategy of position-making involves an orientation towards the popular mass market – what Bourdieu calls the subfield of “industrial art.” It articulates principles of autonomy by rejecting the restrictions imposed by the industry’s Comics Code. The core of this rebellion is to express adult-oriented pulp-literature-like narratives and graphics. It remains wedded to what I call a “popular aesthetic” in narrative and visual arts, playing “off the grain” of dominant comic book conventions. It expands off the pulp genres that existed in the diverse field of popular comic books in the late nineteen forties and early nineteen fifties, before the Comics Code. As Ken Gelder argues about popular aesthetics more generally, this strategy in comic books adopts a genre-based approach in positioning artists, publishers and art works.

The pulp strategy includes “serious” superhero comic books like Frank Miller’s *Batman: the Dark Knight Returns* (series, 1986) and Alan Moore’s *Watchmen* (series, 1986-1987). It also includes crime comic books like Max A. Collin’s *Road to Perdition* (1998) and cyberpunk comic books like Warren Ellis and Darick Robertson’s *Transmetropolitan* (series, 1997-2002). Other pulp positions in the field include fantasy comic books like CrossGen Comic’s *Meridian* (series, 2000-2004) and *Sojourn* (series, 2001-2004); horror comic books like Neil Gaiman’s stewardship of *Swamp Thing* (series, 1984-1987); romance comic books like the Hernandez Brother’s *Love and Rockets* (series, 1981- ); and “goth” comic books like Jhonen Vasquez’s *Johnny the Homicidal Maniac* (series, 1995-1997). The greatest creativity in this strategy can be seen in the hybrid mixing of genres like the mix of superhero, science fiction and crime in Kurt Busiek’s *Astro City* (series, 1995- ), or the mix of adventure and horror in Alan Moore’s *League of Extraordinary Gentleman* (series, 1999-2003).

The pulp strategy also expresses a principle of autonomy by rejecting the ethos of the artist as “craftsman” that prevailed in the industrial age of comic books. Instead it promotes an ethos of artist as “auteur” and unique visionary. The predominant auteur artist in the pulp strategy is the artist who writes the “script,” although the “penciller” or “illustrator” can be co-featured. This becomes most apparent in the more commercial pulp comic books produced by the specialty imprints of Marvel and DC or by major independent publishers. The creation of the comic book is a collective effort of separate writers, pencillers, colorists, inkers, letterers, and cover artists, with the writer usually as the “marquee” name. Writers, however, can illustrate their own work as well as letter, etc. The artist as sole producer of a pulp comic book is more common among the smaller independent publishers.


While the pulp strategy works to create a new social space in industrial art, what I call the “alt” strategy of the second-wave works to create a new social space in the subfield of bourgeois art. It expresses its principles of autonomy by rejecting the rules of art for both mainstream and pulp comic books: it rejects the popular aesthetic of these comic books and orients its positioning towards what Gelder calls the “literary.” This strategy does not adopt a genre-based orientation and in general plays “against the grain” of the narrative and visual conventions of mainstream and pulp comic books. It seeks to emulate the conventions of literary works – a pretension of autonomous artists following no conventional formulas of creativity, but only their own inspirational muses. Like the pulp strategy, artists are viewed as auteurs of the art form, but unlike pulp auteurs, alt auteurs claim autonomy from any demands based on a popular aesthetic or an industrial art market.

The alt strategy covers a wide range of narrative forms and visual styles and can appear as comic book

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13 Bourdieu, *Field of Cultural Production*.
14 Gelder, *Popular Fiction*. 

Fantagraphics Books publishes *The Comics Journal*, a fan magazine squarely in the alt strategy camp of the comic book art world. It follows what it calls an “art-first perspective” – a clear distinction from the popular aesthetics of the pulp strategy. In comic fandom, this magazine has a reputation for its in-your-face attacks against anything viewed as purely commercial and its occasionally excessive “intellectual” reviews and criticism. To affirm this reputation in the comic book subculture, it named its magazine awards the “Snobbies.” This magazine, however, is constantly covering the state of the comic book market and marking “successes” whenever evidence shows the market expanding beyond the restricted subfield of the comic book subculture. *The Comics Journal’s* pages make clear that to capture a bourgeois art market for comic books as “art-first” would be considered a major victory in the alt strategy.

When Art Spiegelman won a special Pulitzer Prize for his work *Maus* (graphic novel, 1986 & 1991) in 1992, he did not have to defend such institutional recognition among his peers. Unlike the French literary field, rebels in the heroic age of comic books desperately looked for institutional recognition, i.e. respect for the comic book as an art form outside the comic book subculture. In fact, both the pulp and alt strategy have generated institutional recognition. The alt comic artist Chris Ware, for example, won the Guardian First-Book Award in 2001 for his graphic novel *Jimmy Corrigan or the Smartest Kid on Earth* (2000), while Ben Katchor was awarded a MacArthur “genius grant” in 2000. *Time Magazine* in 2000 began publishing best lists of graphic novels showing institutional recognition of a bourgeois art market for comic books: reviews of graphic novels in *The New York Times Book Review* are another example of this growing recognition. In terms of the pulp strategy, *Entertainment Weekly* has initiated graphic novel reviews which cover mostly pulp comic books with an occasional alt comic book – just as its book reviews distinguish between reviews of pulp novels and literary novels.

The second wave of rebellion also included two other minor strategies. Both strategies oriented themselves to the new social space of a “restricted” art subfield supported by a subculture of comic book cognoscenti. They did not orient themselves to the market forces of either industrial or bourgeois art. The “self-publishing” strategy was the first of these minor strategies. Beginning in the late 1970s, the self-publishing movement in comic books rejected not only a mass market, but also the marginal market of comic books during this age. Even independent small publishers were considered imposers of orthodoxy in the field of comic books. The Canadian artist Dave Sim’s self-published *Cerebus* (1977-2004) in the late 1970s was the most successful position-making in this strategy. Another successful self-published comic book is Wendy and Richard Pini’s *Elfquest* (1978- ). The orientation of this strategy was evident in the criticism Dave Sim received among this movements’ adherents when he eventually decided to go with a small independent publisher. The self-publishing strategy was an attempt to remain in a restricted popular art subfield where charismatic consecration remained solely in small communities within the comic book subculture. A few successful self-publishers, however, would join independent, and even major, publishers’ position-making towards a commercial market.

The “avant-garde” strategy of the second wave was the second minor strategy of rebellion. It was oriented towards creating a restricted high art subfield of comic books. This strategy adopted an avant-garde approach to comic art that demanded a far greater amount of aesthetic “competence” to appreciate comic books. It articulated the type of cultural capital found in the contemporary high art subfield of the visual arts. The early comic book anthology *Raw* (1980-1991) edited by Art Spiegelman and Françoise Mouly is a good example of this strategy, as well as the anthologies produced by the Canadian publisher Drawn & Quarterly. The alt artist Chris Ware also crosses into the avant-garde strategy. His work has been exhibited at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago. While this strategy emerged within the same comic book subculture as the self-publishing strategy, and therefore also exis-

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ted in the restricted art subfield, the avant-garde strategy has attempted to create both a restricted “high art” subfield of comic book art as well as invade the larger restricted high art subfield of the more legitimate visual arts.

In presenting these basic strategies of rebellion during the heroic age of comic books, I am not suggesting that each artist, publisher, and critic necessarily has adopted a single strategy of position-making. These basic strategies might best be viewed as orientations available to be articulated in a variety of ways, with individuals adopting different positions at different times. The artist Dave Sim, for example, can be seen as moving between the restricted popular art subfield and the industrial art subfield with his work *Cerebus*, while the Pini’s self-published *Elfquest* is now published by DC Comics. Chris Ware’s recent work in *The New Yorker* and *The New York Times Sunday Magazine* also shows how artists can shift between the boundaries of a restricted high art subfield and a bourgeois art subfield.

**Conclusion**

The model of the field of comic book art presented in this essay allows us to better understand how artists, publishers, critics and readers conceived of rebellion and autonomy in this field. Pierre Bourdieu’s model helps us better understand what the space of possible strategies of rebellion has been in the comic book field from the late twentieth century to the present day. My application of his model clearly demonstrates that autonomy and rebellion will emerge in distinct ways depending on the history and structure of an art field. What Bourdieu calls the orthodoxy of an art field – the rules of art against which individuals rebel during heroic ages – is distinct for each field, setting the stage for unique articulations of position-making and creations of new social spaces. For example, the heroic age in French literature occurred at a time in which this art form enjoyed a vibrant market, while the heroic age of comic books occurred when this art form did not enjoy vibrant bourgeois art or industrial art markets. Therefore, the new social spaces created during the heroic age of comic books were far more wide reaching than the new social spaces created during the heroic age in French literature.

I also claim that, like Bourdieu’s analysis of “heroism” in high art forms like French literature, “heroism” can be found in the world of a popular art form such as comic books. Struggles for principles of autonomy and claims of legitimacy can exist in both popular art and high art. What is striking is how the uniqueness of the comic book field can account for principles of autonomy and strategies of rebellion which do not fit the model of artistic rebellion as presented in Bourdieu’s works. This is in part due to Bourdieu’s inability to imagine the possibility of rebellion in the world of popular art. Ironically, in using the basic analysis created by Bourdieu, I have shown the potential for new and unexpected dynamics in the rise of principles of autonomy in art. Such principles do not necessarily work against the overdetermined forces of bourgeois or mass markets, or institutional consecration, but rather seek to garner such recognition in order to expand social spaces for new innovative, diverse, and authentic forms of artistic expression.

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Paul Lopes is an Associate Professor at Colgate University. His areas of interest include art worlds, popular culture, mass media and cultural studies. Transforming culture from the margins best defines the major theme in his research and writings. His first book, *The Rise of a Jazz Art World*, for example, explores how a popular art form at the margins of cultural legitimacy in the first half of the twentieth century was radically transformed in meaning and practice by musicians, critics, producers and others to become a new hybrid form of art between the popular and the high. He is writing a book on a similar revolt against official culture in the world of comic books, *Demanding Respect: Transforming the American Comic Book*. This book explores the various strategies in the comic book art world to eliminate the stigma of this art form as a sub-literate, visually simple, low brow art. He explores how artists, publishers, critics, fans and others are transforming the comic book into a diverse, serious and respected art form.

16 Bourdieu, *Field of Cultural Production*.
17 Bourdieu, *Rules of Art* and *Field of Cultural Production*.
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