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How do creative genres emerge? The case of the Australian wine industry☆

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ABSTRACT

The present paper examines how a new, creative genre emerges out of a commodity-based industry. Building on the genre-emergence literature, the paper analyzes the Australian wine industry since the 1950s. Based on content analysis of a wide variety of sources, the study identifies four mechanisms that account for creative-genre emergence: shifting and layering of metrics, analogies with established creative industries and practices, resonance with society-level logics, and personification. The results contribute to the genre-emergence and creative-industries literatures.

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1. Introduction: The emergence of a new genre in Australian wine

A concoction of wild fruits and sundry berries with crushed ants predominating..., which no one in their right mind will buy—let alone drink. (Davoren, 1956; quoted in Hooke, 1994: 2).

Less than 50 years after John Davoren, a winemaker at Penfolds, had ridiculed and dismissed Penfolds Grange, a new wine painstakingly created by his colleague Max Schubert, the Australian wine industry had undergone a profound revolution. Higher-quality table wines had replaced cheap fortified wines, with many qualifying as fine wines with exceptional organoleptic (i.e. sensory) qualities and aging potential. Large corporations continued to produce low-price, commodity-style wine for export markets, but were increasingly challenged by new, entrepreneurial ventures that considered winemaking as both a commercial and an esthetic endeavor. In addition, new stakeholders such as wine connoisseurs, journalists and critics, collectors, and auction houses marked the emergence of a new, creative genre within the Australian wine industry in the early 1960s. This paper studies the mechanisms that enabled the emergence of this new, creative genre within an existing commodity-based mass-production industry.

Traditionally, research on genre emergence in the creative industries looks at the formation of new genres from pre-existing

ones (e.g., Becker, 1982; Ennis, 1992; Peterson, 1990; Peterson & Anand, 2004). Recent work highlights the role of cognitive boundaries in these processes (Lena, 2012; Lena & Peterson, 2008). However, the question of how a creative genre emerges within a commodity-based industry remains unaddressed.

The present paper focuses on this issue by tracing the evolution of the Australian wine industry since the 1950s. The paper identifies four mechanisms that drove the process of genre emergence: shifting and layering of metrics, analogies with established creative industries and practices, resonance with society-level logics, and personification.

The study makes four contributions to the genre-emergence and creative-industry literatures: highlighting the cognitive functions of metrics; stressing the role of analogies in creating cohesion around emerging genres; linking factors traditionally associated with genre emergence to society-level dynamics; and discussing the role of personification. The study achieves this last contribution through demonstration that a new genre is not necessarily the outcome of strategic agency, but that creative geniuses may be discursively constructed to consolidate a new genre during the final stage of genre emergence.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Creative industries, genres, and genre emergence

The design, production, and commercialization of esthetic and symbolic content characterize creative industries (Alvarez, Mazza, Strandgaard Pedersen, & Svejenova, 2005), which people regard as being at the forefront of innovation, both in products and services and in management and organizational practices (DiMaggio, 1991; Hirsch,

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2000). Understanding how creative activities can develop within commodity-based environments is therefore of interest.

Recent research on genres and genre emergence provides a basis for conceptualizing the development of creative practices within commodity-based industries. In the cultural-sociology and creative-industries literature, genres denote “systems of orientation, expectation, and conventions that bind together an industry, performers, critics and fans in making what they identify as a distinctive sort of creative experience” (Lena & Peterson, 2008, p. 698).

Genre emergence implies cognitive processes that connect disparate actors and audiences around a new, coherent genre, which in turn guides the collective production of symbolic content (Hsu, 2006). Scholars have proposed three interrelated perspectives to explain the emergence and evolution of genres (Anand & Croidieu, 2015). First, Becker (1982) emphasizes the role of multiple social actors for understanding the creation and legitimacy of specific art forms. Second, building on Becker's work, Ennis (1992) theorizes genres as “streams,” arguing that genre emergence requires both a favorable constellation of actors and changes in the configuration of existing streams of activity. The third perspective, building on the production-of-culture perspective, focuses on “how the symbolic elements of culture are shaped by the systems within which they are created, distributed, evaluated, taught, and preserved” (Peterson & Anand, 2004, p. 311). This approach identifies six factors that interact in shaping genres: technology, law and regulation, industry structure, organization structures, occupational careers, and markets. Recent empirical studies build on this perspective to study trajectories of genres within creative industries (Lena & Peterson, 2008).

2.2. Genre emergence: commensuration, authenticity, status ordering, and comprehensibility

The emergence and evolution of genres require the formation of boundaries (Lena & Peterson, 2008). Boundary formation is a set of processes resulting in the creation, maintenance, and disappearance of social and cognitive boundaries, and underlying a variety of phenomena, including the dynamics of collective identity, professions, or communities (Lamont & Molnar, 2002), as well as the emergence and development of aesthetic boundaries (Pachucki, Pendergrass, & Lamont, 2007).

The literature on genre emergence suggests four interrelated problems that play a critical role in boundary formation: commensuration, authenticity, status ordering, and comprehensibility. *Commensuration* refers to the problem of comparability between different genres within an industry. A new genre must differentiate itself from pre-existing ones, and audiences need common metrics to evaluate this difference. Commensuration is of critical importance for valuation processes in fields (Espeland & Stevens, 1998; Karpik, 2007; Khaire & Wadhvani, 2010).

Authenticity is the extent to which the members of a genre conform to most of the rules of a genre most of the time (Peterson, 2005). Whereas commensuration allows comparing across genres, authenticity here refers to the internal coherence of a genre in the sense of “type authenticity” (Carroll & Wheaton, 2009). The formation of a genre is characterized by the simultaneity of conformity (“most of the rules, most of the time”) and differentiation within the emerging rules of the genre (Beverland, 2006). If either conformity or differentiation is lacking, the new genre does not form, or audiences will reject the members perceived as inauthentic (Carroll & Swaminathan, 2000).

Status ordering allows distinction between the members of a genre by shaping the attention of audiences (Anand & Peterson, 2000). Without status ordering, a new genre is unlikely to emerge because audiences are unable to perceive the internal structuration.

Finally, *comprehensibility* refers to the extent to which people define and understand a genre on the basis of a clear and coherent account. Following Suchman (1995), comprehensibility refers to the availability of cultural models to supply plausible explanations and content. These

explanations and this content establish legitimacy across audiences and play an important role in enabling audiences to make sense of a new genre.

To summarize, the emergence of a creative genre within a commodity-based industry faces the four interrelated problems of commensuration, authenticity, status ordering, and comprehensibility. The concrete mechanisms and processes by which these problems cease to cause difficulties in the formation of a new, creative genre is the focus of the empirical study, which addresses the following overall research question: How do creative industries emerge in the context of commodity-based industries?

3. Research design and methods

The evolution of the Australian wine industry since the 1950s serves as a revelatory case to identify the mechanisms that drive creative-genre emergence. This case is particularly suited to the study of creative-genre emergence in a commodity-based industry, because since the 1960s, Australian wine has witnessed the emergence of a creative fine-wine genre, deviating from its historically established commodity-based logic of mass production. The interplay of local and national-level actors has facilitated the historical redefinition of the industry, based on a strong domestic innovation capacity (Aylward, 2004, 2006; Aylward & Turpin, 2003).

Six different markers characterize the fine-wine genre (Robinson, 2006): use of premium-grape varieties; distribution in standard bottles; aging capacity of the wines after bottling; visibility at wine shows and auctions; coverage by national and international critics, wine websites, and guidebooks; and significant price premiums. As Table 1 shows, the strong increase in the share of table wine in the total Australian wine production (from below 30% before 1970 to above 90% after 1990) and the almost-twentyfold rise in premium-grape crush over the last five decades reflect the ongoing emergence of the Australian fine-wine genre over the same period. The establishment of new wineries has exploded since the 1970s, culminating in more than 1000 new wineries coming into existence between 1990 and 1999. Over the period that the study examines, wine consumption in Australia increased sixfold, and annual wine exports increased from 4 million USD (representing less than 1% of global wine exports) to more than 1.5 billion USD (representing more than 8% of global exports).

Genre emergence involves multiple actors and audiences on different levels and over extended periods of time. Following prior research (e.g., Peterson, 1990; Peterson & Berger, 1975), the study investigates genre emergence at both industry and product levels. The two-level research design facilitates the identification of key mechanisms at the industry level and a more precise understanding of how they operate at the product level. At the industry level, the study examines genre emergence by documenting the principal evolutions and industry actors in six areas: technology, law and regulation, industry structure, organization structure, occupational careers, and markets (Peterson & Anand, 2004). At the product level, the study looks at the development of one particularly well-documented wine, Grange, which strongly relates to the new genre (e.g., Byron & Ashenfelter, 1995). The study includes this wine to illustrate the mechanisms of genre emergence at the micro level. Penfolds, a large Australian wine producer, has produced Grange since the early 1950s. One of the company's winemakers, Max Schubert, created the wine in 1951, after an opportunity to taste very old French Bordeaux wines, when he became determined to match such wines' quality and aging potential. After its growing recognition in Australia since the 1960s, Grange received strong international acclaim from the 1980s, culminating in its 1995 nomination as wine of the year by the renowned U.S. magazine *Wine Spectator*.

Data sources at the industry level comprise texts covering a wide range of actors and audiences, including general and specialist media, wine critics, wine shows, auction houses, collectors, and the winemaking profession—as well as academic articles and books on wine marketing,

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