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Damon J. Phillips: Shaping Jazz: Cities, Labels, and the Global Emergence of an Art Form

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Damon J. Phillips: *Shaping Jazz: Cities, Labels, and the Global Emergence of an Art Form*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013. 217 pp. \$35.00 / £24.95, cloth.

This fascinating historical analysis of the dynamics of the early jazz industry should be of great interest to organizational theorists, cultural sociologists, and social-network analysts. Phillips studied jazz recordings made between 1917, when recorded jazz began, and 1933, a low point in the production of jazz recordings—the year before swing jazz was introduced and reinvigorated the market. This was an important era in the market for jazz: nine out of the ten most frequently recorded jazz tunes were first recorded during this period. Phillips' study is both historically sensitive and geographically broad. Unlike many previous studies in the "production of culture" perspective, which tend to focus on a single region, this analysis covers a vast geographic territory, from New Orleans to New York, Saint Louis to Stockholm and Sydney, Chicago to Calcutta.

Phillips' theory about the dynamics of the recorded jazz industry is based on four assumptions: (1) tunes that are recorded frequently, such as "Stardust" and "Summertime," constitute the core of the market for jazz; (2) the development of the market for jazz is path-dependent, meaning that actors and activities at any point in time are shaped by actors and activities at earlier points in time; (3) the market for jazz is also driven by exemplars like Charlie Parker, whom listeners and purchasers of records invoke when they think of the genre, rather than by typical representatives of the genre; and (4) the boundaries and meaning of jazz are dynamic, meaning that they shift over time, which is a clear and direct consequence of the first three assumptions. These assumptions may seem simple, but in combination, they allow Phillips to develop a complex, compelling picture of how the market for recorded jazz evolved across the globe.

One of the most enjoyable things about this book is that it demonstrates the importance and historically contingent nature of social categories. There were many different styles of jazz, produced by a wide variety of combinations of instruments and voice, by ensembles that varied greatly in size and racial composition. Phillips shows that the prevalence, appeal, and legitimacy of these many different jazz styles shifted over time and varied among types of producing organizations at any point in time and over time for any particular type of producing organization. Other people who study product and organizational categories would do well to emulate his concern for concrete phenomena—activities in the market for cultural products—and steer away from trying to develop a theory of categories disconnected from all cultural, economic, and political roots. His sensitivity to time and place are critical to the insights he

draws from his research, insights that have wide applicability outside the early jazz recording industry.

This book also shows exquisite sensitivity to social context. Social-network analysis often has an unfortunate, albeit understandable tendency to reify dots and lines: to pull social relations among individuals, informal groups, and formal organizations out of rich social context and put them into simple graphs and then calculate relations between those points and lines. Phillips' analysis provides a welcome correction to that tendency by putting both geography (cultural and physical distance) and history (path dependence) in the spotlight. Geography matters in his analysis of the production networks of recorded jazz because the context of production—the city in which a recording is made—provides strong clues about the product that audiences evaluate to assess its cultural relevance; in turn, cultural relevance determines a product's success. Specifically, the legitimacy of a jazz recording is equated with its authenticity, and authenticity is a function of a jazz musician's or group's location in a network of recording artists and the atomistic characteristics of the artists and the song. History matters in this analysis in several ways, notably in that past actions of recording companies themselves shaped those companies' subsequent actions. Companies founded in the Victorian era, which were the first to record jazz songs and had long catered to social elites, responded to elite criticisms of jazz as "primitive" (read black) by distancing themselves from their musical innovations and producing instead a more "sophisticated" (read whiter) symphonic style of jazz that was more congruent with elite tastes; when they did record "primitive" or "hot" jazz using black musicians, which was less costly than producing symphonic jazz, they hid behind pseudonyms. Newer recording companies, which were not the original innovators in this genre, persisted in producing "hot" jazz under real names because they were not hobbled by any past dependence on social elites.

For social-network analysts, this research is innovative in that it examines the role that disconnected social actors (outsiders) play in social exchanges, especially in markets for innovative products. Phillips shows that products from disconnected actors are more appealing, especially when they are difficult to categorize. Actors' levels of disconnectedness depend on their ties to other actors and on the degree to which other actors are interconnected. Holding constant a focal actor's number of ties to others, the more other actors are interconnected (i.e., the greater the density of their social networks), the more disconnected that focal actor is. Holding constant the degree of interconnectedness among other actors, the fewer the ties between a focal actor and other actors, the more disconnected that focal actor is. It is important to note that disconnectedness is neither the opposite of centrality (effective network size, which is merely one component of disconnectedness) nor the same as isolation (having no ties to other actors in the network). With this new arrow in their quiver, social-network analysts can reassess the impact of actors' positions within networks. For example, they can investigate, either through cross-sectional comparison of different networks or through longitudinal analysis of a single network, the differential impact of being an isolate when the main component of a network is densely or sparsely tied.

Phillips is quite engaging, and we travel through his analytical journey, peeking over his shoulder as he records his path from empirical puzzle to solution, to new empirical puzzle to new solution, and ever onward. For example, he

shows in the first two chapters that a city's location in the network of jazz productions determined the appeal of the music recorded there. This explanation works for all cities, from New York to London to Calcutta, except Berlin. Admirably, Phillips does not ignore this anomaly; he delves into the case of Berlin in chapter 3 to see what exactly happened there. This analysis, done with Greg Liegel and Jennifer Omoregie, shows that Germans began to record jazz at a moment when symphonic jazz (exemplified by Paul Whiteman's orchestra) was dominant; this historical accident, combined with the vibrant tradition of classical music in Germany, made this form of jazz most appealing to Germans. But as the legitimacy of symphonic jazz declined over time, German-produced jazz became less appealing to artists outside that country and thus less likely to be recorded. A historical accident combined with a long historical tradition to produce an outlier. Such meta path dependence is entirely appropriate for a study that demonstrates so lucidly the long shadow that the past casts over the present.

I have a few small quibbles with this otherwise exemplary study, but I will mention just the most troubling one: the persistent issue of reciprocal causation. For example, Phillips finds that jazz recordings that are more difficult to categorize—produced by groups that use rare instruments, by groups whose names don't explicitly signal their style, and/or with titles that don't explicitly signal their category (specifically, whether or not they contain sexual content)—are more likely to come from disconnected producers. To be fair, he does assess whether more disconnected producers are more likely to produce original work, but original is not the same as difficult to categorize, although the two concepts are probably positively correlated. (He finds a negative association between disconnectedness and originality.) Still, Phillips is well aware of this issue, and it does not detract substantially from the value of his work. Despite the growing concern about causal inferences among sociologists in general and organizational theorists in particular, demonstrating "mere" associations can still yield important insights.

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