"The Closed-World Principle": Corporations and the Metaculture of Newness via Oldness

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Abstract

Although many corporations make claims about the newness of their products in order to make the public interested in purchasing them, not all of them make the same kind of claims. Whereas previous studies have highlighted claims to newness that are based on emphasizing the newness of almost all the parts of new products in relation to the parts of those products' previous versions, I highlight claims to newness that are based on emphasizing the oldness of the parts of new products in relation to the parts of those products' previous versions. These two distinct kinds of claims are patterned after two diametrically opposed normative ideals of newness that have a specific intellectual history in the modern west. This history and its contemporary instantiations have implications for the study of the motion of culture in general, and of the mechanisms that propel it in the corporate world in particular.

Key words

innovation; newness; oldness; cultural motion; metaculture; creativity

When the 1999 Jeep Grand Cherokee was launched, news media, conveying information that had been disseminated by Chrysler, reported that it was "'a completely new vehicle' with only 127 parts carried over from the previous model" (Rusbridger 1999). Chrysler solidified the idea of the radical newness of the 1999 Grand Cherokee by highlighting the banality of the 127 parts that were carried over from the previous model. Those parts included "the oil filter, rear-view mirror, and a bunch of nuts and bolts" (Sillery 1998:32). Its executives dramatized the vehicle's newness by "gleefully [displaying] a small cloth bag, too tiny for an anorexic lunch, which contained all the parts carried over from the past model" (Storck 1998).

In an article on "corporations and the metaculture of newness," Greg Urban and his colleagues (2007) have approached the launch of the 1999 Grand Cherokee as an opportunity to discuss the reasons for which corporations make metacultural claims to newness (i.e. claims about the newness of the products and services they produce and sell) even in relation to products and services that betray visible continuities with their previous versions, as well as whether such claims are false or have substance. They have argued that the answer to these questions lies in the study of the movement or motion of culture. Corporations make money by disseminating culture in the form of the products and services they produce and sell. The dissemination of cars and many other products depends on generating interest in potential buyers. One of the key ways to generate such interest is to periodically make changes in products. Thus, paradoxically, some elements of culture can only be disseminated if they are first altered and modified.[1] Urban and his colleagues have further argued that the modifications made in cars can be detected by consumers, and that the purpose of the metacultural claims to newness made by manufacturers and their representatives is to direct the public's attention to those modifications. They have concluded that in the specific cases they studied, "the metaculture of newness … [i.e. the claims to newness made by car manufacturers and their representatives] accurately portrays the culture it is about [i.e. the cars about which those claims are made]" and that they "found no evidence of a hyping of newness where none existed" (Urban et al. 2007:17).

Against this empirical and theoretical backdrop, in this essay I have two goals. First, I argue that while many corporations make metacultural claims to newness in order to make the public interested in their products and services, not all of them make the same kind of metacultural claims to newness. Rather, it is possible to discern distinct

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[1] In contrast, the dissemination of cultural elements such as myths and canonical texts in certain cultural contexts of veneration is often accompanied by metacultural claims to "oldness," i.e. claims that the transmitted cultural element is a faithful representation or copy of a previously existing original text (Urban 2001; Wilf 2012).

styles of such metacultural claims. Whereas Urban and his colleagues have highlighted a metaculture of newness that is based on emphasizing the newness of all or almost all the parts of new products in relation to the parts of those products' previous versions albeit with the same overall functional relationships between those parts, I highlight a metaculture of newness that is based on emphasizing the oldness of the parts of new products in relation to the parts of those products' previous versions albeit with different functional relationships between those parts. I suggest that these two distinct metacultures of newness are patterned after two diametrically opposed normative ideals of newness that have a specific intellectual history in the modern west.

Second, given the existence and specific intellectual history of such distinct styles of metacultural claims to newness, the answer to the question of whether corporations depend on a hype of newness in order to disseminate their products becomes more complicated than meets the eye. Drawing on anthropological research on cultural creativity, I argue that the two metacultures of newness that are presented and branded by their proponents as diametrically opposed to one another in fact represent two aspects of or stages in the same process of product development. Hence in gravitating toward one or the other of the two extreme and diametrically opposed metacultures of newness, i.e. in highlighting only one of these two aspects while erasing the other, corporations do, indeed, end up relying on a kind of hype of newness that does not accurately reflect the nature of the products they try to sell or the conditions of possibility for their development.

The Ethnographic Context

In making these arguments, I rely on ethnographic fieldwork I conducted with innovation consultants in the United States between 2012 and 2016 (Wilf 2019). Innovation consultants belong to a steadily growing professional group of people who claim that they can help companies innovate their products, services, and structures by means of the innovation strategies that they developed. These strategies are different from the informal innovation routines that many companies have, also known as "in-house" innovation. As opposed to such informal innovation strategies and routines developed by many companies, which are meant to be applied only to the specific products and services these companies produce and which are not immediately relevant to companies in other business sectors (cf. Moeran and Christensen 2013), the strategies developed by innovation consultants are higher-level strategies that can be applied to any product, service, or structure in need of innovation, including to themselves, i.e. to innovate the innovation strategies. In this sense innovation consultants' professional practice is one of a number of contemporary professional practices that distinctly revolve around, or

whose essence consists of, a metaculture of newness.[2] The emergence of this professional group is part of the rise of innovation as a key dimension of the contemporary economy. As the *Wall Street Journal* has noted, "the innovation trend has given birth to an attendant consulting industry, where Fortune 100 companies pay innovation consultants 300,000 to 1 million dollars for work on a single project, which can amount to between 1 to 10 million dollars a year" according to estimates (Kwoh 2012).

In this essay I focus on the innovation strategy developed by one of the consultancies I worked with, which I call Brandnew. Brandnew was founded in 1994. Since its foundation it has collaborated with major companies from different sectors on a vast spectrum of consumer products and services, one of which has become a standard of innovation in the field of consumer electronics. Brandnew's consultants base their expertise in cognitive science and the study of creative problem solving with a focus on engineering problems, in addition to business management. During my fieldwork I participated in innovation workshops and training sessions organized around Brandnew's signature innovation strategy. Participants in Brandnew's workshops and training sessions tended to be senior executives in large, established companies, some of which were Fortune 500 companies. They were mostly c-level executives (e.g., Chief Innovation Officers) with business management degrees who were interested in learning about Brandnew's innovation strategy in order to be able to implement this strategy by themselves in their home organizations or to decide whether to buy Brandnew's consulting services in relation to specific innovation projects.[3]

Houston, We Have a Problem

In March, 2013, I participated in a three-day innovation workshop that Brandnew organized in a conference hall in a hotel in downtown Manhattan. At the beginning of the workshop's second day, Tom, a man in his late 30s who was one of the workshop's facilitators, explained to the participants one of the core principles of Brandnew's signature innovation strategy (Wilf 2019:50). "One of the most basic principles of our method, the most important, perhaps," he emphasized, "is 'the closed-world principle', and it says that when you're looking to invent a new product or a system the only resources you're allowed to use are

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[2] Another such practice is contemporary art and, more specifically, the practice, which many artists now need to master, of coming up with some kind of rationale for their art. Such a rationale is often presented in written form and placed in proximity to the art so that the viewer can perceive the art (as a cultural element) and the rationale for it (as a metaculture of newness) at the same time.

[3] The cost of each of Brandnew's workshops was in the range of a few thousand dollars. Each workshop was usually facilitated by four consultants and attended by twenty-five participants.

resources that are already there. You have to imagine yourself in a closed world as if you have nowhere else to go. The only things you have that you can use are the things that are already there in your existing products or services."

To dramatize this principle, Tom approached the media unit and screened a short clip from the movie *Apollo 13* (Howard 1995:01:20:00—01:21:05). In the clip, the ground control team is frantically trying to figure out a way to save the lives of the astronauts whose air supply is rapidly diminishing because of a malfunction in their spacecraft. After being ordered to find "a way to put a square peg in a round hole, rapidly," a number of engineers pour on a table, which is situated in a small room, replicas of all the resources that the astronauts have at their disposal on the spacecraft. One of the engineers then says: "OK people, listen up. The people upstairs handed us this one and we gotta come through. We gotta find a way to make this [holding a cubical object with his right hand] fit into the hole for this [holding a tube with his left hand] using nothing but that [pointing with his head toward the replicas scattered on the table]." After screening this clip, Tom turned to the participants and said: "So this is the part where they realize there's a problem and they're looking for a solution. So it's that image and that sentence: 'You gotta find a way to make *this* go through *this* using nothing but *that*'. That is our closed-world principle—that image of pouring everything—their available resources—on the table—that allows us to really make an inventory of our closed world and find innovative solutions," i.e. to find ideas for new innovative products and services.

Before unpacking the rationale for the "closed-world principle" in the framework of Brandnew's innovation strategy, note the stark contrast between this principle and Chrysler's launching stunt. Where Chrysler's executives "gleefully displayed a small cloth bag, too tiny for an anorexic lunch, which contained all the parts carried over from the past model" (Storck 1998)—127 parts, recall, i.e. a small fraction of the total number of the 1999 Grand Cherokee's parts, in the *Apollo* movie engineers from the ground control team pour on a table replicas of *all* the parts that the astronauts have at their disposal on the spacecraft, with which the engineers are supposed to find an innovative solution to the problem that afflicts the astronauts. Tom used this movie clip to argue that innovators can come up with ideas for new innovative products if they resist using new parts and instead limit themselves to working with the parts of the existing products or services that they would like to innovate.

This contrast was crystalized in another way. Brandnew's founders conceived of the "closed-world principle" as a result of an incident that involved a car, no less, albeit not a 1999 Grand Cherokee. As narrated by Tom, this incident constitutes Brandnew's origin story, a fact that suggests that its meaning is crucial to Brandnew's innovation philosophy (Wilf 2015a: S25-S27). "This morning's learning starts out

with a story," Tom addressed the participants. "It's not a very well-known story. It's about an important event in world history," he laughed. "Maybe I went overboard with the buildup but it's a story of how our innovation philosophy was born. … It all started in the early 1990s. Two students were studying in a very interesting program—a joint program for aeronautical engineering and marketing. Quite interesting. And as good friends do, especially when they're studying for their doctoral dissertations, they went out one evening, had a good time, and they finished their going out very late at night. They got into their rental car that they had rented for a short while and they said—'O.K, it's really late, we gotta get back to the city, let's take a shortcut'. They started driving home on an off road in the middle of a nowhere area and all of a sudden they got a flat tire." Tom paused for a second and said, "It happens, especially when you're looking for shortcuts and maybe having too much to drink," he laughed. "So they are aeronautical engineers—they said, 'No problem changing a flat tire'. So what did they do? Has anyone ever had to change a flat tire?" Tom did not wait for the participants to respond. "So you pretty much know. What they did is they opened up the trunk, took out the jack, positioned it next to the tire, took out the cross wrench to affix to the bolts, started to release the bolts to remove the old tire. They removed the first bolt and the second bolt and then they got to the third bolt and it wouldn't budge. And with closer inspection with their flashlight they saw that it was rusted on and although they started jumping on the cross wrench and both of them pushing at the same time it just wouldn't turn. That was the situation."

As he was saying this, Tom wrote on a whiteboard "existing situation/problem." He then asked the participants: "Do you agree that there was a problem involved there? Would you characterize this as a problem if you encountered the story?" Some of the participants nodded with approval. Tom continued: "So this morning we are going to learn our approach to problem solving. It's completely new. It's a different approach to problem solving. And we'll learn it through some of the things that they noticed during this really important event, which they later studied and tested in order to form the basis, the foundation of Brandnew's innovation method." Pointing at the participants, Tom instructed them: "So now in pairs, just as you're sitting, jot down a few thoughts on what can be done, how to solve this problem."

After the participants worked in pairs for a few minutes, Tom solicited from them a few solutions. He then revealed the solution that Brandnew's "founding fathers," i.e. the two students, had come up with: "I would like to suggest another solution that typically doesn't come up and the solution is as follows: let's use the jack to remove the bolt. The jack lifts the car by providing a lot of leverage. What do we need to move the bolt? Leverage. So maybe we can place the jack under the wrench and use the jack to turn the wrench. This is the solution they came up with." Tom

then explained that the reason people do not come up with this innovative solution in particular, and innovative solutions in general qua ideas for new products, is that they do not stay within the boundaries of their existing resources—their existing products and services. They do not abide by "the closed world principle." Another reason people can't find the proper solution is that they tend to think that objects can only perform their present function. It is hard for them to think of alternative functions the same objects or parts can perform, as in the case of the jack.

Thus rather than using external or new resources to solve the specific car-related problem that they faced, akin to what Chrysler's designers did apropos the problem of how to innovate the Grand Cherokee, the two students solved this problem by means of the car parts that were already available to them. According to Brandnew's consultants, the novelty or newness of their solution stemmed precisely from this fact. If Chrysler's metaculture of newness is based on emphasizing the newness of all or almost all the parts of new consumer products in relation to the parts of those products' previous versions albeit with the same overall functional relationships between those parts, Brandnew's metaculture of newness is based on emphasizing the oldness of the parts of new consumer products in relation to the parts of those products' previous versions albeit with different functional relationships between those parts.

Templating Newness

Brandnew's method of innovation is based on the notion that it is possible to generate ideas for innovative products following the careful and systematic analysis of the history of the formal changes that successful products went through in the past. Such an analysis allows the innovator to detect the patterns that underlie the "evolution" of successful products, synthesize those patterns into a limited number of "creativity templates," and methodically apply those templates to existing products to change their form in a procedural way.[4] By trying to think of the functions that the new and, initially, strange forms might be able to perform for consumers, the innovator can generates ideas for how existing products might "evolve" into "future" innovative products. An example frequently used by Brandnew's facilitators is that of the introduction by Domino's Pizza of the promise to its customers to reduce the price of pizza whenever its delivery takes longer than 30 minutes. An analysis of this innovation reveals that it is based on the creation of a new dependency between two already existing components of the product that were previously independent of each other: the price of pizza and how long it

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[4] "Evolution" and "creativity templates" are terms that are indigenous to Brandnew's innovation strategy. See Wilf 2019:77-100.

takes to deliver the pizza. Brandnew's innovation strategy stipulates that many innovative products are based on this formal transformation that can be synthesized into a template. This template can be applied to existing products and services from highly different domains (including to existing innovation strategies) in order to generate ideas for their future innovative versions. An example of a potential innovation generated based on this template would be a drinking glass whose color turns red when the temperature of the liquid it contains is above a certain threshold. A new dependency is thereby created between two previously unrelated components of the existing product: the glass's color and the temperature of the liquid it contains.[5]

In explaining to the participants how to use this method of innovation, Tom emphasized that the first stage is taking inventory of the components of an already existing product or service that one would like to innovate and writing those components, as well as the functional relationships between them, down on paper: "We always begin with an existing situation. It can be a product, a system, a process—anything that we want to innovate and can break into components. And the first thing we want to do is to create, in a very mechanical way, an inventory of everything we have. It's a snapshot of the existing situation." The reason "inventory taking" constitutes this innovation strategy's first stage, he explained, is that it forces the innovator to clearly outline the product's form, which then enables him to alter the form according to one of the "creativity templates" that represent the types of formal change that products undergo in the process of becoming successful innovative products. After changing an existing product's form according to one of the "creativity templates," the innovator needs to think how to make sense of the resulting strange form by finding the functions that it could perform for a hypothetical consumer. Staying close to and working only with one's available resources is a way to help the innovator resist violating the "creativity templates" by introducing new components (what Brandnew's consultants dismissed as "deus-ex-machina" solutions) and to make sure that the innovator's ideas for new products will not be unrelated to the company's present context of existing products, services, and technologies.

Crucially, if, according to Urban and his colleagues, the purpose of the metacultural claims to newness made by car manufacturers and their representatives is to direct the public's attention to the modifications made in cars (Urban et al. 2017:15), Brandnew's consultants argue that there are universal dimensions to the public's perception of the

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[5] See Wilf 2015b:686-87 for a description of a session in which Tom and the participants generated an innovation in real time by means of a different "creativity template" in which the innovator needs to reorder his or her already existing resources in space or in time rather than create a new dependency between two such resources.

innovativeness of products and that the "creativity templates" capture those dimensions and can thus help the innovator develop new products that consumers will perceive as innovative. In other words, consumers are bound to perceive the innovativeness and newness of a new product with respect to its previous version if that new product was developed by the application of one of the "creativity templates" to the product's previous version. In this framework, the perception of the innovativeness of the solution to the problem of the flat tire, and of Domino's Pizza new service, is in large part the result of the fact that these innovations were generated by using the components of already existing products or services. In other words, using the parts of existing products but in new ways in the innovation process is likely to increase rather than decrease consumers' perception of the resulting product's innovativeness and newness.

Brandnew's consultants further argue that because the "creativity templates" represent "deep cognitive structures" that underlie consumers' "perception of innovativeness," the innovator can use them time and again to develop new products without undermining the public's perception of the innovativeness and newness of the resulting products. The consumer has immediate and conscious access only to "surface properties," as opposed to the "structural properties" that are processed at a sub-conscious level. Hence even if two new products or services (such as Domino's Pizza's innovation and the drinking glass that changes its color according to the temperature of the liquid it contains) are modeled after the same template, the consumer will still perceive each of them as new and surprising because he or she will notice the products' surface-level differences while remaining unaware of (though unconsciously affected by) the shared underlying features (i.e. the specific "creativity template" by means of which the new products or services were generated). This claim, whatever its empirical veracity is, is important in metacultural terms. Chrysler's executives needed to dramatize the newness of the 1999 Grand Cherokee by publicly displaying the 127 carry-over parts because the potential consumer could not immediately perceive such newness before actually test-driving the car (Urban et al. 2007:17). In other words, they needed to make metacultural claims to newness to direct consumers' attention to the newness of the Grand Cherokee. In contrast, according to Brandnew's consultants, directing consumers' attention to the newness of products that were generated by using the "creativity templates" is a built-in feature of such templates. The consumer who approaches a new product that represents a novel reconfiguration (that is nevertheless patterned in a very specific way) of an existing product is bound to perceive this new product as new and innovative, as in the example of the innovativeness of using the car jack to

release the rusted bolts in the case of the flat tire.[6]

In conversations I had with Brandnew's consultants, they emphasized that "the reverse engineering is of the logical structure and not of the product itself." That is, it was important for them to stress that the innovator does not copy specific products and services but rather finds "the logic of creativity in reverse from products that the market decided are innovative so you'll be able to use it again in the future to produce new products" (Wilf 2019: 88). Although the ideas for products produced in this way are new, they adhere to an already established style of innovation that itself directs the public's attention to the newness and innovativeness of its resulting products.

Innovation, Done In Cultural Style(s)

The two diametrically opposed metacultures of newness that find expression in Chrysler's launching strategy and in Brandnew's innovation strategy align with two opposing cultural tropes or ethos of creativity and newness in the modern west. These tropes and ethos can most clearly be detected in the sphere of art, which has provided the modern-western popular imagination with its vocabulary of ideas about creative agency and newness (Taylor 1989: 376). Most relevant in this context is the distinction that emerged in 18th century Europe "between the merely reproductive imagination, which simply brings back to mind what we have already experienced, perhaps combined in novel ways, on one hand, and the creative imagination, which can produce something new and unprecedented, on the other" (ibid.: 378-79).

In an essay that played a key role in this intellectual tradition, entitled "Conjectures on Original Composition," Edward Young argued that "an Original may be said to be of a vegetable nature; it rises spontaneously from the vital root of Genius; it grows, it is not made. Imitations are often a sort of manufacture wrought up by those mechanics, art, and labour, out of pre-existent material not their own" (Young 1759: 12). This romantic framework relied on metaphors of spontaneous vegetable growth to praise the creative imagination as the wellspring of new worlds, likening the true artist, in Herder's words, to "a creator God" (quoted in Taylor 1989: 378), and expecting him or her "to

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[6] Of course, the claims made by Brandnew's consultants about the ways in which the "creativity templates" already capture the "universal dimensions" of consumers' perception of newness and innovativeness and hence obviate the need to explicitly direct consumers' attention to such newness and innovativeness—these claims are themselves metacultural claims whose purpose is to direct the attention of Brandnew's clients (and of my own) to the newness and innovativeness of Brandnew's signature innovation strategy and thus help disseminate it in the world by encouraging clients to buy Brandnew's services and to use its innovation strategy.

articulate an original vision of the cosmos" (ibid.: 381). This distinction between "mechanical making and organic growth, between the reordering of given materials by artificers like Beaumont and Fletcher, and the vital emergence of an original form in the plays of Shakespeare" (Abrams 1971: 199), also relied on notions of property rights to disdain imitation as a form of debt that should be avoided at all cost. Thus even if we "suppose an imitator to be most excellent (and such there are), yet still he but nobly builds on another's foundation; his debt is, at least, equal to his glory; which therefore, on the balance, cannot be very great" (Young 1759: 11). Artists consequently sought to base their works on a radical break from the past, i.e. from "traditional iconography ... accepted conventions ... [and] pre-existing lexicon of references" (Taylor 1989: 381). This romantic ethos of newness has had a definitive impact on the western popular imagination. It found crystalized expression in abstract expressionism and artists such as Jackson Pollock who were hailed for creating radically new and personal aesthetic worlds. Chrysler's branding of the 1999 Grand Cherokee as a car that represents an "all new" model, almost all of whose parts are entirely new and that thus owes very little to previous models, is patterned after this culturally-specific ethos or style of creativity and newness.

At the same time, what the romantic tradition denounced as "imitations" made out of "pre-existent material not their own," the "reordering of given materials," and "traditional iconography ... accepted conventions ... [and] pre-existing lexicon of references," has continued to inform normative ideals of creative agency in the western popular imagination. Its traces can be detected in strands of conceptual art that emerged as a direct reaction to and a rejection of romantic notions of creativity, originality, and genius, and whose normative ideals turned on "appropriation, citation, copying, [and] reproduction" (Perloff 2010: 23). It found crystalized expression in artists such as Marcel Duchamp who took already existing or found objects, i.e. ready-mades, and transformed them into works of art either by slightly altering them (e.g., adding a mustache and a goatee to the Mona Lisa in his 1919 work, L.H.O.O.Q.), changing their functional relationships with one another (e.g., his 1913 work, *Bicycle Wheel*, consisting of a bicycle fork with a front wheel mounted upside-down on a wooden stool), or simply signing and placing them in art spaces (e.g., his 1917 work, *Fountain*). More recently, a conceptual poet such as Kenneth Goldsmith composed poems that consist of transcriptions of a year's worth of daily weather reports for the tri-state area (2005), of a twenty-four hour period of New York traffic reports (2007), and of an entire baseball game between the New York Yankees and the Boston Red Sox as reported by professional commentators (2008). As Marjorie Perloff has noted, even if conceptual artists such as Goldsmith explicitly argue that their work is "uncreative" and make "no claims on originality" (2010: 147), creativity, originality, and genius do inform conceptual art, albeit not in the sense instilled by

the romantic emphasis on the creative imagination (ibid.: 21). In this form of conceptual art, originality, creativity, and genius find expression in the ways in which the artist appropriates and uses already existing cultural elements rather than in the ways in which he or she creates entirely new cultural elements.[7] Brandnew's insistence that breakthrough ideas can only be generated by working with one's already available resources resonates with this second culturally-specific style or ethos of creativity and newness.[8]

The fact that this ethos or style of innovation confines itself to working with available resources does not mean that its ambitions are modest as far as newness is concerned. In an interview I conducted with Gabriella, a woman in her mid-30s who is one of Brandnew's consultants, she described an innovation session that she and Tamara, another Brandnew consultant, had once facilitated for one of the world's largest petrochemical companies (Wilf 2019: 44). "We had an experience where we facilitated a project involving [Gabriella mentioned the name of the company] on producing fuel extracts," she said. "It was this crazy chemical project. Now, I worked with another facilitator. We gave the company representatives the task of using this specific template where one of the product's components changes in relation to another of the product's components. And then," Gabriella smiled, "I heard from the end of another room this exchange. Tamara told the participants something like: 'This molecule changes in relation to this molecule', and then I heard one of the participants say: 'But Tamara, it's God-given!'" Gabriella looked at me and asked, "Do you understand? There was this kind of distress, almost exasperation in his voice. He was like: 'You can't just say that a molecule will change and make it true!'" "So how did Tamara handle this?" I asked. "She handled it well," Gabriella replied. "She suggested that we first understand what is God-given in that specific situation and then

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[7] With the increased availability of digital tools and internet-based information that make appropriation, citation, copying, reproduction, and recombination of already existing cultural elements much easier than the creation of entirely new cultural elements, it is highly probable that this style of innovation will become the defining feature of amateur creative practices and of how creativity and newness are understood in the popular imagination.

[8] In conversations I had with Brandnew's consultants, some of them mentioned Edison as a person whose genius is the quintessential example of this ethos of newness. They explained a specific "creativity template" by means of a story about visitors to Edison's estate who complained that they had to use great force in order to open the gate to the estate. Those visitors wondered how it could be that such a great inventor was unable to address such an easy problem. Only years later did Edison reveal the fact that the energy visitors had to invest to open the gate was used to pump up water to fill his swimming pool. Edison thus created a new dependency between two already existing resources (visitors to his estate and the gate to the estate) in order to create a new reality that produced value (albeit only to himself and to the people who were given the opportunity to use his swimming pool).

that we understand if there is something that can affect or produce change. So it won't be temperature but it will be something else. And they did manage to come up with a relevant dimension. The lesson in that," she concluded, "is that even when someone tells you that something is God-given there is a space to figure out what can be relevant to change." Gabriella's story exemplifies in a literal way this innovation style's iconoclastic potential: even what counts as the universe's basic physical "God-given" properties can be approached as an already available resource or "ready-made" that can be appropriated, reordered, cited, and reproduced in novel ways.

The Hype of Extremes

The fact that Chrysler's and Brandnew's distinct metacultural claims to newness are patterned after two diametrically opposed, culturally-specific normative ideals of newness that represent the two extreme ends of a vast spectrum suggests that even if the purpose of such claims, as Urban and his colleagues argue, is to direct the public's attention to real modifications made in the 1999 Grand Cherokee or to the novel use of already existing parts in a color-changing drinking glass, such claims do, in fact, constitute a kind of hype of newness. It is easy to show that neither the one nor the other style of innovation exists at the level of purity hailed by its proponents. Thus, although Chrysler's representatives touted the newness of almost all of the 1999 Grand Cherokee's parts, they remained silent about the question of how much many of those parts were actually modified. Although a very slightly modified part could still be technically considered "new," for all intents and purposes it is an already existing resource. Similarly, although Brandnew's representatives tout the originality of a potential innovation such as a color-changing drinking glass or a real one such as the innovation introduced by Domino's Pizza due to the novel use of already existing resources, they remain silent about the new or not already existing components or parts that are needed to realize such innovations in practice such as temperature-sensitive and color-changing materials in the first, or time-keeping technologies in the second.

We might conclude that such diametrically opposed metacultural claims to newness are good to market with. I intentionally riff on Claude Lévi-Strauss's famous statement about the function of animals in myths (1991: 89), for Lévi-Strauss himself gravitated toward these two extremes in his discussion of cultural creativity and, more specifically, in the distinction he made between the bricoleur—the archetypical improviser—and the engineer (Wilf 2015b: 688-689). In a description that immediately brings to mind Brandnew's "closed-world principle," Lévi-Strauss argued that the bricoleur's "universe of instruments is closed and the rules of his game are always to make do with 'whatever is at

hand', that is to say with a set of tools and materials which is always finite" (1966: 17). Furthermore, in the same way that the first stage of Brandnew's innovation strategy is taking inventory of one's already available resources, the bricoleur's "first practical step is retrospective. He has to turn back to an already existent set made up of tools and materials, to consider or reconsider what it contains" (ibid.: 18). This set is "'pre-constrained' like the constitutive units of myth, the possible combinations of which are restricted by the fact that they are drawn from the language where they already possess a sense which sets a limit on their freedom of manoeuvre" (ibid.: 19).[9] With respect to the engineer, Lévi-Strauss argued that although he "too has to begin by making a catalogue of a previously determined set consisting of theoretical and practical knowledge, of technical means, which restrict possible solutions," he "is always trying to make his way out of and go beyond the constraints imposed by a particular state of civilization while the 'bricoleur' by inclination or necessity always remains within them" (ibid.: 19). Lévi-Strauss's anthropological theory of cultural creativity was thus informed by the two culturally-specific opposing styles of innovation that I discussed above. His theory, in turn, has helped reproduce those styles and their opposing relation to each other by informing subsequent strands of anthropological research on cultural creativity.[10]

Later studies have problematized the difference that Lévi-Strauss assumed to exist between the bricoleur and the engineer. They can consequently inform the answer to the question of whether Chrysler's and Brandnew's distinct metacultural claims to newness represent a kind of hype of newness. In Tim Ingold and Elizabeth Hallam's succinct formulation, the distinction between the two styles of cultural creativity "is not that the one works within established convention while the other breaks with it, but that the former characterizes creativity by way of its processes, the latter by way of its products" (2007: 2; see also Redfield 2000: 20; Latour 1996: 109). That is, normative ideals of innovation as the creation of entirely new cultural elements tend to present those elements as the results of a kind of creation ex nihilo and to neglect or downplay the much more mundane, trial-and-error, conventions-based processes that made this creation possible. A crystallized expression of such downplaying was given by William Blake who, of his poem, *Milton*, stated in 1803: "I have written this poem from immediate Dictation, twelve or sometimes twenty or thirty lines at a time, without Premeditation and even against my Will; the Time it has taken in writing was thus render'd Non Existent, and an immense Poem Exists which seems to be the Labour of a Long Life, all produc'd without Labour or

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[9] For a discussion of a crucial difference between bricolage and Brandnew's innovation strategy, see Wilf 2015b: 689.

[10] See Wilf 2014: 398-399 for a review of those strands of research.

Study" (quoted in Abrams 1971: 215). This statement presents the final poem as a decontextualized and entirely new cultural element by erasing Blake's years of reading and studying prior to the creation of his poem.

Conversely, normative ideals of innovation as the mere appropriation of already existing resources tend to focus on mundane, trial-and-error, conventions-based processes and to downplay the ways in which the experimentation with such processes are, in fact, informed by the search for originality, creativity, and a break from the past. Such downplaying finds expression in the poet Kenneth Goldsmith's claim that "conceptual writing or uncreative writing … obstinately makes no claims on originality. On the contrary, it employs intentionally self and ego effacing tactics using uncreativity, unoriginality, illegibility, appropriation, plagiarism, fraud, theft, and falsification as its precepts; information management, word processing, databasing, and extreme process as its methodologies; and boredom … as its ethos" (quoted in Perloff 2010: 147). This claim's focus on the mundane, boring, uncreative, and ego-effacing processing of already exiting material downplays the ways in which the use of such processing for creative purposes is itself novel and results in the renewed reification of the poet's ego as a quasi-natural genius who is a creator of new worlds.[11]

Conclusion

The discussion presented thus far has implications for the study of the motion of culture in general, as well as for the study of the metaculture of newness as an engine that is responsible for this motion in the corporate world in particular. In relation to the study of cultural motion in general, the following argument made by Urban and his colleagues can now be complexified in a more concrete way:

> There appears an apparent paradox as regards the movement of culture forward through time in the case of SUVs (and, we should argue, of many other mass-disseminated cultural elements). The paradox is that expanding dissemination, which results in increased secondary replication, requires changes in the cultural elements themselves over time. In order to get culture to move through the world, you cannot keep it exactly the same. [Urban et al 2007:11]

The comparison between Chrysler's launching stunt and Brandnew's innovation strategy suggests that although it is true that most mass-disseminated cultural elements must be periodically changed and

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[11] A cursory analysis of Goldsmith's public persona (especially as it finds expression in his comportment and attire) points to the many ways in which he has aligned himself with the romantic notion of the artist as a highly original individual whose life and self are themselves akin to unique works of art.

renewed to keep the public interested in them, some forms of change and newness are inherently intertwined with maintaining radical forms of "oldness" and with directing the public's attention to those forms. In such cases, "keeping it [almost] exactly the same" is a condition of possibility for the perceived newness of the cultural element and for the public's interest in acquiring it.[12] At stake is not the overall valid point that "a mixture of oldness and newness" is required for culture to be disseminated, i.e. that "the culture cannot be too new, or it would risk being unrecognizable and, therefore, undisseminable," and that "at the same time, neither can it be too similar to its past" (Urban et al 2007: 18). Rather, the point is that some metacultures of newness are based on highlighting rather than suppressing tropes of "oldness" or "sameness" as positive elements even in the case of mass-disseminated cultural elements.

In relation to the study of cultural motion in the corporate world in particular, the fact that the two corporate metacultures of newness I discussed in this essay are patterned after two distinct and diametrically opposed normative ideals of newness in the modern west, whereas in practice new product development is a process that involves elements associated with both normative ideals, suggests that a certain "hype of newness" is a constitutive feature of such metacultures. In itself, this is not surprising, for in a business environment that is characterized by a high level of competition between numerous players differentiation becomes necessary. Such differentiation takes place not only on the level of the products and services corporations sell (qua cultural elements) but also on the level of corporations' descriptions of those products and services and how they developed them (qua metacultures of newness). The result of the competition on the second level is the emergence of two metacultures of newness that are almost the exact negative copies of one another. This fact suggests that metacultural claims to newness depend on contrastive terms against which such claims' distinctiveness can be defined (cf. Keane 2002: 66) and, therefore, that to better understand such metacultural claims they should be analyzed not only with respect to the cultural elements to which they refer but also with respect to one another.

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[12] Indeed, in some cases "keeping it exactly [rather than almost] the same" can be a condition of possibility for the public's interest in a cultural element. An interesting example is the case of "retro" cultural elements such as vinyl records that have experienced a recent surge in popularity. Such examples suggest that a cultural element might be perceived as novel and interesting by remaining the same against the backdrop of a constantly changing environment.

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