

and begin to see what made HBO so very successful. We cannot afford to buy the lie that it's all about "taste" "intuition," or "genius." This knowledge is knowable.

External consultants are a little more forthcoming. They can give us the why and the how of their analysis. But the larger question remains: Should the corporation trust so important a body of knowledge, intelligence, and strategy to a traveling salesman with an attention deficit disorder? We need someone with an enduring knowledge of our culture and our corporation. We need a Mary Minnick who gets the Coke proposition absolutely even as she understands everything else that is taking place in the world. Surely this is too important to be left to outsiders.

The CCO matters for another reason. Without him or her, the corporation is vulnerable to passing fads and fashions, the "stunt" ideas of business literature. The next big business book says it's all "memes." That we need to "go viral." Neural nets! Widgets! Web 2.0! Brand virus! Too often in matters of culture, the corporation is driven by the idea of the moment, as if intellectual churn will somehow help the corporation plot a better course. But of course the result is navigational zigzag.

We need someone on the inside who can canvass these new ideas, separate the wheat from the chaff, and choose what if anything the corporation shall use. Marketing is not a Pachinko machine. People like Geoffrey Frost find a way to save their corporations with exactly the right insight at precisely the right time. The CCO is a profession like others—lawyer, doctor, strategist—a person who thinks long and hard and systematically, considers options, explores alternatives, and makes careful choices. The corporation mustn't gimmick, stunt, or trick its way to market share. Stunts are for Steve-O, not serious, gifted professionals.

## CULTURE FAST AND SLOW

IT WAS THE LATE '80S. I WAS SITTING AT MY DESK, WORKING away, minding my own business. A junior academic living in obscurity. An ink-stained wretch hoping for tenure. Think someone out of Dickens . . . with a Canadian accent, eh. My life was about to change.

The phone rang. It was Amy from Harpo Productions in Chicago. Amy wanted to talk about my work on homeyness. We chatted for a while. And that was that.<sup>1</sup>

A week or so later, Amy called again. Would I like to come on the show and talk about my work? I said, "Sure, I would."

Nothing happens in the academic world without the knowledge and approval of the department secretary. I took my news to Barbara.

"Oprah Winfrey?" she asked with reverence.

I nodded.

"You?" she said dubiously.

Barbara made further inquiries.

"On the *Oprah Winfrey Show*?"

"In *Chicago*?"

"On *television*?"

I nodded. Barbara's eyes narrowed. Something was wrong with the universe.

I arrived at O'Hare airport on the appointed day. I'd been told where to look for the Harpo Productions limo, and sure enough, there it was, purring curbside. I stepped inside expecting to have the car to myself, and I was surprised to find someone in place: a woman dressed all in blue. She was wearing a blue Chanel suit with matching stockings. The suit had piping around the jacket and over the pockets, and her hair was pulled back in the socialite manner, held by a little black bow.

A look of instantaneous dislike passed between us. Conversation inched forward. It turned out that the woman in blue was the other expert to appear on the show. She was a New York designer and the author of a recent book on design in the home. As I recall, she said something like, "My publisher has printed an extra 50,000 copies of my book. What about you?"<sup>2</sup>

I had no book and no publisher. I had a photocopy of my academic essay.

"Oh, you know, we're talking about it," I lied shamelessly.

We made our way to a Chicago suburb and stopped in front of an attractive middle-class home. Taping commenced.

The first shot took place on the outside, to show the "experts" entering the home. We were supposed to climb the stairs, hit the doorway, look to the camera, and say, "Hi, Oprah. We're here at the home of the Sullivans, and we're going inside to take a look around!"

The blue-suited woman dispatched the task effortlessly. She hit her mark, dispatched her line, and the producer said, "Perfect. You're a doll."

My turn came. Repeatedly.

"Grant, let's do it once more. But this time could you give it a little more *oomph*?"

I tried a couple more times, but it was clear I was hopeless.

"Can you be more . . . vivid?" the producer asked me.

"Um," I said finally, "you do realize I'm Canadian."

No one thought this was the least bit funny.

The next shot was to capture our reaction to the Sullivan home. The designer strode down the hallway into the kitchen. She said something like, "Well, it's obvious this is a family with no sense of design. None! Look at these curtains. Wrong shape. Wrong size. Wrong color!"

I cast a glance at poor Mrs. Sullivan, who was cowering against a kitchen wall. She was beginning to have doubts of her own. I couldn't watch. I slunk into the living room.

And there were Dan, the father, and Danielle, the daughter, doing what they called the "Pocahontas dance." A couple of days before, they had been to see the Disney movie. Danielle, blonde, sunny, and about six, had "memorized" her own scrambled version of the theme song, and father and daughter, oblivious to the commotion in the kitchen, were now performing it. Dan picked Danielle up, threading her across his shoulders and sliding her back down to the carpet. Danielle sang throughout these exertions, and as she dropped to the carpet, she finished with a joyful flourish.

The designer had swept out of the kitchen and was now, it seemed to me, laying waste to the living room.

She said something like, "Oh, look at this furniture. I mean, really. Everything is pushed to the wall. No sense of *proportion*. No sense of placement."

I took this as my cue. I signaled for the camera, and as it swung toward me, I said, "Well, actually, there's a reason the

furniture is pushed to the wall. It's to make room for the Pocahontas dance. Would you like to see the Pocahontas dance, Oprah?"

The producer looked around in panic. She spotted Dan and Danielle and cued the cameraman with a desperate, pointing gesture.

Just in time. Dan and Danielle were already exuberantly singing and lifting. It was perfect. Had they known they were going to be performing for national television, the dance might have been anxious or labored. As it was, they were merely sharing a private joy. It was about the sweetest thing you ever saw.

The producer gave me a look of new regard. I might not be good television but I could see what was. The designer, on the other hand, was staring daggers.

We went to a couple of other homes. The designer was predictable. No one in suburban Chicago seemed capable of grasping the simplest precepts laid down by the New York design community. Her job was apparently to mock and diminish. My response was predictable too. I kept suggesting the Sullivan home was something remarkable, that this family had turned 2,000 square feet of concrete and drywall into something happy, homey, and theirs.

The CCO has a core competence: a deep body of knowledge and a strategic feeling for how to apply this knowledge. The designer and I were talking about two kinds of culture. She was talking about fast. I was talking about slow. Both matter to the CCO, but fast culture gets the lion's share of our attention. It is so much more visible, vivid, obvious, and, yes, fashionable. Slow culture plays the country cousin, less interesting, less fashionable. It is punished with neglect. Think of it this way: Fast culture is like all the boats on the surface of the Pacific. We can

spot them, number them, track them. Slow culture is everything beneath the surface: less well charted, much less visible. Slow culture is the lesser known half of the CCO competence. But it is equally important.

Homeyness is slow culture. It consists in a set of rules. It specifies our choice of colors, materials, furniture, decorative objects, arrangement, interior design, and exterior characteristics. It is the way we take an ordinary space and give it extraordinary powers. It shows us how to turn a house into a home. It is an enduring, deep-seated aspect of our culture. To find it we have to root it out. We have to visit the home and ask the consumer to talk about it.<sup>3</sup>

As a part of slow culture, though, homeyness gets scant attention. It is too sentimental to interest the designer. (All those doilies, antimacassars, throw rugs, and fridge magnets.) There is no breaking story here, so it doesn't capture the attention of the journalist. Because homeyness is so stubbornly behind the trend, it doesn't interest the cool-hunter or the trend watcher. Even academics have been slow to take a look, and they are puzzled when they do.<sup>4</sup> As slow culture, homeyness is everywhere in our midst and, apparently, everywhere invisible. It shapes Americans' lives but stays below the radar of American experts.

Pity the CCO who ignores it. It is often homeyness that helps decide whether consumers will embrace a new product, how they will use it, what they will use it for, and whether this proves a "keeper" for any given American household. When we follow A. G. Lafley's injunction and dolly back to see the consumer in her or his full complexity, it is often homeyness that comes swimming into view. "Homeyness" is the secret, the very code, of domestic life in America. Get at *this* and we can

grasp family life, what a “mother” and a “wife” is, what a “father” and a “husband” is, how the budget is apportioned, and, perhaps most important, why some brands and innovations resonate for the family and others bounce off. (Homeyness can even explain the Pocahontas dance.)

It is topics like homeyness that separate the CCOs who are moved by genuine curiosity about their culture, from those who are merely in it for the really stylish eyewear. There is nothing in homeyness that will make you look hipper to your friends. There is nothing here you can drop into conversation at a party. There is no knowledge here that really works as social capital. No, the CCO wants to know about homeyness because it is part of American culture and that’s his job.

I was in Charlotte, North Carolina, in late 2008, and my taxi driver had a copy of *Common American Phrases in Everyday Contexts: A Detailed Guide to Real-Life Conversation and Small Talk*.<sup>5</sup> I paged through it on the way to the airport and thought, “This is a book I have to have.” Here are a couple of outtakes.

You bet your life.

That’s the last straw.

You make me laugh (never said by someone who is laughing).

Shake the lead out.

I need a change of scenery.

We know these phrases. We “get” them immediately. But they depend on cultural knowledge. If we were recently arrived from Gambia, struggling to learn American English and hearing these phrases for the first time, we would find them strange. (“I bet my what?”) We could call this the Ziva effect,

after the character on the TV show *NCIS*. As a trained Israeli assassin, Ziva is smart, beautiful, and dangerous, but when speaking English, she gets the little phrases wrong. She retrieves them from their familiarity and suddenly they are slow culture made visible.

Now consider these:

See you!

I’ve changed my mind.

Come back anytime.

Care to dance?

Our first reaction is to say, “These don’t demand a special knowledge. If we know the terms, we get the meaning.” Really? Look again and imagine yourself a taxi driver from Gambia. Culture operates here. We must supply a deeper, slower knowledge to understand these phrases.

Culture supplies us with knowledge we don’t know we know, that operates invisibly to shape our understanding of the world. Slow culture is especially hard to see. The CCO who knows only fast culture is just another kind of cool-hunter. American culture is imperfectly and incompletely mapped but there is great scholarship on which to draw. Rutgers sociologist Eviatar Zerubavel gives us a sense of how we organize our cultural categories. English anthropologist Kate Fox explores the rules of interaction. Cornell University French literature professor Richard Klein gives us a brilliant study of how smoking and tobacco insinuated themselves into our culture. (Although smoking and tobacco are ending as a cultural preoccupation, why and how they were important still matters.) Professors George Lakoff and Mark Johnson examine our metaphors. Historian Richard Huber

studies our idea of success.<sup>6</sup> Some scholars have made themselves very useful. But the CCO often will have to do his or her own work. This will take Lafley-like excursion into people's homes, to patiently listen for a long while. The CCO has years of ethnographic work in view.

Clever Oprah. When her production staff teamed the anthropologist with the designer, a perfect contrast was created. In the designer, they discovered an expert on the fast culture that shapes the American home. In the anthropologist, they discovered an expert in the slow culture at work there. Out of the tension came a show.

#### FAST CULTURE

Alvin Toffler published *Future Shock* in 1970. Change, he said, was changing. He wrote, "We have not merely extended the scope and scale of change, we have radically altered its pace. We have in our time released a totally new social force—a stream of change so accelerated that it influences our sense of time, revolutionizes the tempo of daily life and affects the way we 'feel' the world around us."<sup>7</sup>

The decade that followed the publication of *Future Shock* served as proof of its argument. In 1970, China was a socialist economy with Mao Tse-tung at its head. The Soviet Empire stood impregnable. Iran was a pro-Western monarchy. No woman had served as the elected head of a Western government in the twentieth century. By the end of the '70s, Mao was dead and his regime repudiated. Russia was in crisis. Iran was an anti-Western republic. By 1980, eight women had been elected heads of government. Yes, change seemed to be accelerating.

When it came to technology, Toffler might as well have fired a starter's pistol. Intel released its first microprocessor in 1971.

Cray, the maker of supercomputers, was founded in 1972. Magnavox released its first video game console in 1972. Home computers appeared suddenly from Apple, Atari, and Commodore. Philips produced the VCR. Fiber optics came from Corning Glass. Bell Labs installed the first commercial cellular network. In ten years, computing went from big business to small desktops.

In 1970, the family sitcom (*The Brady Bunch*), the western (*Bonanza*), and the variety show (*Ed Sullivan*) were all fixtures of popular culture. By the end of the decade, they were gone, dislodged by an independent film sensibility shaped by the films *Easy Rider*, *M\*A\*S\*H*, and *The Godfather*. The big three TV networks, once the only game in town, now shared the airwaves with cable, specifically MTV and HBO. Comedians went from punch lines to improv. In ten years, popular culture went from a place of mainstream entertainment to something more various and complex.<sup>8</sup>

As if feverishly trying to prove the truth of Toffler's argument, the world was speeding up. It was decentering. It was multiplying. It was churning. And, yes, it was shocking.

But of course the '70s were just the prelude. In the next thirty years (1980 to the present), the "scope and scale of change" has become unimaginable. In American cities, Main Street was dismantled by the big-box "category killers" like Wal-Mart and Home Depot. Digital technologies rewired banking, retail, and entertainment. Scientific research has increased by 40 percent since 1988, and the conversion from science to technology is happening faster. The World Intellectual Property Organization says that from 1997 to 2002, the number of patent applications went from 680 to 5,359, an increase of almost 700 percent.<sup>9</sup> The Internet, circulating 93,000 terabytes of data at any given moment, opened new worlds of content, knowledge, and opinion.<sup>10</sup>

Computer games like Halo and virtual worlds like Second Life literally created new worlds. Social networks like MySpace and Facebook changed the very nature of the social group.

On the economic side, there was still more turmoil. In the words of financial journalist Harris Collingwood, "Idiosyncratic volatility is the signature of our economic age."<sup>11</sup> President Ronald Reagan's reduction of government spending and control added a new dynamism to local and international economies. There was a huge run-up in the creation of value in the dot-com economy, and NASDAQ broke 5100. The roller-coaster ride continued with a sudden collapse in the spring of 2000. NASDAQ lost 500 points in five days. More recently, the real estate market has seen a great ascent and decline. Venerable financial institutions, the great foundational suppliers of capital and advice, have actually disappeared. Wachovia, Merrill Lynch, and Lehman Brothers, as independent organizations, are no more. At this writing, the auto industry is flirting with bankruptcy. Only massive government intervention has stabilized the economy.

Taste and preference, as the economists like to call them, are in a spin. Fast food slowed down. McDonald's started stocking salads. Processed food fell more and more from fashion. People stopped smoking in droves. (Forty years ago, 40 percent of Americans smoked.) Omega-3, soy, and more fiber are suddenly in everything. It became harder and harder to anticipate what audiences wanted. "Television used to provide big-tent programming designed to appeal to a lot of people, with characters and story arcs that would appeal to everyone," says Alan Wurtzel, president for research and media development at NBC. "Now you find audiences are very, very specific."<sup>12</sup>

How fast are things changing? Friendster was founded in 2002, a media darling by 2003, overtaken by MySpace in 2004,

falling fast by 2005, and had completely vanished by 2007, managing to run full circle from obscurity back to obscurity in five years. How fast are things changing? Growing up in Hawaii in the 1970s, young Barack Obama saw plenty of racism. And he was struck by how casual, confident, and deeply embedded it was in the world around him. Racist Hawaiians *just knew* Obama was inferior and untrustworthy. A mere forty years later, this "certain" knowledge is a minority opinion. Forty years later, Obama is the forty-fourth president of the United States.<sup>13</sup>

If Toffler's remarks were a little hyperbolic in 1970, now they seemed to understate the case. If the future was shocking in 1970, now it was concussive.

Business is alive to the presence and force of this change. We can detect a whiff of anxiety coming off the titles of recent business books: *Faster, Blur, Out of Control, Blown to Bits, Fast Forward, Speed of Thought, The Age of Unreason*, and *Predictably Irrational*.<sup>14</sup> Business thinkers John Hagel, John Seely Brown, Lang Davison, Nassim Nicholas Taleb, Peter Schwartz, and Clayton Christensen ask us to accept disruption and turmoil as the new order of the day.<sup>15</sup> *BusinessWeek* declared the arrival of an "innovation economy."<sup>16</sup> "Creative destruction" went from being an arcane term from a little-known European economist to the title of a book from the head of an American consulting house.<sup>17</sup>

The American corporation rose to the occasion. It made itself more responsive, more creative.<sup>18</sup> It began to downsize, restructure, flatten, delayer, decentralize, outsource, and go global. It became more fluid, more responsive, and more questioning, and prepared to reinvent itself continually.<sup>19</sup> But the paradox was inescapable. As the corporation struggled to respond to change, it increased the speed and depth of change. There

was no hope of catching up to change. The best the corporation could hope for was to keep it in view.

Culture is a critical part of this change. It is sometimes the cause, as when hip-hop joins us as a kind of music but eventually becomes a style of clothing, masculinity, filmmaking, celebrity, and politics. Culture is sometimes the effect. The rave culture that transformed dance, drugs, and the social experience in the 1990s was driven in part by new technologies. The counterculture of the 1960s was driven in part by a demographic (baby-boomer) tidal wave.

It would be easier for the CCO if culture were a small and discrete player in the world. But culture is hyperactive. Even when not a cause or event, it concatenates so furiously with other factors that no event is culture free. Good luck teasing this apart. The CCO must be good at understanding complexity, because this is the nature of the beast in question.<sup>20</sup>

Fast culture is invasive. Even the "quiet corners" of our culture have let it in. Until quite recently hardware stores were mostly fashion-free. They were staffed by guys called Dave who knew a lot about glue guns and not a thing about fad and fashion. If we wanted white paint, Dave had two choices (really white and not so white). Now Sherwin-Williams sells over two hundred shades of white, including Dover White, Aesthetic White, and Panda White.<sup>21</sup> (To be honest, Dave's a little hazy on the difference between Dover and Panda.)

Fast culture is obligatory. The cable show *What Not to Wear* feels like a Soviet show trial. Participants are mocked for their old-fashioned choices, obliged to admit the error of their ways, and then publicly repudiate their favorite outfits. Redressed and transformed, they are readmitted to the civilized community. We are unkind to people who don't keep up. "When you

walk down the street and catch a glimpse of yourself in a window and say, 'Oh my God, do I really look like that?' Well, you do, and you've got to start paying attention. When people don't change, they become caricatures of themselves."<sup>22</sup>

Fast culture is alarming. As usual, the intellectuals are quick to tell us how dangerous fast culture is. They warn us that change must wear away the foundations of our knowledge of the world. It must overwhelm us with choice. It must confuse and conflict us. But this is what the intellectuals always say, and we must take their advice with a grain of salt.

Fast culture is now the great challenge for the C-suite. Every corporation is like a fishing boat, pitching on high seas, wave after wave crashing through the wheelhouse. Circuit City, recently deceased, failed to take advantage of the "Geek Squad" trend that helped lift competitor Best Buy to greatness. A couple of years before, Best Buy had purchased Musicland, just as kids were using peer-to-peer file-sharing technologies to download their music from the Web.<sup>23</sup> Rupert Murdoch, owner of News Corporation and once a dominant force in the media world, now presides over a cataclysmic loss of share value. Property developers were surprised by the loft condo trend that hit American cities in the 1980s. Some responded; others fell. Some advertising agencies grasped what TiVo meant for their business model; others will never catch up.

Fast culture has many origins and the CCO must monitor them all. New cultural developments can come from the worlds of cuisine, sports, music, fashion, moviemaking, Web sites, and new media. Chefs, point guards, engineers, indie bands, Hollywood producers, bloggers, new presidents—any of these can prove a decisive influence. It's a lot to monitor. To make matters trickier still, we can't merely monitor the most famous of these

players. The new technologies make it possible for obscure players to punt their influence in from the margin. And all of a sudden, too. (Take a bow, Jimmy Wales, founder of Wikipedia, Craig Newmark, founder of Craigslist, and Arianna Huffington, founder of the Huffington Post.)

Fast culture is a blessing and a curse. It can open up "blue oceans" of opportunity.<sup>24</sup> It can deliver "game-changing" developments.<sup>25</sup> But it also delivers blind-side hits. The CCO who can manage fast culture can earn her income for the year by lunchtime . . . every day.

#### DISPERSIVE CULTURE

A couple decades ago, our culture seemed to lose its center of gravity and began to run off in all directions. It became dispersive. There were more ideas, more people creating ideas, more ways of living life, more points of view. The real diversity of contemporary culture was not race or gender. It was this and everything else. The center would not hold.

When we were contemplating options for the subtitle for this book, I devised this list:

synchronized swimming, Target, Simon Cowell, Facebook, Bryan Singer, Chinese soft drinks, Grammys, SNL, YouTube, Gucci, Wikipedia, Jeff Koons, Apple, Kanye West, Hulu, Francis Bacon, South by Southwest, Mizrahi, TypePad, Heath Ledger, Nike, Karim Rashid, Josh Friedman, Agent Dinozzo, Manolo Blahnik, *Veronica Mars*, *Arrested Development*, Lil Wayne, Coen brothers, *Heroes*, Hollywood Hills, Tina Fey, reality TV, *Chuck*, Frank Gehry, Claire Bennett, FriendFeed, mashable, Thievery

Corporation, Twitter, tagging, Henry Jenkins, Milton Glaser, *Monk*, Last.fm, Second Life, Cherry ChapStick, Hannah Montana, *Dexter*, David Simon, Panic at the Disco, iPhone, Xbox, Shoegazers, Andy Samberg, Joss Whedon, *Ellen*, anime, hip-hop, Ollie, cut-and-paste culture, *Entertainment Weekly*, Matador Records, Tim Gunn, Yahoo, Damien Hirst, Audrey Hepburn, IDEO, Ashton Kutcher, *Twilight*, synchronous, SMS, Bollywood, Mickey Rourke, Christopher Guest, Ownage, MMORPG, Rasta man, red vs. blue.

It's a noisy list that names brands, actors, architects, designers, musicians, academics, writers, producers, computer games, fictional characters, generic categories, and slang terms. But the real noise comes from the sheer cultural diversity encompassed here. It is hard to imagine that a single culture can produce Frank Gehry and Hannah Montana, a *Monk* and a *Dexter*, a Damien Hirst and an Audrey Hepburn, an Ashton Kutcher and a Tim Gunn. They are so different that they appear to come from mutually exclusive worlds. Or here's a simpler example. Chances are, dear reader, you use e-mail and the Internet daily. But one in five Americans has never sent an e-mail.<sup>26</sup> We can't imagine their lives. They can't imagine our lives. Ours is a dispersive culture.

In the late 1980s, I did research on teens.<sup>27</sup> I was preparing an exhibit on popular culture for the Royal Ontario Museum and it seemed like a good place to start. My first efforts were sad. As an ardent TV viewer, I expected, vaguely, to find myself talking to the likes of Alex P. Keaton, the character played by Michael J. Fox on the 1982 NBC series *Family Ties*. I was wrong. By 1990, Alex P. Keaton existed only on TV.<sup>28</sup> The



"preppy" teen was disappearing. In his place was a world teeming with diversity. I went to the mall and asked a local teen to help identify the new species of social life.

"So what's he?" I asked.

"Ah, he's a rocker. You know, heavy metal music."

"And him?"

"He's kind of a surfer-skater kind of guy."

"And those girls?"

"Oh, man, those are b-girls."

"What about her . . . and her?"

My informant turned to gaze at me in wonder that anyone could be so thoroughly stupid.

"She's a goth and that's a punk."<sup>29</sup>

By the time I had finished the study, I could manage without a "seeing eye" companion. There were some fifteen types of teen. Nothing in my experience as a teen, nothing in the academic literature, had prepared me for this. The category "teen" is itself a relatively recent invention, and for a long time it was structurally simple, containing few options. In the 1950s, for instance, there were only two categories of teen. As one of our respondents put it, "When I was sixteen, you could be mainstream or James Dean. That was it. You had to choose."<sup>30</sup> Without much fanfare, things got more complicated.

We are not just talking about surface variety. These are differences with depth. As I began to talk to b-girls, goths, punks, and skaters, I found myself listening to different values, outlooks, and points of view.<sup>31</sup>

I continued to look in on teen culture during the 1990s, and something interesting was happening. Kids were now joining not one but several groups. Sometimes they would be a

goth and sometimes a Rasta man. Multiple memberships were now possible, and it seemed right to think of kids as ships that could up and change their port of call at will (or whim). In my day, you signed onto a single group and you gave it your undying loyalty. At least for a year or two. I went from being a cliquer to a hippie, a shift that consumed the whole of my adolescence.

As we enter the new century, we can see yet another change. Kids do not have multiple memberships so much as multiple selves. They are many people bundled into one. And now we can't tell very much about them from the way they dress. Now they belong to networks (we'll discuss those soon), and this is the new locus of the self. These kids are distributed across social worlds and cultural worlds. The days of a defining social group are gone. The days of fixed membership are gone. Indeed, the very idea of a generation may well be over. It was once possible to talk about boomers and Gen Xers. These were messy categories but useful generalizations. Millennials, the tag most often given Generation Y, sometimes looks like an empty generalization and is not very useful at all.<sup>32</sup>

Everywhere we look we see this kind of multiplication. Not just among the young, but at the other end of the age spectrum where there appears to be a quiet revolution among the elderly. Many resist the stereotypes. People who were once obliged to give up their selfhood as they crossed the threshold of seventy now insist on taking it with them as they go.<sup>33</sup> There may come a time when "old" people will be as diverse and heterogeneous as those of middle age.<sup>34</sup> One told me, "I want to live for myself and not worry quite so much what the neighbors think." Indeed, it is possible that the last years of life may

offer new opportunities for self-exploration. In the words of Florida Scott-Maxwell, "Near the end of my life I am myself as never before."<sup>35</sup>

We are a mere century removed from the Victorians. The world that existed one hundred years ago was vertical, divided into groups, defined by class, controlled by orthodoxy and elites—political, religious, and social. At some point in the intervening period, we managed to throw off virtually all these properties.

This plenitude is driven by a hundred little engines. We have more people engaged in creating culture. There are lots of people starting bands, writing scripts, shooting movies, turning out blogs. Let's say the ratio of culture producer to culture consumer was once 1 in 10,000. It is now more like 1 in 100. Many of the new producers are working "without supervision." They are not answerable to studios or editors or critics. They are not aiming for mainstream participation. They do not need to make compromises. Our culture is dispersing because many more people are making it with more technologies out of new motives and with much less constraint.<sup>36</sup>

The symptoms of a dispersive culture are everywhere around us. The social and lifestyle typologies are breaking down. We have seen a steadily inflation of categories. Nine was plenty. Then twelve were called for. And then people just gave up. No typology could capture all the things we were. Award shows are changing. Where once there were a handful of genres, now there are many. There are now forty-eight subgenres of the electronic genre alone.<sup>37</sup> Jon Pareles, the *New York Times's* chief music critic, says the Grammys "continue to add [award] categories for more niches and subgenres in a delightfully futile quest that's something like mapping an amoeba."<sup>38</sup>

This shift in culture forces a shift in commerce. Chris Anderson, the editor of *Wired*, tells us that we are now dealing with a long tail as we move from mass markets to many little ones. And Swarthmore College author Barry Schwartz believes that more choice makes us less happy. The great new pipelines of commerce—eBay, Amazon, Craigslist, Netflix, and iTunes—are compelling commercial propositions because we live in a culture so thoroughly dispersed. The dispersive effects of technology are only just beginning, as Internet gurus Clay Shirky, David Weinberger, and Don Tapscott have warned us.<sup>39</sup>

The Public Broadcasting Service is a network of stations spread across the United States. There are five big stations that produce most of the content for the system. (WGBH in Boston is one.) And there are around 350 little stations whose job is to broadcast this content. This is pretty much what our culture looked like until about fifteen years ago. There were a few key players, professions, and places, and the rest of us were little stations that didn't produce much of anything. Our job was to pass things along. And then something happened. In the past couple decades, a great transformation took place. It's as if Paula Kerger, president and CEO of PBS, woke up one day in Washington to discover that all her little satellite stations were now producing too.

It is the CCO's job to find a pattern in this chaos. We can assume that dispersion will continue and that it will get worse. The generative engines in our culture will continue to throw off more differences.

#### CONVERGENT CULTURE

But for all this new variety, there are still moments when a magical consensus will emerge. We decide that for all of our

differences, we share a way of seeing the world and defining ourselves. A characteristic style of clothing, language, music, art, and prose springs up. These convergences don't last long but they are interesting when they do. They are fantastic market opportunities, thermals on which to rise.

It's a glorious moment. Suddenly we hear something new and we know the world has changed.

"It's Too Soon to Know" by The Orioles was like Elvis Presley's "That's All Right (Mama)," Aretha Franklin's "I Never Loved a Man (The Way I Love You)," Nirvana's "Smells Like Teen Spirit"—a shock, a dead-in-your-tracks what is that?—a sound that was stylistically confusing and emotionally undeniable.<sup>40</sup>

Out of the noise and commotion something comes. Our culture suddenly snaps into a new configuration. A certain kind of music, prose, spoken language, clothing styles travel as one. A tiny but powerful culture is now upon us. It may last a couple of years. It may endure for a decade. But there it is, a moment of consensus. This happens, usually, with each decade, each generation.<sup>41</sup> These convergences are miraculous. And puzzling. How we get from the "disorderly conduct" that is our customary approach (lots of opinions, lots of difference, lots of discordance) to a sudden agreement is not clear. What makes it more puzzling is that we accomplish this consensus without a referendum, explicit discussion, or debate of any kind. Apparently we are all listening all the time. Along comes the right book or video, and we all quietly think, "That could work." And in the blink of an eye, somehow we agree to new marching orders. The good news is that these convergences are scrutable. We can sense them coming. Especially if we are prepared to keep an ear to the ground and to listen for faint signals.

Take the case of the preppy convergence. It's the most recent convergence for which we have full hindsight.

The convergence began to form visibly and publicly around 1980, but if we were well informed, we could have seen it coming ten years before. Doug Kenney founded *National Lampoon* in 1970 with staff from the *Harvard Lampoon*. And we could have tracked the convergence as it began to scale up. *National Lampoon* published parodies of *Newsweek* and *Life*, the 1964 *High School Yearbook Parody* (1974), and a well-received issue titled *Buy This Magazine, or We'll Shoot This Dog*. By the end of the 1970s, *Lampoon* circulation had reached nearly a million copies per month. And by this time even the dimmest trend hunter had it on radar.

Sales were one thing. Another clue was the migration of talent. The world started raiding the *Lampoon* community for talent. Kenney left to write movies. Michael O'Donoghue left in 1975 to become head writer for *Saturday Night Live*. Harold Ramis left for *Second City*. P. J. O'Rourke left to write for *Rolling Stone*. The *National Lampoon* spoke with the voice of the ruthless private-school boy. Apparently this was now in demand.

The preppy convergence went to the movies. Kenney created *Animal House* in 1978 and Harold Ramis created *Meatballs* in 1979. The first featured a prep prototype in Tim Matheson; the second, in Bill Murray. The prep also appeared in *Bachelor Party* (1984), played by Tom Hanks. Most famously, the prep turned up in the 1982 NBC series *Family Ties* in the character of Alex P. Keaton. The prep also appeared in the 1982 late-night comedy show in the person of David Letterman, who gave voice to prep form by standing in a window of Rockefeller Center and announcing with a bullhorn, "I'm not wearing any pants."

(Preps loved to be vulgar and clever at the same time. It's a frat thing.)

Everyday language began to vibrate with new phrases: "go for it," "get a life," "get a grip," "snap out of it." These phrases spoke for the new convergence. People were impatient with the old pieties. They were being asked to snap out of their '60s idealism. People were done with that.

Convergences must shake the webs of the publishing world, or they cannot be convergences. One of the bestsellers of the period was Lisa Birnbach's 1980 *The Official Preppy Handbook*. This was two hundred pages of detailed advice on what to wear, where to go to school, what sports to play, what sports to watch, what slang to speak, how to be rude to a salesperson, and how to mix a Bloody Mary. If the *National Lampoon* had supplied the new character of the decade, here were instructions of a much more detailed kind.

The consensus was visible in public life. Suddenly Harvard Yard, never especially presentable in its architecture, appointments, or personnel, filled with glossy teens in down vests, Norwegian sweaters, and Top-Siders, all newly minted by L.L. Bean. Some of them were the children of old money following ancestral footsteps to the Ivy League. But most were kids from Boston University who believed that the Yard was a better lifestyle accessory.

The convergence began to recruit ferociously. A young woman remembers:

As a teenager [my mom] was pulling *The Preppy Handbook* out from under my [sleeping] cheek. These were the mid-'80s, and I just lapped up all that puppy/yuppie/J. Crew catalog/Lands' End stuff. I didn't want to live in

Wisconsin; rather, I wished my parents played tennis and would send me away to Phillips Exeter. In fact, I waged a two-year send-Ann-to-Exeter campaign ("or, hey, Choate would be OK. C'mon, at least consider the University School of Milwaukee!"). I wished we summered on Martha's Vineyard and wore penny loafers without socks. I wanted to ski in Vermont during Christmas vacation like my copy of *The Preppy Handbook* recommended . . . I wanted to live far away from Wisconsin and my family and come home only at Christmas. As pathetic as it sounds, deep in my soul I wished I owned a navy-blue blazer with my school's crest embroidered on the lapel and wore grosgrain ribbons in my hair. I daydreamed about the day when I would go East to college, and I believed I would.<sup>42</sup>

The preppie convergence sold a lot of cars for Chrysler (Jeeps) and, eventually, a lot of SUVs for everyone. It sold clothing for L.L. Bean, Lands' End, J. Crew, Ralph Lauren, and eventually Tommy Hilfiger and the Gap. It sold a lot of furniture for Restoration Hardware, Ethan Allen, and eventually Sears. It sold a lot of watches for Rolex and a lot of cars for BMW. Eventually, it would serve as the foundation for Martha Stewart and her brand of status. It would shape and still shapes what boomers wear on the weekends. Boomers will take this convergence to their grave. It's their look.<sup>43</sup>

Then the tide turned again. Repudiation came on like gangbusters. I remember seeing graffiti on a Tom Cruise movie poster that read, "Die Yuppie scum." Another was Gordon Gecko in *Wall Street* (1987), a film Roger Ebert hailed as a "radical critique of the capitalist trading mentality."<sup>44</sup> The prep hero was now

tarnished. (Life soon imitated art, with the fall of Michael Milken, the junk-bond trader indicted in 1989 for violations of federal securities and racketeering laws.) The third repudiation was the movie *Heathers* (1989), in which teens took a terrible revenge against the preps. The fourth was the publication of *American Psycho* in 1991. This was, among other things, a vilification of the prep. At this point, the CCO is fully apprised. The prep convergence is failing fast. But pity us if this is our first warning. CCOs are not allowed to be caught by surprise.

When I was doing research with teens in 1990, almost to a person, they were saying, "Well, I guess you could say I'm a prep, but I don't really think I am." Or, more forcefully, "The last thing I want to be called is a prep." This was coming from kids who were still wearing button-down shirts and Top-Siders. Teens were moving on, some to the emerging subculture of rap, some to a brief revival of the hippie regime; still others were taking an "alternative" turn. We do not have access to this data, but we can assume that sales figures for Ralph Lauren, Rolex, BMW, and the decade's other "flagship" brands fell sharply. Presumably, furniture and textile stores suddenly found it difficult to move their "duck" and "sailboat" motifs. What convergences give, they take away. The prep look lives on at Ralph Lauren and, debased, at Tommy Hilfiger, but it is no longer at the center of things.

Convergence culture is fleeting. But it supplies order, and for the CCO this order is a gift. It is the chance to speak a single language to a very large group. Every convergence culture is a remarkable opportunity, the bluest of oceans. But only if we get there early.

## STATUS AND COOL

**THE STATUS CONVERGENCE AND THE COOL CONVERGENCE** are central for the CCO. They are now foundational parts of our culture, and the great ying and yang of the Western tradition. Both have passed from absolute currency, but they remain active and formative. It's the CCO's job to figure out how they work, and the framework they provide for our understanding of fast and slow culture. Without this framework, we're chasing trends.

### STATUS CULTURE

Why do people never live in the living room?<sup>1</sup> They lavish time and money on this room. They agonize over colors, fabrics, drapes, art, and decoration. Then they seal the room away. They might even put up a velvet rope. Or just forbid everyone to go in. Occasionally Bernie, the family Labrador, wanders in. But Labradors don't always grasp the subtleties of American life. What about the rest of us? Why spend money and space on a room we will use only a couple times a year?

The answer is that the living room represents a status message we want to make but don't want to live. Living rooms are designed to show our best choices, our good taste, our feeling

for the finer things. And that's the problem. In a room like this, we're obliged to stay "on our best behavior." How very tedious. We would much prefer to be in the kitchen, where we can "just be ourselves."

If we were a CCO in the sixteenth century, status would be the great preoccupation of our professional lives. And this is because status was the great preoccupation of everyone's life. Status was a capital more precious than capital. We know this because the moment people made extra income they turned it into status goods. But status wasn't just about owning the right things. It was also a code that specified how people should speak, whom they should marry, where they should live.<sup>2</sup> Right through the twentieth century, status was the cardinal compass point, the true north, of what people cared about. For the early modern CCO, virtually everything you needed to know about culture was contained in the idea of status.

After World War II, Americans bought clothing, cars, homes, and club memberships with a view to staking status claims. They engaged in competitive spending, in a struggle to change their social standing. And they engaged in emulative spending, to imitate their "betters" in the status system. (The famous photojournalist Margaret Bourke-White shot a series of photos called "High Society in Philadelphia" for *Life* magazine to keep Americans informed of how the "other half" lived.) CCOs of the 1950s watched Americans use their consumption choices to get into the right school, the right club, the right suburb. The car one drove, the scotch one drank—these were determined by status aspirations.

Vance Packard, an influential journalist after World War II, called these Americans "status seekers."<sup>3</sup> The prototypical CCOs monitored status closely. Pierre Martineau studied status in

Chicago. Herbert Gans studied it on Long Island. John Seeley et al. studied it in Toronto. W. Lloyd Warner studied it in Yankee City.<sup>4</sup> Paul Fussell made a good living making fun of American status pretensions.<sup>5</sup> But people secretly bought his *The Class System* to learn about the status code.

All the while, status was actually dying. What used to be a relatively tidy system for ranking people, classes, and consumer goods is now a mess. Classes are hard to identify, and relative status is murky. Take ten of your neighbors, and imagine ranking them. An Elizabethan could do it in his sleep. We're less sure. There are so many different and conflicting grounds to use. We might be able to manage a crude distinction between upper class and lower class. We can distinguish between people who rank very high and very low. But anywhere people cluster, it's quite hard to say.

The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu thought he had found a way to sort this out. Status, he said, is finally about taste. What one wants, how one chooses, the sophistication evident in one's material world—*this* determines where we stand. Louis Vuitton handbags aren't just there to show income; they are sold as badges of discernment. In France, this may well be true. But in America, taste is in shambles and unclear. Those Americans. So frank.<sup>6</sup>

Once the magnetic north of social aspiration, status is now merely one of the things we care about. Certainly, when the occasion calls for it, we like to think we can stage a persuasive social performance. If need be, we can unrope the living room and treat some high-standing visitor to refined conversation and decorous behavior. But really that's what the living room is for: to say that we *can* do the status thing, not that we *want* to. The CCO needs to know the vanishing status system because

you never know when it is going to rear its beautiful head. Status still moves us when it comes to certain kinds of purchases. It matters particularly when it comes to luxury brands, like Chanel, Mercedes, Dior, Burberry, Cartier, Patek Philippe, and, yes, Louis Vuitton. Sometimes status is the wind beneath the wings of a trend. For example, the single-malt scotch trend of the 1990s was driven in part by status consideration, as boomers began to look for a kind of EZ connoisseurship.<sup>7</sup>

What or who demoted status? Part of the problem was that the social elites Bourke-White photographed ceased to act like elites. They bought into American individualism. They came to see the "high society" thing as a threat to their individuality.<sup>8</sup> Besides, American culture wasn't paying them in deference anymore. After the 1960s, elites were scorned as snobs and thereafter admiration was generally "sneaking." There was a brief restoration in the 1980s, as we have seen, but that too has passed. And now it looks as if some people with wealth don't know how to act like elites. It's hard to imagine the likes of Mark Cuban or Donald Trump acting as our social "betters." (Trump may come from second-generation wealth, but that haircut is a dead giveaway. This is a man with no taste.) And there are others with wealth and prestige—Google founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin, say—but by all accounts they couldn't care less about status. Silicon Valley managed to produce vast wealth without producing any kind of social elite.

Our models of admiration have shifted. We care more about celebrities than about social doyens. If *Life* once gave us pictures of polite society, we now read *Vanity Fair*, which gives us photos of Tina Fey, Miley Cyrus, and Bernie Madoff. Celebrity culture has trumped high culture. If once we cared about the affairs

of royal families abroad and the Rockefellers at home, now we prefer to follow Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie. These two are many things, but are they paragons of taste and breeding? We really have no idea.

For some people, culture still means "high culture." This might be defined as what the English critic F. R. Leavis called "the subtlest and most perishable parts of tradition [and] the finer living of an age."<sup>9</sup> It is the kind of culture we absorb through what Matthew Arnold called the "study of perfection" and the pursuit of our "best self."<sup>10</sup> This is culture with a capital "C," represented by elite institutions like museums, ballet companies, symphonies, and art galleries.<sup>11</sup> In its day, this was a potent idea. It helped organize the Anglo American world. But it could not, did not prevail. Popular culture in all its noisy, facile glory won the day. It did so, finally, by proving that culture can be good, illuminating, and subtle, without actually being difficult. Thus did the elites lose a favorite device for sorting the world.

Upward aspiration has been replaced by our search for authenticity. People may admire Martha Stewart for the status advice she gives, but they *love* Oprah Winfrey, a woman who never gives status advice and who, if pressed, would probably say that status is a false god we should not worship. The democratic, egalitarian, energetically anti-status America is winning after all.<sup>12</sup>

Consultants Michael Silverstein and Neil Fiske, authors of *Trading Up*, say the consumer society has turned its back on status. "New Luxury goods, however, avoid class distinctions and are not promoted as elitist. [Instead], they generally appeal to a set of values that may be shared by people at many income levels and in many walks of life."<sup>13</sup>

Taste now belongs not to elites but to the professionals. When furnishing our home we look to the likes of interior designers Victoria Hagan and Barbara Berry. Were they “well born”? Did they go to Vassar? We don’t care. It doesn’t matter. Taste now comes from experts, and experts come . . . from television. There is something old world about Tim Gunn, but the reason he designs American lives is *Project Runway*. We used to admire things that were old world. This has been trumped by things that are old school. Taste now comes from a mastery of change, not a mastery of status.

The very verticality of our society has changed. It’s not clear who sits on top. Is it celebrities like Kate Winslet? Politicians like Barack Obama? Editors like Graydon Carter? Basketball stars like Kobe Bryant? Computer billionaires like Steve Wozniak? Short-fingered vulgarians like Donald Trump? (Okay, not Donald Trump.)

Almost no one these days tries to pass as a member of a group more exalted than their own. This fiction (or “status counterfeiting”) was common in the 1950s, but these days it does not interest us at all. For most people, self-presentation is like yard work: We do enough of it to keep the place looking respectable. The idea of devoting much of our concern, most of our income, and all of our aspiration to great status performances is over, the ideological antique of another age.

And what’s become of the living room? For a while it was roped off. And in the past ten years it has suffered a still crueler fate. It has been displaced by the “great room” that began to appear around the turn of the twenty-first century. This consisted a single, large, open room, constructed out of three existing rooms: the living room, the dining room, and the kitchen. The great room sprung from several motives. But it

was clearly intended to demolish two status places, the living room and dining room. The kitchen absorbed them both. And once Americans were persuaded they could live without their “status rooms,” they spent a small fortune excising them from the family home. From 2005 to 2007, expenditures on interior renovation rose about 40 percent to \$13 billion.<sup>14</sup> It was the only way Americans could find to live in the living room.

### COOL CULTURE

Cool culture is a much newer cultural force than status. It rose as an attack on status. Cool holds status to be an anxious, craven act of conformity, a needy clinging to convention. Cool scorns status as clueless and dopey. It prefers a more thoughtful self-assembly, intelligent choice in music, clothing, and attitude that shows one’s autonomy and distance from the group. If status is about standing, cool is about standing free.

Cool came up late but it came up fast. We can see it arise from its tiny origins in nineteenth-century Paris. I reckon the original community was fewer than 5,000 people.<sup>15</sup> This avant-garde had a distinct cultural mission: to break the rules of art and life.<sup>16</sup> They lived in open violation of the middle-class code, the better to scandalize those who conformed to the code, the better to “épater the bourgeoisie.” Manet’s *Absinthe Drinker* would challenge the competitive Salon partly because this drinker was a creature unfit for the salon of the middle-class home. Horrifying middle-class expectations, this is what “cool” was for.

The avant-garde might easily have been a small band of rebels who had their moment and then passed into obscurity. But the fates were kind. The Paris artists attracted the attention of American artists who came to Paris in such numbers that



in 1926 *Time* magazine took to calling the Latin Quarter the American Quarter.<sup>17</sup> Some of the wealth being created in the new world was returning to Paris as the stipends and trust funds with which wealthy families long ago learned to manage the "artistic" child.<sup>18</sup>

Ernest Hemingway's 1926 novel, *The Sun Also Rises*, sold briskly.<sup>19</sup> And with its publication came the avant-garde "meme." Now you didn't have to spend any time in Paris to master cool. You could find Hemingway's book in any American public library, drugstore, or five-and-dime. And you didn't work very hard to "decode" this new social posture. *The Sun Also Rises* reads like a lifestyle manual, specifying how to dress, to live, to speak. Cool had leapt from art to prose, from France to America, and from artists to anyone with a library pass.<sup>20</sup>

Cool scaled up furiously after World War II.<sup>21</sup> The "carrier" in this epidemic was the "beats," poets, artists, and "apocalyptic hipsters" who lived in obligatory violation of the status code. One founder, Herbert Huncke, ran away from home at age twelve and divided his time between jail, freak shows, and the street.<sup>22</sup> The father of the movement, William Burroughs, abandoned a life of privilege in St. Louis and a Harvard education for a life of heroin abuse and destructive self-discovery. He found his Montmartre on Chicago's North Side.<sup>23</sup> But there was no posing as a romantic artist here. Burroughs worked as a bug exterminator and styled himself a criminal.<sup>24</sup>

In the manner of cool, the beats protested the narrowness and timidity of the bourgeois view of the world. Jack Kerouac sought spontaneity in Benzedrine, jazz, and trances. He created "wild form" prose and scorned Allen Ginsberg for his more classical, rule-bound poetry.<sup>25</sup> It was Kerouac's very

portable prose that carried the standard. *On the Road* sold fantastically well, recruiting an enormous audience for cool. As Burroughs was to mutter, "Kerouac opened a million coffee bars and sold a million pairs of Levi's."<sup>26</sup>

Cool is one lucky meme. While other social innovations died around it, it went from strength to strength. It was nurtured by one community until it could be adopted and cultivated by a still larger one. It started in art. It moved to poetry and then to prose, and, eventually, as we shall see, to movies and music. An ideological hustler, cool seemed to have an eye for the main chance and its next best move, even as it protested its artistic distance. It may have started as an obscure style in the Paris café, but it was climbing international best-seller lists in no time.

In the late '50s, the avant-garde commandeered popular novels. The best-seller *Bonjour Tristesse* gave voice to the existential angst of the café dweller.<sup>27</sup> Better still, the popular press was paying attention. In 1957, a columnist at the *San Francisco Chronicle* helped popularize the beats by calling them "beatniks." The big magazines, *Time* and *Life*, were offering coverage.<sup>28</sup> Thus did cool find its way into the middle-class living rooms, using mainstream media as its Trojan horse.

Cool captured the attention of the most popular of media: the Hollywood film. It appeared in *Rebel Without a Cause* (Nicholas Ray, 1955), *Funny Face* (Stanley Donen, 1957), *Bell, Book and Candle* (1958, Richard Quine), and *Lolita* (Stanley Kubrick, 1961). The last of these gives us Charlotte, a middle-class creature passionately interested in the poetry reading, the jazz solo, and the African mask. Apparently, beat values were finding their way off the coffee table and into the design scheme.<sup>29</sup>

Cool even found a way to colonize TV. A series called *The Many Lives of Dobie Gillis* ran from 1959 to 1963 and featured a character called Maynard G. Krebs, who wore black clothes, grew a goatee, played the bongos, and used coffeehouse argot to comic effect. The show appropriated cool, to be sure, but it also helped recruit on its behalf. As one young man remembered it, "Maynard had . . . a profound effect on my personal development." It prepared him to read Ginsberg's *Howl*.<sup>30</sup>

The avant-garde impulse reappeared, reworked, in the counterculture of the 1960s, thanks to the intercession of Allen Ginsberg, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, and Bob Dylan.<sup>31</sup> Compared with the streetwise beat who haunted Times Square, hippies were kinder, gentler, more starry-eyed. (New drugs, new vistas, no doubt.) But finally, hippies cared about the very "madness" Kerouac prized.<sup>32</sup> Like the beats before them, hippies violated the middle-class code to a purpose.

To be a hippie, it wasn't actually necessary to make art or music. Some people transformed their lives, to be sure, but others merely grew their hair long and entertained a new set of values. Hey presto. A diffusion miracle was now accomplished. Cool had gone wide but remained cool. It was that exclusive club that anyone could join. And because music was now the preferred medium, the would-be recruit didn't even actually have to read. Cool: the little meme that could.

Measures are hard to find, but we can extract the following numbers from the "hippies" entry in Wikipedia.<sup>33</sup>

1965 1,000, a rough estimate of the number of prototypical hippies living in the Bay area.

- 1966 10,000, the number of people who attend the Trips Festival organized by Stewart Brand, Ken Kesey, and Owsley Stanley.
- 1966 15,000, the new estimate for the hippie population of Haight-Ashbury in San Francisco.
- 1967 20,000, the number of people who attended the Human Be-in, January 14.
- 1967 100,000, the number of people who visited San Francisco for the "Summer of Love."
- 1969 500,000, the number of people who attended Woodstock.
- 1970s millions, the number of people in the postwar baby boom who were prepared to identify themselves as hippies in style of life or thought.

Cool was winning the day. Once the minority enthusiasm of a tiny group of artists in Paris, it had scaled the heavens. It was now an official, massively distributed, crowd-sourced, counterculture, colonizing popular culture from top to bottom. The exact tipping point is not clear, but the transition year might have been 1967. In 1968, Jimi Hendrix held the top spot on the best-seller list with his album *Are You Experienced*. In 1966, the best seller had been *Whipped Cream and Other Delights* by Herb Albert and the Tijuana Brass.<sup>34</sup> These albums appear to come from different cultures. And in a sense they did. Earnest, transformational, bent on cultural and political revolution, hippies would dedicate no art to whipped cream.

*Time* magazine was increasingly sympathetic. In the 1950s, it had treated beats with ambivalence, but the tone of its hippie coverage was more respectful. One story offers a dignified

subtitle ("the philosophy of a subculture"), and the content is sympathetic, in places almost proselytizing:

If there were a hippie code, it would include these flexible guidelines: Do your own thing, wherever you have to do it and whenever you want. Drop out. Leave society as you have known it. Leave it utterly. Blow the mind of every straight person you can reach. Turn them on, if not to drugs, then to beauty, love, honesty, fun.<sup>35</sup>

By this time, cool and status cultures had been locked in battle for a hundred years. One outcome now looked inevitable. Cool was going to take the day. Status had lost so many battles, surely it must lose the war. As the torch passed from Montmartre to Montparnasse to Chicago to San Francisco, cool was apparently inexorable.

By the end of the twentieth century, the results were in. The winner was obvious. And the victor was . . . compromise. For all their intense conflict, the avant-garde and the middle class had achieved a glorious rapprochement. They had fought so long and hard, they now were one. The middle-class world was shot through with avant-garde liberties, encompassing a new latitude of personal expression and a new order of creativity. And the avant-garde discovered that certain kinds of social order, self-discipline, and instrumentality were, when all was said and done, obligatory. You couldn't live without them.

Both parties won and lost. The status code would never be the same. Its "anchors" had been permanently loosened. Senior white males were losing their hegemony. Social regulations were in steep decline. Cool had come to accept compromises of

its own. Some kinds of self-expression were not to be allowed. Certain intoxicants must remain against the law. Certain social experiments, like communes, could only end badly. Capitalism was no longer the obvious villain of peace. Property might be "theft," as Proudhon said, but it was going to endure.<sup>36</sup> Cool also had to accept that personal liberty was probably not going to eliminate social differences or social sameness. A hipster regime was not going to happen.

If the avant-garde artists of Paris had had their way, we would have seen the demolition of bourgeois society. Indeed, public life would now look something like Burning Man, that extraordinary festival that happens each year in Nevada.<sup>37</sup> As it turns out, we hold this festival only once a year. And we stick it way out there in the desert. Like the living room, we felt, somehow, that it was better kept roped off.

Cool is an outsider's sensibility now completely internalized, built into every individual and our entire culture. This feels like a puzzle and a paradox to the likes of Thomas Frank and Naomi Klein, and this is perhaps the best way to see it.<sup>38</sup> But it is anthropologically more rewarding, I think, to see cool as a measure of our culture's ability to absorb conflicting impulses and embrace contradiction. Once so sure of itself, so monolithic, so clear and well defined, our culture is increasingly a house of many mansions, a bundle of conflicting points of view. To everyone's astonishment, it not only survives this complexity but thrives on it. Frank, Klein, and all their new-order orthodoxy to the contrary, we bumble along quite nicely. It's not very elegant, but it is pretty effective. (Elegance, we leave to the French, who prove in return that you have to choose.)

The larger outcome is clear. Neither cultural constellation will ever seize the day and return itself to its once glorious

position. For we are a culture with a third term, a restless creativity. If once we were mainstream and avant-garde, now we are a great wilderness, with thousands of little experiments happening everywhere. Point, counterpoint is dead. The struggle between status and cool is over.<sup>39</sup> We are now a culture overflowing with variety and noise.

## PRODUCERS AND CONSUMERS

**CULTURE WAS ONCE MADE BY A HANDFUL OF PRODUCERS** on high and delivered to millions of consumers below. The producers mostly gave us what they thought we wanted. And the consumers might sometimes have disliked the outcome, but there wasn't much we could do about it. We either watched one of the big networks, or we didn't watch TV. We called it mass media because this programming was made for the largest possible audience. Niches were impossible. Tiny audiences were forbidden. Active audiences were unlikely. Power belonged to producers. Consumers did what they were told. And then things began to change. The new contract between producer and consumer is perhaps the most urgent thing the CCO needs to know about. It is one of the most compelling messages he or she has to deliver to the C-suite.

### PRODUCER CULTURE: WE'RE ALL DEKTOR NOW

When *NYPD Blue* launched in 1993, it was praised for the work of actor Dennis Franz, new kinds of dialogue from creators Steven Bochco and David Milch, and an ensemble style that built on *Hill Street Blues*, the TV show that ran from 1981