Journal of Libertarian Studies
Volume 26, No. 1 (2022): XX–XX

Economies of Clichés: Toward a Free Market Approach for Describing and Measuring Literary Archetypes and Tropes

William A. Hanff

ABSTRACT: This research proposes a free market approach to describing and measuring popular culture archetypes and stereotypes that result from the contemporary political culture of digital communications and an economic system of transmedia narratives. First, an historic overview of libertarian literary theory is given. Three existing systems of measuring archetypes and tropes are then described: crowd-sourced wiki projects (e.g., TV Tropes), academic classification systems (e.g., Aarne-Thompson index), and corporate marketing research (e.g., Neilsen PRIZM). Each system is evaluated based on (1) division of labor, (2) voluntary exchange, (3) gains from trade, and (4) openness to spontaneous order.

A dynamic combination of aspects these three types of systems can evolve toward a systematized study of archetypes that is flexible enough to accommodate the varied needs of academic researchers, advertising metrics, and pop-culture entrepreneurs. The suggested result would be a compact, economic, rigorous, and predictable system that allows for both qualitative and quantitative measurement, as well as discussion of narrative story units that combine economics, rhetoric, and aesthetics from a libertarian perspective.

Literary theory and cultural studies have been often overlooked by free market thinkers, Austrian economists, and libertarian theorists in the disciplines of philosophy, politics, and economics. But many of the questions that are relevant to the classical liberal

William A. Hanff (WHanff@udc.edu) is assistant professor of mass media at the University of the District of Columbia.

approach to philosophy, politics, and economics arise from cultural studies and literary theory: What is the exchange value of a good story, a popular character, or an engaging plot twist? Researchers should work to construct a compact, economic, rigorous, and predictable system that allows for both qualitative and quantitative measurement, as well as discussion of narrative story units that combine economics, rhetoric, and aesthetics. The libertarian study of archetypes and aesthetics remains of primary concern to economic thinking and political theory. The economist David Harper states this emphatically:

> Fostering a deeper appreciation of the aesthetic potential of market systems is not just an idle intellectual curiosity. The aesthetic and experiential aspects of consumption are vital for economic wellbeing and human flourishing. The capacity to interact aesthetically with the world is an important part of what it means to be human. (2020, 77)

This is both a methodological claim about knowledge and a social political claim for improving society. In his influential essay *On Fairy Stories*, J. R. R. Tolkien makes this liberal, or libertarian, approach clear, "Fantasy remains a human right: we make in our measure and in our derivative mode, because we are made: and not only made, but made in the image and likeness of a Maker" (Tolkien 2001, 56). Reinforcing this idea, Virginia Postrel sets out to embrace a spontaneous, evolving popular culture:

> The future we face at the dawn of the 21st century is, like all futures left to themselves, "emergent, complex messiness." Its "messiness" lies not in disorder, but in an order that is unpredictable, spontaneous, and ever shifting, a pattern created by millions of uncoordinated, independent decisions. (1994, xv)

The "emergent, complex messiness" of contemporary media and digital culture recommends a gradual systematization of a classically liberal and libertarian cultural theory including aesthetics, cinema, and archetypes—in order to address and counter (1) the focus on "ideology" encouraged by Marxist literary theory, (2) corporate/industrial control of marketing research, and (3) centralized authoritarian political systems which have sought to use literary and cultural theory as mass propaganda tools since the nineteenth century. Many of the existing classification systems for describing archetypes and tropes are either unfocused, too narrowly academic, or ad hoc. Classical liberal and libertarian theorists require a systematic study of narrative forms and cultural

and literary theory that is as specific, detailed, and diverse as the tropes, motifs, and archetypes themselves. What is needed is a free market approach to describing and measuring the popular-culture archetypes and stereotypes that result from the contemporary political culture of digital communications and an economic system of transmedia narratives.

This new system will take years of interdisciplinary research and cooperation to develop. But the systematic philosophical, political, and economic study of archetypes and tropes should begin now. All economists, not only free market thinkers, have shied away from cultural studies for many reasons, despite the centrality of the aesthetic impulse in philosophy. In her work on the subject, *The Insatiability of Human Wants*, Regenia Gagnier posits:

> Fraser in 1937 thought that the narrowing of economics was a sign of the discipline's "modesty," and most contemporary economists would see it that way. Yet the explosion of economism in public rhetoric and social policy at the end of the twentieth century look more like imperialism than modesty. Hegel derived the aesthetic impulse from the fact that it is in our nature for humans to represent ourselves to ourselves and thereby construct our identities. (2000, 18)

Deirdre McCloskey (1998, 48) explored this incongruity of ignoring rhetoric and aesthetics in *The Rhetoric of Economics* and points out, "Economists and other scientists are less isolated from the civilization than you might think. Their modes of argument and the sources of their conviction—for instance, their uses of metaphor—are not very different from Cicero's speeches or Hardy's novels. This is a good thing." And while exploring the necessity of aesthetics in any market system, Harper notices this contemporary lack of aesthetics in economics, and gives some suggestions of how to overcome it:

> The general belief is that we as economists can ignore aesthetics because aesthetics concerns matters of mere subjective taste, the exogenous unchallengeable axioms of a person's economic behavior. With its standard assumptions of stable and given preferences of the space of commodities (i.e., the objects of choice), the neoclassical theory of consumer behavior would regard differences in between people in their aesthetic judgements of a commodity as no more than differences in personal tastes. (2020, 58)

What Harper suggests for aesthetics is broadly applicable to the study of archetypes and all narrative forms. There is a need

for a free market or libertarian practice of cultural theory, and an economic assessment of archetypes and narrative forms, that allows for a spontaneous order to emerge in measurements and descriptions based on existing cultural practices of describing archetypes and other narrative tropes and forms. In his work *The Social Structure of the Economy*, the aesthetician Pierre Bourdieu describes economics as "based on an initial act of abstraction that consists in dissociating a particular category of practices, or a particular dimension of all practice, from the social order in which all human practice is immersed" (2005, 1). Regenia Gagnier concludes, "If economics in the nineteenth century defined itself as the domain for the provision for the needs and desires for the people, aesthetics was in its most inclusive sense the apprehension and extension of the people's needs and desires at the level of sense, feeling and emotion" (2000, 145). From this idea, she posits the conception of "practical" aesthetics and applies it to the study of literature, literary theory, and by extension archetypes, characters, and motifs.

A HISTORY OF SPONTANEOUS ORDER IN LITERATURE AND CULTURE

The theory of spontaneous order remains one of the most overlooked theories in contemporary cultural studies, aesthetics, and literary theory. Disciplines like literary constructivism, British cultural studies, and Marxist aesthetics hold to grand narratives and prescriptive histories that are closer to traditional humanities than quantitative social sciences such as contemporary econometric research, Russian formalism and American New Criticism. Regardless of whether it is qualitative or quantitative research, much of the study of tropes, motifs, and stereotypes remains hierarchal, top-down, and essentially walled off from competition from other disciplines and research that could make use of spontaneous order in cultural theory. The libertarian literary critic Paul Cantor points to an enduring history of spontaneous order in art, theater, and literature.

> The creation of art may at many times be an example of spontaneous order—an achievement that does not have to take place in a single moment of perfectly planned creation. Instead it can involve a process, with the work evolving over time, in a feedback loop that requires a good deal of revision and correction; and a number of different hands may be involved in the process. (2012, xxii–xxiii)

Classical liberal scholars and thinkers have focused attention on literary and cultural theory in the past. Some examples include Miguel Cervantes's novels *Don Quixote* and *Rinconete y cortadillo*, on chivalry and property; Voltaire and Montesquieu's *Essai sur le goût*, on aesthetics, curiosity, and education; Adam Smith's *History of Moral Sentiments* (1759), on national cultures; Edmund Burke and Thomas Paine's "pamphlet war" (1790s) on the cultural changes caused by revolution; John Locke and Joseph Priestly on metaphysics in society; Madame de Staël's "Coppet Group" on theater and poetry; and other eighteenth- and nineteenth-century examples. Many of these writers allowed for "Providence" or spontaneous order in their accounts of the history of culture. However, across the twentieth century, classical liberal and libertarian thinkers frequently relinquished theories of literary and cultural studies to more collectivist thinkers aligned with Marxist theories, such as the Frankfurt school, the Birmingham school, and others. Cantor suggests that "the best way to counter the negative effects of Marxist literary criticism is not to deny that economics has any relevance to literature, but to substitute sound economics for the unsound" (2009, 8). Cantor suggests that the Austrian school of economics has the best chance of being applied to the study of literary theory and culture because

> the Austrian School respects the heterogeneity of phenomena and hence of a variety of methods of studying them. The Austrians do not accept the idea of a master science, one method of knowing that provides the key to understanding all phenomena. Far from being reductionist, Austrian economics refuses to study the human in terms of the non-human. (2009, 19)

Cantor then asks the central question of his work, "Might forms of economic thinking sympathetic to free markets be more helpful in analyzing literature than Marxism?" (2009, 7).

Responding with a resounding yes to Cantor's rhetorical question, this research seeks to extend the application of spontaneous order to contemporary digital culture and transmedia narratives. It anticipates a free market approach to measuring creation, dissemination, and inflation of tropes, motifs, and stereotypes that focuses on the individual writers, producers, and directors as cultural entrepreneurs and maintains a focus on consumer sovereignty as a "way of understanding how producers and consumers freely and complexly interact in any market activity and hence a way

of understanding how the literary and cultural marketplace can actually work to foster artistic creativity" (Cantor 2009, 96). This could create a robust approach reflecting Cantor's assertion that "some of the most fruitful lines of research in literary criticism today are converging on the idea of spontaneous order" (Cantor 2009, 97).

This spontaneous order is reflected in the literary and psychological study of archetypes. As these archetypes evolved along with spoken and written speech, they were freely created, traded, improved, evolved, and preserved. During the Axial Age (~800–300 BCE), markets focused not only on the trade of goods and services but also of legends, religions, rituals, feasts, and holidays. As a result of this marketization of ideas, people in positions of religious, political, or economic power, took literal "authority" and sought to contain and channel those stories and archetypes which preserved their positions of privilege. Popular cultures evolved along with high art and officially prescribed cultures across human history.

Despite occasional censorship, the Western tradition generally allowed a free flow of archetypes and tropes to move back and forth between official, commercial, and folk cultures. Folktales and heroes were adapted and evolved to suit the psychological needs of audiences. Painted icons were bought, sold, and traded outside of religious restrictions. Even when officially suppressed, tropes and archetypes remained free in folktales and folklore. With few exceptions, folk archetypes and culturally "authorized" stereotypes remained closely related, whether they were commercially published or encouraged by monarchs and churches. With industrialization, mass printing, and cinema, popular culture icons and representations became easier to produce and reproduce and encouraged a deeper split between "authorized" texts, often considered high culture, and folklore, frequently considered low culture.

Tyler Cowen examines "how high and low culture have complemented one another throughout history. Successful high culture usually comes out of a healthy and prosperous popular culture." He notes that "art consists of a continual dialogue between producer and consumer; this dialogue helps both parties decide what they want" (Cowen 2009, 24). Libertarian scholars such as Cowen and Harper point to the copious research and literature on the interaction of culture, politics, and commerce and have made some contributions to it. The qualitative studies by libertarian researchers Don Lavoie and Emily Chamlee-Wright provide

political grounding for a system of archetype description. Paul Cantor was an outspoken libertarian and free market theorist of pop culture. There are several important differences that a libertarian or free market approach could make in the research of archetypes in particular and in cultural studies in general.

Open systems for measuring archetypes could uncover government propaganda, push back against corporate coercion in commercial pop culture (through copyright and trademark enforcement), and protect individual cultural entrepreneurs exploring which archetypes to "invest" in when creating characters and plot twists. In doing so, an open system for describing archetypes and clichés would evolve to foster greater interest in cultural entrepreneurship in a period when the cost of entry is dropping due to ubiquitous digital production tools, internet distribution, and online social media for promotion.

To create an open system for measuring archetypes and clichés, research must first distinguish and define the existing practices used to describe and measure shared archetypes, idioms, and tropes and then suggest a means of evolving and combining these practices. These systems can be grouped into three categories: (1) crowdsourced classification systems such as TV Tropes and other wiki projects for popular culture icons, (2) academic systems such as the Aarne-Thompson classification system and other motif indices to measure archetypes in folklore, and (3) commercial systems of proprietary marketing and advertising audience research. A dynamic combination of aspects these three types of systems can evolve toward a systematized study of archetypes that is flexible enough to accommodate the varied needs of researchers, scholars, filmmakers, writers, journalists, and fan creators in a system of spontaneous order, allowing for dynamic change, yet structured enough to make cross-referencing and citation possible. This need has only been partially fulfilled by traditional academia, only partially fulfilled by corporate media research, and only partially fulfilled by crowdsourced wikis.

A shared digital media society requires a means of understanding the economics of these quanta of storytelling and the deep character structures described by Carl Jung, which have been expanded by corporate research and explored by the website TV Tropes. With the advent of ubiquitous audiovisual production tools, distributed computer networks, and social media, the

ease of repeating or remaking high-quality media and cinematic spectacles and distributing them via digital channels continues to democratize culture, despite the high budgets of Hollywood productions and marketing. This creates an inflation and hyperinflation of clichés and stereotypes in digital media, particularly in hypercommercialized transmedia narratives (e.g., "cinematic universes," extended canons, and successful media franchises). As audiences continue to become joint producers of this very same recycled content, self-publishing of hyperinflated media clichés will expand exponentially.

DEFINING ARCHETYPES, CLICHÉS, AND TROPES

Archetypes can be defined by the Jungian approach: as a primeval mental image that is inherited, either intrinsically and neurologically or extrinsically and culturally, from humans' earliest genetic and cultural ancestors. This contrasts with a cliché, which is an image, character, or trope that has been concretized by a particular representation or usage at a particular time but still remains a signifier or exemplar of an original archetype. A cliché has a particular grounding in a time and place. Clichés are considered less valuable not only because of their overuse, but also because they can only partially represent the deeper meanings implicit in the archetype from which they are derived. This relationship is explored in Marshall McLuhan's *From Cliché to Archetype*, where he posits that some clichés may rise back to the level of archetype, but very rarely do. Another term for *cliché* in literary theory is *stereotype*. Both clichés and stereotypes are identified by the way they are used and the mode or technology used to disseminate them. Marshall McLuhan reevaluated Jung's ideas of archetypes in terms of the technology used to produce, distribute, and consume them:

> The archetype is a retrieved awareness or consciousness. It is consequently a retrieved cliché—an old cliché retrieved by a new cliché. Since a cliché is a unit extension of man, an archetype is a quoted extension, medium, technology, or environment. (1971, 21)

This contrasts with the cliché or an individual use of a trope or motif, which is always rooted in one particular place in space and time—even if it is reproduced thousands of times in a film, video, or book.

> The cliché, in other words, is incompatible with other cliches, but the archetype is extremely cohesive; other archetypes' residues adhere to it. When we consciously set out to retrieve one archetype, we unconsciously retrieve others; and this retrieval recurs in infinite regress. In fact, whenever we "quote" one consciousness, we also "quote" the archetypes we exclude. (1971, 21)

A motif can be defined as a metaphysically dominant and recognizable idea or form in a narrative or work of art. This can apply to architecture, music, fine arts, theater, cinema, and other narratives. A trope is a specific deployment of a motif. Motifs can be arranged into the overarching narrative or plot of a story or may be used repeatedly in architecture or artworks. A rough analogy may be made that clichés are to archetypes as tropes are to motifs. The etymology of both *cliché* and *trope* includes a specific motion or rendering of an abstraction into a specific instance or use. However, clichés tend to become more obvious to audiences more immediately, while tropes tend to allow for forbearance and suspension of disbelief by their audiences. This can have an economic implication in terms of how tropes and clichés circulate in commercial popular culture, which will be explored in the next section.

APPLICATION OF ARCHETYPES AND CLICHÉS

Archetypes and clichés can also be differentiated by how they act in a cultural marketplace, and how they are seen in the legal framework of intellectual property. Archetypes, as collective neurological forms, resist ownership and natural property rights. They are nonexcludable goods, and therefore subject to a tragedy of the commons if overused. Clichés and stereotypes can be claimed by individual authors and owned via trademark and copyright laws. They can exist within a legal framework of intellectual property and are therefore subject to inflation and hyperinflation like currency within a cultural marketplace. For example, "the Hero" is an archetype, but Luke Skywalker is a stereotype or cliché of that archetype that was first deployed in the film *Star Wars* (1977) and later in the corporate media canon of sequels and merchandising that followed. This individual character was then concretized into a character cliché by several other commercial attempts to copy the popularity of *Star Wars*, such as *Starcrash* (1978), *Battle beyond the Stars* (1980), and other mockbusters.

Economic theory can help distinguish why, when, and how archetypes are concretized by corporate Hollywood-style

blockbusters or state-controlled propaganda; cycled and recycled as clichés; and hyperinflated based on ownership of cultural capital and intellectual property.

(A) At the most centralized and authoritarian, there exists a cultural landscape of command and control, or state ownership. This has existed for brief periods in totalitarian and authoritarian states and usually leads to banal uses of archetypes in clumsy clichés for the purpose of propaganda. Government-run movie studios of the Soviet bloc struggled to compete for the attention of audiences, who turned to black markets and samizdat. Local populations largely ignored newsreel productions by colonial powers, even though the films were culturally imposed in movie theaters. Self-censorship by creators led to both puritanical and jingoistic productions that failed to connect with viewers, especially once the authoritarian power was overthrown. The writings of the Frankfurt school and more contemporary postcolonial studies scholars contain copious research into how audiences react to and read against the dominant narratives forced upon them by a state apparatus.

(B) A contrasting cultural approach is a relatively free market with very limited legal trademarks and some intellectual property, leading to a very dynamic contemporary folklore, with rapidly evolving stories, literary fan fiction, and fan films created with digital tools on personal computers. These systems tend to exist in developing nations (e.g., Brazil, Nigeria, and Pakistan) where global culture is imported and copied, drastically remixed, and fitted into local cultural conditions. Here intellectual property enforcement is restricted, and the system can be anarchically utopian and often short lived. However, these systems have also persisted in developed countries, for example as Japanese *doujinshi* (fan-created comics / manga), video game modifications, and fan fiction/films. This system likely leads to the most efficient allocation of archetype resources for public consumption by allowing voluntary exchange, gains from trade, specialization / division of labor, and the emergent spontaneous order.

(C) However, the current system in the US and around the developed world is much closer to a more interventionist mixed economy, with state-granted monopolies leading to transnational corporations and some form of Hollywood studio system. This creates a vibrant economy for some but will lead to the

hyperinflation of clichés and stereotypes, as described earlier. Although the legal protection for copyright and trademarks differs technically in the United States, there is a considerable overlap with other countries' policies that can lead to the ambiguity that typifies this mixed economy of openness and restriction:

> Generally, however, the majority of courts have proved reluctant to comprehensively address the issue, and have consistently accepted that trademark protection can apply to creative works when they are used to identify products offered for sale in the market. This perceived judicial support has contributed to further overlapping protection and, in turn, an increase in trademark claims. In the past two years alone, claims for trademark infringement and dilution were brought, inter alia, with respect to characters such as "The Hobbit," "Tarzan," and "Betty Boop." Calboli (2014, 52)

This "overlapping protection" and cultural dilution has led to a perceived crisis in the entertainment industries. When pushed to the extreme, the situation leads to a semianarchic piracy of online file sharing (as seen in the 1990s), international copyright and trademark infringement, and the phenomenon of mockbusters. Economic literacy is required in order to adequately describe how this cultural currency of archetypes acts upon audiences and content producers.

Whether used earnestly in derivative sequels and mockbusters or ironically in parody, the overuse of clichés and stereotypes displays a market attempting to make the most value out of a market-tested trope or cliché based on a deeper archetype. Cantor explored earnest overuse of clichés and parody in depth in *Gilligan Unbound* and *The Invisible Hand in Popular Culture*, and he took a more positive tone. He insists that both characters in *The X-Files*, which are played earnestly, and characters in *South Park*, which are played as farce, contradict the idea of a postirony society and openly embrace the fact that they have become the self-parody that an overextended trademarked pop culture cliché becomes. "The cultural elites had passed a death sentence on irony, but it was by no means clear that the American public was ready to carry it out." And "popular culture always has a way of colonizing new media, especially when they offer greater freedom of expression. As a result, since the 1990s a good deal of American popular culture has migrated to the Internet" (Cantor 2012, 279).

These processes of recontextualizing and commodifying archetypes into clichés are examples of spontaneous order. In fact,

Hayek could have been describing archetypes and tropes with his famous quote "that there exist orderly structures which are the product of the action of many men but are not the result of human design" (Hayek 1974, 2). Peter Boettke extends the idea of spontaneous order in culture by pointing out how individuals interact with cultural institutions.

> The key question for the social theorist is how the various and diverse images of reality that individual minds develop could ever be coordinated to one another. The social institutions that arise through the voluntary association of thousands of individuals serve to guide individuals in the process of mutual accommodation. (69, 1990)

Like Cantor, Boettke extends the economic and social philosophy of individual agency within spontaneous order far beyond traditional market transactions, into the realm of social life and culture.

> Social life, however, is not restricted to the market but encompasses a vast array of complex structures which enable us to successfully plan our actions in reference to others. The same procedure by which we understand successful plan coordination on the economic scene is applicable to other areas of our social existence. (69, 1990)

Originally applied to the ethnography of folklore, many of these classification systems for narrative tropes and motifs can be applied to popular cultural tropes, motifs, and characters to build a groundwork for describing these narrative structures and archetypes from a free market perspective. Don Lavoie and Emily Chamlee-Wright explain the connection between economics and cultural studies: "Critical theory is trying to do for politics what the Austrian School is trying to do for economics: conceive of its central phenomenon as unintended results of social learning processes" (2002, 6). Marxist, postmodern, and critical theory have all made some attempts at understanding and categorizing these cultural uses of clichés and tropes, but a liberal or praxeological approach is more likely to work.

This is a process of cultural reception where "the way consumers read the meaning of cultural products—comes to be understood as a complex interaction, in which consumers are not only manipulated by the culture industry, but always have some recourse to respond in their own fashion, to appropriate meaning in their own ways" (Lavoie and Chamlee-Wright 27, 2002). There is a compelling call for "a way of understanding how producers and consumers freely

and complexly interact in any market activity and hence a way of understanding how the literary and cultural marketplace can actually work to foster artistic creativity" (Cantor 96, 2006). And Lavoie and Chamlee-Wright agree that "The 'masses' [should] stop getting treated as helpless victims of commercialization who are to be pitied for having been denied the high culture academics enjoy, and start being treated as active and creative contributors to culture" (27, 2002).

The fact that "the masses" play an important role in shaping popular narratives can explain why academic intellectuals frequently distrust pop culture—it frequently subverts the prescriptions of academic theories. Following on this idea, the scholar of fan fiction and transmedia narratives Henry Jenkins explains how evolving media technologies affect the consumers of mass media texts: "Fandom does not preserve a radical separation between readers and writers. Fans do not simply consume pre-produced stories; they manufacture their own fanzine stories and novels, art prints, songs, videos, performances, etc." (45, 2013). Jenkins advances the idea that this new evolving participatory culture of fandom "blurs the boundaries between producers and consumers, spectators and performers, the commercial and the homecrafted, to construct an image of fandom as a cultural and social network that spans the globe" (45, 2013).

Jenkins implies that nascent participatory media culture may have shaped the cultural praxis of the internet. "Fandom here becomes a participatory culture which transforms the experience of media consumption into the production of new texts, indeed of a new culture and a new community" (Jenkins 45, 2013). Fully aware that they are always using the recombinant artifacts and clichés of pop culture, fan filmmakers have freedom within their derivative works, both in terms of ironic remixes and earnest homages. In the new participatory use of shared tropes, narrative devices, and clever clichés descended from resonant archetypes, there is a distributed cognition and emergent spontaneous order among professional and amateur producers and audiences in general, even if only in deciding where to spend money.

ANALYZING EXISTING SYSTEMS OF CATEGORIZATION

This research now requires a brief review of the three existing systems for categorizing narrative tropes and motifs to determine

how these descriptive classification systems can fit with a decentralized system of spontaneous order. These classification systems should describe these narrative structures thoroughly and point toward a market for the cultural currency of archetypes, clichés, tropes, and motifs with (A) division of labor / specialization; (B) voluntary exchange in markets; (C) gains from trade (and copying/piracy); and (D) openness to an evolving, emergent order. This groundwork will allow for a useful description of the creation, dissemination, and evolution of archetypes as a cultural currency deeply linked to an attention economy and cultural aesthetic awareness. Virginia Postrel describes this phenomenon in her book *The Substance of Style*.

> Many natural and social scientists, meanwhile, are increasingly interested in the nature of aesthetic universals. While the material culture scholars ponder the value and social creation of aesthetic meaning, these researchers want to understand the biological origins of aesthetic pleasure. (2003, 31)

These are the existing systems from most open to least open: (1) crowdsourced systems, (2) academic systems, and (3) proprietary commercial systems. Each system will be analyzed by how well it serves division of labor, voluntary exchange, gains from trade, and openness to spontaneous order.

(1) The crowd-edited website TV Tropes begins with the self-referential page "Your Mileage May Vary," where the volunteer editors state that the research and results will be idiosyncratic to the crowdsourced writers. The "Main Narrative Tropes" page lists more than fifteen thousand different motifs, and the "Characterization Tropes" page lists more than twenty-four thousand archetypes and clichés with remarkable cohesion and structure. The "Main Plots" page cross-references both of these lists to create an astonishing number of narrative deployments. The site has slightly less than four hundred thousand pages. Many of these pages reference articles in Wikipedia or other crowd-curated online sources. TV Tropes is completely open to division of labor / specialization through the practice of online crowdsourcing; the voluntary nature of the work leads to easy exchange, but the largely noncommercial nature of the site limits profitability for the individual researchers and writers. By nature, the massive open online community allows for great gains from trade and copying, aside from occasional plagiarism, and piracy is nearly nonexistent.

Although it has limited use for start-up capital, TV Tropes is nearly a perfect example of an emergent order.

(2) By contrast, the academic classification systems are typified by the Aarne-Thompson-Uther (Atu) Index. Other academic systems are also frequently used and cited, including Vladimir Propp's Motif Index of Folklore; Carl Jung's Four- and Twelve-Archetype systems, and other narratological systems. Many of these systems were contentious in their early phases. Propp was initially skeptical that a prescriptive system would be applicable. Over time he suggested a descriptive "tabulation" of the shifting elements of folktales to allow for multiple meanings within a narratological classification system, surprisingly similar to an economic tabulation system. Despite the challenges, Propp believed that "nevertheless, analysis is possible. The constancy of functions endures, permitting us to also introduce into our system those elements which become grouped around the functions. How does one create this system? The best method is to make up tables" (1969, 88). Propp described the system of calculations required for systematizing motifs.

> But the composing of tables and the study of the attributes of dramatis personae, as well as the study of variables, generally allows something else as well. We already know that a tale is constructed on the basis of identical functions. Attributive elements are not alone in being subject to the laws of transformation. Functions are equally subject to them, although this is less apparent since they are less conducive to analytical study. (1969, 89)

Due to the nature of peer review and academic publishing, there is an organized division of labor / specialization in these academic systems. However, there is very little voluntary exchange in these markets, and instead, an information-silo effect can form. Only recently have these academic classification systems been cross-referenced in journals and databases with hypertext links. As such, there have been some limited gains from trade but very little copying and piracy even though many of the systems have similar aspects. As with TV Tropes' users, the researchers earn their livelihoods outside the cultural marketplace of ideas, and due to the very slow pace of traditional academic research, there is a very slowly emerging order.

(3) A little-known Austrian psychologist, Ernest Dichter, pioneered the application of these academic classifications of archetypes

and motifs into corporate marketing and advertising research. His application of Jungian psychoanalysis eventually supplanted Edward Bernays's use of Freudian psychology due to quantifiable results and clinical reproducibility. Aspects of this research found their way into contemporary psychographic segmentation research, most notably by the A. C. Nielsen Company and Claritas, which developed the consumer-type system VALS (Values and Lifestyles) and the zip code–based system PRIZM (Potential Rating Index for Zip Markets). Both systems apply archetypes to measure the impact of messaging on purchasing behavior. Also based on Jungian archetypes are management tests such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), which remains both popular and controversial. Applying psychological and literary archetypes to market research has been a complicated process due to the overlapping nature of narrative themes and tropes. For example,

> whereas we may think of segments as clearly differentiated groups of consumers, the truth is that a large portion of people within the segments are actually on the periphery. Many even end up in a different segment when the analysis is re-run. In identifying archetypes within a segment our aim is for each one to have a very similar profile on the original segmenting variables. With this common profile the archetypes become different expressions of the same overarching theme. (Morris and Schmolze 2006, 11)

The use of quantitative and qualitative research into archetypes and clichés in marketing research reflects the economic approach of Hayek and Boettke, where the results are focused on individual choice and actions based on shared stories and character types.

> With an archetype analysis the output focus shifts from presenting a bland profile of a segment to vivid description of the archetypal individuals. This is possible because we are not dealing with broad generalisations, but the idiosyncrasies of individual people. (Morris and Schmolze 2006, 17)

Given the competition in marketing research, there is a high level of division of labor / specialization among these corporate systems. But given their proprietary nature, there is limited voluntary exchange of information. There are demonstrable gains from trade based on the lucrative nature of the marketing research industry, which likely leads to both copying and occasional piracy. Lastly, the continued controversy around several of these systems points toward an evolving emergent order.

Each of these systems evolved due to a need for a language to describe narrative tropes, archetypes and motifs in separate but overlapping contexts. Continued research toward a combination of these three systems can evolve a functioning study of media stereotypes and clichés, and a measurable economics of archetypes. Understanding and respecting the openness of shared archetypes is socially imperative in a free market and in a free society because these archetypes cut across cultures and groups, and remain an open source of cultural innovation and narrative entrepreneurship. The market forces in this cultural landscape matter because they create new patterns of narratives and tropes, along with new aesthetic frameworks.

> Competitive market processes are generating ever more aesthetic variety and complexity, which encourages people to devote more attention to the aesthetic features of products and to affirm the importance of aesthetics through the choices they make and the actions they take. (Harper 2020, 56)

Beyond that, "one can shed more light on the way a culture can be conducive to economic prosperity by going for the finer granularity of detailed ethnographic case studies" (Lavoie and Chamlee-Wright 2002, 11). By measuring the types of motifs, tropes, and archetypes used in the media texts that a culture both consumes and uses to represent itself to itself, an economics of archetypes can be vital to understanding the spontaneous order emerging in contemporary digital culture. A new system for describing archetypes, clichés, and tropes would bring a tangible cachet to persuade researchers and producers of media to enter this field of study or creative enterprise with substantive research or cultural productions. Despite some research on aesthetics by Harper, Postrel, and others, there are still relatively few libertarians or classical liberals researching and writing in the creative space. Among the barriers to entry are limited funding for publication in this area and some social costs for operating in this space. However, advertising research has been reaching into the study of market aesthetics, and more researchers are likely to explore these archetypes and clichés from an economic and political perspective.

TOWARD A LIBERTARIAN SYSTEM OF STUDYING ARCHETYPES

There are several salient features of the "language of markets and exchange" used in this proposed evolving system. For example,

profit and loss in the inflation of clichés and price signals such as the encouragement of mockbusters and fan fiction. Harper proposes the idea of an "aesthetic cynosure" as a type of market phenomenon that is performed by cultural products and aesthetic choices.

> Amid the increasing aesthetic complexity of market systems, orientation schemes emerge that help people to navigate the myriad of entrepreneurial offerings and to coordinate their own actions (and style choices) with those of others. These orientation schemes and reference points are institutionalized "beacons"—what I shall refer to as aesthetic cynosures. (2020, 62)

In a market competition of clichés and trademarked characters, certain archetypes can impart a luster, fascination, or estrangement mystique to create a fad or cynosure that becomes valuable in trade and exchange, cinema, media productions, fashion, design, and other aesthetic arenas.

Reinforcing this, Cowen describes market competition that "provides an ongoing battleground for opposing high and low cultural forces, as the differing goals of the participants build artistic conflict into the system. Artists are motivated by creative self-expression, fame, and money, but owners of capital goods are usually motivated by profit alone" (2009, 41). Cowen also notes that "high and low culture usually appear to be diverging. New genres tend to have initially high capital costs; otherwise they would have been feasible prior to innovation. The new art of film appealed to a broad public with popular themes. At the same time painting and literature, with falling capital costs, moved away from mass taste" (2009, 41). The falling capital cost in a digital participatory culture will become more pronounced in the value of shared archetypes.

In conclusion, shared cultural archetypes are powerful. They are the code of the entertainment industry, they are the references people make in conversations, and they are increasingly the cultural currency with which market-based exchanges of popular culture narratives occur. Although there have been writers and researchers who have looked at their use and value from a classical liberal or libertarian perspective, too often the entire field of cultural studies is either neglected in favor of philosophy, politics, and economics, or ceded to cultural studies and Marxist theorists because of the perceived unquantifiability of narrative forms, tropes, and archetypes. Many of these free market literary critics are simply following incentives (or disincentives) or are daunted

by the high cost of entering an academic discipline. Harper extends this idea to style and aesthetics across cultures.

> Aesthetics is part of the growth of knowledge since it concerns how our sensory-perceptual-motor systems interact with the external world and generate new patterns and knowledge structures that may themselves have aesthetically relevant properties. The formation of aesthetic judgements is part of the causal process of individuals' learning from experience and of one person influencing others. (2020, 77)

Finally, a new system could encourage a more pleasant media environment and discourse for society overall, by creating a broader language for discussing the corporate and government use of public archetypes as "owned" clichés (trademarks)—applying TV Tropes to broader systems of dialogue that could encourage libertarian scholars such as Cowen, Chamlee-Wright, Bryan Caplan, and new upcoming thinkers to use a spontaneously evolving vocabulary for discussing cultural theory. In fact, McCloskey has been urging economists and other thinkers in philosophy, politics, and economics to reembrace literary theory for decades.

> The service that literature can do for economics is to offer literary criticism as a model for self-understanding. (It would not be a very good model for polite behavior or even, I am afraid, literary style.) Literary criticism does not merely pass judgements of good or bad; in its more recent forms the question of good or bad hardly comes up. Mainly it's concerned with making readers see how poets and novelists accomplish their results. (McCloskey 1998, xxi)

A systematized study of archetypes can be of immediate practical philosophical, political, and economic use to researchers and producers. Postrel suggests that market processes will better describe human desires.

> With its emphasis on shifting relative prices, microeconomics is a clearer guide than Maslow to understanding the increasing value of aesthetics. In a subtle variation on Maslow, the value of the *next increment* of what we want to consume changes depending on what we already have. It's the ever-changing mix that matters, not a hierarchical checklist. (2003, 45)

Shared cultural traditions and archetypes cut across cultures, ethnic groups, geography, and generations. This long-term continuity and popularity explain why archetypes continue to be used to indicate consumer personality types (i.e., MBTI tests) and have become an integral part of both marketing data and

crowdsourced pop culture knowledge bases (i.e., TV Tropes), even though they have been frequently ignored by traditional academics. Archetypes remain "free" even when individual clichés and stereotypes can be owned and trademarked. As the outcome of a spontaneous order, archetypes allow differing lifestyles and values to be represented by entrepreneurial creators and reinterpreted by diverse heterogenous audiences.

Archetypes, motifs, clichés, and tropes have always been a part of commerce. It is time to restore them not only as a quantifiable cultural phenomenon worth studying, but more importantly as a practical wing of economic thought and study. By extension, serious liberal and libertarian scholars should work to reintegrate aesthetics and narratology into the study of politics, philosophy, and economics, and to integrate the measurement of archetypes, tropes, motifs, and clichés in the study of cultural praxeology and approach it in a uniquely libertarian manner.

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