
The power of organizational song: An organizational discourse and aesthetic expression of organizational culture

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Abstract (Article Summary)

In this research, the authors examine organizational songs, referring to songs that are created and sung by members of an organization as an aesthetic expression of organizational culture. Specifically, the study examines the organizational songs of the Maytag Company (USA-based manufacturer of home appliances) sales organization, and is historically situated during the invention and development of the washing machine technology (the early 1900s). The research considers organizational songs as a relatively unexamined form of organizational discourse. More critically, the research considers organizational songs as an organizational discourse and aesthetic expression of organizational culture – with “power to” shape the identity and actions of the Maytag sales organization, as well as “power over” consumer and employee behavior.

Full Text (6,922 words)

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INTRODUCTION: FRAMING ORGANISATIONAL SONG AS A FORM OF ORGANISATIONAL DISCOURSE

Grant, Keenoy, and Oswick (1998) assert that organization “is articulated by and through the deployment of discursive resources” (p. 12). With the emergence of social semiotics and postmodern semiotics, it has been argued that the definition of “text” can be broadened even further, to include cultural artifacts such as art, architecture, and music (Hodge & Kress, 1988; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1990; Gottdiener, 1995). We assert that organizational songs, similar to novels (e.g., Brawer, 1998; Czarniawska-Joerges & Guillet de Monthoux, 1994), poetry (e.g., Windle, 1994) and plays (e.g., Taylor, 2000) can be considered as a form of organizational discourse.

Also, Barry and Elmes (1997) assert that while much of organizational discourse ends up as some form of print, that which is communicated verbally is often overlooked. We would extend this assertion, to say, that the verbal – sung – discourse is nearly ignored in organizational studies, aside from the emerging works that explore the organization-music relationship (e.g., Clegg, 2000; Nissley, 2002). To better understand this unique form of organizational discourse, we turn to the organizational aesthetics literature.

First, we assert that the text of organizational song is rich with social meaning and can be analyzed in terms of what it reveals about a social context (e.g., the organizing of the invention and development of the washing machine within the Maytag Company).

This idea is most evident when one considers the lyrics of organizational songs that readily express memories, histories, emotions, and ideologies — thus, making organizational discourse theory appropriate as a means for analysis. However, as Mattern (1998) points out, “music provides a communicative medium that is not simply an alternative way to say the same things that humans say through speech. Music, like other art forms, can express meanings that are not accessible through words or express them in ways that give listeners more immediate access to emotions” (p. 17). Similarly, Booth (1976, p. 242) asserts, “The words that go with music in songs live a life different from that of words written down for printed poetry”. Booth suggests that song lyrics are an oral art, thus making organizational aesthetics the most appropriate place from which to analyze what the organizational songs tell us about the social organization.

Strati (1996) describes the history of aesthetic epistemology and the development of organizational aesthetics, noting that the German philosopher, Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten developed the field of inquiry we refer to as aesthetics, during the mid-18th century, in response to the emphasis on rationality and intellectual knowledge extending back to Descartes. Strati notes:

Baumgarten conceived of aesthetics as one of the two components of the theory of knowledge or gnoseology: on the one hand, logic, which investigates intellectual knowledge; on the other, aesthetics, as both the theory of the beautiful and of the arts, which investigate sense knowledge. (p. 216)

Strati (1999) develops this idea of aesthetic epistemology within the organizational studies framework. According to Strati, aesthetics in organizational life “concerns a form of human knowledge; and specifically the knowledge yielded by the perceptive faculties” (p. 2). Strati argues “that it is possible to gain aesthetic, rather than logico-rational, understanding of organizational life” (p. 7). More specifically, Strati (1992, p. 575) describes aesthetic discourse, and similarly Gagliardi (1996, p. 574) describes aesthetic communication. Nissley (2002) specifically considers organizational song as a form of aesthetic discourse/aesthetic communication.

Thus, according to Grant, Keenoy, and Oswick (1998), who assert that organization “is articulated by and through the deployment of discursive resources” (p. 12), we assert that organizational song – if understood as a form of organizational discourse – may inform the inquiry of the organizational researcher. In this research we begin by simply seeking to examine what the organizational songs of the Maytag Company may inform us about that organization – to answer, what is articulated by and through this unique form of discursive resource.

RESEARCH METHODS: MAKING SENSE OF MAYTAG’S SONGS

This is a descriptive study – an exploration of organizational songs – of songs that are created by members of an organization as an expression of organizational culture. In this research we seek to examine what the organizational songs of the Maytag Company may inform us about that organization – to answer, what is articulated by and through this

unique form of discursive resource. Methodologically, the study can be described as an “archaeological approach” (Strati, 1999, p. 189) – the investigation of ‘fragments of organizational life’ (organizational artifacts) and of the organizational cultures that have generated these fragments of organizational discourse.

Specifically, this research examines the organizational songs of the Maytag Company (USA-based manufacturer of household appliances), and is historically situated during the invention and development of the washing machine technology (the early 1900s). Due to the historical nature of the research and the inherent limitations, we do not claim to have *listened to all* the songs ever created. However, the research considers what is believed to be the most complete recording of Maytag songs¹, dating from the first half of the Twentieth Century. In addition, primary documents (e.g., company newsletters such as *Profit News* and *Maytag News*) are examined.

Butler (1997) parenthetically notes that turn of the century home appliance advertising was rich with reflexive commentary. For example, Automatic Electric Washing Machine Company's advertising slogan, "ten o'clock and the washing is done," while appearing to promise housewives quick relief to washday blues, actually reflected the fact that banker/founder of the firm, O.B. Woodrow, no longer had to leave the bank at 10 o'clock on Monday's to crank his family's hand powered washing machine. We shall start by uncritically telling the story of the organizational songs, inviting you, the reader, to make your own sense of it as you read; then, we present our analysis.

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT: THE ORGANIZATIONAL SONGS OF THE MAYTAG COMPANY

The Maytag Company began in 1893 as Parsons Band Cutter and Self-Feeder Company. By 1900 it was one of the leading manufacturers of a dying product. Maytag and his partners expanded into other farm implements introducing a small hand powered washing machine in 1907 to extend its factory season in the farming community of Newton, Iowa. But washing machines remained a sideline operation. Not until 1915 did washing machine revenues equal farm implement revenues. However, by 1923 Maytag had abandoned the farm implement business.

Maytag was not the first Newton factory to manufacture washing machines. Nor was it the largest washing machine manufacturer in Newton prior to the introduction of its aluminum tub gyrator washer in the early 1920s. One Minute Washing Machine Company peaked its production in 1911, manufacturing some forty thousand washing machines that year. At the end of World War I, both One Minute and Automatic Electric Washing Machine Company manufactured more washing machines than did Maytag. Several other firms in Newton and the surrounding communities manufactured smaller numbers of washing machines – some as sidelines to other seasonal businesses.²

Yet Maytag had to transform its business and marketing plan for the "gyrafoam" washer to succeed. When Maytag distributors demonstrated their first Model 80 washers,

washing clothes as they had always washed them, the clothes came out badly torn. F.L. Maytag, the firm's founder, and Howard Snyder, the firm's design expert, rushed to Minneapolis to counter competitors' claims that the new machine was an "ensilage cutter" and "spaghetti machine".³ It quickly became clear that if Maytag were to succeed with their new washing machine they would have to rely upon direct sales and demonstrations to the consumer.⁴

The 1920s were a period of growth for Newton's major washing machine manufacturers, but Maytag, after the 1922 introduction of their aluminum "Model 80" washing machine, outstripped its competitors. While industry sales improved by sixty-eight percent in 1922, Maytag's improved by three hundred sixty-one percent.⁵ Maytag would double in size every year between 1922 and 1927. Maytag struggled to maintain control of its innovative technology, but not until 1931 was it granted crucial patents on its "gyrafoam" washer.⁶

By 1925 many of its competitors both in Newton and throughout the United States were adopting similar washing machine technologies.⁷

Maytag increased its advertising budget in the fall of 1924 to counter inroads made by competitors into the agitator washer market and sought new means to motivate its sales force. New advertising included sponsorship of the "Maytag Troubadours" who composed and sang songs such as "The Aluminum Blues," "The Rack Bar Rag," "The Wringer Rings," and "The Gyrafoam Waltz" on the new Des Moines radio station WHO.⁸ At the next annual sales meeting, in January 1925, songs were introduced as a motivational tool for Maytag's sales force.

Maytag began the meeting facing several problems. The company had just finished paying off its debts incurred during World War I, in developing the aluminum washer and had established a \$1.5 million dollar recapitalization program. Maytag was king of the washing machine industry, but king in a capital community. Iowa produced 60% of washing machines manufactured in the United States in 1924. Maytag produced about 20% of the nation's washing machines, Newton's remaining three plants produced about another 25%, and the rest of Iowa produced another 15% of the nation's washing machines. National competitors like General Electric, had between a ten to twenty percent decline in business the previous year, while the four Newton firms, Maytag, Automatic Electric, One Minute, and Woodrow, all had substantial increases. Maytag's serious competition lay just across the street, and the annual sales conventions, complete with slogan's and special entertainment became a mechanism not only for boosting enthusiasm among the sales force, but for intimidating the competition.

Maytag had long held sales conventions for its branch managers, expanding them to include the newly developed sales force in 1923. Maytag's sales conventions would typically follow the week after the much smaller sales conventions of Automatic Electric, One Minute and Woodrow. The conventions were lavish affairs. Entertainment alone for the 1924 convention, hosting 200 salesmen, cost \$20,000.⁹ The typical convention would consist of several sales meetings, evening movies or live entertainment culminating in a

sales banquet the last night of the convention. Each company would try to out do their local competitors' convention.

Maytag would begin 1925 facing problems common to many successful companies. They had just redesigned their Model 80 washer to eliminate leaks through the agitator mechanism – a problem which had enabled competitors to start cutting into Maytag's agitator washer market. Numerous competitors were contesting Maytag's gyrator patent application and potentially infringing machines had been introduced to the market. While Maytag and its three Newton-based competitors continued to increase sales, other national firms had sales declines the previous year.¹⁰ By June of the previous year, Newton's three largest firms, Maytag, Automatic and One Minute manufactured forty-seven percent of America's washing machines. Both Automatic and One Minute had introduced new washer lines. Maytag was successful but faced new and increasingly viable competition. It had substantially increased its newspaper advertising to counter the growing competition.

At its annual convention held January 8-10, 1925, Maytag turned to songs to help motivate its sales force. On January 9, Newton Rotary Club appeared at a sales convention meeting, marching in singing "My Maytag Gyrafoam" to the tune of "My Irish Rose". The next night salesmen from the various divisions spread enthusiasm at the banquet held in Des Moines' Savery hotel by singing parodies of popular songs. "How do you do, Mr. Maytag," "Good Ol' Maytag" and "Yes, We Have No Excuses" became the standards of the evening.¹¹

Sales conventions quickly became more than an annual affair. In 1926 Paul Scott, manager of Maytag's Eastern Branch sales force, held a series of "It's a Great Gang that Sells the Maytag" banquets where Maytag songs became the order of the day.¹² Other branches would reward top salesmen with trips to the Maytag factory for a branch convention. Again, focusing on songs to whip up enthusiasm for both the branch and the company. Even the Lockhardt-Walker evangelistic services joined in. On "Maytag Night" Maytag employees and their families would be invited to sit in reserved seats and the singing evangelist led the congregation in singing:

*"Maytag, Maytag, Maytag
Cleanest Name I Know.
Maytag, Maytag, Maytag
Washes Clothes as White as Snow".¹³*

In Newton the local band would pipe trainload shipments of Maytag washers out of town to the tunes "That's Where the Tall Corn Grows" and "The Gangs All Here".¹⁴

On July 12, 1927, Maytag factory workers dressed in white, and wearing Maytag fezzes, assembled at the factory before marching to the community picnic grounds – singing Maytag songs. This picnic celebrated the founder's seventieth birthday, July 14, 1927, and saw the publication of the first Maytag songbook.¹⁵ This initial songbook, included songs not only promoting the sales of Maytag washer, but also songs to shape

the dreams of young consumers.

As Maytag songbooks became a common script at sales meetings, Maytag expanded the use of music to shape the culture of the sales organization. In the fall of 1927, Automatic Washer Company, taking its clue from the earlier Maytag Troubadors, began sponsoring the Apollo Quartet singing under the name "Automatic Agitators" over WHO radio.¹⁶ Within a year, the Apollo Quartet was singing at Maytag sales meetings.¹⁷

In November 1927 Maytag test marketed a radio program over Chicago's WHT.¹⁸ The program was expanded the following month to six clear channel stations across the United States. A trio from the Chicago Philharmonic became the "Maytag Ramblers" and the 1927 "most popular disk jockey" Pat Barnes, of WHT served as master of ceremonies.¹⁹ The network would eventually expand to fifty stations. Drawing on leading radio personalities and performers, the show's theme song became "Let a Smile be Your Umbrella and a Maytag Your Washer"²⁰ as Maytag spent nearly \$450,000 on its radio budget. Maytag developed a program of specially written dramas, utilizing popular tunes performed by such bands as Ted Fiorito and his Edgewater Hotel Orchestra, Coon-Sanders and the Original Kansas City Nighthawks, Fred Hamm and his Recording Orchestra, Art Kassel and his "Castles in the Air Orchestra", and Dan Russo's Oriole Orchestra.

The half-hour long "Maytag Radio Hour" would expand and go through several transformations before it closed in 1932.²¹ For a brief period it broadcast stories about salesmen or others who solved a family or life crisis frequently with the use of a Maytag washer or with salesmen qualities that made them uniquely Maytag.²² By 1930 the "Maytag Happiness Hour" was delivered weekly over NBC's blue network. While Ted Fiorito initially conducted the Maytag Orchestra;²³ in an effort to cut costs, the show was frequently reorganized, not allowing for a stable conductor of the Orchestra. In 1930 Maytag cut its radio budget by twenty-five percent and the growing depression forced further cuts.²⁴ By 1932, the well-known performers were gone, the Maytag Orchestra had gone through four directors,²⁵ and the "Maytag Happiness Hour" played light music. The theme song "Let me Call You Sweetheart" no longer made direct connection to Maytag.²⁶

Maytag songbooks, however, continued to produce evangelistic fervor at Maytag sales meetings. In the 1930s Maytag sales organizations rewarded salesmen for songs extolling their performance.²⁷

Maytag songbooks in numerous editions were sold to dealers and salesmen for 2.5 cents a copy until the beginning of World War II. Maytag's sales organization was shut down for the duration of the War as the company's plants manufactured airplane parts and other military equipment. But Maytag remained a part of song lore. During the War, small Piper Cub aircraft were used to spot enemy gunfire and report range data to allied guns below. Known as the Grasshopper Artillery, their battle hymn chorus concluded:

*So we'll give the Axis fits
With our Maytag Messerschmitts*

*We're the Grasshopper Artillery.*²⁸

After the War one new edition of the Maytag Song book incorporated new songs about Maytag's expanded line of ovens, freezers and refrigerators. But times had changed. Maytag found it difficult to recruit door-to-door salesmen and the seller's market for much of the remainder of the 1940s made them unnecessary. Sales returned to the showroom floor and the workforce of Maytag trained and paid salesmen declined. Store salesmen sold more than Maytag products. Maytag advertising developed new techniques for attracting consumers to its products.

The Maytag songbooks of the 1920s and 1930s played a powerful role in uniting and motivating a sales force, unparalleled in the home appliance industry. Through song, they learned the features of their product line and the techniques that enabled them to sell it. Salesmen also developed camaraderie, among one another and with their customers who heard Maytag songs over the radio. Even when the decline of Maytag's "Happiness Hour" resulted in "Let Me Call You Sweetheart" for the show's theme song, every salesman undoubtedly heard, the following, instead of the traditional words.

*Let me have a Maytag
For I love you true,
Let me have a Maytag
Then I'll wash for you
If you buy that Maytag
I will love you so,
Let me hear you whisper
I bought it for you.*

Maytag songs defined for the salesmen, their role in the company, their relationship to the customer and their product's role in society. It shaped the organizational culture and the identity of the Maytag sales organization – extending from the factory to the salesman to the consumer – it bound them to the Maytag product and to each other. After considering these organizational songs from the Maytag Company, we assert that Mangham (1986) is right to point out that “organizations are created, sustained, and changed through talk” (p. 82) – or, more specifically, through song. But, where there is light, there is also shadow, so we now turn to a more critical analysis of organizational song at Maytag.

A MORE CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF THE USE OF ORGANIZATIONAL SONG AS ORGANIZATIONAL DISCOURSE AND AN AESTHETIC EXPRESSION OF ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

While the organizational studies literature is expanding, to include novels (e.g., Brawer, 1998; Czarniawska-Joerges & Guillet de Monthoux, 1994), poetry (e.g., Windle, 1994) and plays (e.g., Taylor, 2000) as forms of organizational discourse, organization and management theorists have made few contributions (e.g., Clegg, 2000; Nissley, 2002;

Sicca, 2000) to the literature of music and organizations, aside from the intense interest in the relationship of jazz to organizational studies (e.g., Barrett, 2000; *Organization Science*, 1998; Bastien & Hostagier, 1988, 1992; Hatch, 1997b, 1998, 1999; Perry, 1991; Weick, 1990). Also, while critical perspectives on music have been undertaken (e.g., Cary, 1990; Conrad, 1988; Lewis, 1991; Mondak, 1988), a more specific, critical management studies reading of organizational song is still unexplored in the organizational studies and organizational aesthetics literature.

Similar to Barker's (1999) research, our story of the Maytag Company sales organization's use of songs has a rhetorical character and a critical character. By rhetorical, we mean focused on how the Maytag organization "used" discourse – specifically, the aesthetic discourse of organizational song, to do things as an organization – especially, to create shared meaning among the sales organization, or in other words to sing their culture and sense of identity. In this section we also turn to what Barker (1999) refers to as the critical character. Barker describes the critical character as an "analysis of how patterns of discourse or language use create oppressive or overly constrained systems in organizations" (p. 23). Thus, we consider the use of organizational song at Maytag through the lens of critical management studies.

By applying the critical management studies lens to our "archaeological approach" – we consider a way the Maytag organization "used" the organizational songs as an organizational discourse. Here we will describe how the power of organizational song – as an organizational discourse – was used to shape the Maytag Company sales organization. We use the metaphor of "acting in concert" to describe this *power-ful* discourse – the power of organizational song to shape the culture, identity, and image of the Maytag sales organization.

Mattern (1998, p. 32) describes music in relation to power, differentiating "power over" and "power to," referring to a sense of power as domination, on the one hand, and power as a positive capacity on the other hand (e.g., power over the consumer, versus power to develop a community of salesmen). First, we will consider the Maytag company's organizational songs as a discourse with "power to" develop a community of salesmen. Second, we will also consider those songs as a discourse with "power over" the salesmen and consumers.

Acting in Concert: Organizational Song and the "Power To"

John Dewey (1934) wrote:

Works of art that are not remote from common life, that are widely enjoyed in a community, are signs of a unified collective life. But, they are also marvelous aids in the creation of such a life. The remaking of the material of experience in the act of expression is not an isolated event confined to the artist and to a person here and there who happens to enjoy the work. In the degree in which art exercises its office, it is also a remaking of the experience of the community in the direction of greater order and unity. (p. 81)

Like Dewey, we assert that organizational song can act as both, a ‘sign of community’ and as an ‘aid in the creation of community.’ As a sign, organizational song reveals an aesthetic discourse that explains the culture of the organization. As an aid in the creation of community, organizational song acts as a form of communication through which the commonalities of community are created and discovered. Thus, the communicative capacity of organizational song supports the development of organizational culture by enabling and shaping the sharing of experience.

One reading, a more functionalist reading, reveals the organizational songs as an expressive strategy (Gagliardi, 1986) – a means of creating shared meaning among the Maytag organization. Certainly F.L. Maytag, the company’s founder, also strategically expressed the values described in these songs. Consider, in a 1928 article in the *Maytag Profit News*,²⁹ he asserted that the first rule he developed in his business life "was to keep on regardless, even blindly when some particular discouragement was hanging over me". He continued, "Many discouraging situations needed only one thing to make them turn out right – work, and because of this many complications disappeared before work like mist before the morning sun".

However, a critical management studies perspective offers another reading of the songs. Salesman and workers, not management and its agents, in the main, composed the subject Maytag songs. From this perspective, critical management studies reveals the songs as a form of cultural pedagogy and cultural hegemony (Lears, 1985), or as Altman (1990) states, a *discursive constitution of ideology*. Similarly, to Altman’s concept of the discursive constitution of ideology, Mattern (1998) uses the phrase “acting in concert” as a metaphor for community-based political action through music. He describes ‘acting in concert’ as taking three main forms – each representing a distinctly different kind of community-based political action through music. The form which he labels as “pragmatic” (p. 30) describes how the Maytag sales organization used organizational songs. According to Mattern (1998, p. 30), the pragmatic form of acting in concert “occurs when members of one or more communities use music to promote awareness of shared interests”. We borrow this metaphor to describe how organizational song, functioning as a form of aesthetic discourse, may have acted as a means of organizing and controlling organizational actions – specifically, the development of organizational identity (the identity of the Maytag sales organization), the organizational culture of the sales organization, and the actions of these employees.

It appears that organizational song served as a record of a community, by capturing the human experience of the salesmen and rendering it meaningful in the context of the Maytag Company, “creating a window into the identity of a community” (Mattern, 1998, p. 18). One may also consider the songs as a sort of organizational autobiography (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1996). Consider the following examples that offer a window into the identity of the Maytag sales organization. First, consider this song.

*It's a great gang that sells the Maytag,
It's a great gang to know;
They are full of pep and ginger,*

*And their watchword is "Let's Go!"
Always on the level
Always fair and square,
It's a great old gang that sells the Maytag,
And my heart right there!"³⁰*

This discourse is a very straightforward expression of a set of espoused values — asserting that the Maytag salesman is energetic and honest. We hear similar values about ‘working hard’ expressed in the following song.

*Gone are the days, when I laid in bed till nine,
Gone are the days, when I wasted hours so fine,
Gone and fore aye, for I wakened with a jerk,
I heard the prospect loudly calling;
Work, work, work."³¹*

Also, consider the following song, sung to the tune of “Carolina in the Morning”. Similarly, this song speaks to the values of the sales culture – the importance of “making the sale” (“get an order signer”).

*Nothing can be finer than to be a real headliner, with the Maytag.
Each day I take a flyer and my sales go climbing higher, with the Maytag.
I meet the smiling ladies as I approach the door
I call back again some evening and
bask in their smiles once more,
Oh! popper, I can't stop 'er, she is cleaning clothes proper, with the Maytag.
She's going to sing more sweetly as she does here washing weekly, with the
Maytag.
If I get a chicken's wishbone any old day, I'll make a wish, and here's what I'll
say:
Nothing could be finer, than to be a real headliner, with the Maytag
Nothing could be finer than to get an order signer every morning.
Nothing could be sweeter than a prospect when you meet her in the morning.
When the Monday's washing has her good and sore
And she is almost weeping, I pound upon the door.
Strolling in to demonstrate a good old "Maytag" washer, in the morning.
Start the motor humming and a smile will soon be coming in the morning.
When she sees it wash the clothes she can't help but say:
"Ill take that 'Maytag,' what must I pay?"
Nothing could be finer than to get an order signer every morning."³²*

Certainly a critical view must include some consideration of the context. These songs were from the 1920s — a decade of incredible prosperity and economic expansion in the US. However, it was also a decade of overnight paper millionaires — created in the bull stock market that preceded the stock market collapse of 1929 and the Great Depression.

Mattern (1998, p. 31) asserts that acting in concert may “occur in many different social settings and situations, including social spaces traditionally viewed as political, such as town halls and party headquarters on election night; but they may also include less traditional forms of political arenas ... In short, acting in concert can occur wherever music is produced and consumed”. Thus, our research reveals the business organization as one more such social space.

In the Maytag Company, organizational songs were recorded in song books, sung at sales meetings/conventions, and sung on radio shows by groups like the “Maytag Troubadors,” “Automatic Agitators,” “Maytag Orchestra,” and the “Maytag Ramblers”. Mattern (1998, p. 19) notes that as an audience listens to music (like the Maytag sales organization audience), “they may begin to internalize some of its meaning, and it becomes part of their identity”. He continues, “By expressing common experiences, music helps create and solidify a fund of shared memories and a sense of “who we are”. These organizational songs appear to have created a sense of “who we are” for the Maytag Company sales organization.

Barker (1999) uses the language of “concertive control” when discussing self-managing teams and how “a self-managing system creates an environment that controls worker activity in ways quite different from the bureaucratic (hierarchical, rules-based) forms of control found in traditional organizational structures” (p. 3). We suggest that these organizational songs may be thought of as an earlier form of the self-managing technology of concertive control found in modern management. That is to say, singing these songs embodied the structure of culture and identity that salesmen had created for themselves, reminding them of rules of behavior that went with that culture and identity.

There is a particular power in organizational songs because songs are enjoyable. Enjoyment produces two effects. The first is engagement. The more we enjoy the song, the more we are drawn into the moment and the more the aesthetic experience dominates the instrumental concerns of the moment. As the aesthetic experience dominates the individual’s critical functions and filters become less active, the felt meaning of the story is allowed to be accepted uncritically and unquestioned. The second effect is repetition. A song that is enjoyed for its own sake is more memorable and gets repeated (Taylor, Fisher, & Dufresne, in press).

Barker (1999) explains control in relation to organizational culture, using the concept of “generative discipline,” referring to “the mechanism through which an organization’s discursive formations and system of control ... become manifest in actual day-to-day organizational activity” (p. 42). He continues, describing generative discipline as a “method for ‘teaching’ us how to do good work in the organization” (p. 45). We found organizational song acting in such a way – a “rough draft” methodology for how to live in the organization (Barker, 1999, p. 47) – a form of cultural pedagogy and cultural hegemony (Lears, 1985). Consider this song about persistence:

When things are looking blue

*And your volume's slipping too,
Turn new door-knobs.*

*If your profit shows in red,
There's no need to lose your head;
Turn new door-knobs.*

*Selling knows no regular season.
Look around and find the reason.
Turn new door-knobs.*

*If you find you're in a rut,
Getting dead as old King Tut,
Turn new door-knobs.³³*

This song tells a simple lesson about how to do good work in the Maytag organization, and that is to never give up – just keep making sales calls. There is no room for failure, just keep trying. The following piece is even clearer about the cultural expectations for a Maytag salesman.

*This jumble of words is very plain, yet you'll find them true,
And they don't apply to anyone else, anymore than me and you,
Your life is what you make it, you can be your own Devil or God,
Remember as you go through life, you fashion the paths you trod,
You can build yourself to the highest peaks or drag yourself down,
Your name can be sung as a man among men or you can be a clown,
If other fellows get out and make good, then you can do the same,
Keep on your toes and do your stuff, it's all in playing the game,
Always be one of the pushers and don't let your feet ever drag,
For nothing goes but builders, in the gang that sells the MAYTAG.³⁴*

This song clearly communicates, there is no room for dreamers, for failures of any form – only success through hard work is acceptable.

If we take seriously the idea that songs created and reinforced cultural hegemony, we might then turn to the question, why did the songs fade away? The story we told suggested that after World War II, it was difficult to find salesmen and Maytag shifted to selling through retail stores. The implication is that the songs were only tied to the direct sales force culture and not connected to any broader Maytag culture. A more critical reading might be the hypothesis that the songs stopped working as way of creating and enforcing cultural hegemony. We have no data that provides any insight into this question, but we do have a possible story that is based on our ideas of how songs work as a form of aesthetic discourse. We suggest that the post-World War II workforce may have become sophisticated consumers of organizational songs.

Eco (1990) describes naïve consumers of aesthetic forms as being carried along

by the song, unaware of what is happening. Sophisticated audiences are carried along as well, but are aware of the technique and methods used as well as being aware that the song is carrying them along. This sophisticated consumer can then be critical of the song while they enjoy it. This addition of criticality strikes directly at the power of songs we described above. It reengages the intellectual, critical filters and brings the nature of the song into question. Workers did not need to see the songs as a form of cultural hegemony, it may have been enough to simply see the blatant idealism of the songs and the contrast with the world they knew from their experience of World War II. We suggest that somehow the experience of World War II, both for individuals and for the nation, may have transformed workers from naïve consumers of organizational songs to more sophisticated consumers, and that may be part of why the songs faded from use in Maytag.

Next, we shift our focus from the sales organization to the customer of the Maytag washing machine (from identity development of the sales organization, to image development of the Maytag Company and its products), considering the relationship between the Maytag product, the consumer, and the organizational song.

Composing a Consumer Culture: Organizational Song and the “Power Over”

Let us now turn to the other use of the Maytag songs, as sales tools with power over the customers. Consider this sales song that was sung to a popular tune of the time.

Maytag Smile³⁵

(Sung to tune of "Pack Up Your Troubles")

Put out your washing with the new Maytag

And Smile, Smile, Smile

While you are working with the New Maytag

Smile boys that's the style

What's the use of worrying

Never was worth while

So put out your washing with the New Maytag and Smile, Smile, Smile.

The message is simple and clear – buy a Maytag and you’ll be smiling. It takes only the simplest of critical readings to see the song as pure propaganda (e.g., Altman, 1990, p. 287), and it is hard to imagine the song having any great effect on a potential customer. That is there would be no effect if we assume a process of rational reasoning. However, aesthetic forms bypass rational reasoning processes, relying directly on felt meaning. The strength of the song is enhanced by playing on any positive felt meaning already associated with the original song “Pack up Your Troubles”. As a modern example, think of English football fans singing their team song. The feeling from tens of thousands of Liverpool fans singing “You’ll Never Walk Alone,” cannot be ignored, even though the lyrics hardly make a compelling rational case.

Maytag clearly designed its Monday night “Maytag Radio Hour” to influence consumers. “The Maytag Radio Hour,” the Company informed its dealers and salesmen,

"is more than mere entertainment; it is a well designed advertisement that keeps pounding away at the old theme, 'A Maytag is the Washer for You to Buy' ". In its musical selections, the Company asserted, "we try to make love to the housewives of America. We play soft soothing music and sing love songs to take her back to her happiest days, days of courtship, carefree and bright".³⁶ Many of Maytag's songs did harken back to courtship relationships or promise youthful beauty through the purchase of a Maytag washer. Consider the following, sung to "Too Many Parties".

*Too many washboards and too many tubs
May break your back some day;
Too many wristbands that have to be rubbed
Bring sorrow to you on washday.
But just get a Maytag and we have no fear
You will look younger in less than a year;
Maytags wash faster and cleaner we say,
So let's put a Maytag in your home today.*³⁷

Let's turn to some additional examples. The Maytag Company introduced the washing machine to replace the washboard technology. Some of the organizational songs spoke to the consumer and why they should replace the washboard in their homes with the newer washing machine technology. Consider the following example, sung to the tune of "Bye-Bye Blackbird".

Bye-Bye Wash-Board³⁸

*Pack up all your cares and woes
I don't care where you go.
Bye-bye wash-board.
If somebody asks for you
I'll just say "Went Keflue"
Bye-Bye wash-board.*

*I have always found you mighty handy,
But that "Maytag" surely is a dandy.
It washes clothes, ladies hose,
Press the lever and away it goes
Wash-board bye-bye.*

This is an example of how salesmen used a discourse that marginalized the washboard technology (e.g., "bye-bye wash-board") – a discourse that could be understood as creating "power over" the consumers' ideas of the value of old technology (e.g., washboard) versus new technology (e.g., washing machine).

Other songs served as a similar type of discourse. These did not marginalize the low-technology washboard; but, rather exalted the product benefits of the new washing machine technology. Consider the following example.

Queen for a Day³⁹

*Would you hear the tale of a weekly fear changed to a happy sphere
By one who serves?
Washday now has lost blue Monday look.
Maytag days have made the whole world talk.*

*Washday is a dream;
Clothes supremely clean
When done Maytag way
Have that joyous satisfaction;
Clothes cleaned to perfection
Done with gyrafoam action,
Time for happiness and play.*

*Be the happy one
When your wash is done,
You're queen for the day.
Let the Maytag solve your troubles
With "White King" bubbles,
Notice how your play time doubles,
You're queen for the day.*

These Maytag Company songs are examples of discourses framed by the sales organization and directed at consumers, seeking to exert “power over” consumer behavior. These discourses spoke to the inferiority of the previous technology (washboards) versus the superiority of the new washing machine technology. As well, these discourses exalted the product benefits of the washing machine technology; but, not at the expense of the previous technology.

Here we assert that these songs, sung by the Maytag Company sales organization, not only had “power to” shape the identity, culture, and actions of the sales organization; but the songs may have had “power over” consumer behavior (or, one may posit that this is the desire of the sales organization). We draw a parallel between the Maytag Company sales organization’s use of song to compose a consumer culture (a culture predicated on the value of owning and using a Maytag washing machine product) and Altman’s (1990) analysis of the Better Homes in America (BHA) Campaign, and what she named the “discursive constitution of ideology” (p. 286). Altman describes how BHA, “a national reform campaign during the 1920s, mobilized institutions with diverse interests in defining the modern American home and in addressing the American public as consumers” (p. 286). She continues, “BHA constructed a modern ideology of home ownership, housework, and consumption” (p. 280). This formation of consumer culture was realized through multiple rhetorical strategies, such as: dedication speeches; homemaking articles; fiction; and, non-fiction. Our research suggests that organizational song may have acted as a similar rhetorical strategy, and one may understand the Maytag Company sales organization’s performance of organizational songs as the ‘composing of a consumer culture.’

How much these songs were a factor in Maytag's sales is impossible to quantify. Certainly many other factors, from product design to the overall socio-economic environment also played a role. But we believe that the songs, as a form of aesthetic discourse played an important and often undervalued role. There is a power in aesthetic discourse that is subtle and does not fit well in most conventional theories of power. It is a power that is not based in the properties of the individuals involved, it is not based in the authority and legitimacy structures of the social situation, nor even in the relationship of those involved. It is a power based in the form (not the content) of the discourse. It is this idea of power based in form that is the unique focus of critical engagement with aesthetic discourse such as these organizational songs. And it is through this power, that songs are able to play a unique part in forming and maintaining aspects of organizations such as culture, identity, and image.

CONCLUSIONS

This study is not definitive; it is exploratory and intended to provoke thinking and ideas regarding organizational song as an organizational discourse and aesthetic expression of organizational culture. We recognize that much additional research is possible. However, we assert the following.

First, while Strati (1992) and Gagliardi (1996) have generally discussed aesthetic discourse and aesthetic communication, respectively, this research identifies organizational song as a unique organizational discourse – an aesthetic discourse. Second, Hazen (1993) posits, “Are organizations sound?” (pp. 20-21), asserting “As we hear what goes on in them, we learn something different from what we see” (p. 21). This study suggests, more specifically, that organizations may be sung; and, indeed we may learn something about the organization if we listen to the songs that are sung in organizations. Third, and similarly, O'Donnell (1985, p. 10) asserts a pedagogical significance of songs performed by workers. Thus, songs may teach us, organizational researchers, about organizational life, *and* such songs may teach workers about organizational life. Fourth, Barry & Elmes (1997) ask, “what form will strategic narratives take next?” This research suggests that a new form may be the organizational song, given its power to shape identity and image. Finally, the critical management studies lens allows us to consider that organizational songs not only have the “power to” teach us about organizational life, but they may also have “power over” our organizational lives – shaping those that participate in the song of organizational life.

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NOTES

[1] Compiled by Orville Butler in the early 1990s, who was then affiliated with Iowa State University's Center for the Historical Studies of Technology and Science.

[2] As many as seven different firms manufactured washing machines in Newton, at least briefly, between 1900 and 1930. Most manufactured them as sideline operations to other product lines. However, four — Maytag, One Minute Washing Machine Company, Automatic Electric Washing Machine Company, and Woodrow Washing Machine Company focused on washing machine manufacturing. The neighboring communities of Grinnell and Pella also had manufacturers devoted to washing machines. (Swisher, 1940)

[3] Bones, W. (1933). *Testimony: Maytag vs. Easy & Maytag vs. Hurley and Electric Household Utilities*. Maytag Archives.

[4] High Lights of the Philadelphia Meeting of October 7th," *Maytag Profit News*, Easterner Edition, 1 (11)(December 1927): 17.

[5] *Newton Daily News*, 5 January 1923, p. 1.

[6] A 1939 Supreme Court ruling overturned those patents, but that story lies outside the purview of this paper.

- [7] As late as the 1940s there were still four washboard (the manual alternative to washing machines) manufacturers in the US, and at the start of the 21st century only the Columbus Washboard Company remained, which up until 1998, was owned by Steve Taylor's (this paper's author) family.
- [8] "The Maytag Troubadours," *Maytag Profit News*, Southern Leader Edition, 1 (1)(February 1927): 15.
- [9] *Newton Daily News*, 2 January 1924, p. 1. *Newton Daily News*, 3 January 1924, p. 1. *Newton Daily News*, 4 January 1924, p. 1. *Newton Daily News*, 7 January 1924, p. 1.
- [10] *Newton Daily News*, 29 December 1924.
- [11] *Newton Daily News*, 9 January 1925, p. 1. *Maytag Profit News*, 4 (6)(January 1925): 1.
- [12] "Ten Years ... A Review and a Prophecy," *Maytag Profit News*, Easterner Edition, 4 (4)(May 1930): 25-26, 54.
- [13] *Newton Daily News*, 6 October 1926, p. 1. *Newton Daily News*, 7 October 1926, p. 1.
- [14] *Newton Daily News*, 11 October 1926, p. 1. *Newton Daily News*, 12 October 1926, p. 1. *Maytag Profit News*, Southern Leader Edition, 1 (3)(April 1927): 18.
- [15] *Newton Daily News*, 12 July 1927.
- [16] *Newton Daily News*, 24 September 1927, p. 1. *Newton Daily News*, 3 October 1927, p. 6. *Newton Daily News*, 11 October 1927, p. 1. *Newton Daily News*, 8 November 1927, p. 1.
- [17] "Division 'A' Marches on Newton," *Maytag Profit News*, Kansas City Spotlight Edition, 2 (9)(October 1928): 28-29, 33.
- [18] *Newton Daily News*, 9 November 1927, p. 1. "WHT Radio Programs Continue," *Maytag Profit News*, Western and General Edition, 1 (12)(January 1928): 39; Bones Booster Edition, 1 (12)(January 1928): 55; Easterner Edition, 1 (12)(January 1928): 47; Southern Leader Edition, 1 (12)(January 1928): 47; Kansas City Spotlight Edition, 1 (12)(January 1928): 47; White Lightning Edition, 1 (12)(January 1928): 63.
- [19] "Radio's Best Now Entertains Maytag Audience. Premier Maytag Talent Now Broadcasts From WHT, Chicago, and Five other Super-Power Stations," *Maytag Profit News*, Western and General Edition, 2 (1)(February 1928): 7, 36-37; Bones Booster Edition, 2 (1)(February 1928): 7-8, 36-37; Easterner Edition, 2 (1)(February 1928): 7-8, 52; Southern Leader Edition, 2 (1)(February 1928): 7-8, 36-37; 7-8, 52; White Lightning Edition, 2 (1)(February 1928): 7-8, 92.
- [20] *Maytag Profit News*, Western and General Edition, 2 (8)(September 1928): 37.
- [21] "Maytag Adds two More Stations to Radio List. Maytag Programs Now Reach Average of More Than 14,000,000 Persons Every Week," *Maytag Profit News*, Western and General Edition, 2 (2)(March 1928): 4; Bones Booster Edition, 2 (2)(March 1928): 4; Easterner Edition, 2 (2)(March 1928): 4; Southern Leader Edition, 2 (2)(March 1928): 4; Kansas City Spotlight Edition, 2 (2)(March 1928): 4; White Lightning Edition, 2 (2)(March 1928): 4. "Maytag Adds WBZ to Broadcasting Units. Boston Station Starts Programs April 6th to Cover Eastern States," *Maytag Profit News*, Western and General Edition, 2 (3)(April 1928): 6; Bones Booster Edition, 2 (3)(April 1928): 6; Easterner Edition, 2 (3)(April 1928): 6; Southern Leader Edition, 2 (3)(April 1928): 6; Kansas City Spotlight Edition, 2 (3)(April 1928): 6; White Lightning Edition, 2 (3)(April 1928): 6. "Notice," *Maytag Profit News*, White Lightning Edition, 2 (4)(May 1928): 79.
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[24] "Ten Years ... A Review and a Prophecy," *Maytag Profit News*, Easterner Edition, 4 (4)(May 1930): 25-26, 54.

[25] Ted Pearson replaced Fiorito in March 1930. Roy Bargey in turn, replaced him in May 1931, who was replaced by Clarence Wheeler early in 1932.

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[27] "Song Contest!!!" *Maytag Profit News*, Bones Booster Edition, 4 (5)(June 1930): 26.

[28] "Maytag Included in Song of Flying Artillerymen," *Maytag News* 17 (4)(May 1943): 12.

[29] *Maytag Profit News*, (February 1928): inside cover.

[30] "Convention Songs," *The Profit News*, 4 (6)(January 1925): 2.

[31] *Maytag Profit News*, Easterner Edition, 1 (4)(May 1927): 23.

[32] "Convention Songs," *The Profit News*, 4 (6)(January 1925): 2.

[33] *White Lightning*, 1 (2) (September 1926): 31.

[34] *Maytag Profit News*, Easterner Edition, 1 (4)(May 1927): 30-31.

[35] *Maytag Profit News*, White Lightning Edition, 1 (8)(March 1927): 12. *Maytag Profit News*, Bones Booster Edition, 1 (2)(March 1927): 12. *Maytag Profit News*, Western and General Edition, 1 (2)(March 1927): 12. *Maytag Profit News*, Easterner Edition, 1 (6)(March 1927): 12. *Maytag Profit News*, Southern Leader Edition, 1 (2)(March 1927): 12.

[36] *Maytag Profit News*, (July 1931): 8.

[37] *Maytag Profit News*, Easterner Edition, (January/February 1926): 7.

[38] *Maytag Profit News*, White Lightning Edition, 1 (5)(June 1927): 41.

[39] *Maytag Profit News*, Western and General Edition, 3 (3)(April 1929): 24; Kansas City Spotlight Edition, 3 (3)(April 1929): 40; Bones Booster Edition, 3 (3)(April 1929): 40.

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