

# **Power Shift and Boundary Erosion**

## **Changing Institutional Logics in the Dutch (and US) Trade Book Field 1960-2005**

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**Draft for CACPS session October 19, 2006**

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## **Abstract**

Drawing on Bourdieuan field theory and neoinstitutional theory of organizations, the paper examines material and symbolic production, distribution and consumption in the trade book field as interdependent phenomena. It shows how changes in practices of and relationships between agents and organizations - changes in institutional logics - can usefully be understood as a form of adaptation to a changing institutional environment. Major (and causally related) changes in the classification system of the trade book field are the shift in power to attribute value (hence legitimacy), and boundary erosion (the de-hierarchization of boundaries between genres). These are connected with constraints both at the micro- and meso-level (emanating from the trade book field itself), and, at a meso- and macro-level those resulting from this field's embeddedness in a wider context: the cultural and the social-economic field.

During the second half of the twentieth century, important changes occurred in the division of labor among agents of material and symbolic production and distribution: conglomeratization of publishers (involving a change in institutional logic and boundary erosion between the subfields of small-scale and large-scale production); formation of bookstore chains and rise of the Internet as marketplace; producer, distributor and consumer focus on bestsellers; declining legitimacy of traditional agents of symbolic production (criticism, literary education) as publishing conglomerates and retail chains developed tools that procured them greater symbolic power; print media gradually lost competition with electronic media (television and pop culture; the Internet), involving a shift in consumers' cultural repertoires which turned potential readers into non-readers or readers of just one genre (thrillers; biography); cultural and educational policies; cultural globalization. Proprietary and public data, over some 50 years, on the practices of agents and organizations jointly constituting the trade book field provided a basis for analyzing and explaining these changes.

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**INTRODUCTION**

The paper focuses on classificatory changes in the US and Dutch postwar trade book field (the American panel of my diptych is under way). Classifications are viewed as tools used by organizations to help shape symbolic production after their own image. Classificatory changes will be described as a form of adaptation of institutional logics to a changing institutional environment.

I'll review a number of developments in the cultural field which cultural critics in many European countries qualify as 'Americanization of culture'. Their qualification is meant to be understood as a *disqualification*. Though I disagree with most of the cultural critique, I believe country comparison is useful, and a comparison of the European and US media market pays off.<sup>1</sup>

Brief justification of the NL as object of comparison: notably since the post-war period, the NL has become an important book producing and consuming country with, over the years, a honorable fifth place as import partner for the US (after English language countries like Canada and GB) and a tenth place as export partner of the US trade book market.

Due to a number of influential changes, the Dutch cultural field increasingly comes to resemble its American counterpart. In the light of field theory and neo-institutionalist theory

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<sup>1</sup> The paper is part of a comparative study in progress of the Dutch and American trade book fields. It is affiliated with a larger comparative project aimed at describing and accounting for changes in the cultural classifications systems of several Western countries (Janssen 2002).. The present draft mainly reports on the Dutch panel of the project, though the American situation is constantly referred to.

of organizations, I will argue that the changes in question can be usefully described in terms of institutional constraints affecting

- the structure of the cultural field and its context
- the operating of agents and organizations, their institutional logics
- the arts classification system that is the ever-changing product of interaction among agents and organizations
- the way cultural products, notably trade books, use to be classified.

I'd like to address two questions: (i) How did the classification system in the Dutch cultural field change? (ii) To what extent can changes in classifications be explained by taking into account the interaction among agents and institutions involved in the material and symbolic production and consumption of cultural goods (besides trade books, other print media, non-print media such as television and the Internet)?

More specifically, the paper aims to identify a number of analytically distinct but empirically interdependent institutional factors that constrain the institutional logics of agents and organizations active in the trade book field and to clarify how, over time, these constraints affect both the shape of the trade book field and the way book genres use to be classified. One set of constraints emanates from the trade book field itself, more specifically, from the literary field. Another group of constraints that need to be considered are those emerging from wider institutional contexts such as the cultural field in which the literary field finds itself embedded (print media competing with electronic media for consumers' attention; expansion of cultural policy beneficial to new cultural producers; advance of television and pop culture). Together they entail a certain erosion of boundaries between cultural practices, cultural genres and cultural repertoires as well as a shift in the location of power to legitimize cultural products.

In the following I will outline the field-theoretical and neo-institutionalist framework that was used to look at the data. After mentioning a number of structural differences between

the US and Dutch trade book markets, I will briefly sketch major developments in the interaction between organizations and agents in the trade book field.

#### **TRADE BOOK FIELD THROUGH THE LENS OF FIELD THEORY AND INSTITUTIONAL THEORY**

Field theory, as developed by Bourdieu and others, and sociological new institutionalism in organizational analysis (Powell and DiMaggio 1991) provide a suitable framework to examine changes in the interaction among the institutions composing the trade book field.

[cf Slide#1, Scheme of the Trade book field]

The trade book field and, more specifically, the literary field must be conceived as a space of positions occupied by agents and organizations in interaction with each other. Figure 1 gives an outline of these institutions and agents in interaction with each other. The outline is far from exhaustive. The notions of material and symbolic production, in the left hand column of Figure 1, refer to the major dimensions of activity of the organizations mentioned to the right of it. Material production appears more characteristic of publishers and their trade organizations, while symbolic production -- the assignment of quality and value to cultural goods -- is a major concern of criticism, education. By no means, however, are these dimensions of material and symbolic production exclusively reserved to the organizations immediately to their right. On the contrary, this paper aims at describing and explaining the shifts that occurred over the past forty years, shifts to the effect that publishers and retailers, through the categorization of their products, through their marketing strategies (the introduction of best seller lists and commercial literary prizes) managed to increase their symbolic power, and got a greater hold on how our society tends to perceive the nature and quality of cultural goods, hence how it classifies these goods.

More than the outer parts of the field (writers and readers), the inner section consists of fairly organized institutions involved in the material and symbolic production and classification of specific cultural products, books oriented towards the market of general readers. Indeed, writers and readers appear less well organized.<sup>2</sup>

Given this paper's focus on changes in classificatory practices regarding the book supply, we are interested in shifts in symbolic and/or economic power enabling organizations to structure the supply according to its alleged nature and quality, that is, according to how they view it. A Bourdieuan-inspired analysis of the cultural field as a field of forces is guided by two assumptions: (i) material production and symbolic production are interdependent and simultaneous processes; (ii) consumption of cultural goods is affected by this interdependence and, in its turn, affects production (see also DiMaggio 1987). One of the implications for cultural sociology is that the production of symbolic goods must be viewed as a collective action involving, besides the creator, all "creators of the creator", that is, the agents producing belief in the value of the goods in question. Hence, the cultural field is also described as a world of belief (Bourdieu 1977; 1980: 207 ff). This constructionist view implies that through their struggles, conflicts and apparently peaceful interactions, the parties involved not only assign values to cultural products but also reproduce the belief in the value of what is at stake, the belief in the legitimacy of the agents' actions and the belief in the truthfulness of their discourse. It is the collective alchemy of these agents' and organizations' activities that results in cultural classifications.

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<sup>2</sup> To some extent, even readers and writers may appear organized. Reading circles—flourishing in my country—are mostly small, informally organized groups of people who every three weeks come together to discuss a book of fiction, and willy-nilly form a target for publishers hoping to see their books selected, and public libraries which may derive legitimacy from the support they provide to book circles.

Much of a writer's performance is the result of solitary work. But from literary histories we also learned to appreciate the value of mutual contacts among writers (in societies, associations, clubs, cenacles and nowadays in the pub). However, we'll benefit most from analyzing even these communities through their interdependency relations with literary institutions proper. Hence, writers appear to be "organized" not only through their "Literary Writers Association" [The Authors Guild, Inc] but also through their publishing in the same magazine, or their belonging to the same publishing house, less, it would seem, due to their sharing the same literary agent.

The institutional approach peculiar to this theory takes a critical stance towards certain taken-for-granted assumptions on how these institutions operate. Thus, the theory of the cultural field questions widely held views about the art critic as an objective expert proficient in designating qualities in a work of art to which it owes its rank in the hierarchy of artworks, and it shows that quality assignment and classification result from a long-term process of consensus formation among reviewers, authors reviewed and publishers (Van Rees 1987). It questions views about the textbook writer as legislator on the canon or national heritage (Verboord 2003); about the genuine art consumer as a person who, urged by his innate love of art, concerns himself with high-quality artworks (Bourdieu 1969, 1979, 1983). Contrary to this, field theory argues that artworks are the object of incessant value-assessments by several cultural institutions; the theory also suggests that consumers are, to varying degrees, cognitively wired and indoctrinated through education into becoming ‘cultivated’ persons, displaying ‘legitimate’ taste. In light of changes in the trade book field, we will notice a change in what the term ‘cultivated’ is supposed to refer to.

In having recourse to this theory as its model, empirical researchers need to address the issue of interactions between institutions and of the resulting classifications. This involves a differentiation of agents and organizations according to their institutional logics, their way of operating in line with institutionalized conventions. Such a differentiation results in varying researchers’ classifications, each specifying for a given period the relational properties by which agents and organizations come to fall not only into categories of publishers, periodicals, reviewers, authors, magazines, distributors and reading groups, but also into distinct (though partly overlapping) clusters, each consisting of a particular kind of publisher(s), in combination with a select group of writers, distributor, critics, education curricula and reading groups, jointly constituting a network that through its existence and processing, gives life to a particular genre or sub-category of products and is in many respects

distinct from other similarly structured networks which value other genres or sets of cultural goods.

Students of the cultural field are interested in what its core institutions are, how each of these institutions is organized, and how they operate in interaction with each other. Thereby one has to take into account the impact of conceptions of art, literature and culture, sets of partly normative and taken-for-granted assumptions used by members of institutions not only to plan their actions but also to justify or rationalize their decisions. In any period, agents in the cultural field draw on a specific normative conception to induce among other members of that society a specific perception and evaluation of cultural goods and practices. At any time, however, there are competing conceptions people can select from, entailing competing institutional logics.

To measure interactions between institutions and to shape these measurements into a descriptive and interpretative assessment of what is going on in the literary field, information is needed from both a micro- and a meso-level (and, if possible, also from a macro-level). As for the relation between micro- and meso-level, new institutional theory argues that what actually is done by members of a particular organization is shaped to a large extent by their awareness of its recent history, their perception of the present state of the field, and, more specifically, their perception of the practices of competing agents and similar organizations as more or less successful, a model to imitate and emulate. Much of the data obtained at the practice (object) level of the field cannot be taken at face value. At a meta-level of research, one is mostly obliged to reconsider the categories used in the field to make them fit research purposes.

In a general way, the products of organizations are the result of institutionalized choice and decision processes performed under uncertainty and resulting in classifications. A publisher's backlist, a reviewer's selection process in selecting a work for review, the literary curriculum, each could be viewed as a product that boils down to a classification, and, secondly, each is the result of an institutionalized choice process. 'Institutionalized' here means something like routinely produced according to the conventions of the organization. The phrase 'under uncertainty' means that no agent or member of an organization in the cultural field can ever be certain of the successfulness of his /her decisions, since there is no instrument to measure the quality of a manuscript or a recently published book. The public rhetoric of these agents in the cultural field is aimed at hiding this uncertainty and at conveying an image of self-assurance. What is institutionalized here are organizational forms, structural components and rules which world-wide tend to constrain individual actors' options and to establish the very criteria by which they 'discover their preferences' (Powell and DiMaggio 1992: 11).

However, two factors reduce uncertainty in the cultural industry: producer's past performance (for example a publisher's backlist; a writer's earlier success in drawing reviewers' attention to his/her previous work) and societal signals of consensus formation in the field. Researchers need to reconstruct past performance and to develop the ability to read the signals.

Subfields of the cultural field (e.g., the literary field; trade book field) are not isolated isles, unaffected by what happens elsewhere in the cultural field and in society at large. Societies vary in the way their cultural fields are relatively isolated or get intertwined. Admittedly, in the 1950, the Dutch trade book field, especially the literary subfield, was relatively isolated from what went on elsewhere in Europe. Therefore, one needs to take into account how the cultural field is embedded in wider social systems and how it is affected by these systems.

One illustration of this is provided by changes in arts coverage by print media, where in the last decennia pop music and film came to increase their share of space in arts section of

dailies, at the cost of literary reviews and reviews of classical concerts (Janssen 1999). For another example, we might turn to author selection in literary textbooks, that is, the institutional process leading to the decision to include authors in textbooks and devote a certain amount of discourse space to their work (cf. Verboord & Van Rees 2006). See the discussion below, under “literature education”.

### *Classification*

As the notion of classification plays an important role in the outline of what organizations in cultural subfields do, it may be useful to summarize a number of features characterizing its meaning and reference. The notion refers both to a product resulting from a process and to the process itself. One’s reconstruction of classifications remains an idiosyncratic enterprise unless it is based on insight into how hierarchies are produced by classification processes.

- Classifications are a form of symbolic production, they are the result of processes of [quality] assessment by institutions that have the authority to do that (e.g., publishing houses, criticism, etc.) Much of what leads to these classifications remains covered up, protected from disclosure in order to sustain public belief in its truth value.
- In their institutional logics, (trade book) organizations use classifications as tools;
- Classifications are the product of consensus within an institution
- Classifications are associated with classifications by other organizations which share an interest in sustaining belief in the field’s authority and legitimacy
- Classifications are connected with audience segments sharing a particular taste
- Classifications come gradually into being (time is needed)
- Classifications are affected by social developments.

In sum, classifications can be regarded as hierarchizations on the basis of value assignments by institutions, generally resulting in an – implicit - hierarchy.

Classifications – that is, the objects resulting from the classificatory process - can be differentiated by three major features which are variables affecting the classification’s form and content:

1. They are the product of consensus formation (within and between institutions)
2. They are more or less hierarchical in nature
3. They are dynamic: they change over time.

These aspects are closely connected with DiMaggio's (1987) four dimensions of art classification systems: differentiation, hierarchization, universality, and boundary force.

In the remaining part of the paper, I will briefly outline major developments in the interaction between organizations and agents in the trade book field; thereby I shall refer to a number of tables and figures.

## **DATA**

Data on material and symbolic production are drawn from proprietary and public sources, and from personal research mentioned in the footnotes to the tables and figures. Many of the data on the American trade book field are derived from the *Bowker Annual* (since 1955), and *Publishers' Weekly*. As for Dutch publishers' sales figures from 1975 to 2000, the Research Agency of the Dutch Organization of Trade Book Publishers held weekly surveys among 400 to 800 families, inquiring about their book purchases. Every quarter the Agency informed its members (publishers, retailers) in a proprietary report (*Speurwerk Boeken Omnibus*, SBO) about the results. SBO does not claim to reflect exactly the market situation; but the results do provide an indication about current developments, the size of the book market, purchasing behavior of the private consumer with respect to book genres and retail channels. In 1996 the continuity of the survey was broken as in the questionnaire the period of purchase interviewees reported on was extended from seven to fourteen days and, more importantly, as the way of extrapolating from the sample to the population was modified by the introduction of a weigh factor. A major problem with these data is that figures do not mean what they are supposed to mean. Generally, organizations add comments on how to interpret them. In the US market, for example, sales figures are just approximations due to the returns. Though Census figures may appear more reliable, they have the drawback of high-level aggregation and that of leaving out shippings under \$500.

## **MAJOR STRUCTURAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE US AND THE DUTCH TRADE BOOK FIELD**

For reasons of space, even obvious differences between the two book fields remain under-discussed here. However, a number of organizational differences need to be mentioned at the outset. Besides, it has to be noted that over time, several of these differences tend to disappear, illustrating what one might term the gradual Americanization of the European cultural field, that is, a convergence of institutional logics affecting the structure and organization of the trade book publishing industry.

**(1)** In 1960, Dutch population amounted to 11.3 million, that of the US 178 million. In 2005, the Netherlands had a population of 16.3 million, living on 16,164 sq miles (=0.4 % of US area); this makes the NL one of the most densely populated nations. In 2006 the US has 296 million inhabitants, on an area of 3.8 million sq miles. In Holland, therefore, a first print of 100,000 for a bestseller is considerable; US bestsellers nowadays run to two million.

**(2) Literary agent:** Until recently literary agents were almost inexistent in the Dutch field. Since some fifteen years they come to play a greater part, as more newly published titles (more than fifty % of the fiction titles) are translations from a foreign language, predominantly English. Literary agents as well as wealthy publishing conglomerates play a role in the considerable increase in money paid for the right to publish bestseller authors and even first authors. How these payments affect the institutional logics of publishers and retailers deserves further research.

**(3) Publishers' classification:** Similarly to the US, each Dutch book receives an ISBN (international standard book number), making it uniquely identifiable. In addition, Dutch publishers use the Uniform Genre Classification (NUGI) as a way to identify and classify their products by content type. The 'Library of Congress Cataloging-in-publication data' involves a Library of Congress control number and an ISBN but no clear content characterization. On the back cover of many (but not all) fiction and non-fiction paperback

and pocket books published in the US, a topic can be mentioned (biography, fiction, animals) informing about the genre to which a book is deemed to belong, or a field of research is mentioned (sociology, arts).

Compared to the Dutch NUGI-system, US books categorized by the broad notion of ‘fiction’ remain discretely under-specified. Yet in the Bowker Annual, reporting among many other things about American book title production, output is also analyzed in twenty-three subject categories. [Except for ‘Fiction’] Each of these twenty-three subject categories represents a certain range of Dewey Decimal Classification numbers, the categorization system used by public library organizations all over the world. ‘Literature’, for example, includes the DDC numbers 800-810; 813-820; 823-899; ‘Poetry and drama’ includes the numbers 811; 812; 821; 822). Though ‘fiction’ is included among the content categories, it is the sole category without DDC numbers.

The range of fiction titles selected for review in quality newspapers appears broader in the US than in the NL. Clearly, in the NL, this range is broadening over the past decades.

**(4) Net book agreement (NBA):** The *Net Book Agreement* is a voluntary (gentlemen’s) agreement, since the beginning of the twentieth century, among publishers and retailers, and committing these parties to the fact that a trade book’s resale price is fixed by its publisher and has to be respected by retailers in the market.<sup>3</sup> No agent was allowed to give discounts. In the UK the NBA collapsed and was abandoned in the mid-1990s (Thompson 2005: 68). In the US this happened already in 1913, when the Supreme Court ruled that copyright is not excepted from the provision of the Sherman Anti-Trust Act against monopoly (Madison 1966: 159). Despite liberalization of the European market, the Netherlands granted general trade publishers dispensation from the rules of free trade, implying that the publisher continues to determine the book price and retailers are not allowed to sell a book for less. As recently as

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<sup>3</sup> As indicated, in the US (early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century) and in the UK (c. 1995), the agreement broke down, entailing closure for many independent booksellers.

2005 a Parliamentary decision prolonged this dispensation for another five years.

Of course, just as in the US, Dutch publishers use to grant retailers some 40% reduction on the price of these books.

(4a) US publishers use to have hardcover rights and they sell paperback right at auctions to the highest bidder. Dutch publishers have both hard cover and paperback rights but the majority of fiction books is published as paperback.

(4b) In 1988, the US Congress approved US participation in the Berne Convention (1886), the international copyright treaty.

**(5) Right of return:** US publishers are constrained by retailers' right to return unsold books even after more than a year – inexistent in the NL. US retailers' returns account for an important percentage of trade that proves to be non-trade (from 15 to 45 percent of books supplied).

**(6) Central Book House:** CBH is a wholesale organization, founded already in the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by the Association of publishers, and since 1978 for most Dutch publishers the suitable place to store their output. In a way, the Central Book House solves a serious space problem for publishers concentrated in the city of Amsterdam. But this comes at high costs, not only direct costs of storage itself. Besides, for retailers, CBH allows for a very restrictive ordering policy, since books not available in store but ordered from the CBH can arrive within 24 hours. Of course, this restrictive policy is beneficial neither to publishers nor to book consumers.

(7) A seventh point bears on a lagged resemblance between the American and Dutch book industry. Until quite recently (the post-WW2 decade), book publishing in both countries used to be regarded as a cottage industry. Long-established, family-owned firms of medium size but of high standing experienced problems to continue the family tradition. In October 1959, Bernard Cerf and Donald Klopfer took Random House public, setting off a boom in

publishing stocks (Cerf 1977: 284-7; Korda 1999: 103; Thompson 2005: 54-64). In 1965 Random House was acquired by RCA, setting a pattern for the future acquisition of Simon & Schuster by Gulf & Western (which owned Paramount) and of G. P. Putnam by Universal-MCA. Hence, in the US, large media corporations date from the late 1960s and the early 1970s, while in the Netherlands an increase in mergers started in the late 1980s and concentration became a fact in the mid-1990s. This means that the economic sociological literature on the formation and growth of large industrial corporations must be handled with care, when one addresses the book trade.

## **CHANGES IN THE DUTCH TRADE BOOK FIELD**

### **Material production**

#### **PUBLISHERS**

As is shown by Table 1, containing core figures of a number of trade book organizations over the past forty years, the number of Dutch publishers has increased as has the supply of new titles. Here I briefly highlight a number of important developments

*Conglomeratization:* The major point is the concentration among publishers. While in 1990 the field comprised 15 concerns, each with a share of 5% of the market, in 2001 no more than three conglomerates were left which jointly accounted for a proportionately increased annual turnover. These three firms, counting twenty imprints, published nearly 65 % of the literary fiction titles. The remaining publishers were responsible for the rest.

*Autonomy of management:* Within the three remaining conglomerates, each comprising a number of formerly autonomous houses as imprints, quite a few houses lost full autonomy in management decisions concerning the yearly title production, marketing expenditures and human resource management. Sometimes, targets set by a conglomerate's board that failed to

have experience in book publishing proved far too ambitious and resulted in overproduction (Title production: shower of a shot”). Many thousands of new books had to be destroyed.

Within several large publishing houses, power tended to shift from the editorial to the marketing department. This had negative consequences for the relationship of trust between editors and authors.

[*Meulenhoff Case*] This is illustrated by the falling apart of one of the most prestigious publishing houses, Meulenhoff, during the past decade. In 1991, Meulenhoff, then one of the more prestigious houses for literary fiction (involved, for example, in international projects with Random House, Gallimard and other renowned houses in other countries) became part of (“merged with”) a large newspaper publisher, Perscombinatie, resulting in a large conglomeration called PCM. As in 1995 PCM took over the next-largest newspaper firm from Elsevier, the Board felt that the new debts incurred did not allow it to keep its earlier promises regarding autonomy granted to its book publishing division (Meulenhoff). As a consequence, the Board member representing Meulenhoff stepped down. Two years later, the two publishers-directors of the house resigned, and several editors left the company, taking with them very remunerative best-selling authors, to start a new publishing house and leaving the house in disarray, stripped as it was both from its longtime prestige and its main income generating source, authors who had been successful in the past.<sup>4</sup>

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4 [Re-Work Literature Note based on Dobbin: Rise of diversified conglomerate between 1950-1975: Fligstein 1990 story of competing elite factions (production, marketing, finance) focuses on the power play by finance managers successful in persuading boards of their views. After the 1950 amendment to antitrust law (making it more difficult for firms to expand into related businesses, finance managers sketched a new theory of the firm: -large firms should act like investors with diversified portfolios. Portfolio theory in economics reinforced idea that firms should spread their risk and should invest profits in industries with high growth potential. → PCM / Meulenhoff.[?] Finance managers succeeded to persuade boards, and came to hold most CEO positions. As diversified firms struggled to please the market, this diversification model has since given way to the core-

-Figure 2 about here-

*Sales/ Turnover/ Price:* As is shown by Figure 2 (“Sales, turnover and sales price”), the title supply increased considerably. For some decades until the beginning of the 1980s, sales also went up but stagnated as of the mid 1980s. De-reading – people’s massively abandoning reading as leisure time practice – and over-production of new fiction titles resulted in a steady decline of turnover. As turnover did not keep pace with the overproduction, publishers tried to compensate for this by increasing books’ sales prices well beyond the inflation rate. Though this measure of strongly increasing book prices, notably of paperbacks and hard covers, permitted to give a more flattering portrait of the year results, it was less well suitable to stimulate the declining number of regular book buyers to purchase new books.

*Title management:* For the majority of publishers, *Central Book House* (1978), a large distribution center founded by the Association of Dutch Publishers, centralized storage and greatly facilitated the logistics of distribution. But it had also negative side-effects: retailers effectively became far more restrictive in buying new titles; hence, less new titles became accessible to browsers in bookstores. Authors were rather unhappy with this development as it decreased the chances of their new book to be displayed and to build some shelf life. Over the decades bookstores increasingly tended to focus display on bestsellers.

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competence model, the view of the focused firm, operating under the theory of core competence, sometimes after 197x.: a change in corporate strategy:

In 1970s diversification: big firms were buying firms in other industries. In 1990s: they were buying others in the same industry to take advantage of their own core competence. Perrow, Roy, Fligstein & Dobbin show that power shapes the rules of the game; they also argue that institutional and network camps play an important role in defining what is rational. ]

*Classification: NUGI* In 1970s, the Dutch publishing fraternity developed the Uniform Genre Classification [Nederlandse Uniforme Genre Indeling], a system of codes allowing publishers to classify each new title according to its content or genre. Within fiction for adults, for example, distinct codes were assigned to the more legitimate genres (Dutch literary novels, foreign ditto; poetry, short story) and to the more popular and less legitimate ones (suspense; romance; adventure; science fiction; family novel; regional novel, etc.). What happened over the decades was that more and more books by television and other celebrities, cabaret artists and popular fiction books in translation received a code for *literary* fiction, thus considerably broadening the range of this category. For publishers this classification system provided a shortcut to obtain a better grip on the process of symbolic production, the assignment of quality and value.

Trade publishers as well as book chains invented other means to increase this grip, for example, by creating new instruments (commercial prizes comparable to the Man Booker prize; bestseller lists), by organizing and exploiting events (“Book week”), and adopting a policy that successfully transformed, for example, collections of columns by celebrities from the popular entertainment industry into bestsellers under the label of *literary* fiction. Though Dutch authors took advantage from a number of new policy measures (standard contract; grants; subsidies; literary prizes – see Table 2), most of them suffered from the change in publishers’ institutional logics.

*Share national/ international fiction:* Particularly disadvantageous for Dutch authors was the tendency among fiction publishers to bring out more foreign titles in translation than titles originally written in Dutch. [See Tables 3.2 “Supply of fiction by language and genre” reflecting the situation in 2000.] Nowadays, a majority of newly published titles (more than fifty per cent of the fiction titles) are translations from a foreign language, predominantly

English. The turning point of Dutch and foreign fiction shares dates already from 1990, when more titles in translation were published than original Dutch ones. A foreign book's sale success in its country of origin is no guarantee for similar success in translation. The copyright fees involved with buying foreign titles have sky-rocketed, and not just during international book fairs covered by the press.

*Sales Share literary/non-literary fiction* Compared to non-literary fiction, the sales share of literary fiction has much increased especially during the 1990s (cf. Table 1, panel 2: from 19% in 1980 to 27.7% in 2000). This can be accounted for, at least in part, by publishers' broader application of the NUGI-code for literary fiction. The increase in translated novels may also be a factor.

## **Distribution**

### *Bookstores*

*Market development:* Decrease in number of outlets. Decline of independents, because of rising overheads and rise of retail chain superstores, both in the NL and the US (Miller 2006). Book circulation has changed in a negative way, it has declined for a great number of titles. As the Central Book House allows retailers to become fairly restrictive in their ordering of new titles, new books stand less chance of shelf life, and actual shelf life of books on display is shortened. In addition, there is a clear tendency among retailers – pushed in that respect by publishers with important economic power - to concentrate all marketing and promotion means (display space) on the fast sellers, books that are heavily promoted by publishers. Big cities and cities with university libraries provide an exception to this tendency insofar as in most of these metropolitan areas one still finds large book shops with a considerable stock and a broad range of titles. For authors it is a poor consolation to learn that 'failure of a title' bears a different meaning nowadays than in the post-war decades. Authors whose books are

remaindered by second hand shops or book antiquarians may be delighted to see that the product of their labors really exists. The share of books sold online, through international chains such as Amazon or Bertelsmann, gradually increases and is becoming a reason for concern among retailers.

As is the case with publishers, retailers' capacity to generate attention has increased: marketing has become part of the book retailer's practical knowledge. More importantly, trade organizations (CPNB: Committee for the Propaganda of Dutch books) are increasingly successful in organizing events such as the National Bookweek, which generates a considerable (though temporary) increase in sales and turnover. Retail chains as well as independents have intensified sessions where authors read from and sign their new work.

#### *Book clubs*

In the NL, book clubs became successful only in the 1960s and 1970s. For decades, they have had a sales share of around 20%. Since the early 1990s, they have a very hard time to keep their membership figures at the same level. Marketing costs to recruit new members are high, the more so as members, shopping for the entrance gifts awarded to new members, tend to shift at great pace from one book club to another. In the last few years, since the merger of several big book clubs under the umbrella of Bertelsmann, this is becoming more difficult. Product differentiation does not always seem helpful, as the music cd and video market also strongly evolved. Bertelmann's Internet branche, however, is growing. Though Oprah's talk show is on Dutch television, the format of her Bookclub on Television appears too specific for the Dutch market.

#### *Public libraries*

In the 1960s and 1970s public library organizations benefited from cultural policy measures bringing a period of strong growth (cf. Table 1, panel 2 below). During the last two decades of the century, however, due to economic depression and other factors public libraries fell out of policy favour and as traditionally print-based organizations, they had to cope both with a strong decline (in collection, membership, borrowings) and with the requirement of adapting to a new media age, while its ageing personnel did not appear best fit to adapt to the new technological conditions and requirements. In a way, the libraries benefited from publishers'

broadening of classificatory labels, since it enabled them to upgrade their performance in a ‘serious’ genre (literary fiction) and thus do justice to their cultural mission statement. Actually, borrowers at public libraries appear to have other book preferences (see below, “Readers and non readers”).

### **SYMBOLIC PRODUCTION**

The theory of the cultural field (Bourdieu 1980,1983) asserts that selections for discursive attention in art and culture are forms of symbolic production. Once they are materially produced, literary works (and their creators) acquire symbolic value to the extent that literary critics and scholars take them into account, and assign to them desirable properties and qualities (Bourdieu 1980;Van Rees 1983). In the division of labor among literary institutions, criticism held and still holds a central place when it comes to assigning properties and quality to literary works. Yet, as appears from the previous outline of material production and distribution, publishers and retailers are increasingly able to generate attention for new works. Compared to the period before WW II, they are more active in assigning properties and quality to books. Cultural critics use to qualify this as ‘commercialization’. Trade organizations improved existent means of promotion (Book week/ CPNB; authors signing sessions) and they introduced new instruments, such as commercial prizes and bestseller lists. Thus symbolic production, usually thought to be the privilege of specific agents of symbolic production (critics, teachers), is a process also involving major agents of material production (publishers) and distribution (retailers). This is what power shift in the title refers to; it is what we have to keep in mind when we outline developments mainly in the lower part of Figure 1, the diagram of the trade book & literary field. By no means can students of symbolic production limit their attention to the institutions positioned in this part. One has to take into account the interactions between all institutions in the field.

#### *Literary prizes*

Literary prizes have grown in number and the prize money has likewise increased. [Slide /Table 2]. In the mid-seventies, no more than 21 prizes were yearly distributed; during the 1990s this number has trebled. Corrected for inflation, prize monies increased six-fold within a period of 25 years.

- Table 2 *Prize monies* about here-

The increase in number of commercial prizes (compare the Booker prize) as well as their amounts have negatively affected the status of prizes awarded by the state as part of its cultural policy.

### *Bestseller lists*

Bestseller lists, nowadays an integral part of lifestyle sections of quality newspapers in Western countries, appear to threaten the position and legitimizing role of criticism in the press. Do they enter in competition with criticism, when it comes to symbolic production, the shaping of a society's perception and classification of cultural products like fiction books? It is an open question whether the lists take over criticism's sifting function. In examining this issue, a distinction has to be made between criticism's prestige awarding function that has an effect on the canonization process and these lists' boost effect on sales. With the former, authors' literary status and their chances of claiming forms of support and recognition are at stake (subsequent critical attention, free publicity, literary prizes, grants). The stimulus resulting from bestseller lists is not likely to directly affect this canonization process; it appears to aim rather at book buyers' behavior ("Millions already enjoyed the dazzling reading experience..."), not only individual but also institutional buyers like public libraries and book clubs. As distribution chains are awarded a higher discount on the purchase of a large stock of a title, they have to seek ways to get rid of these piles. The publishing and retailing fraternity is successful in using bestseller lists as a tool to improve distribution and display conditions and to boost purchasing behavior. For a position on BLs, Oprah's Bookclub (since 199x) proves decisive.

In the US bestseller list are over a hundred years old. In the Netherlands they only started to appear after 1970. Over the years, The Bowker Annual comprises a growing amount of information about previous year's ranking lists of hard covers and paperbacks in

all genres (fiction, non-fiction; adult and children), based on sales figures provided by publishers. Since the beginning of the 1990s, the Dutch trade organization follows this example, though its information is limited to top 50 lists. Both in the US and the Netherlands, the lists illustrate an aspect of the boundary erosion between genres: ‘thrillers’, a genre originating from the English market, has much increased its share over the period 1983-2000. In the US Grisham has held the top spot from 1994 to 2000. Danielle Steele holds a place in the Publishers’ Weekly top ten since 1983. Perhaps some of the Americanization of the Dutch trade book market is reflected by the fact that in Holland Grisham held the same position during that period. Comparison of international bestseller lists suggests that the trade book field is globalizing both for fiction and non-fiction, mostly however, for fiction.

-Tables 4.1-4.4 about here-

Tables 4.1-4.4 inform about one instance of a Dutch bestseller list, the one organized by a quality chain (Libris) between 1983 and 2000. The weekly lists are based on sales figures reported by a large sample of retailers belonging to that chain. Tables show the number of titles by language; number of weeks titles appear on the lists by language or by genre. Interestingly, the globalization trend, mentioned already when discussing the share of new fiction titles by language (Tables 3.2, 3.3), is confirmed by the data of Tables 4.1-4.4, insofar as Dutch titles on these lists see their share plummeting while English titles see their share doubled in the case of number of weeks on lists. Of all titles figuring between 1983 and 1985 on the list, 64% was originally written in Dutch, the remaining 36% refers to titles in translation. In the late 1990s this share of Dutch titles has declined towards 56%. The decrease is even more serious when we consider the number of weeks titles figure on the list. During the early 1980s the sum of all notation weeks of all Dutch titles amounts to two-thirds of the total number of weeks, while in the last period (1996-2000) this is barely half of the total. Notably translations from English have increased their share. A considerable part of this increase bears on titles from the thriller genre: it increased its share to almost twenty percent of both (number of) titles and weeks. Literature continues to be the genre with the largest share (56% of the titles and 64% of the weeks) , at least in the Libris list. In the case of chains focussing on a more popular supply, this is likely to be different. As indicated, this is partly due to the expansion of the genre itself through the more liberal attribution of the NUGI-code for literary fiction.

### *Criticism*

To reduce uncertainty, publishers tend to rely for their decisions on earlier selections and classifications in the field. By linking choices of new cultural products to reputed producers and genres which already proved successful in the recent past, actors responsible for selections manage to rationalize their decisions. As successful parameters unfold, members of various institutions in the field will gradually come to accept the accompanying discourse which becomes institutionalized (Meyer and Rowan 1877: 349). As indicated, criticism continues to hold a central place when it comes to assigning properties and quality to literary works. Critics and reviewers are not organized as a group. However, their work setting, notably their affiliation with a newspaper or broadcasting organization, constrains and structures their practice.

Arts coverage in the print media has intensified: since 1965, the number of pages Dutch newspapers granted to Arts section have more than doubled. However, this absolute increase has to be relativized as the share of the arts has remained almost the same. Today's newspapers count much more pages due to the increase in advertising volume, which permitted to create new sections (Travel; Home and garden; Fashion). Fiction did hardly profit from this increase. Two other cultural sectors, pop music and film, did benefit from the increase in reviewers' attention for culture: in popular newspapers, pop music went from seventh to first place, while in elite newspapers film went from sixth to third place in the ranking of arts sectors' coverage (Janssen 1999). Compared to the 1960s and 1970s, an increasing amount of editorial space is devoted to interviews, with considerable space allotted to human interest.

Reviewers' attention for fiction genres is increasingly biased towards a few number of authors. Matthew effect: those already in the limelight receive more attention, while those who initially were occasionally reviewed tend to be completely neglected. In 1978, five

percent of new titles by Dutch authors received a quarter of all reviews, while ten percent of the titles absorbed 40% of all reviews. In 1991, ten percent of the new titles attracted even 60% of all reviews (Janssen 1997).

Van Rees and Vermunt (1996) performed a quantitative analysis on Dutch authors' data derived from a survey of the critical reception of eighteen writers of fiction who made their debut around 1975. Changes in the amount of critical attention between first and subsequent titles of these authors between 1975 and 1993 were analysed by means of discrete-time event history models. The dependent variable 'attention' was operationalized as the number of reviews in top periodicals that a title received. In the discrete-time logit model used, 'decrease in the number of reviews' and 'increase in the number of reviews' were treated as competing risks. Mean judgement of previous title and status of the publisher of the current title were used as covariates. Results show that there is a slightly lower probability of an increase in attention than of a decrease in attention. A high evaluation of one title increases the probability of the next title receiving more attention. Finally, with each successive title, the probability of a decrease of attention rises.

*Determinants of critical attention:* until the 1990s, two major determinants were attention for previous title and prestige of publishing house. Since the 1990s, critical attention is more likely to focus on bestsellers or potential bestsellers (titles for which publishers invested marketing monies and high prices to purchase the title). When reviewers with a longstanding career at quality newspapers are disinclined to endorse this policy they are replaced by more pliable candidates. Bestseller lists and publishers' marketing violence reflect growing symbolic power of material producers and appear to affect criticism's symbolic power.

## **Cultural policy**

One of the functions of cultural policy is to legitimize certain fiction books as *literary* fiction. In this respect, cultural policy, and more specifically literary policy, supports the sifting and legitimizing function of reviewers, critics, insofar as juries awarding cultural policy grants use criticism's earlier decisions as an important compass. It is unlikely that publishers' wider application of the NUGI-code for literature affects jury decisions.

Since the 1960s, Dutch authorities have shown a growing involvement with cultural production by allotting an increasing amount of the yearly budget (by way of subsidies, grants) to cultural producers (artists, literary writers). See Table 5 and Figure 3.

- Table 5 and Figure 3 "Government expenditures Literature" -

Figure 3, "Trend Government expenditures on literature, 1969-2005", shows the increase from 600K euro in 1969 to 11.4 Million euro in 2005. Setting the Index for 1980=100, this involves an increase to 357 index points in 2005.

Besides cultural attainments like the standard contract for authors, The Dutch Writer's Guild (VVL) has been successful in having developed not only pension plans for literary authors but also compensation for public library members' use of their books (lending right). Since 1965, the Foundation of Literature (a kind of Endowment for Literature) organizes and channels the distribution of grants and subsidies among literary authors. Grants are awarded to writers in a peer review process involving critics, academics, and peers (other writers). In their decision process on which authors deserve to receive a grant, these juries follow the lead of earlier reviewing and criticism in the media; as additional criteria they use an author's past performance and the status of the publisher.

### *Literature education*

Teachers, agents who decide about the content and structure of the curriculum for Dutch language and literature, have to deal with various other agents and organizations: colleagues

within and outside of their department, school boards, policy makers at the Department of Education. During the period under discussion, 'one' has been not well-disposed towards literature education. Reforms of secondary education weakened the position of literature education. In 1968, an important educational reform reshaped secondary education in the Netherlands (in a way that resembles developments in other Western countries in the 1960s), introducing new school types, more elaborate tracking options and new examination regulations (Dronkers 1993). In a way, this and subsequent reforms can be seen as an attempt to cope with the growth in student recruitment, the increasing variation in cultural capital assets these students bring in as resources while they engage in the secondary school curriculum, the de-hierarchisation in cultural classifications and, more generally, policy decisions. Though the various reforms may not have been aimed at reducing the attention paid to literature, they did entail negative effects (reduction of the time devoted to literature in class; downgrading certain conditions regarding the reading list).

Teachers are instrumental in transmitting conceptions of literature, normative views about the nature and function of literature. While their role in authors' canonization appears less important than that of critics, they probably make a greater contribution to the literary socialisation of adolescents, potential readers. To this end, the literary textbook is an important tool. With respect to author selection in literary schoolbooks for secondary education in the Netherlands in the period 1968-2000, we raised the question how education curriculum content is influenced by choice behavior in other theoretically relevant institutional contexts (Verboord & Van Rees 2006). By combining two 'institutional' approaches, that is, the neo-institutional approach in organizational analysis (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991) and the theory of the literary field as set of institutions in interaction (Bourdieu, 1980, 1983), an explanatory model was built that focuses on the extent to which, for the development of its curricular content, literary education relies both on other literary institutions jointly constituting the literary field and on its embeddedness in the institution of education, itself part of the wider field of social, political and economic forces.

Two kinds of institutional constraints have been relevant to author selection in textbooks: those emanating from the literary field, on the one hand, and educational constraints, on the other. Our research has reconfirmed the hypothesized trend of the literary curriculum turning more student-oriented and less canon-oriented. Processes of value assignment by institutions in the literary field, where criticism is supposed to play a guiding role for teachers, interfere with other institutional processes bearing on the organization of the school system, classroom instruction and curriculum content. Institutional logics in secondary

education have changed since the late 1960s: criticism has a lesser part in the legitimation of author selection in literary education, while students' needs become more important. Results show textbooks increasingly focus on a more limited group of authors, raising the overall levels of consensus and hierarchy. However, in terms of female and ethnic minority authors, textbooks are getting more heterogeneous.

### **Authors**

In discussing changes in the material and symbolic production, implications for authors have been mentioned in that context. For Dutch writers' careers, five developments in the literary field may have a negative impact:

- Literary magazines have lost part of their function and prestige; the competition of newspapers and all kinds of magazines that provide a better paid outlet to prepublications of an author's work makes it increasingly difficult for magazine editors to fill new issues with quality materials;
- the probability of gaining support through government's cultural policy has declined due to the increase in number of candidate authors who are competing for a grant;
- the probability of receiving editorial advice on new manuscripts has declined;
- criticism tends to narrow its focus of attention on a small number of top-ranking authors ;
- media coverage of fiction tends to concentrate increasingly on foreign literature in translation.

An author's chance of surviving and making a career depends on the approval of three parties in particular: publishers, criticism and the reading public. Today its weight seems more important than some thirty years ago. In 2006, the failure of a new title means something different from the early 1970s. The reasons have been discussed in the previous sections (storage costs; distribution through the Central Book House; retailers' selectivity where right of return is non-existent; competition, etc).

The number of new authors shows a steady increase. Though the number of female authors who in a given year had published a new book gradually increased (from 63 in 1947 to 118 in 1987), the ratio of male to female authors hardly changed. Over a period of forty years, women author's share increased from 24 to 27 percent. In the early 1990s, women's share increased at a slightly faster pace: in 1995, it is 29 %.

With the expansion of the Dutch literary field, the diversity in kind of authors (besides female authors, immigrant authors) has increased. This is beneficial to lovers of fiction. But it appears that the readership required to absorb the increasing supply is lagging behind.

### **Readers and Non-readers**

Between 1965 and 2005, people's media consumption has changed as a result of the growing media supply. In the NL television broadcasting went from one public channel in 1965 to on average fifty channels in the 2005 basic cable subscription, including ten Dutch language channels, three public and seven private ones. During this period, reading has declined.

Analyses of Dutch Time-Budget Surveys suggest that five types of readers of newspapers and magazines can be distinguished which strongly vary in their television viewing behavior (Van Eijck & Van Rees 2000; Van Rees & Van Eijck 2003).

-Table .8 , Proportion of reader types in 1975 and 1995 -

Entertainment readers and regional readers avoid high-level reading items. They compensate their dislike for (elite) newspapers by frequent television viewing, with a clear preference for light entertainment, increasingly the monopoly of private channels. A similar preference holds for the non-readers, consisting of people who scarcely read print media, let alone books, and couple a strong preference for private channels with a dislike for public channels. The class of information readers consists of high-educated people perusing quality newspapers and opinion weeklies. Though it is becoming the smallest in size, they are frequent readers. In this respect they resemble people belonging to the class of omnivores, who owe their label to their combining reading items located on opposite poles of the information-entertainment axis. However, while information readers are watching little to no television, the omnivores spent more time watching serious information on television than any other reader type. Though the label omnivores was chosen to characterize their broad reading repertoire, it also seems to fit their television viewing behavior for 1975. Less so in 1995 when a subgroup hardly ever watched television whereas another subgroup spent time viewing both private and public channels.

Book reading is declining in all classes, except that of information readers. Information readers also read books to meet their reading desires. The book reading effect has even slightly increased in 1995. In other words, for those having read a book during the past month, the probability of their belonging to the class of information readers has increased. Between 1975 and 1995, for all other reader types, the probability that they had read a book

during the past month, has declined, while the probability of their watching entertainment on television has strongly increased. Note that the CPNB and the Stichting Speurwerk, the two trade organizations reporting research on the trade book market, including results on reading behavior, gives a far more rosy picture, suggesting on the basis of a survey among a non-representative sample questioned about how much they like reading, that 35% of the respondents like reading literature and 45% like thrillers.

Literature readers are a rather small group whose size over the past decades fell short of expectations given the average increase in education level. Traditionally, education was among the major determinants of reading behavior and reading level. Though time budget surveys since 1975 do provide a reliable estimate of reading behavior, they failed up until 1995 to differentiate among the genres book readers peruse. As indicated above, sales figures are unreliable as estimate of the number of regular readers of fiction, literature or less legitimate book genres. Regularity can be associated with daily, weekly, monthly or yearly. Publishers' sales do not reflect book readers' purchases, let alone their reading behavior. Public libraries are an important outlet for fiction. Their purchase and lending figures, differentiated by literary and non-literary genres (romance, thriller), suggest that readers have a preference for the latter over the former genre. No secure data are available. Time budget data from 2000 suggest that, over a year, no more than 25% of the population had been reading literature. On a population of 12 million people of age twenty or over, estimates of the number of weekly readers of literature, who are also likely to constitute the hard core buyers and borrowers, may vary from one hundred thousand to half a million. Its core making up the lower estimate, is not a homogeneous group. Poetry readers represent an exclusive segment of readers who also use to follow narrative fiction and foreign literature.

Among younger cohorts, the total lack of interest in reading increases. Alerted by reading survey results, governments take measures to promote reading and improve literacy rates. Both in the NL ( the Foundation of Reading since 1987) and in the US, agencies developed efforts since the 1980s to improve the decline in reading and literacy, however these programs do not always appear based on clear policies. The cultural capital built by today's students via the cultural climate at home or through their own experience with peers is quite different from that in 1965. Its present range is broader, its structure may be more complex, but beliefs in the value of literature that parents and teachers transmit, lose the competition from other kinds of schemes of action and preference these young people share with their age group.

## **Concluding remarks**

The analysis shows the relevance of examining material production, distribution and consumption as interdependent phenomena. Especially during the last four decades of last century, important changes occurred in the division of labor among agents of material production and distribution (publishers; bookstore [chains]) and agents of symbolic production (criticism, literary education). This affected the way cultural goods and practices used to be classified. The traditionally narrow concept of literature -- a typical example of high art, legitimized by the then sole agents of symbolic production (criticism and literary education) -- broadened during the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as both the publishing fraternity (in a process of concentration) and distributors each changed its institutional logics (with respect to editorial counseling, book storage and distribution; shelf life of new titles; shift toward translated titles) and managed to increase their power to legitimize new cultural products.

The Dutch book field increasingly comes to resemble its US counterpart. Besides, strong historical (cultural, structural social) differences make it unlikely that the Dutch field completely assimilates the American classification system. However, the Dutch classification system, at least insofar as trade books are concerned, is becoming less hierarchical. Symbolic power, the power to legitimize new cultural products, is shifting from organizations traditionally involved therein toward institutions whose main task so far lay in material production.

In studies of social cultural stratification, knowledge of literature is advanced as a component relevant to cultural competence, with predictive power for people's trajectory and their cultural repertoires. Focus on the changes in the book field suggests that a rather ambiguous notion of literature is underlying the instrumentation of this kind of stratification research.

Under the umbrella notion of cultural capital, researchers appear to use the term literature to

refer to a great variety of concepts and referents. Even in longitudinal research they often appear to stick to a meaning of 'literature' or 'literary fiction' that is transmitted by a previous society with different cultural norms and classificatory procedures.

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