

# **Art & Market: Alienation or Emancipation?**

**University of St. Gallen, 17-18 November 2016**

International congress organised by the Research committee Sociology of Arts and Culture (RC-SAC) of the Swiss Sociological Association and the Institute of Sociology of the University of St. Gallen (Switzerland)

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The market plays an ambivalent role in the sociological analysis of art. Some authors suggest it implies commodification or even bondage of art. From this point of view, the accursed artist – who continues to create pieces of art even if he is not selling them – may become an epitome of authentic creation. According to the Frankfurt School, the “cultural industry”, as an economic system, produces and disseminates standardized products aimed to fulfil needs created from scratch and to bring consumers into line. Within “art worlds”, characterized by Howard Becker as cooperative networks regulated by aesthetic conventions, there seem to be a limited scope for economic competition and market constraints. Pierre Bourdieu draws a distinction between two artistic subfields by setting a relatively autonomous restricted production against a heteronomous broader production responding to commercial and market-based considerations. From this point of view, is genuine the art that succeeds to escape the market thanks to State subsidies or cultural policies protecting “freedom of art”.

Other analyses consider, by contrast, that the market casts off the subordination to Religion, the Prince, an excessively demanding cultural patronage or the State. In the case of Mozart, Norbert Elias describes the use of subscriptions and concerts as a way to move beyond the dictates of nobles – but the musical market was in its early stages, which paradoxically pushed his extraordinary productivity and probably explains the early death of the composer. For Pierre Bourdieu, the historical emergence of the market initially offers the condition of possibility of an “autonomisation” of art. This “reversed economy” enabled the literary field to establish its own rules – in a context particularly competitive and with the risk of an increased exposition to a market-based economy.

Svetlana Alpers shows how Rembrandt's studio labour division simultaneously reflected and shaped the creation of the market while sustaining the art production and the reputation of the master. For Edgar Morin, the "cultural industry" (specifically cinema) produces universal cultural goods and a worldwide public. By contrast, in the "aesthetic theory" of Adorno, the dominant mode of production induces both alienate *and* authentic pieces of art. The most subjected piece of work, which at the same time manages to free itself from its production context, may thus also be the most critical. Finally, in the pragmatist approach of Antoine Hennion, the numerous "mediations" (economical, social, material...) characterizing both artistic creation and artistic reception are less of a barrier than the very conditions to the modern definition and consumption of "l'art pour l'art" or art for itself.

Between alienation and emancipation, what is the historical and contemporary role of the market in arts? Under which conditions and configurations are various types of markets playing as liberating settings or key element in the constitution of art? On the contrary, in which social constellation does the market restrict or obstruct creativity or artistic expressivity? Which specificities can we observe depending on artistic forms (visual art, music, theatre, literature, cinema...), national contexts, political climate, concrete producing conditions and larger historical patterns? How does "originality", "nonconformity", "authenticity" or "criticism" relate to market settings? And to which extent have the Internet and digital devices – censed to blur the boundaries between artistic products and contexts, creators and audiences, buyers and sellers – reframed the debate?

The organisational committee is interested in contributions discussing the couple "art and market" through various past and present case studies and different methodological and sociological approaches. In a context marked by an economy-driven culture ("creative economy", "cultural industries") and, reversibly, a culturally-driven economy (everyday life and commodities "aesthetization"), while new digital monopolies rise (Amazon, Google, Facebook...) and State redefine its strategies on economy and culture, this congress intends to re-address the complex relationships between art and market.

Submissions should not exceed one page and can be written in English, German or French. Abstracts are expected to present the case study analysed, the methods used and the main results. The proposal should include a title, the name and the affiliation of the author(s). Submissions are expected **no later than April 15 2016** and should be addressed to: [art&market@unisg.ch](mailto:art&market@unisg.ch). The authors will be informed about the decision until May 1.

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*The congress will take place at the **Militärkantine** (St. Gallen), which is also a historical and cultural hotel and restaurant ([www.militaerkantine.ch](http://www.militaerkantine.ch)).*