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The Heuristic Significance of Art Sociology

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Article abstract

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GREGOR FITZI

The Heuristic Significance of Art Sociology

Abstract. *Art sociology may be simply seen as a specialised domain of sociological research. Yet the article suggests that it has also an overarching diagnostic significance to gain a better understanding of ongoing societal transformation trends. It analyses the classical contribution of Weber, Simmel and Bourdieu to the topic. Weber develops a causal-historical explanation for the development of occidental music. It becomes a key to the interpretation of the specific occidental form of rationalism beyond religion and economy. Simmel has a different approach. Art is for him one of the expressions of the modern times that he wants to describe to understand the transformation of the society in which he lives. The diagnostic function of art is at the centre of interest. Bourdieu, on his side, proposes a historical reconstruction for the development of the intellectual field in France during the 19th century. In this frame, art contributes to a symbolic revolution that establishes autonomous societal fields and promotes a qualitative differentiation of complex societies. Yet, Bourdieu's researches on art have also a diagnostic potential. Building on the analytical heritage of the classics, the article inquiries into the loss of autonomy of the art field in the contemporary art market and contributes to the debate on the heuristic significance of art sociology.*

Introduction

Art sociology is nowadays often seen as a specialised domain of sociological research. Yet, the question arises as to whether its findings have an overarching significance for a diagnosis of the current times. In this respect, Simmel was a pioneer. He analysed artworks and artistic movement to gain a better understanding of ongoing societal transformation trends. This approach provides a fruitful contrast to Weber's more causal-historically oriented research about the development of 'occidental rationalism' in music theory. Bourdieu, in turn, seems rather to follow the latter path. His reconstructions of the processes that secured the rise of an

'autonomous' intellectual field of literature and art in France during the nineteenth century, however, also have remarkable diagnostic potential. The different perspectives turn out to be relevant for the analysis of the current development of the art field that experimented with unedited transformations since the 2000s. Faced with this challenge, art sociology can renew its diagnostic potential and contribute to the understanding of ongoing societal transformation trends concerning the conflicts and colonisation processes between different social structuration logics (Fitzi 2022). Here, I propose a reading of these classical positions in art sociology and focus in particular on the recent transformation of the visual arts. Such a reconstruction could also be conducted with reference to the developments in pop music, film and theatre. However, this would open up a range of research possibilities that would go beyond the scope of this study and thus will be developed separately.

Art sociology as historical causal explanation

As Wolfgang Schluchter points out, Max Weber started to reorient his analysis of the 'occidental rationalism' toward a comparative cultural sociology as he was confronted with the rise of music theory in the work of Guido Monaco (Schluchter 2015, 236; Weber 2004b). From 1911 onwards, this interest was strongly influenced by Weber's relationship with the pianist Mina Tobler (Lepsius 2004). The 'occidental codification' of music started in Italy around the year one thousand, that is, long before the development of the overarching tendencies to the practical rationalisation of life conduct during the Protestant Reformation. Yet, Guido Monaco's music codification shares a one unique aspect with protestant ascetism that can be found in the most diverse expressions of what Weber calls 'occidental European culture'. It is the tendency toward a theoretical reorganisation of experiential data, which characterise a particular domain of life and come under a systematic conception that selects its most simple elements; in turn, taking these as the starting point to develop the remaining phenomena following a

restricted number of clearly defined rules of deduction (Weber 2016, 101–121). The 'hypothetical deductive' model of modern science thus has cultural roots that must be reconstructed historically (Schlick 2009). Since its beginnings in ancient Greek culture, for example in Euclidian geometry, according to Weber, this approach is typical for 'occidental rationalism' and opposes the specific rationalism that characterises other cultural areas dominated by the religious heritage of Confucianism, Buddhism or Hinduism (Weber 1989, 83–126).

The radicalisation of the practical-rationalist approach to life in the wake of the Protestant Reformation generated the 'rationalism of world domination' which found its highest expression in the 'fateful power of modern capitalism' that expanded from Europe to the rest of the world (Weber 2016, 101–121). Yet, following Weber, from the axiomatic deductive system of Euclid's geometry, through the life conduct of the Benedictine monks, to the development of the experimental scientific method in the Renaissance, and arriving at contemporary science and technique, a red line is drawn that moulds the specific occidental form of rationalism. If this approach was applied even to the codification of music for the purpose of teaching and then determined the way in which the prevailing form of 'musical rationalism' developed later, a culture sociology must be able to comparatively understand how the designing power of cultures unfolds and transforms societies.

This does not mean for Weber that 'superstructure' unilaterally moulds structure in contradiction to what the historic materialism of Marx and Engels postulates (Schluchter 2015, 273–288). Rather, historical causation develops thanks to an interplay between structure and superstructure, in which each develops a potential for shaping the social matter that must be reconstructed in sociological terms. In this way, Weber does not deny the analytical lesson of Marx' societal analysis, but integrates it with the epistemological heritage of Simmel's sociology of *Wechselwirkung*. Cultural phenomena, like for example rationalism, develop a social design potential that must be reconstructed in parallel to the account of the

social impact due to the development of economic productive forces. In this perspective, the 'heuristic significance of art sociology' consists in its capacity of analysing single cultural phenomena – such as the birth of the musical pentagram notation – by identifying their social implications and reconstructing their historical impact on the structuration of society as well as the dominant forms of social life that are selected under their lead. Coming to this conclusion in his historical study on the development of occidental music, Weber planned to rewrite and integrate the essays on religion sociology from the viewpoint of a comparative cultural sociology of the different forms of rationalism that shaped human history. Yet, he could not complete the project, as he fell victim to the Spanish Flu epidemic in June 1920 (Schluchter 2015, 298 f.).

Art sociology as societal diagnosis

Studies in the meaning of art characterise Simmel's whole work and constitute the basis for his late project of writing a 'philosophy of art', in the particular sense that he gave to this endeavour in *The Philosophy of Money* (GSG 6: 9–14). He could not accomplish the project either (Simmel 1941/42-2008: 56). Yet, he left us a body of texts that, after sociology and philosophy, enter the centre of debate on his work and become the subject of valuable efforts at systematisation, as for example Harrington did for the purpose of their English translation (Simmel 2020). Until 1918, Simmel was a public intellectual with a large media following not only in Germany. When planning to rewrite his *Wirtschaftsethik der Weltreligionen* from a cultural sociological viewpoint, it is certain that Weber took the work of his friend into account. Yet, there is also a major difference in their sociological approaches. Historical causal correlations of socio-cultural development were the focus of Weber's research endeavours. Instead, Simmel looked at art – as at almost everything that became part of his life experience – from the viewpoint of a study of the ongoing social transformation characterising his time. Societal diagnosis thus was the main focus of his work.

He understood 'modernity' as the crucial societal phenomenon of the early twentieth century, that is the rise of a social environment, which induced parallel qualitative differentiation of social structure and agency, engendering growing difficulties for the stability of both (Fitzi 2019). Accordingly, the answer to the question: *Was ist modern?* – in the German meaning of: what is up to date? – became the main question of the everyday participant observation that Simmel conducted. Its goal was to understand how the phenomena of steady deconstruction and reconstruction of social structure and meaning developed that mould modern society. During the boom period and the uncontrolled capitalist change of Germany's *Gründerjahre* between 1872 and 1914, there were no lack of opportunities to do this – above all, in the fast-growing metropolitan conglomeration of Berlin. Here a 'transmutation of all values' took place. Money became the benchmark of every social relation, so that whatever item was considered valuable retained value only as long as it could be transposed into monetary appraisal. Consequently, the symbolic meaning of objects increasingly lost its significance. *The Philosophy of Money* engaged in the description of the fluidification, acceleration and intellectualisation of life rhythms induced by the rise of the monetary economy, as a new societal formation (GSG 6). Sociological analysis of cultural phenomena constituted the prism that permitted an appreciation of its unfolding.

At the turn of the twentieth century – and in opposition to the age of 'administered capitalism' during the *Trente Glorieuses* between 1945 and 1975 (Fourastié 1979) – societal change acquired contours that were similar to those emerging under the flag of neoliberalism and became globalised after the strong deregulation shifts of the 1980s. This is what makes Simmel's studies in the monetary economy so topical. Yet, the early age of uncontrolled liberal capitalism also produced specific cultural expressions that, in multiple stages, Simmel made into the subject of his sociological diagnosis. In a more synthetic form, this work culminated in the famous analytical sequence on the 'tragedy', the 'crisis' and the

'conflict of culture'. Yet, if the keyword of the tragedy of culture has to this day had an enduring impact on feuilletonism (GSG 12, 194–223), Simmel's most mature diagnosis of modernity falls under the heading of its conflict culture (GSG 16: 181–207). Here, the indeterminacy and uncertainty of cultural development represent the fundamental finding and offer a decisive contribution to the critique of unilinear philosophy of history. Accordingly, modernity can neither be epitomised as a never-ending progress nor as decadence. The diagnostic endeavour of culture sociology collocates itself beyond Auguste Comte's positivism as well as Friedrich Nietzsche's nihilism (GSG 18: 167–202). The sociological analysis of capitalist society rather points out that modernity qualifies as an indeterministic oscillation between differentiation shifts and differential regressions (GSG 16: 181–207; Fitzi 2019, 2022).

Critically overcoming societal self-interpretation thus means for sociology to understand how the indeterministic variation in the development path of societies takes place not only by analysing socio-economic processes but also the predominating cultural expressions of an epoch. This became the challenge of Simmel's more extensive diagnostic enterprise, which had a significant slant of culture and art sociology. In the monetary economy, mass production progressively took the place of individual manufacture, adding to what Marxian memory found to be the alienation in production an 'alienation in consumption' (GSG 5: 564). Global markets' commodities gradually colonised everyday life, starting from their phantasmagorical presentation at international exhibitions (GSG 17: 33–38). Artworks increasingly experienced the same destiny; they had to be taken up in *tours de force* of superficial perception, allowing only collective aesthetic impressions at the expense of every concentrated experience of *objets d'art* endowed with an individual aura (GSG 17: 242–250). As a reaction, the escape from modern commercialisation and aesthetic levelling empowered a romanticisation of 'untouched nature' that gave momentum to phenomena so contrary as the conservative

weltanschauung of environmental protection (Klages 1913) and the nascent Alps tourism (GSG 12: 162–169).

In the existential and stylistic chaos of the metropolitan *Großstadt*, which was opening up to the scope of early art sociology, it seemed that any artistic expression was struggling to take shape, without being able to capture the rhythm of life that characterised the new societal reality (GSG 7: 116–131). The historicist architectural style attempted to stem the impetuous and anarchic structural development of Berlin's metropolis, whose population quadrupled from 1861 to 1905, by encapsulating the multiplication of anonymous neighbourhoods in forms that, in a confused nature, recalled the plastic values of multiple imagined pasts from neoclassical magnitude to medieval gothic spirituality (GSG 18: 167–202). Yet, looking back from Berlin to Paris, which was some twenty years ahead in the development pace of modernity, evidence materialised for the diagnostic potential of artistic creativity. Auguste Rodin, who was becoming the international star of modern sculpture and whose work was acknowledged as a creative power comparable to that of Michelangelo's plastic, showed that art was able to thematise the life feeling that characterised the booming age of the monetary economy (GSG 12: 28–36). The oscillation between societal becoming and being, which moulded liberal capitalist metropolises, thus came to aesthetic expression, creating an artform that stayed at the height of its contradictions. Despite the static nature of sculpture, Rodin's compositions captured the incessant change rhythm of modern life. Their chiselled dynamic in stone allowed sculpture to thematise both the sense and senselessness, the contradictions and sensuality of social life characterising the *Belle Époque* (GSG 7: 92–100).

Once this analytical result was achieved, it could be formalised in theoretical terms. Art gave expression to culture's ability to record changes and tensions characterising a particular historical society, which otherwise remained hidden beneath the crust of social self-interpretation. Rodin's sculpture in some way represented the modern ideal-type of this process. Yet, from a comparative

viewpoint, the analytical scheme was open to the study of as many artistic expressions as the historical turns of art styles made available. Along this line of research Simmel developed a number of historical studies on art – most notably on Michelangelo's and Rembrandt's work – that showed how artworks give access to the most profound tensions of societal life in a particular age and sociocultural environment. If modernity took the shape of an incessant metamorphosis in the quest of sense, the predominant character of societal life in the Renaissance could be understood as a permanent tension between the empirical, earthly life and its ideal, religious model. Michelangelo's sculptures express it in the most intensive and dramatic way (GSG 12: 111–136). Rembrandt's portrait painting, above all in its late phase, instead allows access to the struggle of proto-modern individuality to constitute itself as a dynamic synthesis anchored in the accelerating temporal becoming of societal life, which could no longer be projected into the ideal frame of the Renaissance portrait (GSG 7: 321–332). Rembrandt's masterhood was to express the ongoing struggle of the soul with its temporality through the simple representation of the empirical appearance of the visages in the portraits (GSG 15: 305–515, Kemple 2021).

Merging historical causal explanation and societal diagnosis

Sociology of art reveals two main vocations: the historical causal reconstruction of socio-cultural development tendencies and the diagnosis of the present time via the analysis of ongoing socio-cultural phenomena. Bourdieu's approach to the reconstruction of the art field and its historical autonomisation process offers a synthesis of both vocations. His epistemic interest in culture sociology stems from the need to historically reconstruct the formation of an autonomous intellectual field during the Second Empire in France (Bourdieu 1996). First and foremost, the research concerns the rise of literature as an innovative professional domain in the wake of the relentless development of print media with a growing readership that demanded more and more feuilletons and

serial novels. A number of professional positions arose that demanded to be filled, yet they were also to be defined and defended in their possible degree of autonomy toward capitalist (in the form of publishing houses' owners) and political power.

With reference to the physical concept of 'field of forces', Bourdieu conceives the 'intellectual field' as a social space dominated by a conflictual relationship between social actors and groups, keen to occupy its relevant positions and to design their margins of autonomy (Bourdieu 1993, 29 f.). Yet, this 'war of all against all' is also seen as having a social structuring resultant. It fosters the common establishment of an intellectual domain that claims to follow its own laws, independently of the interests of the political and economic elites that aim at directing journalism, literature and the arts in the sense of an apology of the established social status quo. The concept of 'intellectual field' thus qualifies as the basis for a theory of qualitative modern social differentiation and provides the means for a causal historical reconstruction of the collective processes that generate new societal domains claiming autonomy. Starting from the work of Flaubert and Baudelaire, Bourdieu's research studies concern in particular the development of an autonomous field of literature in France, yet then he also extends the inquiry to the art field and takes Manet's work as a point of departure for the reconstruction of the symbolic revolution in art (Bourdieu 1996; Bourdieu 2017).

Qualitative social differentiation is read as the product of transformation processes that sociology can reconstruct; it ceases to be seen as the effect of a supposedly natural history of society, as it happens in functional structuralism, which suffers from an amnesia towards the classical sociological reconstructions of the phenomenon. Rather, social differentiation is considered as the result of conflicts for the autonomy of specific societal fields that characterise historical societies, whose autonomisation processes can be reversed at any time. In the second half of the nineteenth century and thanks to a collective founding effort an 'autonomous art field' emerged in France and developed in parallel to the rise of

an independent intellectual field of literature (Bourdieu 1996, 113–140). Field actors therefore found the proper historical conditions here, yet they also had the ability to establish the principle that in order to exist art must respond only to its own criteria of validity (Bourdieu 1993, 238–253). On the basis of romantic reminiscences, the weltanschauung of 'l'art pour l'art' transformed into social praxis and generated the corresponding bohemian lifestyle dedicated solely to the completion of art.

This commitment was accompanied by a denial of the service function of artistic creativity in relation to politics and religion. Because of the dramatic end of the Second Empire, the influence of the political and economic elites over the contents and genres of literary and artistic production gave way, and so, too, the monopoly of the academic salons faded in the determination of the predominant artistic taste. To base the art field on an autonomous logic, however, meant equally to restructure the artistic professions. Artists became more independent from institutional commissioning and academic guidelines, yet in order to do so, they had to assert themselves on the emerging art market. This gave rise to the 'dual character' of the modern art field. Non-commercial production of artistic values under the principle of 'l'art pour l'art' must find a symbolic recognition thanks to a series of consecration steps that characterise the career of artists. This enables artworks to become commodities in a particular sense and within a very special trading place – on the art market (Bourdieu 1993, 35–40).

Coming back to the heuristic significance of art sociology, this finding represents one of the great results of Bourdieu's research on the art field. Beyond the historical causal explanation for the emergence of autonomous intellectual fields (in France, in the second half of the nineteenth century, within particular political constellations, etc.) the approach has a diagnostic potential that can be applied to the most varied societal differentiation processes. The art field is found to be based on two contradictory principles of structuration: the production of artworks that follows the autonomous logic of artistic creation in the form of an

'accumulation of symbolic capital' and the commercialisation of artworks conforming to the rules of the art market that generate economic capital (Bourdieu 1993, 40–55). Yet, what is constitutive for the art field is the way in which the relationship between both principles is regulated. Artists transform profane materials into objects with a high sacral character, by exclusively focusing on the symbolic value of their professional practice. An official refusal of economic value thus constitutes a precondition for the accumulation of symbolic capital that is necessary to climb the steps of sacralisation within the art field and become one of its recognised names. Or at least, this was the basic requirement for the constitution of the autonomous art field in nineteenth century France, as Bourdieu reconstructs it (Bourdieu 1993, 29–73).

Because of the pretended disinterestedness of creative processes, artworks obtain their consecration and claim to be 'priceless', so that in the aftermath they can be transformed into extremely valuable economic objects. This at least is the claim and thus the 'illusio' that constitutes the founding rule for the constitution of an autonomous art field (Bourdieu 1993, 74–111). The normative hierarchy that prevails in it privileges the symbolic value of art and implies a collective repression of the genuine economic interest in artwork production. Art is not made to achieve straightforward wealth, but to realise its autonomous principle of existence. It is thus primarily produced for the judgment of the owners of symbolic capital, that is first and foremost the competing artists within the art field and not the actors who are engaged in the art market. Only through the intervention of intermediaries between symbolic and economic capital such as critics, curators and gallerists can the first gradually be translated into the second. This taboo secures artworks an aura of sublimity and delivers them a charismatic power of attraction that, in spite of all contradiction, constitutes the precondition for their economic valorisation (Schultheis 2020a).

The field of artistic production is thus based on opposing principles of legitimacy that find themselves in a perennial state of competition. Producers who primarily seek an accumulation of

symbolic capital produce exclusively for the autonomous and self-sufficient world of 'l'art pour l'art'. Others rather adapt to the dominant taste that is already consecrated on the art market, but they are severely sanctioned by the others as servants of the status quo. A third group seeks 'popular legitimacy', that is the consecration bestowed by the choice of the ordinary consumer or mass audiences, and are stigmatised as commercial artists. Like a 'permanent revolution', all the time the conflict goes on between these opposing legitimation principles, characterised by a different mix of symbolic and economic capital. The struggle leads to the formation of different competing sub-fields that evidence an opposition between different economies, time-scales and audiences. Commercial art pretends to possess symbolic capital, aiming at its rapid translation into economic capital and the widest possible audience. Non-commercial art strives for protracted and solid accumulation of symbolic capital, like a long-term investment that one day will lead to a high economic return thanks to the recognition of an elite of admirers endowed with remarkable cultural capital. The alternation between the different commercial and non-commercial tendencies is governed by a mechanism reminiscent to that of fashion. As long as a younger avant-garde does not manage to push the consecrated one into the past, this prevails, so that the competition on the art field often takes the shape of a generation conflict.

The 'dualistic structure' of the art field steadily reproduces itself by a double closure process: the implied labelling of legitimated and illegitimated art; and triggering definition struggles that implement the opposing logics of investment in symbolic capital. The autonomy of the art field is thus based on an ensemble of collectively constructed and shared normative attitudes and practices that also secure the art trade's special status. This is valued as an activity capable of transforming economic capital into the prestige deriving from the ownership of trans-economic values endowed with a high symbolic character. It is therefore a commercial activity, but implicitly has a specific aura, because it

paradoxically claims to open the way to what 'money cannot buy'. Providing high concentrations of accumulated symbolic capital and the prestige attached to its possession, traded art becomes the target of desire for all economic and political elites in search of consecration through cultural capital which they themselves cannot accumulate. Yet, if the collectively constructed and shared normative attitudes and practices that grant the 'dualistic structure' of the art field fade, its autonomy from colonisation through other societal logics and thereby qualitative modern societal differentiation are at stake.

Ongoing perspectives of art sociology

The current question of art sociology is whether the development of the art field over the last decades still matches its diagnostic potential or has to be reconstructed beyond its analytical means. Since the crisis of the welfare state compromise in the 1980s, a dramatic loss of functional neutrality between societal domains can be observed in qualitative differentiated societies (Fitzi 2022). Under the flag of 'neoliberal policies', for over forty years now, an increasing number of societal fields have been colonised through the economic logic (Harvey 2015). This trend particularly concerned politics, yet so too art, in rather a spectacular way (Horowitz 2014). Societal restructuration processes induced massive losses of autonomy: the question is thus whether an autonomous art field subsists today or whether it can possibly re-establish its dual character in Bourdieu's sense. It belongs to the characteristics of contemporary societies that normative orders still emerge, yet with an uncertain scope of validity that evidences an entropic development of the societal structuration potential. Rather, a condition of 'normative intermittency' predominates, according to which rules, laws and lifestyle principles apply within increasingly delimited spatiotemporal frames (Fitzi 2022, chap. 3).

The paradigmatic example of this societal trend is given by labour legislation, which varies so strongly in respect to different situations, persons, places and times, that its universalistic principles

are substantially undermined (Fitzi 2022, chap. 4.2). The interlaced processes of dualisation, precarisation and conditionality of labour conditions induce a growing intermittency in the access to citizenship rights, so that agency increasingly struggles to align with this normative inconsistency. Formally established social orders, such as social security principles rooted in constitutions and overall social legislation, are still in force. Yet, this does not apply to everyone, not in all circumstances and only under a number of conditions. Accordingly, in different social fields an increasing difficulty arises in establishing ordering principles. This also concerns the collective effort that establishes and reproduces the dual character of the art field. Modernity, which is rooted in phenomena as cumbersome as capitalism, economic crises and war, still moulds societies despite all the postmodernist reverie; moreover, it does not grant any constant and secure accumulation of societal achievements. Rather, it qualifies as an alternation between phases of strong differentiation thrusts and rapid differential regressions. Today's 'crumbling neoliberal age' is a clear case of the latter societal trend. In this frame, culture strives to take shape and free itself from the grip of forced commercialisation that results in a growing difficulty of the art field to establish its autonomy from a cultural industry. Accordingly, the diagnostic work of art sociology is proving more difficult. Yet, this contingency testifies also to the topicality of its diagnostic endeavour. The question is thus how to meet the challenge and what, if any, is the role of the art field in contemporary societies.

Historically, the autonomisation of the art field was a particular expression of the overall tendency towards qualitative social differentiation that characterises complex societies. Every autonomous societal domain follows a specific structuration logic that can enter a positive relationship of exchange with the rest of society, or conflict with other fields' logic (Weber 2004a). Which societal arrangement prevails in a particular historical moment can only be established empirically. In this frame, the rise of the autonomous art field during the nineteenth century gains a specific

meaning for qualitative differentiated societies. Art partly inherits the thaumaturgical power of sacralisation that was the monopoly of religion in ancient societies and expresses a specific emancipation potential. Following Simmel, each logic of social differentiation, yet especially religion and art, have the potential to express in their language just about every world content. Thus, they can also transform reality, by according it a new – on occasion critical – meaning (GSG 18: 387–404; Simmel 1997; Fitzi 2019, 103–113). The subsistence of a societal domain, in which artistic creativity obtains free rein, facilitates the realisation of innovative syntheses between individual action and institutionalised collective action. So, new avenues open up to societal transformation. In a specific sense, this surplus of social creativity therefore represents the overall performance that the existence of an autonomous art field grants to modern societies. Changes within it are therefore sensitive. Threats to the autonomy of art by the logic of other societal domains such as politics, religion or the economy imply risks of differential regression for the arrangement of complex societies, as the history of the twentieth century showed on several occasions (Benjamin 1980; Fitzi 2022).

In view of this finding, the issue on the agenda is whether the last decades established a metamorphosis of the art field so substantial that its internal arrangement and role for society became completely transformed. This makes an investigation necessary relating to the development trends of the art field and retracing them by assessing their consequences and risks. Reviewing secondary literature in art history and sociology provides a clear picture of the ongoing processes and opens the way to new inquiries into the transformation of the art field. Three main aspects stand out here: 1. An incremental financial investment in artworks has been detected that characterised the art market in recent decades (Adam 2016). Its explanation underlines that worldwide economic and politic elites massively entered the art market seeking the prestige, which grants the consecration of the symbolic capital accumulated in artworks (Glauser et al. 2021, Schultheis 2016). This

trend not only induced a huge increase in the demand for artworks and inaugurated a restructuration of classical art trade. It also motivated financial investors to enter the market, by adding an art division to their portfolios, because of the promising growth forecast in the value and trade opportunities of artworks (Horowitz 2014; Velthuis 2007). 2. As a consequence a global art market established itself with a complex articulation of art fairs, auction houses, investors, art dealers, gallerists, leading artists, critics, curators and media. The global development of this commercial network was characterised by the export of western models of art collecting and trade to Asia and the Middle East. If this arrangement primarily served the prestige demand of local elites, on the other hand, it induced substantial difficulties for non-western art fields to emerge and establish their autonomy (Schultheis 2016). 3. In turn, the globalisation of the art market provoked a progressive industrialisation of artwork production. To satisfy the increasing demand, leading artists transformed into brand marketer, concentrating on the commercial and mediatised side of the art business and letting 'art fabricators' work for them. This transformation underlines the substantial ambiguity of the idea of authorship, which is predominant in the contemporary art field, and erodes the auratic character of artworks that constitutes the basis for the accumulation of their symbolic value (Benjamin 2008; Schultheis 2020a).

Financialisation, globalisation and industrialisation thus emerge as the dominant aspects for the ongoing restructuration of the art field. They have been widely studied from the viewpoint of the market dynamics due to the worldwide increment of demand for symbolic values by emerging economic and political elites. Yet, seen from the viewpoint of offer, two related aspects of this development need to be further investigated. On the one hand, the financialisation of the art market must be systematically reconstructed from the perspective of the investment strategies that characterise the leading financial investors in artworks (Biblio). The restructuration of the art market must come into focus that has been

carried out in recent decades. This means to understand if new hierarchies emerge between different market players, which subordinate art dealers, gallerists and auction houses to the economic power of art investment as a division of the global financial economy. On the other hand, the risks due to the transformation of the art market must be assessed, which redefine the contours of the art field and affect its symbolic and cultural character. These changes concern above all three developments related to the issues of: 1. which actors are selected as the leading protagonists of the art field; 2. which objects predominate on the art market and 3. which role is assigned to the traditional consecrating institutions of the art field such as museums, galleries and media.

In each case it is necessary to identify the specific risks that the transformation of the art market induces for the subsistence of the autonomy and the dual character of the art field. This leads to the formulation of the key research questions that art sociology must address today. Concerning the art market, it is crucial to understand whether the synergy of globalisation, industrialisation and financialisation follows strategies deriving from business models that already mould other economic sectors. As the literature observes, protagonists of financial investment in artworks come from trade and haute couture (Arnault, Pinault), the advertising industry (Saatchi) or the stock market (Nahmad Brothers) (Boltanski Esquerre 2017; Horowitz 2014). Furthermore, since the 2000s a boom in the growth of art investment funds has been recorded (Horowitz 2014, 270–293). The question therefore arises as to what the specific business models are that orient the investment strategies in art (Coslor 2011). It must be understood whether the trading model of the stock market, or the productive model of the creative advertisement and fashion industry has been transposed into the art market; or else, whether we are witnessing the implementation of hybrid investment models that gather elements from different sectors of origin, and need to be inquired into as a new development of financial capital valorisation.

The issue of the art market's financialisation is furthermore relevant because the success of the leading investors encourages emulation. The classical players of the art field (artists, gallerists, art dealers) are among those who increasingly operate according to financial investment patterns and use auction houses or freeports as if they were stock exchange centres, yet without being subject to any control institutions against insider trading and money laundering (Adam 2018; Horowitz 2014, xiii–xviii). Additionally, a new branch of banking advises clients on portfolio management options, in which investment in artworks plays a central role as an alternative to stock market speculation (Schultheis 2016). These developments within the commercial side of the art field demand a structured reconstruction that assesses the impact on its dual character. In this respect, the literature already observes a change in the hierarchy between the primary and secondary art market. The peripheral network of small galleries that secured the incubator which hands over the future star artists to the wider art market, seems no longer to be in a position to grant its function (ibid.). Galleries increasingly operate like small stockbrokers who follow the investment trends set by dominant market subjects, who decide which assets to invest in. It is thus necessary to verify whether – after the global pandemic – this trend is confirmed and which new hierarchies are imposed on different art market players.

Starting from the assessment of these market trends, art sociology can extend the focus of inquiry and ask if financial investment in artworks alters the relationships between art field actors (artists, art fabricators, critics and curators, gallerists, art dealers, auction houses, art fairs, media and museums). This investigation allows the study of the symbolic aspects of the art field and to address three related risks for the dual character of the art field: 1. the process of artistic creation. 2. the typology of objects that become artworks, and 3. the role of museums and galleries as consecrating institutions.

Concerning the transformation of artistic creativity, the focus of art sociology lies on the processes of ideation and the production of

artworks that the current development of the art market selects. It must be understood, if art production still implies forms of craftsmanship, or if its industrialisation process has gained the upper hand. This implies an assessment of whether a structural split of 'artistic creativity' established itself into different social and professional figures such as designers, fabricators and marketers of artworks, and whether this transformation makes the traditional figure superfluous of creators who are strictly dedicated to the accumulation of symbolic artistic capital. On the other hand, it must be verified if industrialised art production functionalises artists to become 'creatives', resembling the corresponding professional figures that can be found in fashion, advertising or architecture. Accordingly, there must be an enquiry into which social figures in the contemporary art field are addressed by the denomination of 'artist' and what are the crucial skills of their professional activity (designers, fabricators, brand marketers, etc.). In this respect, too, it must be clarified to what extent the skills that are typical of other branches of the cultural industry, like the entertainment, marketing and media sectors, become constitutive for a successful career in the art field, or if the marketisation and mediatisation of art production stands out for autonomous patterns of development.

In parallel, the consecration acts and rites of passage must be reconstructed, through which the symbolic capital of artworks is accumulated today. This implies understanding whether this process depends on trans-economic performances, or becomes a functional step for the production of a specific commodity called the 'artwork' that is comparable to other luxury goods. In the latter case, it must be clarified whether a functional substitute appears for the symbolic capital of artworks. Here, it is crucial to determine how the field actors frame the issue themselves and if, in their eyes, the current means of accelerated symbolic capital accumulation still grant the basis for affirming the autonomy of the art field. At the same time, it is important to establish whether counter-trends are forming to the current transformation that, in turn, aim to ensure or restore the dual character of the art field. Its study must assess to

which degree artistic creativity persists as an end in itself, or becomes increasingly functional to the industrialisation of artworks production.

The second risk factor linked to the contemporary transformation of the art field concerns the typology of artworks that succeed on the market. The priority here is to understand whether the selection processes taking place with regard to the actors within the art field have a parallel in the typology of objects that are awarded the predicate of 'work of art'. In this regard, the secondary literature highlights two phenomena (Horowitz 2014): 1. the emergence of new art objects in the recent boom years of the art market (video art, experimental art, machines, performances) and 2. the strong intellectualisation of the approach to the art object. To verify and deepen these findings, a typological classification of the art objects is necessary that predominate on the market as well as an analysis of the practices that contribute to their consecration. The quantitative expansion of art's genres, the hypertrophy of discourses on artworks and the intellectualisation of the fruition of art objects thus become as many factors for the analysis of the art field's transformation. The aim is to understand whether this metamorphosis is an indicator for the establishment of a new balance between symbolic and economic capital that impacts the dual character of the art field.

The question eventually arises as to whether the industrialisation of art creation due to the increased financial investment in artwork also changes the priorities between the different components of the art object. This object no longer seems self-sufficient following its creation. Rather, the artwork in question requires an additional investment of intellectual argument in order to construct a 'discursive aura' that distinguishes it from any other commodity (Benjamin 2008). Leading artists, critics and curators concentrate on discussing the changing meaning of artworks, so that these practices appear to become a performative ersatz for the sacralisation career that once regulated the accumulation of symbolic capital in a supposedly autonomous art field. To understand this phenomenon,

the selection of artistic objects that currently takes place on the art market must be assessed with respect to the amount of symbolic, resp. discursive ersatz symbolic capital that they evidence. The aim is to establish a typology of the artworks that predominate in the age of financialisation, globalisation and industrialisation of the art field.

In relation to this, one must consider the way that actors within this field deal with the shifting consecration rituals and highly accelerated processes of symbolic capital accumulation for contemporary art objects. Their purpose is to assess if, in the actor's perception, the dual character of the art field is still secured by such means. Traditionally, independent museal institutions guaranteed the official sacralisation and historicisation of artists and artworks that completed a successful career of symbolic capital accumulation, mainly under the aegis of a gallery. Yet, as the literature observes, the function of these institutions is changing, if not shifting (ANN 2021). What were once established as independent instances of symbolic consecration, now become increasingly dependent on the predominant processes of the art market. Financial investors, art dealers and mega galleries control the emerging and established stars of the art scene, whereas museums face increasing difficulties in securing the financial resources necessary to fulfil their function of witnessing and historicising contemporary art. As a consequence, in the interaction between institutions and further agents and actors working in the art world there are a growing number of exchange deals arranged between financial and symbolic capital. Investors present themselves as collectors who make their collections available to museums on loan or for temporary exhibition and, in return, they get the consecration of their investments in terms of a museal acknowledgement of the symbolic capital concentrated in their collections. The basic input for consecration processes thus increasingly derives from the preordained logic of financial investments, to which the independent judgement function of institutions bows in retrospect. Furthermore, major investors and collectors take over failing museums or eventually build their own

consecration institutions to optimise these processes. In this case, the entire chain of consecration for the symbolic value of artworks is directly controlled by the logic that orients financial investment in art objects (Boltanski, Esquerre 2017).

As a consequence, independent museal institutions find themselves in a dilemma that is correlated with a double risk factor. If they financially cannot afford an independent choice of the artworks offered on the market, they become increasingly dependent on the stylistic choices made by leading art market investors. On the contrary, if they aim and can afford to pursue their institutional commitment to document and historicise current art trends, they must do this under economic conditions established by contemporary art market rules. They accept prices that developed within the logic of financial speculation and do not necessarily reflect accomplished processes of symbolic capital accumulation. This raises the question whether in the art market a development is taking place that leads to the formation of speculative bubbles, which transfers investment risks from private investors to public institutions, in a similar way to what happened during the subprime crisis. A double risk scenario thus must be assessed concerning the consecrating institutions of the art field to establish to what extent their traditional role and status is shifting.

Conclusions

After the suspension of many activities due to the pandemic the mechanisms of the art market seem to be moving again. To conclude, it can be said that a programme for the relaunch of the heuristic potential of art sociology at the present time must consider four main issues that mould the transformation of the art field and affect its dual character. 1. The structures and hierarchies of the art trade. 2. The processes and figures of artistic creativity. 3. The typology and careers of artworks. 4. The role and status of art-consecrating institutions. The investigation of these aspects follows a common methodological approach. By focussing on the

perception of the field actors, it is possible to reconstruct which typological selections take place concerning the social actors, objects and institutions that comprise the art field. This offers a way to check whether these selection processes follow patterns that are autonomous or whether they belong to other societal domains. We can also verify whether there are counter tendencies or signs of resistance, so aiming at re-establishing a balance between economic and symbolic capital accumulation. Thus, art-sociological research systematically assesses which transformation of the dual character of the art field is taking place. Finally, it reconnects the different dimensions of the inquiry to evaluate the impact that the current transformation of the art field and its creative performance has on the overall arrangement of qualitative differentiated societies.

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