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ART EVENTS	1
Illustration 1 Exciting Art.....	1
Introduction	3
1. Interaction Events.....	3
2. Precious Objects and Membership Symbols	8
3. Rhythmic Entrainment	11
4. The Payoff of the Participation in Art Events.....	13
5. Works of Art and Other Inputs in Art Events	18
6. Repetition and Learning	20
7. Circulation of Symbols and Values	24
8. Internalized Interaction in Solitary Art Events	27

Art Events

Draft version of the first chapter of *The Value of Art* by Hans Abbing. A synopsis of this forthcoming book is available on www.hansabbing.nl. For updated versions visit of this chapter visit www.hansabbing.nl.

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Illustration 1 Exciting Art

[LATER on some parts will be made shorter or removed.]

1.1. *On Thursday 22 July 1976 at age 19 just after he finished his first year's study in economics,, Thomas visits the Tate Gallery in London with his friend Martin.¹ There he sees for the first time original paintings of the British painter Turner. Among them is the painting Rain, Steam and Speed, which Turner painted in 1844, and which Thomas knows well from reproductions —see picture *.² Though he liked this painting as a reproduction, seeing now the original is really exciting; the more so, because talking about it with Martin and facing the actual painting, it turns out that they share the same passion for Turner and this particular work. For several days they continue to talk about the painting and about Turner's work in general. According to Martin Turner is not only a fantastic romantic and expressionist painter, but in a way he is also an impressionist far ahead of his time.' Yes, I like his work; it is important work; it is so much better than that of Constable". And Thomas agrees. When alone Thomas continues to think about the work. He can identify with the work: the hard to control power of the train; the vagueness of its surroundings. The painting seems to be a mirror image of himself, of who he is or wants to be.*

1.2. *On the same occasion they also visit some rooms in the gallery with modern art and come across a sculpture, a rectangle of bricks simply laid out on the floor. This work they do not appreciate.*

¹ To a degree Thomas is the alter ego of the author, but there are important differences. Many facts but also attitudes differ, which is anyway inevitable as Thomas is ten years younger.

² Though being part of the collection of the National Gallery in London at that specific time it was on show in the Turner Gallery.

Thomas says “I certainly do not like this work”. And Martin adds: “Come on, this is no art.” After a brief moment of doubt Thomas agrees. Talking about it they become more and more indignant. “What phoniness”. They find out that it is a sculpture by Carl Andre, which was made in 1966 and had just been bought by the gallery. It is a minimalist piece consisting of one-hundred-and-twenty fire bricks, arranged in two layers, in a six-by-ten rectangle —see picture *.³ This work represents for Thomas and Martin ‘no-art’ and the hypocrisy of the contemporary art world. However, agreeing on this, the situation makes them actually feel good. It is as if they are taking the side of true art defending it against people who want to bring art down. Their feeling good only increases when a guided tour of people enter who look at the piece with clear deference while the guide in a low and serious voice ‘explains’ the piece. Noticing the, in their eyes, artificial behavior of these people they silently exchange glances. They feel connected and different from the others who are apparently taken in by phony contemporary art. (The piece by Carl Andre, called Equivalent VIII, was exhibited several times, but became the center of controversy in 1976 after being featured in an article in *The Sunday Times* and later being defaced with paint. The ‘Bricks controversy’ became one of the most famous public debates in Britain about contemporary art.)

1.3. The next days Thomas and Martin continue to talk enthusiastically about the Turner paintings. Thomas also gives Andre’s bricks some more thought and once the piece comes up again in a conversation between him and Martin. They stick to their opinion, but the indignation and excitement have waned. However, a few days later in the youth hostel’s kitchen Thomas and Martin overhear a conversation by two girls. They talk about the same brick piece, not with deference but enthusiastically. According to them the piece marks a major and exciting step in art history. Because Thomas likes to provoke and because Martin fancies one of the girls and because the firm opinion of the girls intrigues them, they join in the conversation.

1.4. They tell the girls that for them the brick piece is absolutely no art; it is a disgrace for art. The girls, Anna and Elisabeth, who are American art students doing a year at Goldsmith art academy in London, maintain that this is an important and revolutionary work of art. Of course the four of them do not stop short at just giving their opinion. A lively discussion develops on what turns something into art. Because of the girl’s arguments and because the girls are so enthusiastic and also because the boys like the girls, they gradually change their opinion. Thomas says that thinking back at what he saw, he actually starts to like the work. He now can connect well with the girls. But Martin still has some reservations and says “Okay, I know it is a good work, but I do not like it.” In this he stands apart from the other three and actually feels a bit excluded.

1.5. In the course of their discussion on art Thomas also mentions his and Martin’s love of Turner, which is not shared by the girls. In this the boys stand fast. They vigorously defend Turner against these modernist unbelievers. It strengthens the bond between the two of them. Nevertheless, not being able to share their good feeling about Turner with the girls is frustrating. Luckily the overall good mood of the evening prevails. The feeling is that positive, that they decide to prolong the experience the next day. The boys accept the invitation of the girls to visit the Whitechapel Gallery together. There turns out to be an exhibition of works by Victor Vetter involving live bees and lots of honeycomb. The girls are again enthusiastic and their enthusiasm is altogether contagious. Thomas really listens to them and wants to know more about contemporary art.

1.6. Thanks to the girls in the course of many encounters with friends Thomas gradually becomes ever more knowledgeable about contemporary art. (Sociologist would say that his cultural capital increases.) This came in handy when in 1988, being fed up with economics, he takes the entrance examination of the Rietveld art academy in Amsterdam, which at that time had become altogether conceptual. And although he never became a conceptual artist, he now knows much about it and

³ The piece, called Equivalent VIII, was exhibited several times, but became the center of controversy in 1976 after being featured in an article in *The Sunday Times* and later being defaced with paint. The ‘Bricks controversy’ became one of the most famous public debates in Britain about contemporary art.

**when he takes his young nephew *Hiro (more about him in later illustrations) to the museum it is his turn to inform him and kindle enthusiasm in him.*

1.7. To return to the events that summer in London, the four of them started to form a small group and on Wednesday 28 July they go together to a concert in the relatively intimate Queen Elisabeth Hall. The program is somewhat unusual; first the Pastorale of Brahms and after the break Shostakovich Symphony No. 10. The director is Simon Rattle, who at that time is only 21. (It is his first performance in a large hall.) Anna, Elisabeth and Martin are enthusiastic all through the concert. And even though Martin is not very much into classical music, having fallen in love with Elisabeth is eager to learn and shares their enthusiasm.

1.8. Although Thomas likes the Brahms piece, he finds it hard to share in the positive mood in the hall. And during the break he complains about the atmosphere being formal and the audience arrogant. He feels intimidated. His companions do not at all agree. They experience the atmosphere as festive rather than cool. They reproach Thomas for not joining in and Thomas feels excluded and ashamed. At that time he does not belong to the group, let alone to the audience. However, after the break he is completely taken in by Shostakovich' music and by the passionate director and during the burst of applause he feels altogether connected with everybody else. Afterwards the feeling of solidarity wanes, but his enthusiasm for Shostakovich' music remained. The same as in the case of Turner's painting he says to himself: "It befits me; this is me; or otherwise, it is who I want to be". This way in an internal conversation he constructs a personal identity that lasts to the present day.

Introduction

Art events in the way I use the term are not or not in the first place 'events' like an art festival or an exciting art performance with many extras. They refer to any situation in which people focus on art and interact with one another. It can be a conversation on art just as much as a concert in a stadium.

In this chapter I present, explain and give some applications of the set of instruments that will be used in the analysis in the following chapters. Because an important unit of analysis of the book is the art event, I will define the concept and analyze various aspects of it. I base my notion of the art event on the notion of the interaction ritual as developed by Randall Collins.⁴ In many ways the chapter is an exposition of Collins's theory on ritual interaction chains with examples from the arts. And as noted in the preface: it offers an almost 'shameless' application of his theory to the arts, the same as parts of later chapters.^{5]}

[In the preface I will write something like this: Over time my thinking has become that of a sociologist rather than an economist as both colleagues in sociology and economics tell me, but the fact that my first and most thorough training was in economics leaves its traces. I can easily juxtapose my sociological approach to approaches in economics, as shows from notes and many references. This is more difficult for me in sociology—in the list of literature there are more references to works by economists than sociologists. Given my limited time I have chosen not to make up for the lacuna in training. Instead I chose to almost 'shamelessly' use the approach of one major sociologist, Randall Collins. I do this knowing that Collins himself has meticulously positioned his work within the history of sociology and the works of important predecessors and contemporaries, foremost in the first chapter of his book *Ritual Interaction Chains*.⁶ Those readers who are interested in the wider sociological foundation of the contents of this book could benefit from reading this chapter.

Also in another aspect my application of Collins's theory is somewhat 'shameless'. For various reasons I use other terms than he does and occasionally I deviate from his theory. However, this should not be a real problem as I clarify and motivate my choices either in the main text or in notes.]

In as far as the chapter has one central theme, it is foremost the demonstration of the fundamentally emotional and social nature of our dealings with art. In our culture art consumption and production is

⁴ Collins (2005)

⁵ More about this is said in the preface/introduction.

⁶ Collins (2005)

very much associated with an individual experience but, as I shall argue, even just thinking about art is a social process.

[As noted in the preface certain sentences are in italics, not so much because they are very important for the overall analysis, but because I want to convince the non academics reader who is interested in the arts and who reads these parts, that reading the text could be worthwhile.]

[HERE will be inserted some paragraphs about what is to come in the chapter]

1. Interaction Events

Do people passively listen to music, watch a performance, read a book or look at a painting? Or is the perception of art an active process, which involves interaction with other people —both present and imagined people?

First it should be noted that, when people read books, listen to music or watch paintings, they do so in a certain location at a certain time and often in the presence of one or more other people. The same applies to talking, thinking or reading about art. In many of such situations a specific form of interaction takes place. Shortly I will explain the nature of this interaction in some detail. Here it suffices to say that when more than one person is present and these people focus on art and are somewhat aware of each other's focus of attention and share a certain mood, this sets in motion a process that makes the interaction pleasurable for the participants. I call it an *art interaction event* or in abbreviated form an *art event*. In this the term art is used in a broad sense. The focus can be on an actual or imagined work of art or on works of art generally or on art as a concept or on art related matters. Moreover, it can be a small scale vent, like a conversation on art or a visit to a gallery, or a large scale event like a concert or a theater visit during which hundreds of people focus on a work of art.

This provisional definition of an art event implies that at least two people participate in the event. But, sometimes people are alone with an artwork. Or otherwise people do not all the time share their experiences and thoughts with others. Also in these situations there can be interaction and an art event. As Herbert Mead argued, thinking is internalized conversation, which implies that there is interaction with imagined others.⁷ Examples of internalized others are a friend who is not there or a painting which has become personified. Such solitary art events are probably very important in the arts and require a thorough discussion. At the same time for explanatory reasons I prefer to start with an analysis of what goes on in interactions events in which more than one person interact. The solitary art event, including interaction through the internet, will be discussed in the *last section of the chapter.

Art events are part of (or are a subset of) all interaction events. An interaction event, or just event, in the sense it is used in this book, is what the sociologist Randall Collins calls an interaction ritual.⁸ The scope of art events can vary considerably. It can be the exchange of just a glance between people who stand in front of a painting in a museum; it can be the exchange of a single sentence about the painting; or it can be a conversation on the painting or on art in general. But it can also be a full-scale art event that starts with the moment of entering a building, in which, for instance, a lecture on art will be given or a musical or theatrical performance will take place, and that finishes at the moment of leaving the building.

⁷ Mead (1934)

⁸ The use of Collins's term interaction ritual and therefore of the term *art interaction ritual* would be more suitable, were it not that the meaning of the term ritual as used by sociologists and more specifically by Collins is an altogether other meaning than the meaning the term has in common parlance (and to make things worse it also differs from the meaning of the term in anthropology). I know from experience that it takes a long time before it is possible to forget about the common parlance meaning of the term ritual and to read a text with only this specific sociological meaning of the term in mind. Therefore, I shall use the term event or interaction event instead of the term interaction ritual. However, to remind the reader of the specific

In full-scale art events there is usually not a continuous mutual focus of attention and continuous shared mood among the people who participate in it. For instance, in the case of a concert the number of people, who are really into the music, will vary during the event. In such events there is a succession of art and non-art events in which the large majority of the visitors participate while at the same time there are also many intermittent or parallel art and non-art events in which only sub-groups participate. The bowing by the conductor during a classical concert is a sub-event in a series of sub-events. Examples of parallel art and non-art events with fewer participants are that of handing in one's coat to the waiter in the cloakroom, or of the conversation during the break, or the exchanging of glances when one of the musicians misses a note, or of the dancing close to one another of a small group during an electronic/dance concert. In all such cases others are de facto excluded.⁹

Maybe it would be better to say that such full-scale art 'meetings' are a collection of interdependent chains of interaction events (or interaction rituals) with art as an important and recurrent *theme* and not an art event itself. There are parallel chains of events that at crucial moments, which are typical and essential for the overall event, come together (and next deviate again). The latter is for instance the case during the moments of applause. At those moment everybody in a hall, both audience and musicians are participants in an interaction event. But also small scale events like a conversation consist of many sub-events. Therefore, not to complicate matters unnecessarily, I shall also call full-scale art meetings like concerts and museum visits interaction events; they are events that overarch many other events.¹⁰

Looking at the main group of participants there are clearly different types of full-scale art events. A museum event differs from the just described performance events. The full-scale museum event is limited to a specific, sometimes small group, which usually enters and leaves together, know one another and in their trajectories stay together or regularly come together and then interact with one another. It is not an event in which all people which are present in the museum at a certain moment take part.

In the parallel chains of successive events that take place during a full-scale or overarching art event there are many events that are no art events. In the foyer during the break people may well talk about the weather or business. At such moments they are focused on the latter and not on music or art. The opposite can also apply. Whereas the visit to a mall with continuous background music is an overall shopping event and not an art event, in the chain of events brief art events may occur. For instance, for a short moment this is the case when the music draws the attention of people doing their shopping and they exchange some opinion on the music.

The line between full-scale art events and other events is not always clear. Is the visit to a disco with people listening to the music, others dancing on the music and others again talking with one another while the music plays an art event, a dance event or a conversation event? It depends on the main focus of attention during the overall event; on what the event is about. Moreover, as said, people may hold different opinions on what is art and what is not. A sport event or a science event is evidently no art event. But in between and overlapping situations exist as for instance in the case of forms of ice ballet or in the case of rather technical installations.

nature of such events, I will occasionally let the term event follow by interaction ritual within brackets to remind the reader of the specific meaning of the term event.

⁹ Here and elsewhere in this book I use the terms 'dance music', 'electronic music' or 'electronic/dance music' as generic term for various forms of 'popular' music in which primarily electronic instruments are used, including such genres as ambient, house, techno and dubstep. It follows that electronic contemporary classical music is not included.

¹⁰ This is in line with Collins (2005), who also uses the term interaction ritual for a wide variety of situations in which people meet, from extremely short encounters to large meetings like political meetings.

What happens during an event and what defines an event can be explained by looking at Figure 1 on page *.¹¹ Following Collins there are four ingredients and four outcomes in art events.¹² The first ingredient is *bodily co-presence* or group assembly and the second *a mutual focus of attention*. While interacting people are aware that they focus on the same thing, they are caught up in each other's emotion and so, thirdly, a *shared mood* develops. Moreover, fourth, people have a sense of who is participating and who is excluded. There is de facto *exclusion* and a barrier to outsiders. In illustration 1.1 and 1.2. Thomas and Martin were together and aware of their focus on the same object, Andre's Brick-piece, and by interacting, exchanging some words, they developed a shared mood: they were indignant. They did not share their mood with others. Anybody who was not there was excluded. Later on this also applied to the new visitors who showed deference and were evidently in a different mood. (1.2.)

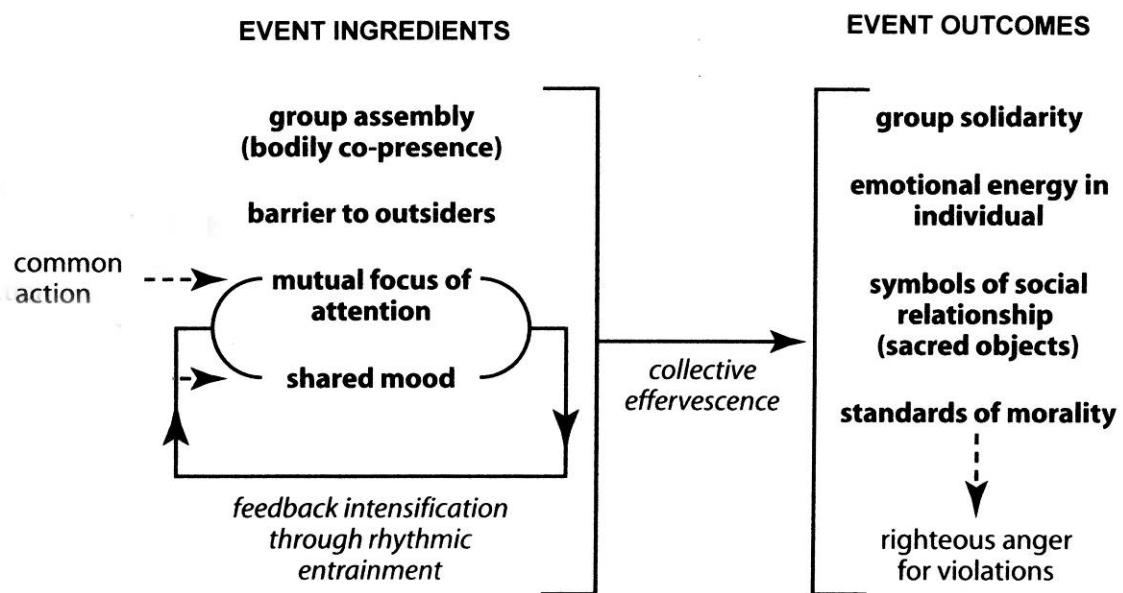


Figure 1 Interaction event (or interaction ritual)

In any interaction there are social barriers and therefore inclusion and exclusion. This may occur at different levels. During the concert, which Thomas and his friends went to, there was a mood among the people in the hall that was not shared by people who were outside the hall. But at times Thomas and his friends will have interacted in a way that other people present could not participate in. And at some stage Thomas felt excluded because he could not go along with the others' enthusiasm about the music. (1.8.)

During events these four ingredients may well reinforce one another. Especially the common mood and mutual focus of attention intensify each other. In the illustration Thomas was at first a bit uncertain about Andre's sculpture, but he picked up the indignant mood of Martin, next showed clear indignation as well and talking about the piece their shared mood became more intense (1.2.). The same applied to the applause after the Shostakovich music in the Queen Elisabeth Hall had finished.

¹¹ With some minor modifications the figure is a copy of the figure Randall Collins uses in his book to explain what is involved in an interactional ritual. Collins (2005) 48.

¹² Interaction events or rituals are a subset of the set of what philosophers and economists call common goods. Therefore the figure also gives a description of ingredients and outcomes of many common goods. In his important discussion of common goods *Klamer (2004) gives a description of common goods which resembles the description of interaction events or rituals in this book.

(1.8.) As always the very first moments only a few people started to clap, but almost immediately others joined in and next everybody was clapping including Thomas. Thus the clapping became synchronized and intense, there was a clear rhythmic entrainment and the shared mood became exuberant. However, though focus and mood reinforce one another, looking at organized art events the two can differ in relative importance. For instance, *it is possible that due to the stillness during many classical concert the mutual focus of attention is stronger than during many electronic/dance concerts, but that because of the bodily activity the shared mood is stronger in the latter concerts.*

The combination of the ingredients of interaction events, first being together, second having a mutual focus of attention and being aware of this, third a boundary separating participants from non-participants and fourth the sharing of a certain mood, leads to a degree of collective effervescence: a contagious stirring, be it sometimes minor or short lived.¹³ The latter applied to Thomas and Martin who exchanged glances when the other visitors started to talk very seriously about Carl Andre's piece. At that moment the effervescence was short lived. But, for instance, during a moving theatre performance the contagious 'stirring' can involve many people, be intense and clearly noticeable while lasting for considerable time. (In most of the art events in Illustration 1 there was collective effervescence and the events were exciting.)

The stronger the collective effervescence the more intense and successful the art event is likely to be. This is reflected in the outcomes of an event. In successful art events it is through collective effervescence that the four event-ingredients lead to four event outcomes. As shown on the right side of the figure, these are: first, *group solidarity*, second, the creation of *symbols of group membership*, third, *feelings of righteousness* and fourth, *emotional energy* among individual participants.

During successful art events *feelings of solidarity and belonging* develop. Participants belong to the group of people who 'make' the event, while others do not. At that moment the latter are no participants. In other words: participants have a shared identity. They could have said: "We are the conversation, the play, the music, we are the event." "This is us." At least for the duration of the event others are no members; "They are not us". Such feelings can easily be recognized in performing art events. People who are not there or people who are not 'in the mood' do not take part in the feelings of solidarity; they are excluded or feel excluded. (1.8.) But in various degrees feelings of solidarity and inherent exclusion also exist during conversations or, indeed, an exchange of glances or a wink as in the case of Thomas and Martin when the other visitors started to discuss Andre's sculpture.

(1.2.) This outcome is enhanced by symbols of belonging or group membership. These symbols are generated and celebrated during the event. Following Emile Durkheim they can also be called 'sacred objects'.¹⁴ Physical objects, but also persons and immaterial things like behavior, opinions and concepts can function as *membership symbols* or sacred objects or—as I shall call them— *precious objects*—to prevent the use of the possibly confusing term 'sacred'.¹⁵ *Examples of precious objects in art events are the performance, the artwork, the rich decoration of the interior of the opera theatre, the waving of arms in certain pop concerts, silence during classical concerts or the recurrent statement that money and art do not go together.*

Next to precious objects successful art events generate *standards of morality* or moral convictions.. The precious objects or membership symbols are not only precious; they are also good, they have goodness. Participants believe in their symbols. There is a feeling of righteousness. In the conversations between Thomas and Martin Turner and his paintings are precious objects whose

¹³ Collins (2005) uses Durkheim's macro-sociological term collective effervescence (Durkheim (1912/1965)) and applies it in his micro-sociological analysis of situations.

¹⁴ Durkheim (1912/1965) used the term 'sacred object' in his analysis of religious and political rituals. For instance, a political leader can become a sacred object. In the systematic micro-sociological approach of Collins sacred objects emerge in any interaction ritual.

¹⁵ Because for readers the term "sacred" in sacred object can in itself be value-laden and therefore confusing, I will use the more neutral term 'precious' object instead.

goodness is beyond question, and when they meet disbelievers like Anna and Elizabeth they are indignant and defend and protect their precious objects. Or, when Thomas refused to or was unable to follow the others in the flow of the classical concert, the others felt righteous anger and reproached him for his disrespect of their precious objects (1.8.) Finally, a successful art event gives the individual participant what Collins calls, *emotional energy*. Thanks to the event he is 'strengthened'. (After several of the events in Illustration 1 Thomas and his friends felt more self-assured and energetic than before the event.)

In the following sections more will be said about the production of symbols and emotional energy in art events. Here I say a bit more about the emotional nature of art events. Many people associate the appreciation of art with feeling. Often stereotypes are involved: art lovers being sensitive and artists being emotional. However, philosophers of art tend to put the cognitive aspect rather than the emotional aspect in the artistic experience in the forefront.¹⁶ And *presently also groups of art lovers, most of all those who are involved in forms of contemporary art, don't want to hear much about emotions and are inclined to emphasize the cognitive aspect of the artistic experience*. This is an interesting trend, which as such is in need of explanation—and later on I shall attempt to offer such explanation. But by itself the denial or mitigation of the emotional in artistic experiences makes little sense. Art events are emotional from beginning to end. Also the cognitions involved are infused with emotion.

Participating in successful performances and museum visits is an emotional affair. The shared mood is emotional, the effervescence is emotional and so are the feelings of solidarity they induce. That art events are emotional affairs is not that special. Ultimately any (interaction) event involves emotions. When an adult smiles at an unknown child in the bus and it responds by smiling, for a brief moment they put emotion in their interaction: very briefly they have a shared mood, there is a moment of effervescence and the outcome is that they feel connected and good. The good feeling wanes quickly, but it existed. Similarly in all of the art events described in Illustration 1, from looking with a friend at a Turner painting to listening together with 800 anonymous people to Shostakovich' music, emotions played an important role as well. To emphasize this I *used the term exciting in the title of the illustration.

The emotions involved go beyond momentary excitement. If the event is successful there usually is an afterglow; the emotions last a considerable time and are easily re-evoked. In the example Thomas continued talking excitedly with Martin about the Turner painting for many days, but of Andre's piece he hardly thought anymore. It was only because of a new exciting event, that is, the conversation with the girls that Andre's piece started to 'figure in his life'. Emotions do not have to be dramatic.¹⁷ A strengthening event can bring good but not strong feelings about oneself, which last long. Probably the romantic and restless *Rain, Steam and Speed* painting by Turner was so important for Thomas, because in an internal dialogue he said and for a while continued to say to himself: "This is me" or "This is what I want to be".¹⁸ The symbolic meanings of the painting appealed to him.

As noted, during art events not only artworks but also all sorts of other things surrounding artworks can become precious objects or membership symbols. Because this is a finding that has consequences for the overall content of the book, I shall discuss it in more detail in the next section.

2. Precious Objects and Membership Symbols

How come that looking at works of art, listening to music or watching performances together can connect people?

¹⁶ [*References. Also discuss the position of Goodman (1954)]

¹⁷ Collins (2005) 105.

¹⁸ Goffman (1959) uses the phrase feelings about one's self.

No interaction without symbols. Any thing, like an object, activity or concept, can have meaning and become a symbol in events. For interaction (or communication in a broad sense) significant symbols are a necessity. The symbol itself is no thing; it is a mental representation of something, which serves interaction and membership.¹⁹ In the case of symbols the meanings of things are no mere signs; they are symbolic. When the adult on the bus smiles at the child and the child smiles back, for a short moment this activity symbolizes their connection, and this symbol becomes a precious object and membership symbol in their momentary two-person group.

During art events, both simultaneously and successively, several more or less meaningful and intense symbols are created, of which some are precious objects or membership symbols. Intense membership symbols are usually taken from what people who participate in an art event consciously focus on. When Thomas and Martin were standing in front of the Turner painting, the painting served as an intense symbol of art, beauty, speed etcetera and turned into a symbol of belonging, of membership in the small group they formed at that moment. But it is also possible that the painting was foremost a symbol that symbolized for them the painter Turner who they admired and therefore it was Turner rather than his painting who represented for them a membership symbol or precious object.

Among the many simultaneous and successive precious objects in large scale organized art events like a concert or a theatre or dance performance or exhibition some objects stand out. The latter generally are what the event is about and people focus on most. This is also what people will remember best. Often it is the actual performance, the music, the play, the dance, but it can also be a conductor, like Simon Rattle or a well known soloist, like Madonna or a genre like Reggae. They become the foremost precious objects. Or it can be people who are not there: an absent or dead composer like Bach, a choreographer like Nijinsky, a playwright like Shakespeare, a painter like Turner. They are often venerated in small scale events as well as is shown in the pictures ** [Bust of Bach, poster of Madonna and picture of Reggae-cap. Subscript: veneration of * * through the use of objects that serve as emblems.]

Often it is the pre-existing reputation of an artist, i.e. the widely shared bits of information about him, which has already served as membership symbol at many occasions that contributes a great deal to the intensity of the event. Due to the already high reputation of Simon Rattle as a young and gifted conductor Thomas and his friends were already full of expectation and in the right mood before actually entering the Queen Elizabeth Hall.

Also such things as buildings, ticket prices, dresses and behavior can serve as additional symbols and can at times become foremost precious objects. At the opening of a new museum the building is likely to be the foremost precious object while the exhibits come second. In a classical concert the tuxedo's of the musicians or the bowing of the conductor and during an opera the rich decoration of the interior of the opera theatre or the high price of the tickets can be symbols of the high value of art and at times they are also precious objects or membership symbols. And in pop concerts the latter can, for instance, apply to the informal and casual or on the contrary exuberant clothing of the musicians or to the shouting by musicians of sentences like: "Hello Amsterdam" or "I can't hear you". Also the title or brand name of an event or series of events like the Film Festival in Cannes or the Night of the Proms in the Royal Albert Hall in London can be intense symbols and sometime important membership symbols during these events and in preceding and successive events.

Often characteristics of the crowd are symbolic and taken as membership symbols. The ways people interact, restrained, polite, straightforward, informal, still, waving arms, dancing and so on, are not only symbolic; ever so often they become symbols of group membership as well. This can also apply to sub-events in which only part of the audience participate. Groups may go along with the general

¹⁹ The symbol itself is no thing; it is a mental representation of something, which serves communication and membership. Collins (2005) 154.

enthusiasm in the overall art event in which they participate, but also have sub-events with symbols of their own. *The peculiar behavior in the mosh pit during a metal concert, in which participants quasi aggressively slam into each other, is meaningful and symbolic and can be a precious object in the subgroup who takes part in the pit. Sometimes the excitement in the events of subgroups can hinder others and go at the cost off the general excitement, but quite often it radiates and adds to it. As Thomas once experienced, the activity in the mosh pit raised the good mood in the hall also among the people outside of it.*

Almost any item, present or not, that symbolizes membership is more than it appears to be. During a performance of the singer Madonna she is far more than just a body, which symbolizes membership. Nor is Bach during a Bach-concert just an imagined body. Madonna and Bach are collages of all sorts of information about or around them, like Bach having been extremely devoted or Madonna working out for three hours each day. True or false, such cognitions are anyway charged with emotion, while the ever changing collages are emotionally charged precious objects.

Also for people participating in a Reggae concert the performers and the music are likely to represent precious objects, but at the same time they will almost certainly serve as symbols of Reggae as a musical style and of the world of Reggae in general with its main singers, its own lifestyle, CD-labels etcetera. Moreover, the imagined community of all people involved in the world of Reggae can also represent an intense symbol of group membership during the event. In a similar fashion for people participating in an opera performance or in an important opening in the municipal museum the imagined community of civilized people who are into high art can serve as an important symbol of group membership in the event at hand.²⁰

Standards of morality or moral convictions, like the goodness of Bach or Madonna or Reggae or art-with-a-capital-a, are not only outcomes of art events, they are also inputs in later events. In this respect they are produced and reproduced during events, in which they can easily become precious objects and intense membership symbols again. As such they bind people together over longer periods of time. This shows when they are threatened. *If someone puts Reggae down or questions the stillness during classical concerts, the rightness of Reggae and the rightness of stillness during classical concerts are defended by all means.*

It should be noted that not every symbol will be experienced as positive. Symbols can be depressing and in that case they will certainly not turn into a membership symbol. Sometimes they spoil the event. *For youngsters the stillness in concert halls can be a symbol of elitism or represent an unpleasant duty and they will not go again.* And when Thomas and Martin focused on Andre's Brick piece it revolted them; the work was no precious object for them. It was a symbol charged with negative emotion. At that time it symbolized no-art and the phoniness of the contemporary art world for them—an art world of which they had a stereotypical view; a vague cognition infused with emotion. The event as a whole could have been depressing as well, but in this case their mutual focus and shared mood led to the creation of other membership symbols like the importance and goodness of art and the importance of honesty in the appreciation of art (instead of phoniness). In all, the event was successful and strengthened them (1.2).

In order to recognize symbols and find out about their significance in art events, one can look at various possible circumstances. In the words of Collins: "Is it treated with respect, as a sacred object, as a realm apart from ordinary life? Is it given a spatially separate zone, a special physical location? Are there special qualifications as to who can approach and who is excluded. Does it attract vehement attackers. Is it regarded as incommensurate with merely utilitarian values?" Such circumstances are clear indicators of important symbols.

The existence of museums and concert halls that look like palaces and form separate zones and the respectful way in which participants treat what is exhibited and performed there, indicates that the

²⁰ Imagined community is a term used by Anderson (1991).

general symbolic significance of works of art and of art in general is high in our society. Also the indignation of art lovers, when in their eyes art is treated disrespectful, is a clear sign of art's significance. It is a central thesis in this book that in our society the symbolic value of art is (still) exceptionally high and that this has consequences for the aesthetic and financial value of art.

Next I want to look at a more specific aspect of interaction events: rhythmic entrainment. I believe that it is important for the proper understanding of much art and many events in which art figures, while so far it has not received much attention.

3. Rhythmic Entrainment

How come that when people listen to music, watch performances and look at works of art together with others, they can become caught up in the 'swing of things'.

In Figure 1 on page * rhythmic entrainment is part of a feedback loop which enhances the mutual focus of attention and shared mood and so indirectly the collective effervescence and the success of an event. Forms of rhythmic synchronization through entrainment play a role in any successful event and in performing art events this is often crucial.

Before looking into this particular type of feedback it is good to remember that the term rhythm is anyway often used in connection with works of art or parts of works of art. Music has rhythm, a dance piece has rhythm, poetry has rhythm and, maybe less obviously, a painting, a play and fiction have rhythm, both in overall composition and in separate parts like movements and sentences. Also in the way artists produce art works, whether in solitary or in group events, there often is clear rhythm in the way they move their bodies. As shown in films many painters or draughtsman move their bodies rhythmically while working —see picture *. Writers type rhythmically, while the sounds the keys make enhance the flow and the mood. And although too much bodily movement is taboo for the musicians in a symphony orchestra, they almost all move their bodies rhythmically. (They do so more than is absolutely necessary to do their work. This clearly shows from registrations of concerts of some 60 years ago. At that time musicians, including pop musicians, were more immobile than they are now and that is what was expected of them. More movement would have been regarded as artificial and unnatural, while now the opposite applies.)

Rhythm is basic to human existence. The heart beats regularly. We walk, talk and laugh rhythmically. We move babies in a rhythmical fashion and we walk and dance rhythmically. When there is bodily contact rhythms become easily attuned. The ultimate example of this is the contact between mother and fetus, which could well be the starting point of the overall importance of rhythm in the existence of mammals. But also in sex or dancing together or walking hand in hand synchronization comes about easily —and when it does not, the event tends to be frustrating instead of successful.

The attunement of bodies that do not touch is less self-evident. Humans are, however, very good in, usually subconsciously, first monitoring each others bodily rhythmic movements, whether in audible sound or visible movement, and next synchronizing them. Also without touching already on the micro level of for instance breathing, gestures and blinking people easily are caught up in the 'swing of things' and so synchronize bodily rhythms. In human history, the monitoring and synchronization of bodily rhythms, for instance in focusing on the prey during hunting, may well have been essential for survival. In the classical concert hall and the theatre bodies do not touch but are close together and it would be strange if there would not be continuous forms of rhythmic entrainment, however minor.

Also synchronization of rhythms beyond this ultra micro level contributes much to the success of events, including art events. In successful conversations the rhythm, pitch and intermissions in speech become easily attuned.²¹ And also when an audience does not respond verbally, *good actors*,

²¹ Collins present more and more detailed examples and refers to several scientific researches that demonstrate rhythmic entrainment at the ultra micro and micro level. Collins (2005) 77 [rather *-*]

comedians, charismatic orators and improvising musicians are well able to enhance and steer the interaction between them and the audience by increasing or decreasing rhythms in combination with volume and pitch or by having little intermissions and next restarting the rhythmic flow of sounds and movements. The swelling of laughter and applause are also good examples of a feedback loop involving rhythmic entrainment.

Audible communication is more effective for the synchronization of bodily rhythms and next enhancement of a shared mood than visible communication.²² One reason may be that hearing starts already in the womb; another, that longitudinal sound waves can travel around corners and can be monitored also when they come from behind.²³ Moreover, the longitudinal effect on the eardrum and the skin generally gets closest to the transfer of bodily rhythms through immediate bodily contact. *This explains why strongly amplified bass sounds in pop and electronic/dance music concerts can be an effective means in enhancing interaction, a shared mood and feelings of solidarity and so add to the success of the concerts. People get taken in by the sounds and by one another. There is a flow or vibe.*²⁴ *Advanced modern amplification techniques have made the effect stronger and also easier to control by bands and DJs, who use it to steer the interaction with and among the audience.*

According to Collins strong motor activity that becomes synchronized and intensified by rhythmic entrainment is generally more effective in promoting a shared mood, feelings of solidarity and the creation of energy in individuals than weak motor activity.²⁵ In this respect *synchronized singing (along), loud applauding, shouting, laughter, dancing and waving of arms are likely to add more to the short term success of an event than humming, a light tapping of feet and a minor swaying to the beat of upper bodies or of just heads while being seated, while the latter again are likely to have a stronger effect than a hardly noticeable breathing that has become more or less attuned, as is the case in many high art events.*

That emotions become more intense during periods of strong motor activity is what can be expected given the so-called James and Lange principle. They proved —independently from one another— that physical changes in the body are not the result of emotions, but that emotions follow from physical changes in the body.²⁶ Strong motor activity surely goes together with relatively strong physical changes in the body to mention only changing blood pressure, heart rate, breathing, body temperature and sweating. Therefore loud applauding, shouting, dancing, waving arms, singing and so forth lead to relatively strong emotions and, when synchronized, a strong shared mood and collective effervescence, which in turn contributes to the success of events.

This is not to say that the impact of minor bodily activity and its attunement as in the case of breathing in classical concerts is ignorable. It certainly adds to the mutual focus and shared mood. Also, if due to taboos on more noticeable bodily movements, as in many high art performances, such synchronization is, consciously or not, experienced as a relatively strong bodily activity, the effect can be considerable. Nevertheless, because “active crowds develop their collective effervescence in those moments when they are active rather than passive spectators”, it is likely that *in high art performances the emotional effervescence and feelings of solidarity only become really strong during the applause.*²⁷

Sometimes rhythms rest on less regular waves with longer wave lengths than is common in musical lines or in applauding or laughter, but which are nevertheless part of a loop and increase

²² Collins (2005) *.

²³ This is emphasized by Henriques (2010) who describes and analyses the vibe in Jamaican dance halls.

²⁴ Henriques (2010)

²⁵ Collins (2005) 83

²⁶ James (1980) [*recheck] Cf. Collins 211

²⁷ Collins (2005) 83

effervescence. Through rhythm in their speech or movements comedians build up a strong shared mood. However, as there is anyway a maximum of energy people can take in, for instance during the telling of a joke, the comedian will see to it that there are less intense intervals in between jokes and so creates a wave with a longer wave length

Any creative artist manipulates short and long term rhythms and waves and inserts interruptions. *In art interruptions in rhythms and waves are particularly important.* They can add to or reinforce the energy the event brings. For instance, *a comedian will insert elements, which go against the rhythm, like an unexpected silence that may even be painful, but this way he grabs the audience's attention again and next he will create a new wave generating new solidarity and energy among the audience.* It is a largely anticipated interruption or surprise, somewhat comparable with the sad middle part of nineteenth century symphonies. One knows that disaster will come, but when it comes it is still painful.

The kind of interruption that occurs in a symphony as a whole occurs in almost any detail of artworks as well, as in a small part of a painting, a specific movement in dance or a single line in a musical piece or poem. Anything that is irregular and somewhat unexpected and interrupts the rhythm or flow can function as a kind of dissonant. Typical recurrent and still surprising interruptions can also be found in the otherwise continuous beat in much electronic/dance music. (Interruptions or abrupt changes can also occur in a flow of thought. Of this many examples can be found in James Joyce's Ulysses.)

It follows that *in art the alternation of painful events or surprises and their resolving in pleasurable events, that is, the expected unexpected is rewarding. However, if there are many dissonances and few resolves, or when the relationship between the two can only be followed by specialists, the event is unpleasant for non-specialists and there is no incentive to participate again. The latter do not anticipate the dissonances or the resolves; for them the sequences make no sense. This may well be the case with some contemporary classical music, like atonal and serial music.*²⁸

So far I primarily looked into rhythmic entrainment in the participation in art performances. However, less noticeable the findings also apply to activities like looking at paintings in a museum together with or without others or listening to music on one's own or reading and other solitary art events. Usually, on such occasions motor activity is less noticeable, (even though there are many exceptions like a person who listens to music at home while conducting an imagined orchestra with both arms). Nevertheless, in the flows of perception and waves of thinking there is always rhythmical entrainment and often the rhythms which are present in art works, including paintings, serve as catalysts.

Having discussed two aspects of art events in more detail, precious objects and rhythmic entrainment, it is now time to have a closer look at the rewards of the participation in art events. Why do people participate in art events, and why rather in some than in others?

4. The Payoff of the Participation in Art Events

Why do people go to performances or exhibitions that make them sad?

The participation in a successful art event, from a concert visit to a pleasant discussion about art, brings participants, what Collins calls, emotional energy. The event strengthens a participant and brings him life force or vitality; it gives him a 'lust for life'. Depending on the situation and the participant other terms with slightly different connotations may be more fitting: the event brings someone enthusiasm, initiative, pride, courage to take action, boldness in taking initiative; it brings feelings of confidence or elation, of being alive; it makes one feel like a good person.²⁹ The notion of

²⁸ Cf. Drösser (2009)

²⁹ In his book Collins (2005) mentions the terms used in this sentence. Some of them were used earlier by Goffman (1967).

emotional energy may be too specific when applied in a rigid way.³⁰ Therefore, unlike Collins, I shall use the term loosely and use other terms like strength, life force, vitality, confidence and emotional gratification as well.³¹

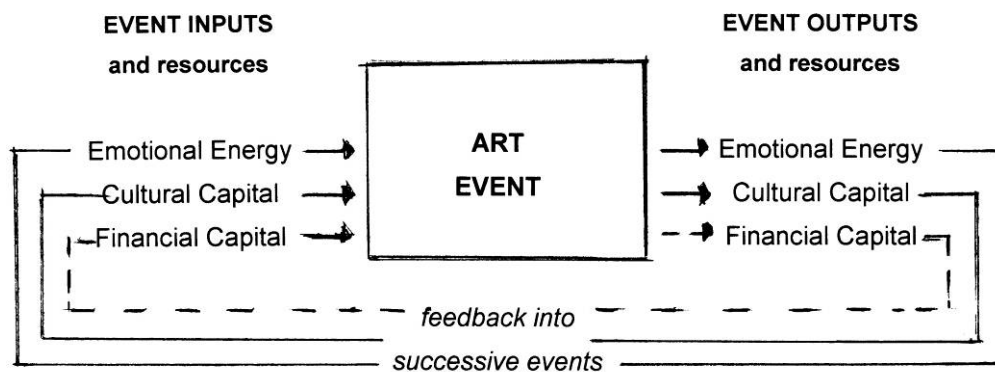


Figure 2 Inputs and Outputs of Art Events

In Collins's approach an individual participant can use the payoff of events, the energy or strength or emotional gratification that an event brings him, as a resource and input in upcoming events. In that case there is a feedback loop. This is indicated by the arrow in Figure 2 on page *. In this respect the term energy is indeed useful, because energy can flow, but it can also be stored for use at a later moment. Moreover, as in the case of a battery, there is depletion. The additional energy, which the exchange of glances with Martin in the Tate Gallery brought Thomas, waned within minutes (1.2.). But the enthusiasm following the conversation event with the girls and their successful visit to the Whitechapel Gallery lasted longer, and before it depleted, it served as a resource and input in the successive successful visit to the concert in the Queen Elizabeth Hall. (1.3 till 6.)

The latter is an example of a chain of art events: a visit to a museum followed by several conversations, another museum visit and a concert. Such chains (interaction ritual chains as Collins calls them) exist at many levels. First, a full-scale organized art event like a museum visit can be conceived as a chain of successive smaller events, from entering the building and handing in one's coat in the cloakroom to leaving the building. Second, a visit is part of a longer chain of events: a trip on the back of one's friend's bicycle to the gallery and afterwards some shopping and a dinner in a restaurant, afterwards.

In Collins's theory the more successful an event is the more energy it brings and vice versa. Moreover, in his theory, people steer from one event to the next, going for the events that energize them most, or, in other words, give them most emotional gratification, strength, life force, vitality, self-confidence, emotional stability and so forth.³² And they steer away from unsuccessful events. During a gallery opening someone drops out of an uninteresting encounter to join a more promising person or group he already scouted looking over the shoulder of the person he was talking to, and he may actually do so a number of times. And after a successful visit to a concert with baroque music, before too long a visit to a similar concert is likely to follow.

³⁰ In Collins's theory emotional energy serves as a common denominator which, in principal, can be measured on a single scale. Collins has been criticized for his strict use of the term emotional energy. See among others Wilterdink (2005), ***.

³¹ The economist would subsume such and other rewards under the term utility: the art event has utility for a participant. But the utility concept is unnecessarily blank and therefore not helpful for the analysis of art events. However, as said, the term emotional energy, the way Collins applies it, could well be too specific.

³² The economist would say that in doing so they maximize utility.

Hardly conscious, people choose the events that bring the most emotional energy. (They can be said to maximize emotional energy.) This explains the chains of events they pass through. Therefore Collins's theory is dynamic. It attempts to explain people's behavior over time. In the chapters of this book his theory will enable us to analyze not only the successive choices people make in their art consumption but also long term developments like the rise and fall of art styles or the rise and possibly forthcoming downfall of art-with-a-capital-a.

Using the economic metaphor of a market one could say, as Collins does, that there exists a market of events. The market consists of all events that people can choose from. For instance during the opening there is a market segment of conversations. Or in the case of concerts there is one of traditional classical concerts with a submarket of baroque concerts; or of electronic/dance music concerts with a submarket of techno concerts. Given their resources and taking into account the costs of participation, moving from event to event people 'rationally' 'choose' the events with the highest payoff in terms of the emotional gratification, energy or strength they 'expect' it will give them.

It follows that the basic model is that of the cost-benefit model in economics and of the rational choice or rational action model in both economics and sociology. Given their resources, people will steer towards events which are gratifying, which energize them, and steer away from events that are less gratifying. However, in the way the model is applied in this book there are some important differences. Foremost in saying that people 'rationally' 'choose' their next step does not imply that people consciously and deliberately make choices; that they calculate the net benefits of each event in which they may participate next. People go with the flow and feel their way through a multitude of alternatives. Nevertheless, finding one's way does imply the conscious or unconscious working out of alternatives, but in real life these present themselves gradually and through experience over a series of occasions.³³

Going with the flow, visions of forthcoming rewards in later events can be important. They often are inputs in the event at hand and so influence the intensity and success of the event and therefore also the 'choice' of successive events. But generally such visions are vague or limited to the near future.³⁴ But this does not imply that people behave irrational. On the contrary, looking at human behavior in this way there is no need to assume that people can behave irrational.³⁵

As said, while going with the flow people 'take into account' costs in the form of energy and financial inputs as shown on the left side of Figure 2. Part of costs is the energy someone puts into an event. Sometimes somebody puts much energy in a conversation with friends about art or is very enthusiastic about a forthcoming visit to a museum with his partner and next the result turns out to be disappointing; there is little focus and no strong shared mood and therefore no strong feelings of solidarity develop. In relation to costs the payoff is small. Hence he will not repeat the event. He will prevent talking about art again with these friends or he will not take his partner again to the museum. (Dealings with art are sensitive. The failed museum visit may well be part of a chain of events which leads to the break up of a relationship.³⁶)

³³ Collins (2005) xiii.

³⁴ Going with the flow is also a matter of trial and error —cf. Menger (2006) 793. People 'maximize' rewards, but, unlike economists often assume, humans are most of all short term maximizers: they maximize forthcoming rewards.

³⁵ For those familiar with economic theory: at least in this respect the model, that is used in this book and which could be called a 'rational interaction model', is closer to the neo-classical model in economics than many heterodox economic models, which have been developed in opposition to the neo-classical model. Moreover, given the way Collins (Collins (2005) 143-5) interprets rationality in behavior most criticism on the rational action theory in sociology (for instance * and *) and the rational choice theory in economics (* and *) does not apply to his approach. However, the more fundamental criticism of Bourdieu (Bourdieu (1992)) on the rational action theory remains relevant. However, this is not the place for a discussion of his criticism. In my view the application of the cost-benefit model in the way Collins uses it leads to useful insights.

³⁶ Student research done by Josien Arts on listening habits and identity in pop music confirm this thesis.

Entrepreneurs know of constraints and path dependency. Therefore they also create/stimulate recognizable markets segments and have targeted groups of potential consumers. They also do this in manipulating product qualities, like atmosphere. Present various examples in art sector. Organized full-scale art events always involve financial costs for participants: even when a performance or museum is free, people always need some resources or financial capital to get there. At the same time, certain participants, among them artists and art-entrepreneurs, earn money with their contributions to organized art events as is shown in the box on the right side of the figure. Such financial aspects are certainly not unimportant. They have an effect on the chains of art events people participate in and the course they take.

Since I am going to use Collins's notion of intensity of events and emotional energy all through the book —be it in a less strict sense than he does— some additional remarks are called for. *First, and foremost, the intensity of the event should not be interpreted as a momentary intensity but an intensity that includes the afterglow of the event. Some events, like sex or a visit to a disco, can be momentarily very intense and have an intense afterglow, but (in the case of most people) the afterglow does not last long. On the other hand the momentary intensity of a concert visit can be less strong, but if the afterglow lasts long, the overall intensity and the energy it brings can be larger than in the case of sex or a disco visit.

To this can be added that the membership symbols, like the bodily contact and the special mood of sex or during a disco visit are not that easily revoked other than by a repetition of the event. The relative sustainability of the event's energy is relatively low. To keep the energy up the event has to be repeated frequently. (This explains that comparable to smoking the participation in such events can easily lead to addiction.) However in enthusiastic conversation and in thinking the visitors of for instance classical and pop concerts will re-invoke the membership symbols of the event, the symphony, the conductor, the importance of classical music as symbol of civilization, the world of Reggae etcetera, for considerable time by remembering the event and talking about it. This way the energy wanes much slower. It wanes until it is replenished by another visit to a concert. This could partly explain why many youngsters visit parties every week, while they go to concerts far less often, even though the price does not differ much.

*Second, it should be noted that for many participants the output including the afterglow of successful events does not necessarily have to take the form of a highly energetic, enthusiastic or excited state. *The gratification, which the participation in a succession of successful art events brings, like listening to cantatas of Bach or songs of Elton John, may have the form of emotional stability or strength, a feeling of being alive —"this is who I am" or "this is how I can be a good person".* And in some cases 'who I am' may well be a person who is happy with a simple life without much excitement or strong emotions. But due to the successful event or succession of events someone is anyway better equipped to face the world. It is the opposite of depression. Moreover, a continuous high state of excitement is anyway unlikely, because the large majority of events (including art events) are not particularly intense and therefore the energy they bring is limited.

*Next, events can not only be unsuccessful; they can be the opposite of gratifying and cost participants energy. *A bad theatre play may leave audience members disappointed, if not depressed and exhausted. Long before the end of the play people start sighing and become restless.* The visit was an energy drain. Also discussions on art cannot only be gratifying and energizing, they can also be frustrating. As with all interaction events many art events are not very successful or just unsuccessful.

Fourth, some events that involve works of art, which make people feel sad or shock people, can nevertheless be successful and not depressing. In this respect the time dimension matters in two ways. In the first place, a happy event can be more happy and energizing due to a preceding unpleasant event. *For instance, as noted, in many nineteenth century symphonies there is a middle piece that tends to make people sad or that is relatively chaotic and disturbs people. These are*

*unpleasant feelings which people usually try to escape from. People know that that this middle piece will come and yet it is experienced as an unpleasant surprise. But next there is the final piece which is cheerful and in which chaos and evil are overcome and the audience feels relieved, even more so because of the preceding unpleasant feelings.*³⁷ Afterwards the audience bursts out in enthusiastic applause. Happy endings in art events, from symphonies to Hollywood movies contribute much to the success of the event and the energy it brings including the afterglow. And in still art events with sad endings it is often the applause that saves the situation. A successful theatre play, which ends with the death of the hero or with actions that emphasize and symbolize the hopelessness of human existence, may leave the audience silent for a while, but the following applause resolves the earlier negative feelings.

However, in the second place, an art event can only be successful in the long run. There are performances, books and paintings that really leave the participants at a loss. (This happened to Thomas, among others, after watching the theater play *Bent* of Martin Sherman together with Peter in the London Bloomsbury Theatre in 1981 and while reading *The Lake* by * in Amsterdam in 1995 and after watching the painting *Totes Meer* by Paul Nash, again together with Peter, in the Tate Gallery in London in 2005.) The works are surprising and the surprise is unexpected and unpleasant. Afterwards there is no applause or no enthusiastic (internal) conversation. But though the art event is intense and depressing, this is more than compensated by an intense and elevating afterglow and mental reworking of what happened in the initial event.³⁸ In this case the main gratification has been postponed. But if the event was really too much and even in the long run there is no gratification, the participation in the event was a mistake and participants will not go again to similar performances or read similar books.

*Fifth, it should be noted that not every participant gets as much out of a successful art event. This is because participants enter the event with various levels of energy or initiative and because they bring along different personal qualities. These include personal emblems or reputations, which during the event are public or made public and as symbols become charged with emotion and so turn into precious objects from which they may profit more than the other participants. The expert in a conversation during a gallery opening may well get more out of the conversation, because he brings along the symbol of his expertise, which is or becomes known to the others and which then becomes charged with emotion and turns into a precious object. *This is the same as what happened to Thomas in illustration * on page *, when he was introduced as artist in a party of non-artists and became the focus of attention. His being artist was a temporary membership symbol in the group from which he and his host benefited most.

*Finally, people differ in their capacity for taking in energy and thus for increasing or maintaining a certain level of energy. Certain people never get much out of an event like a concert or, more generally, out of events in which they interact with other people, while others get a lot. The former are, *in the words of Collins, low energy or depressed people and the latter high energy people.³⁹ These and other personal qualities a person brings to an event are inputs in the event. The same applies to works of art. This is the topic of the next section.⁴⁰

³⁷ Cf. Small (1998)

³⁸ Cf. Collins (2005) 81, where he discusses the storing of emotions and the transforming of short-term emotions in long term emotions.

³⁹ Collins (2005) * [look in A-4s].

⁴⁰ In this section the emphasis has been on the individual who makes choices and receives rewards. Nevertheless, it must be emphasized that, unlike in the case of micro economics, the starting point of the analysis in the symbolic interaction approach of this book is not the individual but the situation and the interaction events taking place in situations. Ultimately the individual or self is the product of chains of events.

5. Works of Art and Other Inputs in Art Events

Can artworks make people feel good?

Works of art are inputs in events. They have an impact on the interaction in both art and non art events and on the emotional energy such events generate. Generally the influence is positive and therefore works of art have value for people. Works of art can be direct or indirect inputs in events. They are direct inputs in art events, when during such events they become symbols including membership symbols or precious objects. When in a concert hall people listen to Bach's Matthew's Passion, the music can become a precious object or it symbolizes Bach, who can then become the precious object. The same is the case when people pass by the Guernica of Pablo Picasso. The painting can become a momentary precious object or it can symbolize Picasso or the fight against fascism, which can then become precious objects and membership symbols.

It follows that artworks are often a necessity for a successful art event, but they are not what make people feel good. What make them feel good are the intense focus and shared mood and the feelings of solidarity and righteousness that follow. The artwork contributes to this as do other inputs, like a frame or a wall. Passing by and watching a painting in a museum room next to many other similar paintings will generally be less rewarding than watching the same painting on a large and otherwise empty wall.

In non-art events artworks can also contribute indirectly to the interaction without becoming important symbols. By just being there artworks may influence an atmosphere which is conducive to a shared mood and collective effervescence and this way they contribute to the success of an event. There are many situations in which works of art are present and people interact with one another but do not focus on them. When a painting by Karel Appel has been on the wall of a living room or an office for a long time, most of the time people, who live or work there, do not pay attention to it anymore. The same applies to the background music in the shopping mall or café, whether composed by Mozart or Elton John or anyone else. Occasionally however, people may still focus on the painting or the music. For a short moment the work may then become a direct input in a brief art event and if the latter is successful, it will straightforwardly contribute to a shared mood and feelings of solidarity. But most of the time such works are indirect inputs and part of an ambience. And ambience matters. If the music or the painting had not been there the outcome of the non-art event may well have been different. Some people get more emotional energy out of a shopping event or a business deal in the presence of muzak or a painting by Appel than without. But, in this respect works of art are not special. Many other ambience factors or 'stage properties' are inputs in events and influence their output. If there had been different lightning in the shop or other chairs in the office, the outcome of the events might have been different as well.

In this context it is worth noting that the popular notion of the artist being active and the spectator or audience being passive makes no sense.⁴¹ In the case of a painter his activities produce an artwork as an output, which next serves as an input in events in which spectators are actively involved. Not only is there mental activity, there is inter-action with others (or with imagined others or parts of oneself in an internal conversation). Symbols are created in an active process and it is this activity that gives the artwork value, in the sense that it contributes to an interaction that brings energy. In the case of a performance the same applies to the composition and performance and in the case of a live performance it often is also the interaction between performers and audience that bring energy.

Not only works of art contribute to the success of art events. Many things can be direct and indirect inputs and have an impact on the interaction in an art event. In this context 'things' can be anything from actions and objects to cognitions and energy. The building, the furniture, the clothing, the lightning, the dimming of the light, the enthusiasm of the musicians, the shouting of 'bravo', the

⁴¹ This notion and the intermediating role of the artwork has been analyzed and criticized by, among others *Ranciere 2010 and *Vargas (forthcoming). The latter also emphasizes the significance of other than artistic inputs in the aesthetic experience.

waving of arms, the behavior of the personnel can be indirect inputs and at times direct inputs or ingredients in the event at hand.

Inputs not only come from participants. Also (groups of) non-participants furnish things that can become direct or indirect inputs in art events, like the building, the interior, the painting, the instruments, the sound system, the vinyl records used by the DJ, the score and the scenario. (Usually these were produced in earlier events by people who do not participate in the event at hand, like a manager or a living or dead composer.) The combination of such inputs can be called the setting of art events; they are circumstances or stage properties.

In this context it is useful to distinguish inputs, prerequisites and resources or means. Some inputs, but not all, are prerequisites and vice versa. Common action is usually both input and prerequisite. No concert or exhibition without people listening or watching. But a floor and a roof are usually just material prerequisites and most of the time they are no inputs in the event. However, stillness during a classical concert is usually both input and prerequisite: if people are noisy the conductor may well stop the performance. The waving of arms during a pop concert on the other hand is a clear input but it is no prerequisite. Depending on the type of event all sorts of hardware, from floors to electricity, are prerequisites but usually no inputs. Also in events, which are not altogether spontaneous, some organization is a prerequisite. In the case of large scale events, like exhibitions in museums and a concert in a concert hall or stadium, the organization can involve a staff consisting of many people using an office, computers etcetera.

Inputs, including prerequisites, demand resources, which participants must have at their disposal in order to be able to participate in art events. Resources or means are energy, cultural capital and financial capital —see Figure 2 on page *.⁴² Participating and interacting always requires at least some energy. Also to be able to participate in, for instance, a concert a person must possess specific knowledge; he must have some understanding of the behavioral and musical conventions, of the frame of experience and of the behavioral manners. And participants also need some money, for instance to pay for adequate clothing, transport and tickets. Moreover, organizers of events need financial resources to pay for material (pre)requisites, from a building to personnel.

Many inputs which are enabled by cultural and financial capital are personal. Participants bring along all sorts of individual qualities, which as inputs in events have symbolic potential. In events they can become symbols. This can apply to, for instance, a visibly expensive suit, expert knowledge that is shared and pre-existing reputations which are known or made known.

All resources and inputs can also be outputs of art events; outputs which next can serve as resource in future events. In this respect inputs are investments. There is a feedback loop. In Figure 2 this is indicated by the arrows. In some events, but not all events —hence the *striped arrows—, there are entrepreneurs, performers and other personnel who earn money, which they can use in the organization of future events of which enable them to participate in events that cost them money. And in successful events participants both invest energy and receive new energy. They also learn; they acquire knowledge, which can have symbolic potential in successive events. Learning is a matter of participating in chains of successful events. It is one of the topics of the next section.

⁴² The metaphoric use of the concept of cultural and other forms of capital became popular in the social sciences mainly due to the work of Bourdieu, in particular his book *Distinction* (Bourdieu (1984 (ed. princ.in French 1979))). However, many differences exist in the way social scientists apply these concepts. As I will explain further down in this book cultural capital is a broad concept. It comprises cognitions, beliefs, recollections, anticipations and preferences, all of which have symbolic potential in events. For some presently popular uses in economics of the term cultural capital in opposition to economic capital (or as I prefer to say: financial capital) see Throsby (2002; Hütter and Throsby (2008))Hütter and Throsby (2008).

6. Repetition and Learning

How come that when people, who are unfamiliar with a certain genre in music, like baroque or electronic music, repeatedly visit baroque or dance concerts, sooner learn the conventions of the genre and start to appreciate the music if they go together with friends rather than alone?

If going to certain exhibitions, concerts, operas and plays is gratifying, people want to do it again; if not, they go for something else. By repeating successful events people try to maintain and rebuild energy and feelings of solidarity. Repetition ensures high payoffs in terms of long term strength or emotional energy. A good example is that of regular church visits. The 'performances' differ little, but for many visitors they remain exciting. *The same applies to visitors of museums or performances or of specific types of exhibitions or performances, like romantic nineteenth century art or baroque music. In the case of opera, classical music and theater people may even have subscriptions to series of related performances. This also explains why subscription holders are often unhappy when organizations 'force' them to consume combinations, which in their eyes contain too little repetition, as when traditional pieces are mixed with experimental pieces..*

In art consumption specific forms of repetition are common. This can be the listening to familiar music at certain occasions, like Sunday mornings or each time before going to sleep. Or when somebody is in a certain mood he may well choose to listen to a specific type or piece of music. He may do so for many years. *A happy or sad mood can be intensified and prolonged by a particular type of music or piece or track, while with the help of another type an unwanted mood like feelings of frustration or depression can be changed into a more pleasurable mood.*⁴³ (And in the case of listening to music each time before going to bed this activity can even be said to have a rhythm.) These are, of course, generalizations. Not all people have the same listening habits, but I am sure that many readers will recognize this phenomenon.

In the chains of art events a person participates in there is almost always much repetition, but some variation or surprise is essential as well. As noted, more or less 'expected surprises' are an ingredient of many works of art and they often have a rhythmic form or are the occasional break away from a rhythmic movement. And, though the term rhythm is probably no longer applicable, over longer periods participation in surprising art events can also have a repetitive form. In this respect some people like a higher frequency of surprising events than others — which does not imply that the overall intensity of the events for the first is higher than for the last or that the first learn more than the latter.

With too much variation or too many surprises the participation in chains of art events become painful and will be avoided. And with too little variation or no surprises at all participation in successive events leads to a relatively large reduction in gratification over time —or diminishing marginal returns as economists would say. But sometimes minor variations can make much difference. Again church visits form a good example. Also going with a different friend than last time or listening to the same piece but by a different orchestra can make much difference. However, often it is a bit more surprise and consequent learning that keep up the attention. In this respect areas in the arts matter: some people are more adventurous in certain artistic areas and others in other areas. Or some people are generally more inclined to be adventurous. Nevertheless, *the idea that in the case of art one wants to be, can be and should be surprised most of the time, an idea which can be found in modern art circles, I find incredible. And this attitude becomes distasteful when it turns out that it mainly serves to distinguish oneself from others who "do not want to be surprised or do not want to make an effort".*

Moreover, it is often argued that good or quality art brings surprise and that this distinguishes good from bad art. But if surprise is a measure of quality, this implies that art cannot be anyway good or bad. Surprise is relative. It depends on the person or group who is or is not surprised. What is a

⁴³ This as well is confirmed by the before mentioned student research by Josien Arts.

surprising revelation for an adolescent or a social group can be kitsch for an adult or another social group. What is surprising depends on one's so-called cultural capital and the latter differs per person and group. As noted the irregularities in some contemporary classical music, like atonal or serial music, only offer important recurring surprises for people who spent much time on attaining the highly specialized cultural capital required for the 'understanding' of these types of music. For others the irregularities are not surprising, but senseless and unpleasant. It also follows that complexity in art is not per se a sign of quality.

The overall or long term energy, which the participation in a more or less intense art event brings, has an impact on the frequency of the repetition. This depends on the afterglow of events and its reworking, which can be more or less intense and elevating. In order to keep up the energy that successful art events bring, these have to be repeated frequently if they are intense but have a limited afterglow and whose energy is therefore less easily sustained. *For many people listening to music on CDs or through earphones from MP3-players can be momentarily very gratifying, but usually the experience is soon forgotten. To keep up the energy the event will frequently be repeated. But listening to the same or other music in a concert hall tends to be a far more intense and rewarding event. The concert will be remembered and be a topic for conversation for a long time and to keep up the energy it needs to be repeated far less often. The sound quality of music at home or from earphones is often higher, but this is easily compensated by the overall intensity of live concerts.* In the latter the mutual focus of attention, the shared mood and the resulting feelings of solidarity are much stronger and therefore the visitor gets far more out of it. Even now, 36 years later, Thomas occasionally remembers the concert with Shostakovich' symphony no.10. (1.8.) The symphony and the event still hold a special place in his heart.

It follows that not only the choice of organized art events but also the frequency of the visits will be related to the overall emotional energy or vitality they bring over a longer period. *Going to the movies together with a friend or friends is rewarding, but on average less so than the visit to a live art performance, like a concert or play.* Because in the cinema there are no live people performing on a stage, the shared mood becomes less strong and there is less effervescence than in live performances. The symbols that are created are usually less intense; they become less charged with emotion and are less easily re-evoked after the event. *Therefore it can be argued that partly because visits to the cinema are less gratifying, people go more often to the cinema than to live art performances. Similarly, the fact that at the moment visitors of classical concerts go more frequently than visitors of pop concerts may well indicate that the typical (with the emphasis on typical) classical concert is less intense than the typical pop concert.*⁴⁴ (At first sight this finding differs from what economic theory would predict, but *as we shall see in the *next chapter there is no real contradiction.)

Next, I want to look in some more detail into the phenomenon of 'learning art' which is directly related to the previous discussion of repetition. People change over time. They learn and 'unlearn'. This implies that in the long run in the repetition, which is so characteristic of much art consumption, and in the choice of art products someone consumes at least some changes are likely to occur over time. Through the earlier described feedback loop the personal inputs someone brings along in the form of cultural capital gradually change. Over time he will experience art differently and he is likely to steer towards slightly different events. (This may not apply to all art consumption. For instance, specific artworks may continue to relax a person, because they matter in the context of some kind of personal unresolved problem, which arose during childhood and will never be altogether solved. The expected unexpected in the specific artwork remains important during decades and possibly all through life. Foremost it is repetition that lies at the basis of learning in the arts. The general model is that of repetition in combination with a progressive feedback from earlier into later events. Cultural capital is

⁴⁴ [*Evidence on frequency]

a personal output on the right side of Figure 2, which on the left side feeds back in the next related event as a personal input with symbolic potential. People learn by participating in chains of events. Using an economic metaphor one could say that cultural capital is each time reinvested and so changes or increases in specific areas but not in others. Such increase occurred in the case of Thomas in illustration 1.6. Thanks to a conversation with two girls about contemporary art early in a series of events Thomas' cultural capital increased and this enabled him to be admitted to the art academy, which in turn was a major event on the way to becoming an artist.

In this book cultural capital is a broad concept. It is a mix of individual qualities, like reputations, diplomas and emblems, cognitions, beliefs, recollections, anticipations, tastes and values.⁴⁵ They have symbolic potential in events and the owner can benefit from them when they are inputs in events.⁴⁶ Such mix is specific and only useful in certain events. Knowledge of the manners in elite circles is of little help in events in which working-class people participate and vice versa. Or cultural capital that is useful when visiting an electronic/dance concert may have little value in visits to classical concerts and vice versa.

Unlike in the case of money or financial capital, cultural capital is embodied and though a transfer from one person to another is possible this is no matter of simply handing over. In chains of art events people learn from one another. It is only during successful events that cultural capital is transferred. When components of the cultural capital that a person brings along become public and symbolic they can have an impact on the cultural capital that others take out of events. Usually this is not just a one directional affair —the 'teacher' or peer also learns from the 'pupil'. There is an attunement of knowledge, preferences and attitudes.

In this respect two aspects of learning must be stressed. First, learning through the transfer of cultural capital is not simply cognitive learning, the filling of one's memory banks. It is foremost the acquiring of symbols that have membership significance.⁴⁷ Second, the transfer of cultural capital is an altogether emotional matter. *An example of the first is that visiting a classical or electronic music (dance) concert for the first times it is foremost the learning or adoption of the right frame of mind that makes these visits enjoyable. There is no need to immediately develop the ability to distinguish the sounds of all instruments being played or to distinguish minor changes in pitch and beats per second.* What the newcomer needs is the development of a feel of the general symbols and their significance of what goes on during the performance of a work of art both in the performance itself and in the ways of participating. Beforehand a newcomer probably knows that stretching arms during certain types of electronic/dance music concerts or stillness during classical concerts are common practices, but had not yet felt their significance as membership symbols and therefore was unfamiliar with their social importance. By actively taking part in the company of people who do, he learns the ways of such art events.

In the second place emotions play a vital role in the transfer of cultural capital. For a successful transfer or attunement a shared mood, effervescence and feelings of solidarity are essential. What makes most pop and classical concerts successful is the presence of a large group of believers: people who already love the type of music, have high expectations and are enthusiastic. They show their emotions. Already before the band or conductor appears on the stage there is an excited mood and when they appear the applause is loud; moreover, when the pop ensemble starts to play a song, which the audience knows well, this may well be accompanied by more applause. The positive

⁴⁵ The metaphoric use of the concept of cultural and other forms of capital became popular in the social sciences mainly due to the work of Bourdieu, in particular his book *Distinction* (Bourdieu (1984 (ed. princ.in French 1979)). However, many differences exist in the way social scientists apply these concepts. For some presently popular uses in economics of the term cultural capital in opposition to economic capital (or as I prefer to say: financial capital) see Throsby (2002; Hütter and Throsby (2008))Hütter and Throsby (2008).

⁴⁶ Collins (2005) 153 [*→→ Bourdieu→→diplomas and other emblems→→]

⁴⁷ Collins (2005) 153

feelings are contagious. Newcomers and even disbelievers get caught up in the others' mood and so 'learn' to like the musicians or the kind of music or specific works. Moreover, the presence of enthusiastic friends or acquaintances among the crowd greatly enhances the process of learning. The same applies to a visit to an exhibition together with someone who already beforehand loves the paintings and admires the artist.

It follows that learning is most effective in the company of others; not just an enthusiastic but anonymous crowd, but foremost of enthusiastic friends and acquaintances one likes. *As readers may have experienced themselves, it is hard to 'learn art' by going on one's own to concerts, whether of baroque music, serial music or electronic/dance music, or to theatre and dance performances or museums or gallery openings.*

Even if a visitor after a first-time visit to a contemporary classical or electronic/dance music concert can still not make much sense of the music and the audience behavior, he may well wish to join his friends again in a later visit, because the mood during the concert was good, he had a good time with his friends and did not feel excluded. Due to the contagious mood the event is a success for him in spite of his limited 'understanding' of the music. He can imagine that he gradually will start to appreciate the music and so his feelings of belonging will increase. Therefore he wants to go again. This way in a chain of successive event he starts to 'understand' the music through 'learning by doing'. He learns and becomes knowledgeable and in due time may even become an expert. It is extremely unlikely that such development would have taken place without some initial participation with enthusiastic people he trusts. Being alone it would have been hard for him to get into the shared mood, get energy out of the event and learn from the event. He would have felt excluded and would not go again. Even when people read fiction or listen to CDs and watch DVDs on their own it is conversations and discussions before or afterwards that make enthusiastic and serve as catalyst in the transfer of cultural capital.

It is therefore most of all through people who one trusts or admires and whose enthusiasm is contagious, that someone 'learns art' and increases his artistic cultural capital. They can be teachers, but most often they are friends. It is the enthusiasm of others in combination with an occasional explanation that makes first time visits to concerts, galleries etcetera enjoyable and leads to a transfer of cultural capital. Often this is not so much a matter of explaining what is on the paintings or going on in the music or happening on the stage, but inducing someone in the proper frame of experiencing the event.⁴⁸ (In illustration 1.5. this is also what must have happened when enthusiastic Anna and Elisabeth introduced Thomas and Martin to contemporary art in the Whitechapel gallery in London. However, in the case of Louise in Illustration * on page * it did not work this way, because she entered the event with preconceived and stereotypical ideas on techno concerts and distrusted Thomas.)

Of course, individual differences exist. For some people the formal learning of skills offers more additional stimulation than for others. There clearly is a demand for books like **Classical Music for Dummies*, but the interest must have been awakened during the participation in events in which live people interacted. Presently it is foremost a group of middle aged people for whom such learning and, more commonly, the learning through program notes in classical concerts and written text on the walls of museums are attractive. Youngsters, who visit concerts with more or less complicated electronic/dance music, would find program notes absurd. The education is foremost peer to peer education.

It follows that experts and expertise are not unimportant. They play a role in the succession of art events in which people learn. For instance, often in the course of larger scale art events like in the breaks during a concert or moving through the rooms of the museum, at which couples or groups of people discuss the art that is offered. Often in such group conversations there is someone who knows more than the others about contemporary painting or about dance music or whatever the art event is

⁴⁸ Collins (2005) 154

about, and has opinions about it. He shares his knowledge and moral convictions and these become precious objects and membership symbols in the group. 'Experts' are often eager to show off their expertise. Because they are the carrier of the symbol of expertise, they get more out of the event than the others.

Although learning or transfer of cultural capital is most effective in the case of physical co-presence, this does not imply that people cannot learn by studying books or watching courses on television or communicating on the internet. But occasional personal contact is vital. Even with long intermissions the events in which 'teacher' and the person who is instructed meet are essential highlights in longer chains of solitary events in which people learn.

Apparently knowledge in a wide sense can become attuned and transferred in chains of events. This way it is shared and circulates in wider circles; it circulates. By analyzing such circulation, as I shall do in the next section, it becomes possible to move from the micro level of the analysis of actual behavior to a mezzo level in which typical or averaged behavior and characteristics of groups are analyzed.

7. Circulation of Symbols and Values

How come that Rembrandt is known to almost anybody in such remote places as Osaka, Sao Paulo and Amsterdam and has a reputation of being an extraordinary good painter?

When we mention Rembrandt (see pictures *) and how good a painter he is, it easily feels as if Rembrandt and his high reputation are things that float in the air; they appear to have always existed and will always exist and so they appear to have an existence independent of people. However, one should keep in mind that over time and up to this moment, his name and reputation are reproduced in actual events, in situations in which people interact with one another. His name and what it stands for is an output and input in chains of events. Such chains overlap and so his name circulates. Moreover, now more than in the past, due to printed and electronic media his name and reputation also circulate between various chains without an overlap in participants. This explains that his name is now known in the most remote places and social circles.

The name of Rembrandt is indeed a precious object all over the world. His name comes up in numerous conversations, not only of art lovers but of almost anybody, from construction workers in Sao Paulo to art students in Osaka. In the western world there is hardly anybody who does not know of Rembrandt and who has never mentioned his name. That his name is mentioned so often implies that it has a huge symbol potential. In countless events it can symbolize painting or good painting or (incorrectly) poverty in the arts and so forth. Even if his name is mentioned only in passing, it conveys some meaning and moral conviction.

Immediately after somebody's birth (and Rembrandt is no exception) his name will only be known to family and friends of the family, but through parallel and overlapping chains of events over time the name will start to circulate in increasingly wide circles symbolizing various qualities of the person concerned. Usually at some stage in life the number of parallel chains in which the name is reproduced will peak to go down again at old age. And some time after death the name will have become meaningless. However, in the case of some people like some prominent historic figures and artists, this period can be much longer and may even seem to be indefinite. This also applies to a composer like Beethoven. After Beethoven's death his name and the reputation it symbolizes as well as the name of some of his works, like Beethoven's Fifth, continued to circulate in ever more overlapping chains of parallel events. But Beethoven and Rembrandt and some more very famous artists, like Picasso, Shakespeare, Van Gogh, Bach and Mozart, are not representative for all famous artists, let alone average artists. However, unlike in the case of very famous artists and of ordinary people the reputation of most famous artists (or scientists or politicians) will for some time continue to circulate in relatively wide circles in the decades after their death but nevertheless go down. Sometimes this already happens during their life time, like in the case of the once famous and well

known visual artist Sandra Chia —see picture— and the composer *, who are now little known outside circles of art historians and musicologists.

Moreover, circulation can be irregular or have the form of a wave. The reputation of the German symbolists, Caspar Friedrich and Franz Von Stücker [umlaut?] was very high during their lifetime. The latter was cheered by crowds coming in processions to celebrate his birthday (see picture *). After the war their reputations went down, foremost in Germany, due to the earlier adoption of their works by the Nazis. However, their names were not altogether forgotten. And since the sixties of the previous century due to the activities of art-historians outside Germany there has been a slow revival. There are exhibitions again dedicated to their works and some works are again permanently shown in museums, also in Germany. Similarly the reputation of Sandra Chia may also be somewhat restored—at least this is what Thomas hopes for— after it had been brought down by the sudden sale of his work in the eighties by the collector Saatchi who had earlier bought many of his major works. (These examples show that the longer term reputation of artists depends on many more factors than what is supposed to be the aesthetic quality of their works.)

And even very big names have an emotional resonance that goes up and down over time.⁴⁹ In the case of Bach there was a huge dip in the circulation of his name and the symbolic value of his work in the decades after his death; his name was almost forgotten, also in circles of experts. It was only after the rediscovery of Bach by Mendelssohn that his reputation started to rise, which at present, just like Rembrandt's, covers the world, be it probably in somewhat smaller circles. And also the interest in Rembrandt waned in the second half of the nineteenth century, though he still was acknowledged as an important painter by experts. Partly in the context of the strengthening of the foundation of the Dutch nation state in the twentieth century Dutch art experts and politicians successfully developed all sorts of activities to boost the circulation of his reputation both at home and abroad. (See pictures *.)

Names and reputations are never neutral. Already the mentioning of the name of a well known artist calls forward associations with an emotional and moral component. In chains of events name symbols, which are both inputs and outputs in events, become infused with emotion. And during the events in which they are symbols standards of morality are produced and reproduced. Rembrandt and his painting the Nightwatch have goodness. For some people the name of Wagner brings mixed associations: good art as well as Nazism. And for some it is: Nazism and pompous or bad art. Clearly, associations may differ depending on the group concerned, like Bach representing “great and exciting music” for classical music lovers and “that well known, but boring composer of the past” for some youngster.

Modern mass media facilitate the building and maintenance of sometimes world wide reputations. Nevertheless, word of mouth remains essential. Almost no kid will remember Rembrandt's name from just having read it in a textbook. It is only thanks to conversations among live people that reputations sink in and can be revoked as precious objects or membership symbols infused with emotion. At the same time however, now as much as centuries ago, *it takes institutions run by live people, like the church, art history departments at universities, museums and record and concert organization companies to set and maintain reputations like those Jesus, Rembrandt, Friedrich, the Beatles and Tiesto*. Especially the longer term maintenance of reputations takes an effort. Just marketing budgets are insufficient to keep the conversation going, as the history of many pop stars shows.

Intensive art events are helpful and sometimes indispensable for the establishment and maintenance of reputations. Also before the large scale downloading of music pop musicians needed live concerts with a crowd which visited their concerts repeatedly and went on talking about them in between concerts. Visual artists need recurring exhibitions. Exciting visits to the Rijksmuseum or the Concertgebouw contribute very much to the ongoing conversations on Rembrandt and Bach. And

⁴⁹ Cf. Collins (2005) 142

Rembrandt and Bach-years in which their day of birth or death is celebrated in all sorts of large scale organized art events add to it.

Real live interaction between people is the motor that sets the circulation of symbols in motion and keeps it going. This way symbols including moral beliefs move through networks of people. However, the larger the groups in which the symbols circulate are and the more these circles transgress social boundaries, the more simplified and stereotypical the symbols will be. For many people Bach is “that genius” or “the guy with the difficult music” and Rembrandt just “a good painter from the past”. For a slightly smaller group the latter is “that poor painter”. For fewer people again he is “the man of the many self-portraits” or “the one who painted the Night Watch”. Again fewer people may think in the case of Rembrandt of more specific qualities like “the man of the paintings which were supposed to be painted by him but turned out to be painted by others”. And with many positions in between there are small circles of experts who know all sorts of details of Rembrandt's personal life or of his painting technique or of the development of the prices of his works in auctions and so forth.

In this respect modern media stars can be an exception. Due to the mass media the worldwide shared symbols, which stars like Madonna and Maradona bring along, can already be relatively detailed. Many people know details of their personal life. Such details primarily function as gossip comparable with the gossip about a class-mate or neighbor. But apart from the case of media stars detailed knowledge that functions as symbols is usually limited to relatively small circles or communities.

As I will argue in more detail in later chapters *the goodness of art* is (still) circulated widely and is a precious object and membership symbol in many circles all through society, from cleaning personnel to groups of art students and cultural elites all over the world. Its goodness is a widely shared moral conviction. However in the case of the goodness of art, what is above all circulated are preexisting cultural stereotypes and these may well invoke different images and have different meanings for various social groups and. The goodness of art for lower social groups may well be associated with realistic seventh century paintings and a civilized life style or with expressive Van Gogh like paintings and a notion of freedom. Students however, may imagine works by for instance Damien Hirst or music by someone like John Cage and associate the goodness of art with exciting innovation or social criticism, while groups of traditional art lovers could have images of the performance of a Mahler piece and associate the goodness of art with deep feelings. (See pictures ***).

On a more detailed level as well stereotypes that are widely circulated may have different moral meanings. For many people classical concerts symbolize, among others, stillness and paying respect. But for older people this symbol probably evokes attractive images of concentration, while many youngsters have unpleasant images of being imprisoned in a boring situation.

In spite of all such group differences general stereotypes that resonate in society, like the goodness of art, can in times of crises be precious objects and membership symbols in very diverse groups and bind people together in large imaginary communities. An example of this is a situation in which art subsidies are under threat of being cut. At such moments preexisting generalized cultural vocabularies or stereotypes, like art's goodness, or an ‘art for art's sake’, can be pressed into service and connect groups of people who when questioned turn out to have very different opinions on what is good art and which art deserves subsidization.

What is circulated in circles of various sizes is not just neutral knowledge with symbolic potential. The knowledge has an emotional component. The standards of morality which are outcomes of events turn into moral convictions, like “Rembrandt is good”. This is an input in later events and so the knowledge and conviction that Rembrandt is good circulates in more or less wide circles. When the moral convictions are widely shared they can also be called values. Therefore one can say that different values circulate in different large groups. This applies to social as well as geographical groups. The goodness of the painter Constable circulates primarily in England and the goodness of art in almost the whole educated world. The goodness of stillness during classical concerts or of

Reggae however, primarily represents a value among the social group of classical music and Reggae lovers.

8. Internalized Interaction in Solitary Art Events

In enjoying art on one's own there appears to be no interaction; but is this true?

Before delving deeper into this issue it is worth noting that solitary art events are not only common, but also much appreciated in our culture. In comparison to group art events, they are often supposed to be superior. Over the last two centuries the association of art with an individual experience has become strong in western culture. Art is personal and the experience is a private affair. Others should interfere as little as possible. Art brings deep emotions or insights which are altogether personal. We do not interact with others; we only have a relationship with the artwork. And though it does not talk back, we may well believe that we interact with the artwork. Afterwards we may want to try to explain our feelings and insight to others, but the explanation will anyway be deficient.

And at home when we are not alone we often want to be able to ignore others. Listening to a CD or reading a poem a partner or children should keep quite. Otherwise they would distract and figuratively speaking stand in the way of a true and pure relationship with the work of art. Thomas remembers that when he was very young his father would sit in a comfortable chair and listen with eyes closed to the sound of Elizabeth Schwartzkopf singing and Thomas and the other children had to be absolutely still.

Also in a concert hall or museum with many people around we tend to isolate works of art. We listen with closed eyes or stare at a painting imagining that we are alone. We not only attempt to eliminate people, but also anything else that may stand in the way of a true aesthetic experience like an ugly frame, a disturbing background or other sounds than those of the music. Moreover, in this we help one another by disturbing others as little as possible. Organizers of larger scale art events help us in this. *To enable people to have their private relation with an artwork those in charge of classical concerts, theatre performances and museums encourage or demand stillness or the speaking in low voices. They also turn off or dim the lights in the hall, while in museums they offer meticulously white backgrounds and plenty of space between the paintings.*

Irrespective of a wish to be alone, also when people are not alone there are many moments in which people focus on works of art without interacting with other people. Many thoughts are private and are not shared, also not afterwards. Even standing in front of a painting and talking about it with one's companion there will often be moments in which thoughts come up which are not shared.

But does all this imply that in such cases there is no interaction at all? Herbert Mead argues that when people are thinking they are talking to themselves or to imagined others. According to him thinking is internal conversation between parts of the self. These can be an 'I' or 'me' or a specific or generalized 'other' or 'others'.⁵⁰ There is internalized social interaction. In his imagination a person (the 'I') tells himself (the 'me') or an imagined 'other' or 'others', who he may or may not know, about his experiences. And in changing roles the imagined 'me' or 'other(s)' talk back.

Often internal conversations with imagined friends or acquaintances are continuations of earlier real life conversations or they are try outs for real conversations to come. The conversation may well be enthusiastic. But it is also possible that the 'I' wants to defend himself against the criticism of the 'me' or 'other(s)'. And if he does not succeed in convincing them that they are wrong the internal conversation is likely to be frustrating and an energy drain.

Especially in taking decisions internal conversations can come close to the surface or even turn into an audible conversation as in the case of people who think aloud. An example of a train of thought or internal conversation in the case of the possible purchase of an expensive painting could be: one part

⁵⁰ Mead (1934)

of oneself saying “Let’s do it now”; another “Come on the price is too high”; and another again “We should think a bit more about it”. (Or a personified other could say: “You should think a bit more about it”.)

Communicating with oneself or with imagined others is so normal that most of the time we are not aware of it. While reading a book or watching a figurative painting we may well communicate with the author or painter or with characters in the book or on the canvas. And in the case of an abstract painting we may even communicate with the painting either as a whole or with areas in the painting as if those parts were other selves. Therefore, the idea of ‘interacting’ with a work, which in itself makes no sense (the artwork is unable to communicate), is not that strange. The work itself does not talk back, but in people’s minds it or parts of it become personified — they are perceived as human—and in an internal conversation they talk back.

When the conversation is one between imagined and personified different parts of the self and the solitary art event is successful, the outcome can be solidarity and a kind of agreement between the parts. There is harmony or unity. The conclusion can, for instance be: “Yes we should wait a bit longer” and not going for the fist impulse feels good. Or, at a more existential level, when Thomas focused on Turner’s *Rain, Steam and Speed*, the conclusion of the conversation was: “Yes this work of art befits us” or “It is me” or “It is who I want to be”. (1.1.) This way there is a feeling of unity and identity. But when a person cannot come to a decision on the purchase or goes on arguing with himself, this is likely to be a frustrating affair. And when the painting arouses confusing feelings or insights the event can well be depressing.

On a more profane level it can be noted that artists and other producers increasingly make products that facilitate personification. Some visual artworks can be set in motion by human touch or are equipped with sensors and so react to actions of the spectator. The same applies to computer games in which the image reacts to key strokes, movements with a joystick or movements registered by sensors. But because the artwork or the images on the screen are no live people they do not share a mood or excitement. Therefore there is interaction but no social interaction. Nevertheless, when the artwork or the people or objects on the screen become personified there is internal interaction and an interaction event. (Also the machines themselves easily become personified. When Thomas writes or edits videos on his computer he continuously argues with the machine, often involving the use of swearwords when the computer does not respond the way he want it to respond; and so do many people.)

That thinking cannot be but a social process makes sense.⁵¹ Small infants gradually start to interact with their parents in non-verbal ways, which later on take the form of real and internalized verbal conversations between infant and parent. This is particularly clear in the period that small children talk to themselves in the form of turn-taking pseudo-conversations with parents. It is the social, the interaction which others that makes us human.

However, even though people probably think most of the time in words and sentences —and sometimes people do talk to themselves aloud— not all thinking is verbal. There can be imagined sounds or images as well. More importantly, not all trains of thought have the form of a dialogue or conversation. This is why for Collins the imagined parts of the self and/or imagined others represent clear metaphors. But thinking is anyway situational; it is the activity of a specific person at a specific location during a specific time span. There is inner live and trains of thought are chains of internal interaction events with or without dialogue.⁵²

In thinking the same as in real live interaction people seek vitality or emotional energy. In this they attempt to steer away from depressing thoughts to energizing ones in which they feel focused and

⁵¹ ‘The Social Process of Thinking’ is a title of a chapter in Collins (2005) 183.

⁵² Collins (2005) 305, 318-20

experience solidarity within. They do so with different success. For, unlike people tend to believe, thinking is not free. It is constrained by the same factors that constrain external interaction, among them the cultural capital someone possesses and puts in the 'thinking event'. Moreover there is so-called path dependency. When Thomas now stands in front of a painting by Turner, all sorts of memories and feelings as well as cognitions color his thinking, among them memories of unique conversations he had 36 years ago with Martin. (1.1.) Some of the earlier excitement will return, symbols will be re-evoked and become infused again with emotion, but the thoughts are different.

In practice people seldom live up to the cultural ideal of the true solitary artistic experience. Most people love talking about art and the feelings it evokes in them. *Be it at low voices there is a lot of talking between friends and partners in the rooms of museums. Moreover, not discussing one's experiences with the people in one's company in the intermission or after the concert, play, dance or film is exceptional and would be strange. Only extremely introvert people may not do.*

Following the reasoning in this chapter *it can be expected that enjoying art is more rewarding in the presence of others than alone. While being together also private thoughts are likely to be more intense. The whole artistic experience is more intense.* Even though this thesis contradicts the popular notion of the superior isolated artistic experience, I think it is generally true. But it may not apply to or apply less strongly to introvert people and it is possible that these are overrepresented among art lovers. Moreover, the cult of the individual, which became so important in the course of the last two centuries, may well have been accompanied by an increase in the relative number of introverts and also by an increase in introverts being attracted to the arts.

The arrangements that allow people to make it easier to feel alone with works of art while being together with others are relatively new. *Not that long ago the walls in the museums had any color but white and the paintings hang close together. And in the concert halls and theatres there was plenty of light. Moreover, contrary to today, audience members made little or no effort not to distract others; sometimes on the contrary.* (See pictures ***) All this shows that our wish to be alone with art is a relatively recent cultural phenomenon. And it may not be of all times. For most visitors of pop and electronic/dance concerts this wish is not strong anymore or it is absent or the opposite is the case.

Up to at least the twentieth century, situations in which a person would and could enjoy a work of art on his own were rare. In the places where works of art could be enjoyed, like paintings, sculpture and music, people were seldom alone; they were not alone in churches, not in the halls of palaces, not in the saloons of private houses and not in museums.

It is primarily due to technical innovations that it became possible or easier to be alone with works of art. Since the large scale multiplication of books, storytelling and reading aloud of hand-written or printed text became rare and the reading of books became a more individual affair. Nevertheless, in the saloons of the bourgeois, who could read, people were seldom alone. *Also today many people read in the company of others and ever so often inform one another on what is happening on the pages they are reading and this leads to all sorts of short conversations. And presently the social art event at home par excellence is the watching of films on television and DVD. Also because of the communication with others, for most people the latter events are more intense and more rewarding than reading and it is well possible that this partly explains the reduction in average reading time.* (In explaining such differences researchers primarily look at product qualities and often mistakenly ignore the social setting in which art products are consumed.)

Also printed reproductions of works of art in the form of engravings and later lithographs and, again later, technically reproduced music made an increased solitary consumption of works of art possible, but on average such solitary art events were and are less intense than those in which the originals or life performances were and are present. It is only with the development of high quality sound recordings, photo's and video's that far more artworks than just books are consumed in situations in which people are alone. The reproductions of musical performances played at home are now very good copies. (Most of the time they are not even copies but multiples, because the recordings were

made in studios.) And when it comes to the audio qualities; many people now prefer the sound of CDs over that of live performances.

The major increase in altogether solitary listening events is recent. It follows from listening to music by means of little earphones, which is now common practice. But in spite of the good sound quality and the possibility to play the music loud —anyway louder than is usually possible at home— almost any regular user of earphones will admit, that most of the time these listening events are not intense. *In comparison with listening to music through earphones and from CDs the artistic experience of listening to music in concert halls together with friends is generally far more intense.* Moreover, if occasionally the first are momentarily intense the overall intensity and the energy or strength they bring including the afterglow is not large. The afterglow may last a few hours at best, while in the case of live concerts it may last and be re-evoked for weeks, months or years. (As noted, this also applies to Thomas who visited in 1976 a concert in London in which Simon Rattle conducted Shostakovich' 10th Symphony and still occasionally recalls the event, even 36 years later —1.8.)

Moreover, solitary art events, like listening to music on CDs and watching reproductions in art books or just thinking about art and works of art, are often offshoots of full-scale group art events like concerts or museum visits. They serve symbolic memory and thus being not very intense themselves may well help sustain the energy derived from the visits. And apart from being an offshoot they usually are also a build up for following group events.

Nowadays there are an increasing number of art events on the internet, which have an interactive aspect, but without the other person being physically present. For instance people send a soundtrack or a video to a friend or a collection of friends —as is common practice on a social site like Facebook. When the receiving person watches these or listens to them he is aware of the person who sent it and he may well have an imaginary conversation with him. At times he may respond by writing a short comment —Facebook actually invites him to do so.— But all this goes fast. It is rewarding but, as most users will agree, on average these exchanges are not intense. And as far as they are somewhat intense, it is usually because they help sustain some energy or strength between two successive physical meetings. Or they are a bit more intense because the participant imagines a real live meeting with the other, who he never encountered in reality and may never meet.

When it comes to being alone with a work of art the position of artists is usually different from that of non-artist. In the process of creating art many artists are alone. This certainly applies to writers and poets and in different degrees also to playwrights, composers, choreographers, painters and sculptors. Moreover musicians often practice alone. In the past however, rehearsing musicians and comedians were seldom alone and most visual artists were surrounded by assistants or colleagues and this situation is coming back. The percentage of time contemporary visual artists are alone in a studio is small. Most of the time they work together with others, on who they depend, for instance, in selecting materials or discussing projects, designs and marketing, or they supervise others in the execution of their work. Moreover, in solitary art-creating events artists certainly communicate with imagined others like teachers or artists, whose work inspires them or they want to get away from. (When Thomas draws it seems to him that all the time there are others who look over his shoulder, like former teachers, colleagues, collectors, and people in funding bodies.⁵³)

Solitary art events, whether alone or not, are frequent and therefore important in the case of artists and art consumers; probably more important than for instance solitary sport events are for sportsmen and sport consumers, but the value and overall importance of art in most people's lives does not rest on them, but on events with others in which they focus on art while interacting with one another. It is this value that forms the main topic of the next chapter.

⁵³ Cf Abbing (2002) 78

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