

THE VALUE OF ART

A Sociological Study of Art, Artists and the Arts Economy

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Provisional Synopsis and Table of Contents

The book studies art, artists and the arts economy from the perspective of interaction between people. Value and values in the arts are created, expressed and maintained in events in which people interact while focusing on art. In this context the aesthetic, financial and foremost the emotional value of art are discussed. The text is primarily an application to the arts of the theory of the sociologist Randall Collins on interaction ritual chains, but insights from economics are also applied.

Each chapter commences with one or two anecdotes based on the author's observation of artists' and art-lovers' behavior.

The book addresses academics: scholars and students in cultural studies, cultural sociology, cultural economics and art-history. The book will be more academic than the author's 2002 dissertation *Why are Artists Poor*. However, interested artists and art-administrators should be able to read and understand the text.

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Among others he wrote *Why Are Artists Poor? The Exceptional Economy of the Arts*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 2002. (Fourth printing 2008. Distribution in the US by the Chicago University Press. Translations in Japanese, Chinese and Korean.)

1. Art Events

In the first chapter the main unit of analysis in the book, the art event, and its ingredients and outcomes are explained. In art events people interact while focusing on art. Art events run from a concert in a stadium to a conversation about art. The focus on art is an ingredient of an event. For participants symbols of membership or precious objects are an outcome. They are loaded with value. People who participate in successful art events get vitality or emotional energy out of their participation.

2. Emotional, Aesthetic and Financial Value of Art

Participants in art events produce the emotional, aesthetic and financial value of art. Artists directly or indirectly contribute to this process. Taste with respect to art is not given: it develops and changes in interaction with others. The discussion of taste and individual choice leads to an analysis of supply and demand in the arts that differs from the common analysis in economics. Aesthetic value as well is not intrinsic. Art entrepreneurs, like art historians, have a large say in its production. Aesthetic and market value are related but do not necessarily correspond. Various players in art worlds invest energy in the value of art. Its value which is still high is maintained by the circulation of symbols, among them many stereotypes.

3. Art's Association with Civilization and Authenticity

In many respects up to the twentieth century society became more formal and this influenced the nature of art events. Moreover, during the eighteenth and especially nineteenth century the role of art in society changed. Art increasingly assisted people in their search for individuality, but otherwise it

became less functional. Art and artists became special; sacred art and the mythology around it are born and art is no longer supposed to be a commodity. Moreover, people could derive distinction from the consumption of art. At the same time art became a means in the education of the masses. However, the trend towards informalization and de-hierarchization, which became the dominant trend after the Second World War, has drastically changed the position of the arts in society. Technological developments added to this.

Presently the meaning and significance of authenticity is not the same as fifty or hundred years ago. The new art-consumer is increasingly omnivore. New media and new ways of communication have a major impact on the popular arts and the ways in which they are consumed. Art works stand out less and art consumption is more integrated in other consumptive activity.

4. High, Serious and Popular Art Events

The chapter proposes a distinction between on the one hand high-and-serious art events and on the other popular art events on the basis of a number of characteristics. The most important are references to art generally and subdued behavior in high-and-serious art events. Also a distinction between on the one hand high art events and on the other serious and popular art events is developed. High art events are ceremonies. Characteristics are a protocol and formalities. In this context the demand for stillness during classical concerts is analyzed.

5. The Value for Artists of Work and Money

The average income of artists is persistently low, much lower than that of any other group of professionals. Standard economics cannot explain this. The phenomenon that many youngsters enter the arts while incomes are low, can be explained by looking at their participation in chains of art events in which positive stereotypes of being-artist are important symbols of membership. Money is relative unimportant and its symbolic value is sometimes negative while that of poverty can be positive. But in the case of failed artists existing stereotypes tend to turn against them.

6. The Value of Support

This short chapter analyzes various forms of support and market income, their extent and their symbolic value for artists, consumers, donors and governments. In this context the morality or legitimization that surrounds them is discussed. Special attention is paid to the wish to help poor artists.

7. An Art Ethos

The chapter analyzes characteristics of the art ethos, which exists among groups of art producers and consumers, and of the aesthetic experience and the various forms of cultural capital that are involved. Looking at the unexpected in art works their repetitiveness and complexity are put in perspective and so is tradition and innovation in the arts. A distinction is made between specialists and generalists among both producers and consumers of works of art.

8. Is Art becoming less valuable?

The final chapter presents an inventory of developments in art worlds in connection with developments in contemporary society and discusses the future of the arts. The simultaneous process of demystification, re-commodification and professionalization is likely to continue. Given self-destructive practices in the arts and dwindling audiences, the legitimization crisis of support is likely to increase. Probably part of art will move in the direction of the sciences, another part will take the form of art-services, while a large part will move in the direction of entertainment.

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