

THE VALUE OF ART

Is Art becoming Less Important?

A Sociological Study of Art, Artists and the Arts Economy

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For updates of this synopsis and the table of contents and for draft versions of some chapters visit:

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The English of this provisional text still has to be corrected by a native speaker

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. Value of art in the title refers to the aesthetic and financial and foremost the symbolic and social value of art in society. Part of the text is an application to the arts of the theory of the sociologist Randall Collins on interaction ritual chains, but other sociological approaches and economic theories are applied as well. One conclusion of the study is that at present the value or importance of art in society is going down.

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

The book will include two diagrams and many pictures.

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.)

Provisional Synopsis of the Chapters of the Book

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 shared focus on art is an ingredient of an art 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. Production of Value in the Arts

Participants in art events produce the symbolic, aesthetic and financial value of artworks. Artists directly or indirectly contribute to this process. Aesthetic value is not intrinsic. Art entrepreneurs, like art historians, have a large say in its production. Financial value and art prices have symbolic meanings. Aesthetic and financial value are related but do not necessarily correspond. In some periods and in some art worlds systematic deviations between the two exist. A discussion of taste, the development of taste and of choice leads to an analysis of supply and demand in the arts that differs from the common analysis in economics.

3. The Triumph of Art

Styles and genres in the arts have a life cycle. The same applies to art as we know it. During the eighteenth and especially nineteenth century the role of art in society changes. Art becomes sacred and assists people in their search for individuality. Art is also increasingly associated with civilization and the nation. Moreover, people can derive distinction from the consumption of art. At the same time art becomes a means in the education of the masses. It is due to the efforts of many stakeholders that the high value of art is maintained. However, in spite of these efforts the “high art period” is presently coming to a close.

4. High Art Events and Popular Art Events

The chapter proposes a distinction between high and popular art events. In this context the differences and correspondences between a classical and a pop concert are analyzed. An important characteristic of high art events are recurring references to art in general and the world of art. Moreover, the respect for art demands relatively subdued behavior. A common difference between high and popular art events also rests in the way in which content is treated in relation to costs. Next a distinction is made between high art events in a narrow sense and serious art events. The first are ceremonies with a protocol and formalities. In this context the demand for stillness during classical concerts is analyzed. Finally the question is raised whether certain types of artworks more often figure in high art events and others in popular art events.

5. Poor Artists

The average income of artists is persistently low, much lower than that of any other group of professionals. Standard economics cannot explain this. The chapter argues that the low incomes do not contradict the high value of art in society but are a consequence of it. 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, including support by artists and volunteers and by the market. They have symbolic value for artists, art producers and consumers, donors and governments. In this context the morality or legitimization that surrounds them is discussed. The wish to educate people or to help poor artists are discussed, the same as the existence of a relatively powerful art-lobby.

7. From High to New Art

The final chapter discusses signs of a diminishing value or importance of art in society, like dwindling audiences of high and serious art events and an increasing legitimization crisis with respect to art

subsidies. It also discusses the causes of the diminishing value; foremost technological developments, informalization, de-hierarchization and omnivorism. Over time new people have entered the stage whose cultural capital differs fundamentally from that of previous generations. For youngsters the boundaries between high and popular art and between artworks and art related products like well-designed flyers and Youtube video's has become meaningless. It appears that the same as around 1800 a new paradigm is emerging. With prosperity art-like products will only become more important in society, but while we shall probably call them art, this is not the same art as that which people celebrated over the last two centuries. It is new art.

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