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Sociology of Art: New Stakes in a Post-Critical Time

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During a long period, sociology of art has been divided mainly between two major directions. Both show art as a social reality but they do so from quite different points of view: one is frontally critical and aims at revealing the social determination of art behind any pretended autonomy (be it the autonomy of the works, following the objectivist aesthetics, or the autonomy of the taste for them, following an aesthetics of subjectivity); the other is more pragmatic and, without pretending to make statements about the works or aesthetic experience, proceeds through a minutious reconstitution of the "collective action" necessary to produce and consume art. Against a purely internal and hagiographic aesthetical commentary of art works, sociology has thus filled back an "art world" which formerly included only very few *chefs-d'œuvre* and geniuses. Mainstream productions and copies, conventions and material constraints, professions and academies, organizations and markets, codes and rites of social consumption have been pushed to the front of the scene.

If the role of many intermediaries has been put under scrutiny, sociologists have mainly focused their attention on the human components of the art production system (professions, market, institutions). The dilemma now faced by sociologists is how to incorporate the material character of works produced and devices used, without reverting to autonomous aesthetic comments, which in the past treated works of art as extractions removed from their social context. The work of re-socialization of art also needs to come closer to art lovers' tastes and practices, without contenting oneself with an external acknowledgment of the value given to art by members of an art world as if art was a belief, and not also an experience of pleasure, expression and emotion collectively lived by subjects and bodies through specific objects and procedures. Asking questions on the political, ethnic and sexual value of art has been a way of showing how art does construct identities, bodies and subjectivities.

Over-rationalizing a general movement in the sociology of art, which is undoubtedly more "Brownian" and less clearly oriented in reality, we will organize the display of recent evolutions in the social studies of arts around the notion of mediation. If the concept remains ambiguous, it clearly points out a strong new trend shared by very diverse approaches: a focus on objects and devices, on local situations, on reflexive and politically critical analyses of the social and artistic values, all this requiring to pay more attention to the materiality of intermediaries, to

acknowledge their opacity regarding social determinations or aesthetic effects, to analyse the active role they play in the definition of art works and tastes.

Introduction: sociology *versus* creation

From more than one century now, the preposition "of" in "the sociology of art" has been a site of tension rather than smooth coordination. Social readings and hermeneutical interpretations of art (see Bryson 1990 for a recent essay in that genre, already "overlooked" - as he puts it himself about still life paintings) have always been readily accepted, but systematic sociological inquiries have often been greeted with a strong resistance in various intellectual milieus. Studies designed to explain artistic values by means of sociological factors have been criticized for being reductionist (Adorno 1967, 1976; for a classical Marxist survey of art history see Hauser 1982, and for a Marxian critique of this reductionism, Wolff 1975), while investigations into the ways in which art is produced, diffused and received have been attacked symmetrically on the grounds that, given their refusal to address "art itself", they cannot acknowledge its specificity. This has been described as an opposition between "studying the art object sociologically" and "the art object as a social process" (Zolberg 1990, cf. ch. 3 and 4).

The latter research trend, which we will refer to as critical sociology - be it global or local, systemic or constructivist - has proved more fruitful than the former. It has significantly improved our understanding of art by providing comprehensive accounts of its diverse and changing contexts of production, diffusion and reception. By contrast with direct, immanent readings of the "social meaning" of art works, or with Marxist analyses that address art as a mere reflection of social classes or economic structures, empirical and historical studies of patronage, milieus of *amateurs*, taste cultures, or markets and prices, for instance, have begun to fill the gap between internal and external approaches: they have done so by providing a grounded and conjunctural understanding of the complex interplays between art and society - an issue which philosophers and aestheticians tend to address in extremely general, and highly speculative terms. We can trace back these orientations through several classical readers on the state of the art in the sociology of art, e.g. (Albrecht et al., 1970), an issue of *La Revue française de Sociologie* on "Sociologie de l'art et de la littérature" (1986), (Foster and Blau 1989); for more recent orientations, see (Moulin, ed. 1986), (Zolberg 1990), (Menger and Passeron, ed. 1994), and on the sociology of culture (Crane ed. 1994), which displays a huge bibliography.

It is important to acknowledge the analytical and theoretical advances made possible by critical sociology, which has provided an antidote to the unconditional celebration of the glories of the great masterpieces - still, by far, the most common discourse that stems from taking art literally. But it is as important to bear in mind the limitations of the critical framework, particularly in light of the dominant position it has come to occupy in the field of sociology of art today. It has become especially important in this regard to put into question its hegemonic stance on art, deemed an issue just like many others, and hence, the generalized disinterest in both the work of art and the aesthetic experience, dismissed by critical sociology as either the mere stakes of an identity game - an *il-lusio*, as Bourdieu (1984b, 1990) calls it - or the purely conventional products of a collective activity (Becker 1974, 1982).

The critical approach: art as "*illusio*" or "construction"

In fact, this disinterest has not been a conflictual but rather a consensual issue among a majority of researchers. Most sociologists of art today are still likely to agree

that creative processes and art works *per se* fall outside the realm of relevance and legitimacy of the sociology of art - and so would do any analytical attempt to acknowledge the specificity of art practices and products (we find in Witkin 1995 a recent problematization of this too self-evident disregard, and a frame for a social analysis of the works which remembers Weber's famous essay on music (Weber 1958); for a classical rejection of the right for sociology to look at the works "themselves", see Silbermann 1963, Supicic 1988). This widely held view is coherent with what classical sociology regards as the key concern of any sociological analysis of art, which is not creation, genius, and works proper, but that which makes them appear as such - this is the case, for instance, with European critical theory (Bourdieu 1984a), or American interactionism applied to the "art worlds" in order to treat art "as any other occupation" (Becker 1982), or even new forms of constructivism aiming at deconstructing genius (DeNora 1995a). It just follows that for most analysts, rejecting subjectivism, the cult of the genius and the artist's self-glorifying discourse is but the precondition of any sociology at all. In that view sociology only starts when, typically, researchers focus on the constraints through which both artistic objects and subjects are determined, albeit unknowingly; on the conventions which rule over how artists and amateurs recognize and create their world; and on the norms which underly the social construction of genius and masterpieces. Accordingly, making art "social" implies pointing behind it, to the mechanisms of production of a discourse which places it at the centre of a special world like that of art - as Bourdieu's question: "But who created the 'creators'?" (Bourdieu 1984b) clearly illustrates. In the work of Bourdieu, who has pushed the critical line of reasoning the furthest, artistic creation as such gets to be substituted for its "magical" effectiveness, that is, the effects that its name alone is said to produce - even if they are nevertheless very "real" effects, as Durkheim's analysis of totems has shown (Durkheim 1912).

The key to the critical approach has been the theory of belief which, from Durkheim to Bourdieu or Becker (which is indeed a lot of sociology!), has uninterruptedly been mobilized. For critical theorists, to analyse from a "social" point of view the objects which the actors handle, produce, create or admire, amounts to considering them as objects of belief, in both meanings of the word. In one sense, with powerful theoretical efficacy, they can be viewed as such for the purpose of shedding light on the institutions and collective mechanisms which produce and influence our values and feelings - even and especially those like aesthetic emotions which we consider our most personal and intimate ones. In another, however, these objects become confused with objects of belief proper as they are reduced to mere tokens or signs deprived of any other value or *raison d'être* than that of being mediums for our social games of identity and difference. Any account of artistic experience in terms of beauty, sensation, emotion or aesthetic feeling is thus considered misleading as it presumably reflects the actors' illusions about their own beliefs. Moreover, art works are not effective on their own; they "do" nothing since, like Durkheim's totems, they are "nothing but" the materialization of our self-production of "ourselves" as a collective entity.

From this perspective, social theory's irrevocable task is bound to be the "revelation" of the unproductive game which consists, for members of every social group or community, in identifying a number of features deemed distinctive and then in naturalizing them, hence striving to give them the power which, according to sociological wisdom, believers grant to any object of belief. A highly pervasive assumption is at work here - one which, after being considered outrageous when it was originally formulated, has become self-evident for most sociologists working from within the constructivist tradition (as well as for many cultural actors, influenced by sociology): it is assumed that whosoever wants to account for the social dimension of works of art has no other choice than to show how the value of art

objects derives not from the objects themselves, but rather, in keeping with the religious metaphor abundantly mobilized by art lovers themselves, from the priests which organize the cult surrounding them - apostles of taste, prophets of art, churches and sects which cultivate the belief in these objects (and above all, in art itself). In our view, this assumption and the arguments it supports are far from being flawless. Insofar as they are readily associated with any of the repetitive and interchangeable mechanisms involved in the manipulation of belief (which Bourdieu for instance mobilizes in exactly the same way when addressing politics, public opinion, education or television), the activities carried out to produce a compound reality such as art, and the processes involved in its appreciation, lose their specificity or specialness (Frith 1996), whereas, as the products of art, works and tastes are returned to the arbitrariness (a key-word in any analysis in terms of belief) of a collective election based on a presumably social, non-artistic principle (merely concealed by aesthetic jargon), and become meaningless in and of themselves.

Without reverting to essentialist arguments, is it possible to acknowledge the singularity of these products as events which are irreducible to either their origins or their effects? Doesn't this disqualification also entail that social identity is posited as the basis for any solidarity of evaluation (and disagreement, considered as a priori evidence of belonging to a different social group)? If it is the case - if the argument is indeed circular - aren't sociologists ill-equipped to account for the equally valued yet contrasting art forms which co-exist within any given social group or for the overlapping of tastes across social groups (the "omnivorousness", as Peterson calls it; on cultural practices see Blau 1985, DiMaggio 1987, Lamont and Fournier, ed. 1992), whereas such phenomena are becoming increasingly frequent in a world where the boundaries of social groups or communities are porous and where most people belong to different communities simultaneously (Frow 1995)? Of course, this forces one to take the works more seriously - they "do" something, they do "matter". But after all, if taking works of art seriously, if taking an interest in aesthetic judgements for their own sake, necessarily means unduly falling for belief - that is, participating in the members' naturalized "art world" (to use Becker's expression) and the illusion upon which it rests - then, what does such a transfer of the issues of normativity from the researcher to the subject/object under study entail with regards to the privileged status of sociologists as social actors, and of sociological inquiry as a powerful institutionalized form of production of knowledge (see a large critical survey of the question, central to cultural studies, in Grossberg 1992)?

A sociology of art, not against art

This is where we are: in what can be viewed as a post-critical era, sociologists are faced with the challenge of developing a sociology of art which is not, a priori and from the outset, hostile to art - in other words, a sociology which does not automatically revert to belief, which does not reduce issues of value to issues of group distinction or identification/differentiation, which has freed itself from a highly pervasive "false consciousness" syndrome, and which is capable of problematizing social identity rather than accepting it as the self-evident cause of any solidarity in aesthetic evaluation/belief... The challenge might be clear, it remains difficult to take up: is it feasible, in the face of a discourse which makes the work of art the miraculous, "increated", product of the solitary genius, to acknowledge that which the work of art "does" without, at the same time, scorning the attainments of critical sociology? That is, to fully accept (rather than merely paying lipservice to, as aesthetics often does when it is forced to) the collective dimension of artistic production, the instituted, over-coded nature of artistic languages, the necessary

learning that both artistic production and appreciation call for, as well as the cultural determination of the competences they respectively require?

Most of modern sociology of art is produced under this banner, once the principal intermediary topics of interest have been defined:

- the more developed area remains the sociology of artists and their careers, seen as a case for the sociology of profession (1983, Moulin, dir., Freidson 1986, Preston 1992);

- another is the "réseau" of internal relationships between artists and their milieu of critiques and "first users" (Becker 1982); see for instance on the social construction of a genre like jazz in France (Fabiani 1986), on the Avant-Garde in New-York (Crane 1987), on the historical role of critics in France (Wrigley 1993), on new "outsider" artists (Cherbo and Zolberg 1997);

- organization of production itself; after Becker's "collective action" (Becker 1974) and Peterson's "production of culture perspective" (Peterson, ed. 1976), this has often been developed on the case of music, e.g. on the quasi-ethnomethodological apprenticeship of rock musicians in an amateur group (Bennett 1980; see an analogous case about drummers in Curran 1996), or orchestra musicians (Kamerman and Martorella 1983, or the special issue on "Musique et musiciens" in Actes de la recherche 1996), or the production of popular or TV music (Faulkner 1983);

- academies and teaching institutions; after Yates's famous work (Yates 1947), see e.g. (Heinich 1993), (Segré 1993);

- patronage and the support for the arts, public and private, e.g. (Lytle and Orgel, ed. 1981), (Martorella 1990), and for instance on the very specific French cultural policy (Urfalino 1989), (Négrier 1996), (Poulot 1997);

- art markets, general economy of the system, production of aesthetical and economic value and process of institutionalization; after the Whites' founding essay (White and White 1965) linking changes in painters' carriers and aesthetic evaluations to critics, academies and salons, see e.g. on a precise historical art market (Montias 1982), on painters, curators and collectors (Moulin 1992, 1995); on galleries and traders (Crane 1987, Moulin 1992); on the unfair competition made to contemporary composers by the dead ones (Menger 1983); on popular music (Negus 1995), (Klaes 1997).

Even though too wide, or vague, the concept of mediation may be a convenient word to sum up the efforts made from these bases towards another, alternative sociology of art and taste, from very diverse points of view. On the one hand, unlike the notion of creation which is, above all, a call for reverence, the term of mediation does not lock analysts into the kind of position of admiration denounced by critical sociology. It does allow sociology to fully recognize the social nature of art. It does not imply an appearance of the work *ex nihilo*; on the contrary, the notion suggests the active role of all that which ensues from the implemented dispositions, actions, material objects, procedures, devices and arrangements which inform and surround art - and even from the works themselves (but always indirectly: through a work, precisely).

On the other hand - unlike critique this time - speaking of mediation is acknowledging that something effectively "happens" in this process, which transforms the ways things were before; an "event" occurs which has a positivity of its own that cannot be limited to its origins and determinants, no more than to its effects. In keeping with the acquired knowledge produced by critical sociology, and having in mind the first advances made by Iser's and Jauss's sociology of reception (Iser 1978), (Jauss 1982), to address the work of art and the collective production of tastes as a mediation means to study the work and its performance and consumption in detail, from the point of view of the various gestures, bodies, habits, materials, spaces, languages, and institutions it requires to exist. It also means, however, to

accept (rather than reject) the very moment of the work of art in its specific, irrevocable, and performative character, as well as to take into account (rather than dismiss) the highly diversified ways in which actors, whether artists, amateurs, or art lovers, describe and experience their aesthetic pleasures.

From mediation as a critical tool...

Maybe we need to further specify our usage of the concept of mediation, especially since it may, at first, appear perfectly coherent with the critical sociological framework it is meant to amend.

Let us revert to the model of visual arts from which the notion of mediation is derived in order to show how it has indeed been used as an analytical support for the "revelation" process in which critical sociologists are engaged. A statue: a solid, lasting object which is there, eternal. Facing it, a subject which finds it beautiful. And in the shadows, no less eternal than the statue itself, is his/her anonymous admiration. To a large extent, it is possible to summarize modern Western philosophy by means of this very arrangement - that is, the face-to-face between an object overlaid with qualities, and a subject which constructs her gaze by looking at it, with the two poles of this relationship deemed the only legitimate concern of an analysis which never examines that which links them. What has been critical sociology's answer to the problem of art formulated in these terms? It has consisted in saying something like: "Be careful! You may think that everything originates in the work of art, or in the admirer who contemplates it and who becomes aware of his own aesthetic competence, his ability, as human subject, to perceive beauty. But sociology can show you that you are wrong, that rather than deriving from either the work or yourself, everything stems from the intermediary mechanisms which enable this work of art to exist, to stand before you." There is a wide range of such mechanisms, including systems of the most physical, local nature (such as the frame, the pedestal, the lighting, the venue of the exhibition) and devices of a more general, if not institutional character (such as the catalogue or the museum), as well as collective frames of appreciation (such as the discourse of critics, the selective inclusion of certain objects within art history, and the very acknowledgment of the existence of an independent domain called art: this has been brilliantly demonstrated by Haskell and Penny on the case of antique Roman statues (Haskell and Penny 1981).) Charles Lalo's claim, formulated in 1908, that "We do not admire the Venus de Milo because it is beautiful; it is beautiful because we admire it," not only provides a succinct answer but it also clearly points out the sociological inversion upon which the critical approach rests.

The concept of mediation is thus in continuity with critical sociology insofar as it urges the analyst to focus on the various devices from which the work emerges, moving from more local to more general ones: for instance, next to the work and its frame are other works which give the former its meaning; there is a museum which, as a result of a complex historical process, people have been taught to attend in order to admire art works; and there are social constructions which organize what it means to admire and appreciate art. We see the workings of these unobtrusive mediations better when their unusual absence reveals their ordinary necessity: put a five-year old facing the Venus de Milo, he will laugh and wonder where the woman's arms are! A certain amount of learning is required to be able to look at a work of art and to see it as such.

The analysis of the diverse mechanisms which reveal the properties (beauty, transcendence, seduction, originality, etc.) of art works (or sets of works) to art lovers who are themselves progressively defined through this process, has been the shared

task undertaken by critical philosophy, and later on, the sociology of art. Both disciplines have brought to light a whole set of new mediations - galleries, merchants, frames, painting schools, styles, grammar, systems of taste, etc. - without which there can be no beautiful works of art. Given that we are secured in our ability to appreciate art, we may well skim too quickly over all of the conditions that enable us to say of any particular work: "I think it's beautiful". It is by taking into account the full implications of this simple phrase that the critical approach can best be formulated.

... to mediation as actual production

Patrons, sponsors, markets, academies: from the first undertakings of the social history of art to sociology of culture, mediations have indeed played a crucial role in social analyses which, by contrast with aestheticism, considered works and tastes to be socially constructed and determined. The notion of mediation can, however, serve other purposes.

As critical sociology has rightly argued, it can indeed be used to challenge essentialist claims by placing in full view all of the screens, means, mediums and frames through which any work of art is produced. But in contrast with critical sociology's common sense discourse, once intermediaries have been identified, they do not have to be played against the work, the tastes, the artists or the art lovers - as if the latter had an autonomous existence (imagine a concert with a single listener in the hall: there is no music, for it all relies on the collective performance of the musicians and the public). This is what music can show better (Hennion 1993): it is possible to do a positive analysis of the human and material mediators of the "performance" and "consumption" of art (scores, instruments, gestures and bodies, stages and mediums). The mediations are neither mere means of the work, nor substitutes which dissolve its reality, and their revelation is not an act of unveiling which leaves the king naked. The performer knows better than anyone, the moment he places a score on his music stand, what the ambiguity of the object is. He plays music, to be sure, but that music is just as much the very fact of playing : unlike a cause or an effect, it does not break loose from its object; it is not the "object" of an action which might be external, instrumental, to him. One has to learn scales and use breath and bodies. And then, at certain moments, on top of it all - that is to say, in addition to this set of mediations - something might happen. Something may emerge from this mix and that may be "the work of the work" of art.

We can conclude by giving several examples of this shift, that is, of what we could abusively call a "mediation turn" in analyses of institutional, material, human intermediaries.

Let's begin with a return of politics: an indirect effect of the duality works-tastes has been to push out of the scene political analyses of art, a former crucial touchstone between Marxist and non-Marxist historians of art; but politics now does not mean passive reflection of social groupings, but active and reflexive self-production of values, e.g. (Leppert and McClary, ed. 1987), (Bennett, et al., ed. 1993), (Darré, ed. 1996); this leads to more wider questions arised by cultural studies, about nationality and ethnicity or center and peripheries, see on Hungarian rock (Racz and Zetenyi 1994), (Grenier 1997), on conjunto music (Valdez and Halley 1996), and on racial and sexual identites (van den Toorn 1991), (Solie, ed. 1993), (Middleton 1995), or to a reformulation of the question of modernity and Avant-garde (Burger 1984), (Born 1995); a social historian of music, J. Fulcher, has revisited French "bourgeois" Opera with the same regard, i.e. as a tentative political production of its own legitimacy by the restored royal power, as being national and popular (Fulcher 1987). But pioneers

here are more often to be found among rock and popular culture researchers, either on the definition of the High/low cultures (Mukerji and Schudson, ed. 1991), (Shusterman 1991), (Grossberg 1992), (Hall 1992), or directly à propos the complex cultural and political definition of rock (Willis 1972), (Street 1986), (Frith 1988), (Ross and Rose, ed. 1994), (Frith 1996), or recently of Country-music, seen as an "invention of a tradition" (Peterson 1997): if we move the camera back towards popular arts or ethnic music, as well as towards TV, cartoons, rock or jazz, the emphasis is placed far more on the collective production of art.

Another case is older, and comes from the social history of art: patronage, since (Haskell 1963), has been the focus of a very interesting long run polemical inquiry, characteristically starting with reductionist views setting the patron, himself but a spokesperson of his class, as the real master of artists, and little by little producing a much more subtle and paradoxical image of himself, and of his advisers, as the co-producer, with and against the artist himself, of the artist's liberty (Warnke 1987): but, as one if us has tried to show (see *l'Année Sociologique* 1989, Hennion 1996), the important point here is in the methodology progressively defined by historians of art to integrate in a seamless web elements of reputation, physical features and materials of works, habits of merchants or priests, intellectual or political designs of the elites; in that sense, they have been pioneers in mediation, and one can fruitfully transpose onto the sociological agenda the work done by the best of them (Baxandall 1972, Haskell 1976, Haskell and Penny 1981).

A third approach can be characterized as an application of the notion of "carriers" to works, after Appadurai's concept of "biography of things" (Appadurai 1986): see (Lang and Lang 1990), (Weber 1992), (Hennion 1993), (Regev 1994), or Bourdieu on Flaubert's literary carrier (Bourdieu 1992); instead of clearly distinguishing objects and their context, works and their appreciation, all these studies lead to finely follow the precise "carriers" followed by objects, themselves strictly depending on the norms, procedures and criteria used to define them as aesthetic objects; the role of techniques and instruments is seen anew (Kraft 1994), (Marontate 1995); new studies on museums and exhibitions have developed in this fruitful direction, e.g. (Stocking Jr 1985), (Pearce 1992), (McClellan 1994), (Poulot 1997); transportation, selection, financial evaluation and insurance, destruction and restoration become concrete trials putting into question the very nature of things - and often deciding their physical destiny - as Gamboni as shown in his study of "The Destruction of Art" (Gamboni 1997).

Last example, on the other side of mediations: about tastes and amateurs. A radical lack of concern for the works had characterized most of studies made in sociology of culture on art consumption; art private collectors and opera amateurs were among the rare exceptions, e.g. on collections and objects (Pearce 1992), on opera (Martorella 1982), on the baroque revival (Hennion 1997a), on jazz (Berliner 1994); taking the formation of tastes as an active production through mediations requires another type of observation and attention, namely to the production of specific abilities and postures, little by little developed in order to "practise" art appreciation; this turns classical stratification analysis of determined tastes for determined categories into a new ethnography of amateurs' practices, keeping with Weber's study of real concert attendances in the 19th Century (Weber 1975); other works have been initiated, often from popular art practices, e.g. on French "PMU" (horse bettings) (Yonnet 1985), on musical rituals (White, ed. 1987), on rock, drugs and sex (Willis, E. 1992), on new forms of amateurism (Donnat 1996). How do we learn that we must contemplate, estimate, compare, decontextualise works, how do we feel obliged to produce a judgment, to over-examine one's own taste for something, to participate to highly ritual ceremonies, or to add "social" or political interpretations to a former apolitical evaluation of works and situations? Pushing the question further, and inspired by

Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty 1945), some authors instead of opposing corporal aspects of sensation to the social forms of learning aesthetic pleasure, propose to follow the path from the feeling body to the appreciating mind (Bessy and Chateauraynaud 1995), (DeNora 1995b), and study the precise devices of "expertise" (Moulin and Quemin 1993).

These diverse studies all care for a concrete "pragmatics" of the works and tastes, through a common attention to the role of the multiple devices, material settings, means of transportation or recording (exhibits, concerts, medias, video, recordings, aso.), which take in charge an important part of requirements made by the aesthetic posture, and of properties attributed to the works; often in a silent way, they carry the inscription of these aesthetic objects, subjects or situations into other logics (market, politics, social or sexual critique, aso). Mediations have to be recognized in their own right, thus enabling the analyst to better understand how something new has come out of various contingent combinations of heterogeneous instruments, temporal and spatial *dispositifs*, procedures and techniques; something else than what caused it, which has its own specific historical trajectory; something which, like a rock concert or a sculpture exhibition, is constituted by the different forms of action, investment, or involvement rendered possible by such combinations; something which does not bring together already existing objects, subjects and social groupings - rather, it is something through which the particular objects, subjects, and social groupings relevant to this conjunctural event are co-produced and whose specific attributes and properties are defined.

Too often used only for deconstruction purposes, the notion of mediation can provide a starting point to more positive analyses of tastes and works. Mediations are of a pragmatic status: they are the art which they bring forth, and they cannot be distinguished from the appreciation they generate. They can thus help us better understand the contingent ways in which particular intermediaries, entities and processes, participate in the progressive emergence of a particular artistic work, as well as the complex and changing ways in which specific value judgments or appreciations become linked to specific art works. By doing so, the notion opens up new analytical spaces left unexplored as a result of the work-taste duality around which social studies of art have traditionally been organized. The problematic defined enables us to link the appreciation to the work, instead of playing off the one against the other.

Return to the work?

On the one hand, an analysis in these terms does not postulate the existence of some general underlying social mechanisms responsible for the presumably stable and necessary relationship between self-enclosed works and pre-existing tastes. Rather, it is based on the twofold assumption that the links between works and tastes are contingent, conjunctural and hence, changing; and they result from specific yet changing combinations of specific intermediaries, considered not as the neutral channels through which pre-determined social relations operate, but as productive entities which have effectivities of their own.

On the other hand, the notion of mediation enables sociologists to problematize creation differently. In order to acknowledge its social and historical nature, sociologists do not have to "take away" creation from the great artists, and hand it to society or, more precisely, to consumers (as some Avant-garde theorists have suggested, in a half-leftist, half-marketing oriented version of the critical approach). What they can do, however, is to acknowledge that creation is not the sole prized possession of the creator. There is such a thing as creation in the strict sense of the

word, that is, the specialized work of professionals who adopt the trade name of creators. But there is more to creation than this. To acknowledge the effectiveness of mediations means to challenge the predominant Western view that everything can be attributed to a single creator, and to recognize that creation is far more widely distributed, as it takes place in all of the interstices between the multiple intermediaries involved in producing and appreciating art. It is not although there is the creator, but so that there can be a creator, that all our collective creative work is required. This is why, as one of us has tried to show (Hennion 1995), N. Elias, for instance, is taken in a "double bind" when he speaks of Mozart as a "socially unrecognized" genius (Elias 1993), an obvious pleonasm: its pretended "unrecognition" is but a central figure of the social production of "genius" (Heinich 1991, Copland 1995, DeNora 1995a, Hennion 1997b). As literary theorists have clearly argued (in keeping with Foucault's 1969 founding lecture "What is an author?"), we end up attributing authority/ authorship to individual creators even though it takes a whole collectivity's love and involvement not only to define and produce art, but also to define and produce creators. Creation can be viewed as something which occurs in a moment, always made out of other creations, but without ever being able only to "consume" one without remaking it: in any act of consumption or reception, heterogeneous elements are brought together which transform, alter the so-called original work and hence turn it - albeit slightly - into something else.

This is perhaps how sociology can better understand the work of the work of art, that is, to use the expression coined by Genette (1994), "l'Œuvre de l'art" (the work of the art) and not only "l'œuvre d'art" (the work of art).

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