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Art at the crossroads:

The arts in society and the sociology of art¹

Abstract

The arts face a number of challenges in the 21st century brought about by various factors. These include rapid expansion of art markets at an international level, the impact of economic restructuring in public funding for the arts, the increasing dominance of neoliberal models of institutional and organizational success, changes in the definition of artistic work and artistic identity, and changes in the definition of audiences and new modes of arts participation in the face of technological innovations in communication technologies. In this paper, we identify and analyze six major themes central to the arts and the sociology of art: the marginalization of the arts in society and sociology, art and the state, arts institutions and organizations, artists and audiences, and issues of meaning and measurement. We argue that the arts and arts scholarship face a crossroads in the current environment. We conclude with some observations about directions for future research.

Keywords: sociology of art, arts markets, art and the state, arts organizations, arts audiences, methodological issues in the sociology of art

¹ The inspiration for a special issue of *Poetics* devoted to the arts came from the 2010 conference “Great Expectations: Arts and the Future,” organized by Victoria D. Alexander, sponsored by the European Sociological Association’s Research Network 02, Sociology of the Arts, and held at the University of Surrey (UK).

1. Introduction

The metaphor of a crossroad suggests both challenges and possibilities. The arts have undergone a series of dramatic changes in the last 25 years—including intensive growth of the global art market, significant reductions in public funding, the imposition of neo-liberal models of organization on arts institutions and associations, shifting roles for artists, changing publics, and new modes of participation brought about by the growth of the Internet and other communication technologies (see below). What are the implications of these changes? What challenges do they pose for the arts and to scholarship on the arts? How do they enrich our understanding of existing conditions in the arts, raise important questions about the future, and afford us an opportunity for critical reflection on the status of our discipline?

Drawing inspiration from these changes in arts worlds and their implications for both the arts and arts scholarship, we explore six major themes central to the arts and the sociology of the arts in the current environment. Each of the themes—the marginalization of the arts in society and sociology, changing markets, art and the state, institutions and organizations, artists and audiences, and issues of meaning and measurement—includes observations about changes in the art world as well, as a discussion of scholarship in the area. We conclude with a discussion of directions for future research. It is our hope that this article will provide a useful overview of the state of arts scholarship at this challenging time, and suggestions for its future development. The articles in this special issue of *Poetics* are a contribution to that development.

2. The marginalization of the arts in society and sociology

The arts have occupied a marginalized position in both modern society and the discipline of sociology. Historically and today, the arts have been judged less important than other areas of study for the social sciences. As a recognized area of specialization, the sociology of art is relatively new and still developing (see below). The marginalization of art in society may be less obvious or even puzzling. After all, the arts hold an exalted, even sacred, position in society; they have the ability to confer status honor on the people who consume and possess expert knowledge about them; and expensive sales of art are reported frequently in the media. But as we demonstrate below, it is precisely this exalted status that results in the marginalization of the arts in the broader social context.

The sharp, hierarchical distinction between the fine and popular arts that was drawn in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries created a dichotomous model of aesthetic objects and practices, the institutions and audiences to which they belong, and the functions or purposes they serve (DiMaggio, 1982a, 1982b; Levine, 1988).² Put simply, the fine arts were defined in terms that marked their dissimilarity from the popular. Fine art forms were characterized as possessing complexity and depth. A great work of art elevates rather than entertains—a view that does not preclude enjoyment but implies a refined notion of pleasure as something acquired through specialized knowledge rather than “fun” and easily accessible. The serious, intellectual qualities

² The history of the modern concept of the fine arts and its relation to other forms of cultural-aesthetic production and audiences is complex, including some cross-cultural differences in periodization. For a description of early distinctions between craft and art, see Wittkower and Wittkower (1963, pp. 1-16). On the system of classification that characterized eighteenth-century aesthetic philosophy, see Kristeller (1951). For a sociological overview of the distinctions between fine/popular, elite/mass, and high/low, see Alexander (2003) and Zolberg (1990).

ascribed to the fine arts thus requires a level of discernment in matters of judgment and taste that emphasizes the singular character of aesthetic object and audience alike.

These definitional criteria simultaneously presume and reinforce the commonplace view of the fine arts as a sphere of elite privilege and exclusivity. Although many, if not most, of the institutions of high culture today are actively engaged in efforts to expand visitor attendance in terms of both numbers and diversity (for example, see Alexander, 1996a, b), fine arts venues are still frequently seen as forbidding and intimidating to the uninitiated. Potential barriers to participation are not limited to prospective visitors' knowledge of the arts but also include factors ranging from admission fees, access to location and the availability of transportation to organizational norms about decorum and dress.³ As Bourdieu (2002 [1984], p. 34) has observed, "It is part of the paraphernalia which always announces the sacred character, separate and separating, of high culture—the icy solemnity of the great museums, the grandiose luxury of the opera-houses and major theatres, the décor and decorum of concert-halls." On a theoretical level, the distinction between the fine and popular arts assumes the status of a binary. In practice, it both reifies and marginalizes the fine arts as a realm disconnected from the lives of the vast majority of the population.⁴

³ An interesting contemporary example of the attempt to address this latter point in the performing arts is a section of the New York Philharmonic website entitled "How to Prepare"—with basic tips for the first time symphony visitor including reassurances on the likelihood of recognizing some portion of the music from a movie soundtrack, television show, or commercial, as well as information about finding one's seats and when to applaud. See www.nyphil.org/ConcertsTickets/your-visit/plan-your-visit/how-to-prepare.

⁴ Of course, the fine arts can be closely connected to the lives of people to whom it is important (See DeNora, 2000; Benzecry, 2009).

Social research on the arts has systematically dismantled the conventional view that the distinction between the fine and popular arts reflects intrinsic differences among certain forms of aesthetic culture and, therefore, is natural, universal, and timeless. The contribution of scholarship in this area has been to show that these systems of classification are, in fact, the historical products of social forces. DiMaggio's (1982a, 1982b, 1992) research has demonstrated that the strong distinction between high and low art in the US was a social construct created by urban elites in the later part of the 19th century. Bourdieu's analysis of taste, elaborated through his theory of class, *habitus*, and cultural capital, challenges the conventional wisdom that aesthetic-cultural standards are universal, revealing the interdependence of taste and social position (Bourdieu, 2002 [1984]; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990 [1977]).

A number of studies have documented that definitions of what constitutes "high" and "low" forms of expressive culture undergo historical shifts in classification and meaning. Levine (1988), for example, has shown that, until the 20th century, works by authors including Shakespeare and Dickens were both prestigious *and* popular. Previously denigrated forms have been elevated to the status of fine art, as studies of film by Baumann (2001) and of jazz by Lopes (2002), Peterson (1972), and Witkin (1988) have shown.⁵ Bowler (1997) has documented the processes by which the work of psychiatric inmates began to be defined as art in the early 20th century. In the late 20th and 21st centuries, some of this work has undergone the process of mainstreaming, including the designation of certain artists as canonized masters (Bowler, forthcoming). Corse (1996) and Dubin (1999), among others, have demonstrated the crucial role of social elites in canon formation. Institutional and organizational factors have been shown to play an important role in the legitimation of new genres and styles (Crane, 1987; White and

⁵ Baumann (2007) proposes a general model of aesthetic mobility.

White, 1993 [1965]). Work by DeNora (1995), Lang and Lang (1990), and Zolberg (1983) have examined the crucial effects of patronage systems on artistic production and reputation.

At the same time, and until fairly recently, sociology as a discipline has paid relatively little attention to the study of the arts (Lang 2000; Zolberg, 1990, 2005b). As Lang (2000, p. 172) reports, “As recently as 1968 the term sociology of art was not indexed in the International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, which sought to sum and assess the thinking and accomplishments in the rapidly expanding social sciences of the post-World War II period.” In part, this neglect can be attributed to a widely held view of art as the proper subject matter of the humanities. These differences in disciplinary identity were understood along lines of methodological orientation, as well as subject matter. Echoing Bourdieu’s famous statement on art and sociology as an “odd couple” (1980, p. 207), Lang (2000, p. 172) points to the tension between humanities scholars skeptical of social scientists’ attempt to rid their research of any evaluative component and the sociological commitment to rigorous empirical methods and a scientific approach to the study of society. Moreover, the association of art with the fine arts and the elite world that this implied was seen as incompatible with the egalitarian goals of sociology. Sociologists focused on subject matter viewed as more salient in the solution of social problem—urbanization and immigration, the origins and structure of industrial capitalism, poverty, and crime (Zolberg, 1990, pp. 29-31, 199).

The status of the fine arts in social scientific research was further complicated by the cultural idea that one of the core components of artistic greatness was to be found in the indifference of the artist to the market. The separation of art and commerce has its roots in the Renaissance (Baxandall, 1988) but was more firmly established with the doctrine of art for art’s sake embraced in the Bohemian culture of 19th century Paris (Bourdieu, 1996). This view of the

artist as cut off from the profane character of everyday life bears significant consequence as it forms the ideological foundation of the myth of art and the artist as outside the sphere of the social and, by extension, outside the purview of sociological analysis.

Sociology's neglect of the arts was not limited to the fine arts but extended to popular cultural forms as well, a fact highlighted by Gans in his influential book *Popular Culture and High Culture*, first published in 1974. If the neglect of fine art stemmed from its close association with exclusivity and elite privilege, popular art tended to be disdained for its connection to the commercial, capitalist market (Gans, 1974; Zolberg, 1990, p. 31, 2005a, p. 126). While distinctions were made among different kinds of popular art,⁶ the mass culture theory that dominated the intellectual discourse on the popular arts in the post-World War II period overwhelmingly focused on the deleterious effects of popular cultural forms. In this way, popular culture became an object of critique by both conservative cultural critics defending the purity of high art against the incursion of the "lowbrow" as well as Marxist and neo-Marxist theorists who equated popular culture with ideological domination.⁷

⁶ Folk art can be cited an example of a kind of popular art viewed as a form of authentic culture.

Nevertheless, it was not elevated above the realm of artifact or craft nor was it recognized as legitimate art. For a discussion of the social construction of folk and Outsider art as a cultural field, see Ardery (1997).

⁷ It should be noted that Adorno, one of the most prominent aesthetic theoreticians in the neo-Marxian tradition, recognized a distinction between popular and mass culture (1975 [1967]), although this awareness was not always reflected in his analysis of aesthetic-cultural objects and practices. Gans' (1974) work offers some incisive critiques of mass culture theory. See Alexander (2003, pp. 43-49) for an overview of the mass culture debates.

At present, several factors signal a shift away from the marginalization of the arts in society and sociology. The distinction between the fine and popular arts that was so strongly drawn in the late 19th and 20th centuries is eroding (DiMaggio, 1987, 1991). The most significant evidence for this erosion lies in the increasing recognition of aesthetic-expressive forms that fall outside the system of classification that has dominated the Western canon. This recognition can take the form of accommodation—e.g., the inclusion of popular or “lowbrow” art forms in established institutions of high art. In these instances, the popular undergoes critical reassessment (usually of a highly theoretical sort) and is assigned qualities associated with high art.⁸ Alternately, and more rarely, a destabilization of boundaries may occur when “non-art” or “not-art” things appear that challenge existing systems of classification.⁹

An increasing awareness of the importance of the arts is a notable feature of 21st century society. As McCarthy et al. (2004, p. xi) note, in the context and aftermath of what became known as the “culture wars,” arts advocates in the US were increasingly forced to demonstrate the significance of the arts. Studies emphasized the instrumental benefits of the arts (e.g., economic growth and student learning outcomes). More recent studies continue to stress instrumental benefits, however, “intrinsic” benefits—ranging from focused attention and pleasure to the capacity for empathy—have also been identified as significant and, as the authors point out, should be viewed as having “valuable public spillover” (McCarthy et al., 2005, p. xiii). A 2014 study by Greene et al. is especially interesting in this light. Focusing on the effects of

⁸ See, for example, the 2001-2002 exhibition of Norman Rockwell, “Norman Rockwell: Pictures for the American People,” at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

⁹ See, for example, “The Art of the Motorcycle,” which premiered at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, NY in the summer of 1998.

school tours of art museums on students (kindergarten through grade 12), the researchers reported findings that include not only more knowledge about the art that students viewed, but also that students displayed high rates of historical empathy, defined as “the ability to understand and appreciate what life was like for people who lived in another time and place,” and increased tolerance (Green et al., 2014, p. 83).¹⁰

The “cultural turn” in the social sciences has for several decades now called attention to the centrality of culture in everyday life. It rejects the conceptualization of culture as secondary to other dimensions of social life, including the economic, and insists on the recognition of culture as constitutive of society and social relations. It underscores the importance of scholarship emphasizing the crucial role of culture, including the arts, in the creation, legitimation, and reproduction of structures of power and domination. For scholars of the arts, this turn represents a challenge to the marginalization of art in social research and a commitment to the future development of the field.¹¹

Sociological scholarship in the arts has gained recognition in the discipline;¹² however, challenges to knowledge arise as the art world changes, which provide researchers with new

¹⁰ See also the 2012 NEA-sponsored study of at-risk youth by Catterall et al. (2012), which reports statistical correlations between arts involvement and positive academic and civic engagement outcomes.

¹¹ For a discussion of the current state of the cultural turn and its theoretical implications, see Jacobs and Hanrahan (2005).

¹² The existence of a robust intellectual infrastructure for the sociology of the arts both reflects and contributes to the current state of the subdiscipline. This infrastructure includes research networks and sections on culture and the arts in the American Sociological Association (ASA), the European Sociological Association (ESA), and the International Sociological Association (ISA). It also includes specialized publications, including *Poetics*, which serve as signals of legitimation within the field as well

empirical data and which, perhaps, may change existing theoretical models. The art world is obviously affected by changes to its structures, and dramatic changes can be seen in several areas.

3. Changing markets

The markets for the arts are complex and changing rapidly in today's world. Today, for instance, visual art is sold in dealerships (the "primary" market¹³) and at auction (the "secondary" market¹⁴). Art fairs, such as Art Basel in Switzerland, have become increasingly important (Thornton, 2008). These fairs are comprised of invited dealers, often several hundred of them. Each dealer has a stall or section in which to showcase artists they represent. Fairs not only allow dealers to sell works of art, but in attracting glitterati alongside art enthusiasts and various hangers-on, the fairs create incredible "buzz."

While various methods for commissioning art have long existed—patronage systems, for example—visual art markets as we currently know them developed in the mid-nineteenth century. At that time, as White and White (1993 [1965]) describe, arts dealers emerged fortuitously and coincidentally with an influx of artists to Paris. The Paris Academy of Painting and Sculpture was unable to absorb all of these artists, including artists painting in new, non-

as providing important outlets for sociological work on the arts and a crucial resource for scholars who seek to read about research in the field.

¹³ The primary market also exists when artists sell their works directly from their studios, a strategy often used by less well-established artists (O'Neil, 2008; Simpson, 1981).

¹⁴ Most works of art sold at auction are "secondary" sales. That is, works of art that have been owned by a collector are re-sold to a new collector. A notable exception was the 2008 auction at Sotheby's of Damien Hirst's work, discussed below.

academic styles (notably, the Impressionists). The surplus artists turned to dealers as a means to continue their artistic work. Over time, the dealer-critic system, as White and White call it, supplanted the centuries-old academic system as a key form for the distribution of fine arts. These market systems grew and expanded in the 20th century (Moulin, 1987).

Observers of art dealerships (e.g., Moulin, 1987; Peterson, 1997; Plattner, 1996; Robertson and Chong, 2008; Velthuis, 2003, 2005) point out the irony that a dealership buys and sells works of art with the aim to make a profit, a commercial goal achieved by means of art, which is often seen as antithetical to commerce. Art dealers do not openly discuss art in terms of prices or as commodities; commercial discussions are held backstage, *sotto voce*.¹⁵ Indeed, art dealers do not like to be called dealers. They prefer to be called “gallerists,” which implies that the works they display in their “galleries” are equivalent to art in (non-commercial) art galleries and art museums. The denial of the commercial is also evident in art fairs and biennales. The importance of money and extremely wealthy buyers (“ultra-high-net-worth individuals” as they are called in the refined language of the international arts) is hard to miss when art is sold at auction—buyers obviously need to bid on their target!—but the proceedings are genteel and polite, providing a veneer of indifference to financial considerations. As Bourdieu (1993, p. 74) has pointedly observed, the business of art rests on practices that “can only work by [actors] pretending not to be doing what they are doing.”

A crucial challenge to visual art markets is their success. To illustrate, there were three record-breaking sales of art sold at auction between May 2010 and November 2013. In November 2013, a triptych by artist Francis Bacon was sold for \$142.4 million (USD) at

¹⁵ For a similar example of saying one thing and doing another with respect to financial matters in the arts, see Craig and Dubois’ (2010) discussion of poetry readings.

Christie's. This sale broke the previous record of \$119.9 million at Sotheby's in May 2012 for Edvard Munch's iconic "The Scream." Prior to that, the sale of Picasso's "Nude, Green Leaves and Bust" at Christie's in May 2010 for \$106.5 million was the highest record for a work of art purchased at auction (see *The Economist*, 2013; Ng, 2013; Tully, 2013; Vogel, 2013).¹⁶ Record-breaking prices for old masters are striking (but perhaps, no longer surprising). Living artists have also reached stratospheric prices in the secondary market. And in 2008, British artist Damien Hirst sold work directly to collectors in an event called "Beautiful Inside My Head Forever," a two-day auction at Sotheby's (Vogel, 2008). Hirst raised a reported £111 million (\$198 million) in the sale (Kennedy, 2008).

Bourdieu (1993) suggests that the field of art can be divided into two general segments, or "poles." In the autonomous pole, art is independent of other fields, and produces "pure" art that is rich with cultural capital, but poor with economic capital (or "art for art's sake," as discussed above). In the heteronomous pole, the arts are penetrated by the commercial sector, producing both "bourgeois" art, which sells reasonably well, but which still has some claim to art-ness, and "industrial" art, which is lowbrow and produced only because it sells. The increasing commercialization of the arts world, then, suggests an erosion of the autonomy of art, as even the market for contemporary avant-garde is interpenetrated with commercial interests (DiMaggio, 1987).

¹⁶ In the media coverage and commentary issued in response to the Bacon sale, the *New York Times* art critic Roberta Smith observed that the price for the Bacon "almost equaled the \$154 million that President Obama requested for the National Endowment for the arts for the fiscal year 2013—and more than the \$138 million that the endowment actually received, with cuts" (Smith, 2013).

The Hirst example is an interesting indicator of increasing commercialization of the market. In this case, the artist eschews the pose of disinterestedness (a pose Hirst does not seem to embrace in any case) as he actively and directly engaged in the selling process.¹⁷ His case also suggests that the increasing commercialization of the market is not confined to dealers and buyers but implicates artists as well.

As the price of art sold at auction has increased, its markets have changed, growing more globalized, with China a growing market.¹⁸ Visual art markets now attract many customers who appear more interested in investment potential than in the art itself, and overall, fine arts markets have become increasingly commercialized.¹⁹ Extremely high prices achieved for some art works at auction have dramatically increased attention to these markets, from scholars (Robertson, 2005; Thompson, 2008), as well as from the public.²⁰

A key component of arts markets in general relates to uncertainty in these markets. Hirsch (1972) has suggested that cultural industries are characterized by demand uncertainty. That is, cultural producers do not know what audiences will enjoy and pay for, at any given point

¹⁷ Hirst, like American artist Jeff Koons, has a particular reputation as an entrepreneur. Of course, artist as entrepreneur is not entirely new. Andy Warhol is the most famous example of this in modern times. Interestingly, Warhol called his studio a “factory,” which had working class connotations. In contrast, there is something of a corporate veneer to Hirst and (especially) Koons.

¹⁸ For instance, Sotheby's CEO William Ruprecht said, in 2011, “Four years ago, only 4% of Sotheby's sales were in China. So far this year, that number is 35%” and pointed out that, at that time, Sotheby's had 90 offices in 40 countries (Yale University, 2011).

¹⁹ The investment potential of art may be overrated, however (Stanford University, 2013).

²⁰ High prices also attract criminals; theft and forgery are, unfortunately, serious issues for the art world (Boylan, 2005; Barboza *et al.*, 2013).

in time, and, on the whole, producers are unable to judge the potential for success of individual products. In the fine arts market, demand uncertainty obtains, but so does price uncertainty (Plattner, 1998; Yogev, 2010). As works of art cannot be valued by objective criteria, what price is set by dealers or at auction is subject to complex and competing logics. In the primary market, the size of an artwork is crucial to its price, and laws of supply and demand are not observed, especially because the price for works is almost never lowered (Velthuis, 2005). Laws of supply and demand are also neglected, because in the primary market, the status of the artist, the dealership and the collector interact with the consequence that unknown buyers are not particularly welcome, even if they have cash in hand. In the secondary market, higher prices occur with greater demand, but the demand does not have to be widespread. Two individuals, neither of whom will give up in a bidding war, can produce record prices (Thornton, 2008). A key question concerns the impact of pricing on how value is constructed: Is price a signal of quality? The short answer is that, while price is known to be somewhat arbitrary and influenced by many extraneous factors, price also does serve as a proxy for quality. Velthuis (2005, p. 159) says that “prices function as boundary objects: on the one hand, they are robust enough for people to recognize them as symbols; on the other hand, they are flexible enough to allow for different meanings to different people.”

Shin, Lee, and Lee (2014, this volume) take advantage of a unique situation in Korea to study the influence of marketization of art worlds on the price of art works. The first art auction in Korea was established in 1988. Previously, art was sold there through dealerships to elite buyers, a world which drew on art specialists and enthusiasts. After the founding of the auction, purchasers included many more lay investors and consortia that bought arts specifically as an investment strategy (rather than for a love of the art work). This unique situation allowed the

authors to examine all sales of art in the Seoul Auction in order to learn more about price formation. Shin et al. find that the price a work achieved in the auction market is positively affected by the “market status” of the artist (the prices achieved by the artist’s previously sold works, relative to the highest priced works in the market), but it is negatively affected by the artist’s “professional status” (the ranking of the artist by professional art critics). Institutional investors strengthened the effect of “market status,” demonstrating the commodification of art with respect to investment potential and the decoupling of market and professional status.

Pénet and Lee (2014, this volume) are similarly concerned with the valuation of artists’ works, and they are interested in the effects of art prizes on artists’ careers. Focusing on the Turner Prize offered by the UK’s Tate Gallery, they show that the Prize serves as a proxy for artistic quality, via several valuation mechanisms and, therefore, it acts as a “valuation device” in the contemporary art market. The careers of recent nominees follow an unusual career trajectory, with nomination creating a fast rise in the art market and leading to early career success. This stands in contrast to an older, but perhaps no longer functioning, process of valuation that proceeded slowly as an artist’s oeuvre grew and then found its place in the existing canon.

In the 21st century, commercial art markets²¹ have faced challenges posed by the Internet. The commercial music industry has most notably been affected, with changes to distribution mechanisms, such as the rise of Internet-based music streaming, and downloading of individual songs which have significantly challenged established business models and profitability in the

²¹ Markets for commercial arts emerged with the rise of the cultural industries in the late 19th and early 20th century (Starr, 2004). Thus, these markets and fine arts markets developed in the same historical period.

industry (Marshall, 2013; McCourt and Burkart, 2003). Major art dealerships, auction houses, and art fairs all have impressive web pages, including textual, visual, and multimedia material. These sites allow casual browsers or collectors to view art works and, in many cases, to purchase or bid on items. (See for example, Saatchi Online, <http://www.saatchionline.com/> , which brings together artists offering work and collectors willing to buy through an online forum, or ArtNet, <http://www.artnet.com/> , a German company established in 1998 which claims that it is “the leading place to buy, sell, and research Fine Art, Design, and Decorative Art online.”) Christie’s held seven online-only auctions in 2012, and fifty in 2013, while Sotheby’s saw a 50 percent rise in online bids between 2012 and 2013 (Battle, 2013).²² Internet use is also evident at the grassroots level, with some artists turning to crowdfunding sites, such as Kickstarter or Indiegogo, to raise money for creative projects.²³ While it is yet unclear how the Internet is changing the market for the fine arts, its presence constitutes a noteworthy feature of the contemporary field.

4. Art and the state

²² A curator told us, “I know an increasing number of galleries are selling work via entirely online means, and that Christie’s is trying very hard to launch an online component (but it’s slow to take off in the high end markets). Amazon has also tried doing online sales, partnering with galleries to list works worth millions, but this hasn’t caught on (and has led to some very funny Amazon user comments). That being said, online sales are widely thought to be the way of the future for galleries, and of course, this raises questions about whether galleries will exist at all. As for auctions: you can place bids for upcoming live auctions online, so the Internet takes the place of paper write-ins. However, phone callers are still considered the way to go” (personal communication to Anne Bowler, 15 January 2014).

²³ On crowdfunding, in general, see Baeck et al. (2012).

State funding can provide an alternative—or, more commonly, a complement—to market systems for the arts (Alexander and Rueschemeyer, 2005). Comparative studies of arts funding shows a large range in the amounts and type of state funding and differences in the types of art considered to be within the purview of the state (Ca'Zorzi, 1989; Madden, 2005; Schuster, 1985). Different “models” of funding have also been discussed (Benedict, 1991; Cummings and Katz, 1987; Cummings and Schuster, 1989; Toepler and Zimmer, 2002). For instance, in Hillman-Chartrand and McCaughey’s (1989) model, the US is seen as a “facilitator” of the arts (through tax relief), the UK and Australia as “patrons” (through arms-length arts councils), France as an “architect” (ministry of culture) and the former Soviet Union as an “engineer” (totalitarian control of the production of culture). While this typology has proven useful, more detailed analysis shows that individual countries often display aspects of each type of support, depending on the level of government or the funding mechanism (Alexander and Rueschemeyer, 2005). However, as Heilbrun and Gray (1993, p. 266) point out, nearly all state support of the arts subsidizes the *supply* of art, for instance, thought grants to artists or arts institutions. It is much less common for governments to support the *demand* for art through direct means such as vouchers for artistic or cultural consumption.²⁴

A common challenge facing the arts in most countries is reduced funding for the arts (Boorsma, et al., 1998). This appears to be related to neo-liberal model of economic organization in which all aspects of social life need to be justified in market-centered or

²⁴ To the extent that governments support education, both general and cultural, governments *indirectly* support the demand for art (Alexander and Rueschemeyer, 2005).

utilitarian terms (Belfiore, 2012; Gray, 2000, 2007; McGuigan, 2009).²⁵ Despite a general view that the arts are somehow valuable, the arts can be hard to justify in state policies (Belfiore and Bennett, 2010)—especially when set against apparently more pressing, or more easily measured, areas, such as health care, education, business support or policing. Indeed, Alexander (2007, 2011) argues that, just as the autonomous pole of the arts is increasingly penetrated by the commercial, losing autonomy in the process, the arts are increasingly penetrated by the state. Governments impose neo-liberal thinking, in general, along with preferred business management tools and current policy objectives, on arts organizations through their cultural policies and funding strategies. In the UK, for instance, the state, via funding arrangements, requires the arts to be an instrument of social inclusiveness and to provide “value for money,” while state funding is justified with the notion that the arts increase economic competitiveness and inspire the creative economy.

An important area of neglect in studies of government funding is that of state (regional) and local government funding, in contrast to studies of national government funding. Johanson, et al. (2014, this volume) address this gap through their case study of local government in Australia. Focusing on four local area governments (councils) and their policies and activities with respect to arts participation, Johanson et al. find that definitions of community participation vary in accordance to the characteristics of the municipality. Local councils appear to resist the neo-liberal emphasis on measurement, despite some pressure to develop sets of participation

²⁵ Neo-liberal thinking tends to equate profit-driven, market models with the economic realm as a whole, ignoring other ways of economic thinking, such as a focus on public goods (Harvey, 2005; Heelas and Morris, 1992).

indicators. The authors argue that acceding to demands for standard participation measures across councils would limit individual councils' capacities to respond to local needs.

Governments remain important for the arts in many ways, some of which are taken for granted. As Becker (1982) has noted, the state maintains civic order, enforces norms and laws of private property and commercial exchange, provides general education and otherwise supports the cultural and physical infrastructure in which the arts function. The challenges to arts from governments at the moment are cuts to arts funding, the related emphasis on private support, the use of the arts as a stand-in for other policy agendas, and the fact that government is part of the wider societal shift toward the enshrinement of neo-liberalism.

5. Arts institutions and organizations

Art institutions, such as museums, theatres, symphonies, ballet companies, and other institutions that house or perform in fine arts disciplines, face many challenges in contemporary society. These include, in many cases, an ageing audience base, competing missions, and funding pressures, as well as challenges in adapting to and drawing on technologies and situations of the digital age. Most of these organizations are third sector (nonprofit, voluntary organizations), governmental, or non-governmental organizations (Alexander, 2010). What these three types of organizations have in common is that they are funded by external entities, including governments.

Governments, as we have mentioned, are cutting back across all policy areas, including funding for the art. Nonprofit organizations can raise funds from individuals and businesses, as well as applying for government grants, but during the current economic climate, such funding

may be harder to find.²⁶ Moreover, research suggests that funders may have an impact on arts organizations and their operations. Some researchers argue that corporate funding can have significant (negative) impact on arts organizations (Wu, 2002), whereas other research suggests that funders do have an effect, but that it can be complex or indirect. For instance, wealthy individuals, as philanthropists and as trustees in arts organizations, have personal (both idiosyncratic and prestige-seeking) and social class (elitist) interests, but they also act for the wider good, as they see it (Ostrower, 1995, 2002). In a study of art museum exhibitions, Alexander (1996a, 1996b) shows that, as funders support only those exhibitions that they prefer, the proportion of preferred exhibitions increases across the entire program of special exhibitions. So, as government and corporate sponsorship grew in the US from 1960 to 1986, the proportion of popular, accessible exhibitions increased, reflecting the shared interest corporations and government agencies had in exhibitions that appealed to large audiences.²⁷

Lachmann, et al. (2014, this volume) review recent changes in the funding structure for American art museums and ask whether special exhibitions have changed given the decline in federal government support for the arts and the increasing concentration of wealth in the US. Focusing on four art museums in New York City, they show that, while exhibitions of patron

²⁶ Figures from the nonprofit organization Arts & Business (2013) show that in England, combined private contributions (corporate, foundation and individual donations) to the arts have been more or less stagnant since 2008. However, this represents a decline during the current economic crisis. For instance, the business sector contributed about £134.2 million to the arts in 2010-11, down from the highest level, of £171.5 million, given in 2006-07 (Arts & Business, 2012).

²⁷ McCarthy et al. (2005, p. 31) show that blockbuster exhibitions do increase museum attendance. Audience figures swell with blockbusters, but the numbers appear to be repeat visitors to museums, rather than new visitors.

collections declined in the 1960s and 1970s, as corporate and government funding increased, exhibitions of patron collections have *not* increased despite a decline of government funding and a concentration of personal wealth amongst the very wealthy in society. They attribute this lack of change to the autonomy gained by professionalized curators in the last few decades.

The power of curators brings up an old but still relevant issue, that of “tensions of missions” (Zolberg, 1986). Nonprofit enterprise in the arts normally involves challenges, as several different constituencies must be addressed. Inside the organization, people in artistic or scholarly roles (curators, artists, dancers or musicians) may favor different priorities than people in managerial or education roles. How has the balance between these internal groups changed in recent years? The success of the neo-liberal model of management seems to have taken hold effectively in many domains, which might suggest that managerial factions may gain strength. Tensions of missions also imply that internal priorities must also be balanced against the desires of external groups. Nonprofit arts organizations have become more managerial and less elitist (wanting to broaden audiences) in the past several decades (Alexander, 1996a, 1996b).

Arts organizations that are underfunded may need to cut back on programming, or they may have to close their doors permanently. McCarthy et al. (2001) suggest that the various pressures on arts organizations will disproportionately affect medium-sized enterprises. Large, flagship arts organizations, they suggest, will be able to reach broad-based audiences and to raise funds successfully, through earned income, admission fees, philanthropy and sponsorship. Small, locally based arts organizations have low costs that will allow them to survive. Arts organizations in the middle, however, are too large and expensive to support with a few local donations, but too small to compete successfully against the large and prestigious institutions for funds or audiences, and are therefore, in greatest danger.

While the hypothetical threat about the closing of cultural organizations has been discussed for many years, cultural organizations can and do close. McDonnell and Tepper (2014, this volume) study closures to learn about cultural organizations and the discourse used to justify their existence. The authors look at the metaphors used in discussions of potential closures of fine and popular arts organizations, both nonprofit and commercial. Interestingly, when nonprofit arts organizations are threatened by closure, articles defending them draw on existing, elitist metaphors about the value of art, rather than finding new ways to defend the arts. Given that elitist justifications for the arts are themselves challenged, along with the deinstitutionalization of the distinction of fine arts, the tendency to rely on elitist metaphors may make it more difficult for threatened institutions to avoid closure.

Arts institutions have struggled with tensions of missions since their inception, and have struggled with changes in funding and audience composition for at least the last 30 to 40 years. More recent changes involving the Internet are widespread, expanding at a rapid pace, and complex. For instance, the Metropolitan Opera simulcasts high-definition recordings of live performances to cinemas in many countries. And many art museums have digitized their collections, increasing viewership (of the online representations) and, in some cases, allowing arts institutions to commercialize the collection through the sales of images and merchandize. The potential impacts of some new initiatives are harder to predict. For instance, the Google Cultural Institute and its associated Google Art Project have taken digitization one step further.²⁸ Museums such as the Art Institute of Chicago (US), The Acropolis Museum (Greece) and the Art Gallery of New South Wales (Australia) have provided digitized images of the collections, and digital views *of the galleries* that the viewer can observe using Google's "street view"

²⁸ See <http://www.google.com/intl/en-GB/culturalinstitute/about/>.

technology. It is unclear how this kind of outreach will affect arts institutions and their audiences.

6. Artists and audiences

Howard Becker's (1982) influential work provides a cornerstone in the understanding of producers and audiences. Becker defined art as "a work being made *and* appreciated" (Becker, 1982, p. 4, emphasis in the original), highlighting the need to understand the links between producers of art and those who receive it. Becker's work on the social factors involved in the creation of art is relevant to several of the challenges facing today's art worlds. One issue is the problem of how some people gain the title of "artist" whereas others, who significantly contribute to the production process, are given less credit or ignored altogether. Becker shows that, to be deemed "the artist," a creator needs to contribute a certain level of effort, but how much effort is needed varies across art worlds. Thus, Becker situates answers to the question "Who is an artist?" in particular cultural and historical context.

In today's world, who is an artist is a particularly complex question. One issue involves the resurgence of a studio model for the production of visual arts, as artists such as Damien Hirst and Takashi Murakami have taken inspiration from Andy Warhol and Renaissance masters. In the studio method, the artist may conceive of the idea for the artwork, but it is realized through a stable of contracted, usually nameless artists who do the actual painting or modeling (Thornton, 2008). This method of producing artwork becomes a process of "branding" where the name of the artist can be spread to a much larger number of artistic products than a single artist could produce him or herself. In this way, the studio model can also increase the income of the brand. Here, we see a blurring of fine arts with commercial models of production, in a way that is not

altogether new, but with a contemporary twist, in the idea of the artist as brand. This practice brings up questions about the traditional binary between commerce and creativity. Does the idea still hold that authentic creativity is only possible if the artist remains indifferent to the market? How do new mergers between commerce and art worlds affect this?

Commerce is involved in the arts in other ways. In capitalist economies, most people make a living through an occupation or profession, giving rise, in the arts, to a distinction between amateur and professional artists. The latter produce art for pay whereas the former do it “for fun.” The distinction might make intuitive sense, but in practice, distinguishing between amateurs and professionals on the basis of earnings is not always accurate, as many serious artists often earn very little from their work (Abbing, 2002; Menger, 1999, 2001). Indeed, it is notoriously difficult to determine who is an artist. Jeffri and Greenblatt (1989) suggest there are three definitions of artists: the marketplace measure (artists make their living through their art, or at least earn some money by it), the education and affiliation measure (artists have gone to art school or belong to various art societies), and the self and peer measure (artists are those who think of themselves as artists and are recognized by their peers as such). Most surveys designed to capture artists do this by looking at marketplace measures, whereas artists believe that the “self and peer” definition is the only appropriate measure.

Lena and Lindemann (2014, this volume) shed light on this issue by looking at artists who fall between definitions. Using an innovative research strategy, Lena and Lindemann examine individuals who, in a survey, report both that they *have* been and they *have not* been professional artists. The apparent contradiction in the statements allows Lena and Lindemann to show how identity processes play out as individuals construct the category of “professional artist.” Some of the process revolves around ambiguous or border occupations, such as

employment in teaching or design, and the process also hinges on an individual's level of embeddedness in the art world, where fewer connections means that the individual is less likely to report that simply performing artistic labor confers the title of "professional artist."

Pedroni and Volonté (2014, this volume) also look outside the borders of the art world, in their case, to fashion. How the fashion world views itself and how it views art worlds can tell us something about both. Pedroni and Volonté argue that, while fashion sometimes aspires to be art (for prestige or profit), the reverse, art aspiring to be fashion, does not occur, as the two worlds are asymmetric in terms of status. Milanese fashion designers do not see themselves as artists, and they define themselves against the fine art world, rather than trying to draw status from it. Nevertheless, these designers do see themselves as individually creative, unlike workers in the mass market, against whom they also define themselves. They are creative but in the context of "a culture of wearability" in which designers bring their own personal visions and innovations into the process of creating garments that individual people will actually wear. Interestingly, the Milanese fashion designers do not claim status honor as artists because, to them, artists are impractical. Their framing of the pure artist as someone who is not beholden to or sensitive to the commercial realm highlight complexities of the contemporary art world wherein commerce has taken a more central role, and it also relates to declining distinctions between fine art (once thought to be autonomous) and popular (commercial) creativity. While the erosion of the binary between the fine and popular/commercial is usually analyzed in terms of the latter "invading" the former, Pedroni and Volonté's analysis draws our attention to the other side of this process, suggesting that it is not one-directional.²⁹

²⁹ In other words, the erosion of the binary may be as much a successful "artification" of commercial arts as it is an intrusion of commercial interests into the realm of pure art. On artification, see Shapiro and

The blurring of distinctions among fine and popular genres also results from changing patterns of cultural consumption. Peterson and colleagues (Peterson and Kern, 1996; Peterson and Simkus, 1992) theorize and provide evidence for cultural “omnivores”—people who consume a variety of cultural forms, both highbrow and lowbrow. Peterson’s work suggests a challenge or complement to Bourdieu’s (2002 [1984]) distinction thesis, as high-status people (omnivores) claim status honor on their “multicultural capital,” in consuming across genres, rather than “high-cultural capital” in displaying interest only in elite cultural forms (Bryson, 1996; see also Warde and Gayo-Cal, 2009). The omnivore thesis has received a good deal of attention and debate, and while some modifications and reformulations are suggested, the general consensus is that the concept of omnivorousness in cultural consumption has utility and that the occurrence of omnivorousness increased the last decades of the 20th century (see, e.g., Chan and Goldthorpe, 2007; DiMaggio and Mukhtar, 2004; Lizardo and Skiles, 2009; Savage and Gayo, 2011; Warde et al., 2008). However, some authors have pushed back against the omnivore argument finding evidence for the continued salience of the Bourdieusian position (see, e.g., Atkinson, 2011 and Friedman, 2012).

Much of the research from the cultural studies perspective has focused on audiences. These range from the classic studies of working class and youth culture (Hebdige, 1979; McRobbie, 1991; Willis, 1978), devalued cultural forms (Radway, 1984), and the complexity of reception (Ang, 1985) to more recent work on subcultures and lifestyles (Bennett, 1999; Hodkinson, 2002) and digital audiences (Prior, 2014). Although they all encompass many different perspectives, contemporary cultural studies tends to be multidisciplinary, including

Heinich (2012). The artification thesis has been highly influential in Continental Europe, but less so in Anglophone countries, as the major works on this idea are in French (e.g., Heinich and Shapiro, 2012).

influences from poststructuralism and various forms of textual/discourse analysis, and what these works share with the omnivore argument is that they show that audiences are more complex than traditional mass culture theories presumed.

Although the strong division between the fine and the popular arts has weakened recently, the distinction is still influential and has by no means disappeared. Furthermore, as Alexander and Schultz (2012) have pointed out, the strong distinction that arose between fine and popular (high and low) art obscured a commonality between them. In both realms of artistic creation, there is a separation between the artists or producers who make the cultural object and the audiences that receive it. This stands in contrast to earlier, folk traditions where people made music, for instance, *for each other* and the distinction between producers and consumers was not strongly drawn. Today, in the digital age, the strong distinction between producer and consumer have blurred in some art worlds, such as fan fiction (Jenkins, 1992, 2006). This may fundamentally alter art worlds that occur online, in some ways bringing them closer to folk art worlds of old (Alexander and Schultz, 2012).³⁰ For instance, van Dijk (2014, this volume) discusses Interactive Fiction, a new genre of creative production in which contributors play an interactive game and record how the story unfolds in their version of it. Online contributors to Interactive Fiction discussion groups have shared raw materials (such as computer codes to create the games), the interactive games themselves and the stories that emerge from playing the games. In the interactive fiction world, programmers and players overlap significantly, begging the question of whether a particular individual is a creator or a consumer in the genre. Individuals are often both, and as in folk art, they create for each other.

³⁰ The discussion of ‘virtual scenes’ in music (Bennett, 2004) suggests that closer links between artist and fans, and among fans, can be achieved through connections wrought on the Internet.

The digital world contributes to the eroding distinction between professional and amateur. The utopian promise of the Internet is a democratization of culture, wherein everybody can be a creator (Schäfer, 2011). However, a critical discourse has emerged, arguing that this so-called democratization has led to a lowest-common-denominator culture that is worse than the mass media critiqued by the Frankfurt school. In such discussions, the Internet is a place where individual creativity is stifled in favor of “crowds,” where narcissism rules, and where commercial interests are imbricated everywhere; it is a system that undermines expertise and significantly reduces the ability of artists to make a living from their art (Keen, 2008; Lanier, 2010).³¹ The fact that Internet audiences want to download content for free has clear implications for artists’ earnings, but it also has implications for artistic quality as business models that rewarded artists for good output are undermined.

As a distribution system, the Internet poses a bigger “discovery problem” (how audiences and artists find one another) than do nonprofit organizations or commercial businesses. Once again, we see the “wisdom of the crowd” (or the “hive mind”) as rankings and popularity replace curated selections and popular blogs replace reviews written by experts on the art form. These trends lead to a blurring of the roles of audience and critic, and indeed, have significantly reduced the impact and importance of professional critics. As Hanrahan (2013) has pointed out,

³¹ See the graphic “how much do music artists earn online:”

<http://www.informationisbeautiful.net/2010/how-much-do-music-artists-earn-online/>, which highlights the reduction in musicians’ earnings through new-media distribution. Interestingly, in research on jazz musicians in the US, who as a group make very little money, Pinheiro and Dowd (2009) found that using the Internet for music enhanced the earnings of jazz musicians, but that the Internet had no impact on their ties to other local musicians (Dowd and Pinheiro, 2013).

the decline of professional criticism in music has a number of negative effects. These range from the loss of an aesthetic discourse to the situation in which search algorithms send audiences to music from only their preferred styles. However, in a study of how college students discover new music, Tepper and Hargittai (2009) found that while online resources matter, social networks and traditional media continue to play an important role. In sum, more research is needed before we can draw conclusions about the full impact of new technology on either cultural producers or consumers.

7. Meaning and measurement

Methodological issues are of central concern to research in the social sciences. Within the sociology of art, rapidly changing art worlds, their shifting boundaries, and the complexity of artistic identity in modern society contribute to challenges for contemporary research on the arts. Studies of artistic identity, for example, reveal an underlying tension around the definition of the artist and the question of what factors define an artist. How is artistic identity measured? Lena and Lindemann (2014, this volume) analyze survey data to explore questions about professional identity, Pedroni and Volonté (2014, this volume) use in-depth interviews with fashion designers to illuminate changes in the traditional distinction between art and craft in contemporary society, and van Dijk (2014, this volume) conducts archival research in an online community to show the blurred boundaries between artistic producer and consumer in a new form of literary production.

While Lena and Lindemann suggest the need for more consensus among scholars about the definition of the artist as a sociological category, the results of their analysis underscores the contingency and ambiguity built into the very concept of the artist in modern society. Bourdieu, among others, would certainly argue that Romantic ideas about the artist thoroughly saturate

contemporary definitions of who gets to bear the honorific title of the artist, even in the context of our presumably postmodern age. Another goal of social research, therefore, is a more acute understanding of contingency and ambiguity as part of the historical legacy of the definition of what constitutes an artist. Together, the three studies mentioned above foreground the complexity of artistic identity in the contemporary context in ways that suggests the need for multiple research strategies, or what has come to be known as “mixed methods research,” an increasingly predominant trend in other areas of the social sciences.

Empirical research on cultural consumption brings a different set of methodological issues to the forefront of scholarship on the arts. If high culture is a sphere of exclusion where elite social groups are able to monopolize and mobilize symbolic resources to their advantage, what are the barriers to cultural participation and how do we generate knowledge that can lead to their eradication? These are the animating questions behind Kirchberg and Kuchar’s (2014, this volume) meta-study of current quantitative research on cultural consumption. Analyzing sixteen surveys from twelve countries in terms of content, theory, and method, the authors conclude that the present state of audience research as a field lacks the level of standardization needed to produce meaningful cross-cultural comparison. Further development of the field is therefore necessary, the authors argue, not simply to produce rigorous academic research but to advance our understanding of cultural participation in ways that can inform democratic social practices and policies.

At the same time, Kirchberg and Kuchar note the limitations of standardization. Systems of knowledge production that privilege standardization and generalizability run the risk of ignoring cultural specificity and difference. The argument for the significance of the particular is one that has become fashionable in its association with various forms of postmodernist theory.

However, its importance is best demonstrated at the empirical, practical rather than theoretical level, as the case study of community arts participation by Johanson et al. (2014, this volume) illustrates.

A similar, though not identical, tension arises between positivistic and interpretive approaches to the study of the arts. This tension has been especially evident in disciplinary debates about the place of aesthetic evaluation in the sociology of art. Traditionally, sociologists have focused on the analysis of the institutions and organizations within which aesthetic objects are produced, distributed, and received, the social construction of artistic fields, and the social uses of art in the struggle over material and symbolic resources. Interpretation and questions of aesthetic meaning, which implicated the social scientist in problems of value and judgment, were viewed as outside the subject matter of the sociology.

While sociologists continue to be divided on this issue, a number of scholars have rejected the traditional impasse between humanistic and scientific approaches to the study of the arts and embraced methodological strategies that combine institutional and interpretive models of analysis. Influential studies in this model for research include Griswold (1987a) on literature, Wolff (1990) on the visual arts, and DeNora (1995, 2000) on music. Such empirical studies have been bolstered by theoretical and methodological arguments for the necessity of advancing the discipline along these lines (Alexander, 2003; Bowler 1994; Griswold, 1987b; Wolff, 1992; Zolberg, 1990). Zolberg has been a particularly leading figure in this area, whose *Constructing a Sociology of the Arts* (Zolberg, 1990) constitutes a classic text in the discipline. More recently, Zolberg (2005b) has called for “bringing the arts back in,” a phrase by which she draws attention to the need for more attention to the arts in cultural sociology, as well as an approach to the study

of the art capable of addressing the aesthetic dimension.³² For many scholars of the arts today, the cultural turn implies a narrowing of the intellectual gulf between positivistic and interpretive approaches as an integral part of what it means to study art sociologically. The promise of doing so is to both enrich our understanding of the significance of the arts in society and challenge us to grow—intellectually and as a field—in the future.

8. Conclusion

This article has explored six major themes central to the arts in society and the sociology of the arts. By way of conclusion, we provide a brief discussion of what we have identified as important areas for research in the future. These are the issues that have come to the forefront of our thinking as we have reflected on the articles in this special issue, the state of the arts, and the state of the discipline.

The increasing commercialization of art worlds suggests the need for comparative research on its effects at multiple levels, including institutions and organizations, markets, artists, and audiences. The study by Pénet and Lee (2014, this volume) examines the effect of Britain's Turner Prize on price, but raises broader questions about the construction of artistic value in the late 20th and 21st centuries. Has the structure of the valuation process been fundamentally altered? Or is valuation better understood as a contemporary manifestation of a process institutionalized by the French academic system more than two centuries ago? Shin, Lee, and Lee (2014, this volume) illuminate the expanding role of market forces in the valuation and

³² For Zolberg, “bringing the arts back in” not only strengthens the sociology of art but also cultural sociology more generally. A similar argument has been advanced by Jacobs and Hanrahan (2005), who argue for an aesthetic conception of culture.

commodification of art. Using the Seoul Auction as a case study, the authors call for “comparative research initiatives in which scholars from diverse national and disciplinary backgrounds examine the neoliberal marketization of art worlds in various different institutional settings.”

The impact of changes in funding structures for arts organizations and institutions constitutes a second area of concern. Lachmann et al. (2014, this volume) suggest that New York City art museum curators have retained a degree of autonomy in the face of funding changes. More research is needed to understand how this professional autonomy is maintained, and if strategies could be formulated to support other institutions in their quest to resist undue pressures from funders. Such strategies might be particularly useful as contemporary institutions seek support from entities that increasingly extol neoliberal and market-centered ideologies. One effect of neo-liberal pressures is that arts institutions must extend outreach programs and increase audience numbers, to obtain measurable indicators. De-institutionalization also presses towards audience development. What effect will these efforts have on attendance? The argument by Kirchberg and Kuchar (2014, this volume) on the need to develop reliable, comparative data on audiences becomes all the more pressing in this context. Questions remain about how to balance the need for comparative data with the flexibility that obtains when (non-comparable) data are collected to suit the needs of the agency that collects those data. Furthermore, researchers must be aware of the risk that measurement itself can become prescription or prophecy (Espeland and Sauder, 2007).

Tensions between democratization and cultural excellence have long been a concern of the supported arts sector. Such tensions are equally important today. As we have stated, neo-liberal funding and de-institutionalization both heighten concerns for audience development and,

therefore, heightens tensions between more elitist and more populist visions of art and arts institutions. As the study by McDonnell and Tepper (2014, this volume) show, when the crunch comes, fine arts/non-profit ventures resort to elitist discourses to justify themselves as fragile and in need of external support. McDonnell and Tepper argue that the claims made by non-profit high culture organizations to value broad-based participation are belied by the discourses called upon to justify their existence, and that the use of the old, elitist models endangers the very survival of these organizations in the long run. They ask, “How can the arts become more central?” And they wonder how the arts could become a center for memory in a community, or its heart and soul? They ask important questions.

The impact of the Internet is a present and pressing issue. Will digitization and streaming enhance the revenue streams of arts institutions? Or will a web-surfing culture replace live visitors at performances and exhibitions with virtual attendance (by people who are used to downloading culture for “free”)? Will online bidding destroy the business model use by art dealerships? Will artists reach larger audiences through the Internet, or will they be relegated to the low-earning end of the long tail (Anderson, 2006)? Will the Internet enable collaboration, among artists or between artists and audiences? Of course, we simply do not know—although we predict that neither the most optimistic nor the most dystopic visions will be realized. The effects of the Internet on the arts are broad in scope. They affect the arts at all levels, including cultural institutions and organizations, critics, artists, and audiences, and the changes will certainly support many researchers’ careers, not to mention the careers of those working in art worlds.

We have argued that the arts are facing a series of crossroads, and at these crossroads, both the arts themselves and the disciplines that study the arts confront many challenges. As we confront these challenges, let us hope that we are able to retain the art in the sociology of art.

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