

## MARKETS AND ART PROCESSES

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### Summary

A market for the arts is a relatively recent phenomenon. Art was originally nearly always sacred art. The most usual arrangement was that artists worked for a prince or the church. It was in Holland towards the end of the 17th century that something like a market in paintings developed. The invention of printing made it possible to market books on a wider scale than the copying of manuscripts had made possible. The most important change for musicians came in the late 18th century, with the institution of the public subscription concert. For many artists nation states, which furthered the development of a unified written language, were an indispensable step towards the development of a large enough market for their works. The "free author" of the late 18th century had to write for a larger and anonymous audience, which in general was not learned and recruited itself mainly from the middle classes. In order to obtain an equitable return for this work, certain new legal concepts were necessary to protect the artist from the unscrupulous exploitation of publishers and plagiarizers. Wherever the state intervenes, the market is distorted. Censorship, be it pre-publication censorship or censorship after the fact, was not only hated by authors and their readers, but also by the publishers. The turn of the 20th century was also the time when some publishers began to expand the potential readership by publishing cheaper books in mass editions. America had the earliest most developed market for films and soon became the dominant producer of films, at least in the affluent Western countries. In the same way America became the leading producer of popular music recordings. The capitalist market is, however, not only not entirely rational, it is also controlled by relatively few players who have no democratic legitimization. While many of the problems deriving from the development of a market for works of art are still with us, there are a number of new problems, challenges and opportunities which we begin to face at the turn of the 21st century.

### **1. The Transition from Patronage to the Market in Works of Art**

A market for the arts is a relatively recent phenomenon. Music, dance, poetry, painting and other art forms were either part of religious ceremonies and were performed by priest-artists or shamans, as in China, where the wu (shamans) performed music and dance ceremonies to ask the gods for rain, or were performed in the service of princes. Greek portrait artists worked in the context of burial rites and for various religious cults. Their art was neither art for art's sake nor art for the market. Later, statues were commissioned by communities to honor individuals who had excelled in the state, the army, cultural activities or in sports, but even then such portraiture retained religious undertones. One of the consequences of the production of art for religious purposes is that, for example, in Christian Byzantium it was the name of the donor of a picture and not the name of the artist which has come down to us.

In most early high cultures in Egypt, Mesopotamia and Israel, there was only a limited form of secularization, and all of these cultures were closely bound to mythical and religious concepts. Art was therefore nearly always *ars sacra*, sacred art, even where we today tend to see its political import. This is true not only of paintings, music and literature, but also of the practice of medicine using incantation, the oath as a curse against oneself, the divine element in justice, and politics as the execution of a divine task. The secularization of the Greeks was paid for by a deep crisis of their basic beliefs, and many Greeks and Romans looked towards the religious mysteries of Egypt and the

Near East with great longing. What this means is that there was little space for a market in art in the ancient Mediterranean world.

Undoubtedly artists have earned money for their works of art or have at least been remunerated in some way by the community they served or by a prince or a rich *maecenas*; but selling works of art on the open market like other marketable commodities was limited to a few categories of produce, mainly commercial products by artisans. Already pre-dynastic Egypt experienced an intensification of trade, although mainly an exchange of produce against produce. Thus there was both in the Far East and in the Mediterranean a market in painted vases and other ceramic produce, and the work of goldsmiths was sold by traveling merchants far from the place where it was produced. The export of papyrus from Egypt, though not yet a market in works of art, did contribute to the establishment of private and public libraries in the Hellenistic period. Egypt, Anatolia and Phoenicia exported printed cloth of high artistic quality; gold and silver vessels as well as glass products were traded from early on in the Mediterranean. But while the artistry was an integral part of such products, they were not bought for their artistry alone. Similarly, in pre-Columbian Central America trade flourished, but there was probably no market in works of art. Archaeologists have found a great number of ceramic work, not only vessels, but figurines and music instruments, like rattles, flutes and ocarinas, but that art itself was traded in a market of any form is highly unlikely.

The developments during the 12th century, when Flemish merchants took their cloth to Italy, and the Italians came to the North to sell their own products as well as those of the Orient, undoubtedly did contribute to the distribution of works of art as well as commercial goods. The great trade fairs in Troyes, Lagny, Provins and Bar-sur-Aube in France were places where artists did show some of their work, but art was and remained a minor part of the trade.

The more usual arrangement was that artists worked for a prince or the church. The T'ang-emperors, for example, employed painters at the court. The most famous painters were Wang Wei and Wu Tao-tzu (Wu Tao-hsüan, approx. 700-792). Some painters were very specialized, like Han Kan, who was a painter of horses. Pope Gregor I. collected and ordered the monophonic music of Christianity in his »Antiphonar«, and Isidorus, the archbishop of Seville, collected the writings of antiquity and wrote an encyclopaedia of the knowledge of his time. Music was an important part of Christian liturgy and provided work for musicians. The great Medici popes at the turn of the 15th to the 16th century called important architects, stone masons, sculptors and painters like Bramante, Raffaello Sanzio, Fra Giocondo, Antonio da Sangallo and Michelangelo Buonarroti to their court. Nikolaus I. of Russia was extensively involved in the selection of the paintings for the Eremitage. The rich bourgeoisie of the Italian Renaissance, driven by the ambition to outdo each other and the great princes of the time, commissioned paintings and statues. Especially in the free towns, the European artists moved slowly from the position of court servants or modest artisans to the dignity of the artist.

Artists, of course, being more mobile than the general population, moved to the places where their work was required, and took any opportunity which promised rich takings, like the conference to end the Thirty Years War in Westphalia. Painters in particular

were in great demand to eternalize the great princes of the earth with their horses and carriages, their great number of servants and their luxurious banquets in exchange for good money.

But it was in Holland towards the end of the 17th century that something like a market in paintings developed. The urban patriciate developed a rich culture of interior decoration, and the painters supplied galleries with portraits, group portraits, landscapes, genre pictures and biblical themes. They not only painted on commission, but also freely for a market. Paris, too, during the time of Louis XIV developed a nascent art market. (see *Distributors and organisers*)

## **2. The Nation State, its Common Language and Culture, as a Unified Market for Art**

In the Middle Ages industry in the Western European towns was mostly of an artisan character and worked for the local or regional market. Painters, architects and master builders moved widely across Europe to sell their skill, and writers and singers looked for communities or princes prepared to pay them for their art, but there was as yet no market for art as we know it today. While the bourgeoisie of Europe developed in towns and cities which slowly freed themselves from at least some of the burdens of feudalism, it was the formation of the large nation-state which proved to be central to the development of markets large enough for capitalist entrepreneurs in the arts to flourish. For many artists, especially writers, but to a lesser degree musicians (as far as they used words), these nation-states, which regulated the many languages and dialects spoken and furthered the development of a unified written language, were a further indispensable step towards the development of a large enough market for their works.

### **2.1 The development of the book market during the age of mercantilism**

Mercantilism was characterized by the attempt of small states to further the indigenous trades in order to increase the state tax return. It led to a fragmented market, especially in a country like Germany with its approximately 300 sovereign states, which were isolated from each other by about 1800 toll gates. There were even internal tolls within a territory like Prussia, and the market was further fragmented and distorted by regional trade monopolies. Within these fragmented markets the guilds could continue to hold their own against large scale manufacturers, who employed more modern methods of production in order to increase their profits. Book printing and selling developed within these restraints and soon broke these barriers.

The invention of printing made it possible to market books on a wider scale than the copying of manuscripts had made possible. The composer Josquin, for example, used the art of printing very early on to spread his fame far and wide over Europe. In 1501 the Venetian Ottaviano dei Petrucci published his first music print. But, it is only during the 18th century that the bourgeois society of Europe started to provide a market for the writer, composer and musician. Painters, too, no longer merely produced works for rich clients, palaces and churches on demand, but also began to sell through galleries. Musicians, who up to now had been largely dependant on the support of the church and princes, began to write for the bourgeois concert halls, music halls and opera stages.

This transition from patronage by the nobility and church to the open market was, however, not without its growing pains, and many an artist either ended up in dire poverty or had to write to the demands of the market. This transition started in Holland, France and England, then spread to other European countries. Some of the problems of this transition are experienced today in many countries of the Third World, while a new wave of transitions on the basis of new media and forms of communication already begins to sweep the globalized trade in artefacts and art works.

## **2.2 The importance of standardization of languages for the development of a common market for the arts**

While after the invention of the printing press Latin works for scholars dominated the book market, a new class of readers slowly developed. The printed scholarly works in Latin were dominant until 1680, in 1740 they still encompassed 28 percent of the production, and even in 1780 they still comprised 14 percent of the book trade. While Latin continued to function widely until the 18th century as the *lingua franca* of research and theology, the new readership which grew up after Dante, Boccaccio, Cervantes, Shakespeare and Luther demanded works in the vernacular.

An analogous situation exists today in many countries in Africa, where writers use the languages of the colonial powers to the exclusion of the vernacular. Attempts by Ngugi wa Thiongo and others to establish a book market for works in the vernacular in Kenya failed for economic reasons, and even the more developed book market in South Africa forces the writer in the vernacular to write for the limited school book market, with its clear limitations on possible themes, topics and treatments. It is to be hoped that the development of a readership in the vernacular will eventually change this situation.

The importance of a widely understood vernacular language is very evident today in the film and media industry, where English as the universal *lingua franca* is essential for the market dominance of mainly American films and television serials (and to a lesser degree of other English-speaking countries). As markets develop in Latin America, India and China, the size of the vernacular markets there will undoubtedly contribute to the development of a large media market there, as can be seen in India, where Bombay (Bollywood) already produces more films than Hollywood. Medium- sized language communities with strong markets, like the German, French and Japanese-speaking groups still have a chance, but small communities, like Hungarian, Danish, Bulgarian, and various smaller African and Asian languages do not have the market size to effectively develop a viable and financially independent indigenous media market.

Where the coming of the nation state was delayed until the 19th century, as in Italy and Germany, the codification of the written standard language was brought about by the book market itself. It was the legal language developed in the chancelleries of various government and transformed by Luther and his Bible translation which formed the basis for a common German standard language and replaced the dialects as the language of the book. But it was the publishers and printers who during the 18th century slowly developed norms which reduced the capriciousness of writers and type setters. The commercial production of texts and their professional distribution on the literary market put pressure on writers and printers alike to unify usage and spelling. The market had to

deal with readers from diverse regional and social derivation, and thus had to find a medium which transcended dialectal and sociolectal barriers.

This transition was not without its detractors. King Frederick II. of Prussia, whose residence in Potsdam was populated by some of the foremost writers of the French Enlightenment, in his essay *De la littérature allemande* (Of German Literature), detailed the limitations of the German language and literature, and writers, like Wieland (in his essay "What is High German?"), had to fight against such prejudices, which diminished the value of such great writers as Klopstock or Lessing. While French (and to a lesser degree English) at that time already had the prestige of being the language of a powerful monarchy, other European languages still had to become recognized as being capable of supporting an important literature. Italian, of course, despite its political disunity, had been developing a rich vernacular literature since the Renaissance, because of the economic flowering of some of the Italian city-states.

Not that there had been no bourgeois literature in German towns before the 18th century. With the growth of the great centers of commerce and very independent towns in the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance, the bourgeoisie began to formulate its interests and cultural preferences. But it had a very limited repertoire of literary forms and genres. There were as yet no public literary institutions; the cultural field was largely dominated by the church, and reading anything but religious tracts had to be legitimated as something more than mere entertainment. The average level of education (outside the Jewish ghetto) was low, the enforcement of schooling for everyone only started in the 1870s; it took many more years before it became a reality. There was a great percentage of illiterates even at the end of the 18th century, a situation which is still characteristic for many poverty-stricken countries in the Third World. Readers were a minority. Ownership of books was essentially limited to the learned and erudite, the bourgeoisie started only slowly to buy non-religious books, while artisans and peasants usually restricted their libraries to calendars and prayer books. This meant, of course, that the literary market was extremely restricted.

The second half of the 18th century saw a development which became the basis of the current state of the free, capitalist market economy: the means of production and the manner of production changed. It was the time of large-scale capital accumulation, the increase in the division of labor, the invention of new techniques and machines and the establishment of a transregional market. These developments had consequences for the art market, which became part of the general market in commodities. Publishers began to sell their books for money (instead of exchanging their books against those of other publishers and then selling them in their home town). There were still retarding factors, like the territorial fragmentation of states such as Germany and Italy, the division of Poland, the power of guilds, censorship and practical issues like an unregulated orthography.

Publishers were, however, one of the first groups of manufacturers who produced for more than the local and regional market. They no longer accepted the limitation of production to satisfy only the needs of their home town and region but worked according to capitalist principles. It took a long time, however, until the writers, too, became professionals in the sense that they could live off their writings. It was only in

the 18th century that writers began to produce texts on a full-time basis for a market where the interplay between supply and demand was not easy to predict, but where a growing readership demanded more and more reading material. The fast growth of the number of titles published under these new conditions created a new type of reader, the extensive reader, who was constantly looking for new material, rather than intensive reader, who kept rereading a few texts over and over again. This was one of the changes which mark the 18th century as the time when our modern concept of culture and art was formulated.

It is also the moment when the modern form of trivial, commercial art for entertainment was born. This type of writing is quite different from the popular art of previous ages - folk songs, fairy tales and legends - which were produced by anonymous members of society and not for monetary gain. Heinrich von Kleist, in a letter, bemoaned the fact that the lending library in Würzburg did not stock the great literature of the time, the Goethe's, Schiller's and Wieland's, but novels about knights, robbers, ghosts and secret societies which had completely ousted even the sentimental literature of the earlier 18th century from its market position. Even Goethe had to make certain concessions to this fashion in his *Wilhelm Meister*, when he introduced the inscrutable secret Society of the Tower as the agent of all the most important events in that novel. A world completely controlled by chance or by sinister forces seemed to appeal to the public more than the sentimental love stories of earlier times. The serious novels of the late Enlightenment at the turn of the century could do little to change this situation.

Immanuel Kant knew exactly that the production of books was not something that a capitalist publisher could leave to the vagaries of the individual writers. He understood that publishers were setting their own agenda and that they acted like the director of a factory, looking for reading matter which would sell widely and quickly. From being free agents, many writers moved into the position of exploited wage earners who produced material which the publishers saw as potentially profitable. (see *Media*)

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### **Biographical Sketch**

**Peter Horn** studied German and English at the University of the Witwatersrand. In 1971 he graduated Ph.D. from the University of the Witwatersrand with a thesis on "Rhythm and structure in the poetry of Paul Celan", and was offered the chair of German at the University of Cape Town in 1974. From 1987 to 1990 he was Dean of the Faculty of Arts, and from 1993-1994 Acting Deputy Vice-Chancellor of the University. He was president South African Association of German Studies (1989-1997), president of the Institute for Research into Austrian and International Literary Processes (Vienna) (2001-), on the executive committee of the Elias-Canetti-Gesellschaft, the National Executive of the Congress of South African Writers (COSAW) (1991 - 1992), the National Executive of the South African Writers' Association. Besides he was Honorary Vice President of the National Union of South African Students (1977-1981), Trustee of the South African Prisoners' Educational Trust Fund (1980-1985), and a member of the Interim Committee of the Unemployed Workers' Movement (1984/5). In 1974 he received the Pringle Prize of the South African English Academy for an essay to the concrete poetry, in 1992 he received the Noma Award for Publishing in Africa (Honourable Mention for *Poems 1964-1989*), and in 1993 the Alex La Guma/Bessie Head Award and in 2000 the Herman Charles Bosman Prize for the short story collection *My Voice is under Control now*. In 1994 the University of Cape Town granted him a Honorary Fellowship for life. Two of his volumes of poetry and numerous other publications by him were banned for possession during the Apartheid regime. His poems are anthologised in most major anthologies of South African poetry, and more than 100 have been published in journals. He has published numerous contributions to academic books, learned journals, and reviews and review articles.