

The Artistic practice: a relevant object of study for the sociology of art

الممارسة الفنية كموضوع دراسة في علم اجتماع الفن

CHEDED Khadidja ^{1*}, BENMEZIANE Bencherki ²

¹ University Oran2 Mohamed Ben Ahmed (Algeria), Human Sciences Research Unit for Philosophical, Social and Humanistic Studies.(cheded.khadidja@univ-oran2.dz)

² University Oran2 Mohamed Ben Ahmed (Algeria), (benmeziane.bencherki@univ-oran2.dz)

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Abstract:

This study aims to determine how art sociology has made its way into the scientific arena, benefiting from all the adjacent disciplines to become a stand-alone discipline by challenging all of them. The history of art begins with the writings of Plato and Aristotle to move into modern times in the 19th century with the emergence of sociology at August Count and the founders Emile Durcaim and Max Weber who began to think about the place of art in society. The qualitative method is used in this article. This study concludes that technical practice is regarded as a topic of persistent research for sociology, such as other subjects, and follows the same research sociological scientific standards. Based on literature in this area, the study is organized as follows: First, the study addresses artistic practice from a sociologist's point of view, focusing on the relationship between art and sociology. It then deals with the analysis of aesthetics through images. Finally, the study focuses on aesthetics based on photographic work.

Keywords: Artistic practice, sociology of art, philosophy of art, image, aesthetics.

ملخص:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحديد الكيفية التي شق بها علم اجتماع الفن طريقه إلى الساحة العلمية مستفيداً من جميع التخصصات المجاورة ليصبح تخصصاً قائماً بذاته من خلال تحديثها جميعاً. ويبدأ تاريخ الفن بكتابات أفلاطون وأرسطو لينتقل إلى العصر الحديث في القرن التاسع عشر مع ظهور علم الاجتماع عند أوغست كونت والمؤسسين إميل دوركايم وماكس فيبر الذين بدأوا في التفكير في مكانة الفن في المجتمع. تم توظيف المنهج الكيفي الوصفي في هذا المقال كما استخلصت هذه الدراسة إلى أن الممارسة الفنية تعتبر موضوع بحث قار لعلم الاجتماع كسائر المواضيع، وتتبع نفس المقاييس العلمية السوسيولوجية البحثية. واستناداً إلى الأدبيات في هذا المجال، تنظم الدراسة على النحو التالي الأول سيتناول الممارسة الفنية من وجهة نظر عالم الاجتماع: العلاقة بين الفن وعلم الاجتماع. والثاني سيحلل الممارسة الفنية: الجماليات من خلال الصور. وأخيراً، سيخصص العنصر الأخير لعلم الجمال استناداً إلى العمل التصويري.

كلمات مفتاحية: الممارسة الفنية، علم اجتماع الفن، فلسفة الفن، الصورة، الجماليات.

* Corresponding Author.

Introduction:

The reflection on art within sociology can be traced back to the writings of Aristotle and Plato. In the 19th century, with the development of sociology as a distinct discipline—initially termed political science, social science, or social physics by Auguste Comte (1853) and furthered by figures like Emile Durkheim (1897) and Max Weber (1922)—sociologist Hyacinthe Ravet (2015) notes that discussions on art's role in society began to take shape. After World War II, this emerging discipline led to new methodologies for studying the role of art in society. Ravet (2015) highlights that the delay in sociological studies related to art can be attributed to the social and cultural transformations affecting the artistic and cultural fields. As the field expanded, leisure activities, initially for the bourgeoisie, extended to other social categories.

Sociological literature indicates that the interest in art is not a recent development. Researchers like Chamboredon and Menger(1986)noted that sociologists such as Marx, Durkheim, and Weber had already identified art as an important subject of sociological study. The evolving role of art within the complex social relations has increasingly drawn sociologists' attention to the art-artists-society relationship. According to Moulin (1992), the sociology of art has made some progress, but it still occupies a somewhat marginal position in sociological studies. Jean-Claude Chamboredon described this field as "very little crystallized," indicating the need for further research. In response, several researchers and publications have recently focused on addressing this gap (Jean-Guy Lacroix, 1991, p. 6).

Art sociologists are often regarded as philosophers or aestheticians. The sociology of art holds a significant place within the broader field of general sociology. According to the sociologist Weber, this branch of social science helps clarify our positions and choices, allowing individuals to confront the meaning of their own actions.

Bourdieu offers a particularly relevant perspective on this field. He asserts that the universe of art is fundamentally a realm of belief. For Bourdieu (1994), the sociology of art is essentially a sociology of culture, which delves into cultural phenomena, including audiences, museums, theaters, and concerts . His viewpoint highlights that, following the events of May 1968, art began to be created with the purpose of making art rather than merely analyzing it.

Heinich(2006) describes the sociology of art as embodying three distinct stages: sociological aesthetics, the social history of art, and the sociology of inquiry. This framework considers art in relation to society—both as a reflection of society and as a form of societal expression. Heinich (2015) emphasizes that the sociology of art is a progressive discipline, building upon empirical investigation tools like observation and interviews, and is part of symbolic interactionism.

In this context, art is viewed as a collective activity. The artistic field focuses on objective relationships between actors, such as schools of fine arts, museums, and their associated sales systems, rather than individual interactions. It is particularly concerned with the art market, exhibitions, and the dynamics between artistic institutions and the market, as well as the self-definition of artists (Bourdieu, 1993).

According to Bourdieu (2013), the artistic field functions as a space of power dynamics, where actors invest resources, including economic and social capital. Laurence Ellena (2014) observes that sociologists bridge the gap between art and sociology by attributing sociological properties to artistic works through their interpretation. As a result, artistic works are transformed upon entering sociological discourse, losing their artistic character in favor of acquiring sociological qualities.

1. Research problem:

The **main** research problem addressed in this study is the insufficient recognition of artistic practice as a legitimate and central object of study in the social sciences. Indeed, despite theoretical advances, art is often perceived as marginal in sociological studies. It is therefore crucial to reassess how artistic practice, as an individual and collective expression, can be integrated coherently and meaningfully into sociological analysis

2. Research Aim:

The main aim of this **research** is to explore the contributions of sociology to the understanding of artistic practice. More specifically, this study aims to:

- Analyze the relationships between art and society.

- Understand the social dynamics surrounding art institutions.
- Explain the role of artists and artworks in contemporary social transformations.

3. Research Scope:

The scope of this research encompasses a wide range of artistic practices, including painting, visual arts, and theater. It also examines the interaction between artists, art institutions, and the public, in various cultural and social contexts.

4. Research objectives:

The objectives of this research are to:

- Demonstrate how artistic practice reflects social structures and dynamics.
- Identify the methodological tools needed to study art from a sociological perspective.
- Assess the impact of social transformations on the perception and reception of art.

5. Research questions:

The key questions this study seeks to answer are:

- How can artistic practice be analyzed through a sociological lens?
- What are the methodological challenges specific to the sociological study of art?
- How do social changes influence the production and reception of art?.

6. Research limitations:

The main limitations of this research include the difficulty in generalizing the results due to the diversity of cultural contexts and artistic practices. Furthermore, the sociological interpretation of works can sometimes distort their artistic essence, which requires a nuanced approach.

Based on a literature review, the study is structured as follows. Three key points will be addressed. The first will examine artistic practice from the sociologist's perspective, exploring the relationship between art and sociology. The second will analyze artistic practice through the lens of visual art, focusing on art as expressed through images. Finally, the last element will be devoted to the aesthetics of pictorial work.

7. Artistic Practice in the Eyes of the Sociologist: A Relationship Between Art and Sociology:

The field of art is, above all, where the values against which sociology was formed are affirmed, according to Heinich (2001). Indeed, artistic practice links art and sociology. This link is described by the integration of sociology and art, rather than the creation of a new territory for art. Sociology pertains to rationality, while art relates to irrationality, aiming to merge two modes of reasoning: objectivity and scientific rigor on one side, and subjectivity and symbolism on the other. This integration is intended to advance critically in both domains, producing a necessary contradiction within a mystified culture.

However, rather than focusing solely on the relationship between rationality and irrationality, the issue is more profound. Art is both historically neutral and more culturally exportable. Marxist philosophy, particularly the work of Georges Lukacs, has emphasized the historical character of art. "The role of the artist is therefore to shape the raw data of empirical life in order to suggest an illusory life, certainly, but more essential than real life. It is therefore a question of creating a simulacrum in order to introduce a split with the real world (Eco, 2015). Sociologically, art's professional position is represented by art sociologists in universities, much like art historians or literary figures. During this period, sociology focused on commentary and interpretation centered on works, utilizing history, aesthetics, philosophy, and art criticism as disciplines.

Darmaud Frédéric challenges this analytical framework, suggesting that the sociology of art is concerned with the social field as a whole rather than art or sociology alone. He posits that "it was neither art nor sociology. It was an ethics and a practice of life that relied on the empirical development of a form of philosophical practice under the guise of art, aiming to reestablish an approach to the so-called human sciences, where the notion of consciousness is considered, taking into account the role of speakers and viewers" (Darmaud,

2011, p. 78). From this perspective, Darmaud adds that this practice aimed to produce actions intended to spark awareness and offer a symbolic displacement to make, as Blaise Galland says, "the viewers aware of the historical moment and their own life"(Darmaud, 2011, p. 78). This practice sought to question pre-established values by integrating them into the social field. Consequently, art and sociology should work to intervene on this intersubjectivity and reveal it to itself. Darmaud postulates that art and sociology, through their ethical commitment, could change the world, with creation becoming a form of questioning akin to the "taon of Socrates"(Darmaud, 2011, p. 79).

According to Heinich, the sociology of art, as practiced in various institutions using statistical research survey methods, focuses not on works of art themselves but on the public. At that time, art producers were the primary funders of art markets and cultural institutions, which facilitated the circulation of artworks. Heinich (2004) argues that the places where the sociology of art is practiced include research institutions or foundations located abroad. The research techniques employed ranged from statistical analysis to qualitative surveys, interviews, and observations.

Heinich (2004) describes artistic practice as a thought realized through actions, which sometimes involves an avoidance of technical and cultural mastery. She notes that the artist's physical engagement and sensitivity often modify the project, making production a rational activity in a field that has become less governed by fixed rules. "In today's art, artists orient themselves with more freedom. This freedom implies permanent doubt. Indeed, the artistic field becomes autonomous. Artistic practice also sometimes becomes a second circle of autonomy. This is what the author calls "the contingency of practice" (Heinich, 2004).

The necessity of artistic practice in the field of sociology of art is noteworthy. The history of the sociology of art is relatively recent and not widely covered in sociology departments. Its distinctiveness lies in its coexistence with other disciplines such as art history, which explores the relationship between artists and works, and between spectators and works from an aesthetic perspective. Heinich argues that the sociology of art is often confused with the sociology of culture. While the French school focuses more on art-related practices, the Anglo-Saxon school, with its anthropological approach, examines customs and civilizations. Heinich (2004, p.7) remarks, "If the sociology of art

aims to better understand the nature of artistic phenomena and experiences, it also has the consequence of prompting sociology to reflect on its own definition and limits."

Heinich continually questions the sociology of art to refine its disciplinary chronology and research focus. Her research spans various fields including the sociology of art, the sociology of identity, the sociology of values, and the epistemology of social sciences. In an interview with Julien Ténédos, she mentioned that her career was marked by a shift from the sociology of art to a broader sociological perspective on art (Heinich, 2015). Art sociologists, once seen as philosophers or aestheticians, have evolved into specialists employing social science research methods such as interviews, observations, and discourse analysis. Heinich (2015) explains that art serves as a sensitive and perceptible expression of the ideas that individuals formulate and communicate through their tangible creations.

8. Artistic practice: art through the image:

It seems to us that it is important to find a concept to the work of art, a concept that is more historically neutral and more culturally exportable. The word art therefore refers in the broad sense to the ability to produce a beautiful or useful object thanks to a know-how - to do. It refers to several disciplines, we mean by art: literature, poetry, theatre, painting etc. It seems that art manifests itself in a whole composed of a set of phenomena, of cultural and societal macro-phenomenon. By the way, it encompasses many areas; we talk about art in music, dance, cinema, poetry, etc.

Additionally, the term 'art' is a contraction of 'fine arts,' and fine arts are a grouping of certain arts. There is another conception of art where certain forms are classified and numbered. The five traditional arts are architecture, sculpture, painting, engraving, and drawing. The sixth art is photography, the seventh is cinema, the eighth is television, and the ninth is comics.

In the 1960s, Michel Foucault demonstrated that the concept of Art, including the artist, style, and so on, became evident only when a particular type of gaze emerged. This gaze involved various perspectives and approaches to viewing visual objects and understanding them to derive disinterested pleasure, as per Kant's formula: religious, documentary, moral, etc. By comparing these

different looks, the aesthetic gaze was largely an exception in the field of the cultural reception of visual objects.

We can also give the example of image. As an artistic practice and work, it represents a rich, relevant and equivalent concept in all cultures. Moving the work of art to the image means moving it from its production to its reception, that is to say from the author to the spectator. "The visual object directly strikes our sight and our sensitivity; in other words, it is not the sight that captures the object or the image but rather the object that touches our vision" (Mejri, 1999, p.61). Currently, the image is at the center of modern life. It plays a media role. It constantly creates a dialogue between the subjects photographed and the observer. It participates in the implementation of a cross-breeding of intercultural perspectives. The visual image, whether sound or mute and different codes (shapes and colors), represents a set of interacting languages that articulate a mode of representation of reality. As a result, it becomes a vector of information, memorization and communication.

Moreover, the philosopher Baudrillard (1981) believed that we are witnessing the triumph of the abstract over the real, as exemplified by the history of 'American visual studies,' which has relegated the aesthetic question to the background or transformed it into a sociological approach, similar to Bourdieu's treatment in *L'Art moyen*. In addition, Americans advocate an anthropological approach to the image. "This approach to images opens up a very dynamic field of exploration and generates greater inspiration and enthusiasm. It makes the disciplines of art appear as active realms, which come together through the mediation of the artist who creates a dialogue between them on the canvas." (Baudrillard, 1981).

9. Aesthetics from the pictorial work:

Treating the subject of aesthetic expression from the perspective of pictorial work through sociology involves examining not only the intentions of painters but also their methods for capturing history and their overarching goals. The concept of 'aesthetics' first appears in the work of the German philosopher Baumgarten, who used the term to describe the study of emotions associated with beauty. For Baumgarten (1750), aesthetics relates to perceptions, senses, and beauty. He defined it as the science of sensitive knowledge rather than art as we understand it today. Baumgarten (1750) offered various equivalents for

aesthetics: the theory of the liberal arts, inferior gnoseology, the art of the beauty of thought, and the art of the analog of reason. Aesthetics, therefore, encompasses all fields of knowledge that are not purely rational or logical.

The object of aesthetics is undeniably the concept of beauty, which evolved during the Renaissance as a form of knowledge associated with the Fine Arts. Art is approached epistemologically, establishing connections between various arts such as poetry, painting, and music. The realization of this conception, similar to that of Baudelaire (1863), involves a conscious grasp of aesthetic criticism as treated by philosophers like Kant (1781), Hegel (1835), and Nietzsche (1872). Aesthetic theory, defined as the study of the "beautiful," restricts aesthetics from a philosophical perspective by emphasizing the cognitive potential and reflective nature of art.

Each work of art carries a semiological dimension. The painter or canvas often reflects a historical narrative, adding layers of meaning and interpretation. The representation in art reveals both the painter's and society's perspectives and provides a new way of viewing the present. While art sociologists have increasingly focused on artistic professions, art markets, and associated practices, some argue that exploring the artworks themselves remains essential. This ongoing examination challenges art sociologists to offer insights into these objects and to provide fresh perspectives. The debate within the field often revolves around whether art sociologists should only engage with works that offer insights beyond those provided by critics, philosophers, or art historians.

Heinich suggests that, in the context of art sociology, the approach should shift from describing what works are to focusing on what they do. This perspective allows sociologists to discuss artworks without making value judgments, thereby creating a novel discourse. This approach contrasts with other art sociologists who argue for a necessary content analysis, such as Jean-Pierre Esquénazi (2007), who argue for a necessary content analysis in the chapter 'Work and Mediation' (pp. 44–47). Analyzing a work of art involves delving into its deeper aspects, moving beyond the visible to interpret its unique details. Art encourages reflection and invites multiple interpretations, making criticism an integral part of understanding and analyzing the work. Criticism itself often represents a secondary work, exploring various disciplines including the sociology of art, and holds a significant place within the field.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, artistic practice and art, in general, occupy a significant place in sociological research. They become relevant subjects because they are the products of the imagination of their creators, who are the craftsmen behind these works. From a sociological perspective, artistic practice—whether through images, aesthetics, or other forms—takes into account not only the social context of its production and reception but also the discourse conveyed by the public. This approach allows for a deeper understanding of art in relation to its sociological context.

Artistic practice thus reflects the relationship between individuals and the society that produces them. It often questions art as a total social fact, echoing Marcel's expression. Moreover, the sociology of art fundamentally employs the theories and methods of the social sciences. This application enables artistic practice to create a field of experience that enriches sociological theory.

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