

IS THERE A CONCEPTUAL GAP BETWEEN ART AND BUSINESS?

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Communities of taste ('what we like') historically relate to changes in the production process. How does art respond to this? Three case studies will demonstrate how Marcel Duchamp responded to mass production, how etoy responded to a dematerialized Internet economy, and how Christophe Bruno on a meta-level has addressed the result of the artist response itself: the appropriation by marketing.

The silence of Marcel Duchamp is overrated. (Joseph Beuys)

The experience economy, as proclaimed by Joseph Pine and James Gilmore, highlights how aesthetic experiences producing human capital (that is, cultural, social, and symbolic capital) may be converted into financial capital, adding to the exchange value of a brand on a market. [1] In this, they perceive the aesthetic experience as 'icing on the cake.' In contrast, we want to emphasize how contemporary digital art practices incorporate critique, and may be business innovations in themselves.

As described by Kant, the judgment of taste is based on a subjective experience proclaimed as a universal truth 'we' share ('this is beautiful'). [2] The transformation from subjective experiences to universal statements produces communities of shared experiences, or 'communities of taste.' Our argument is that communities of taste relate to changes in the production process. For instance, with the introduction of photographic techniques, our perception of images changed. [3] People developed a taste for images that could be copied; easy-to-print snapshots, movies, and so on. With this, art lost its traditional aura of uniqueness, but art also reflected these transformations. Artists develop markets for newly occurring communities of taste that come along with changes in production processes. Particularly, we find this during times of major change. The following three case studies will demonstrate how Marcel Duchamp responded to mass production, how etoy responded to a dematerialized Internet economy, and how, more recently, Christophe Bruno on a meta-level has addressed the result of the artist response itself. Marketing often appropriates artworks that address the new communities of taste, how does art respond to this?

Fountain: Selling shit

The best-known artist exploring the relationship between art and capital is Marcel Duchamp. His ready-made urinal, or *Fountain* (1917), jokingly reflects how changes in capitalism and production affect taste (aesthetics). Belgian art theorist Thierry de Duve has argued that *Fountain* was all about selling 'shit' ('arrhe') as art; commenting on the result of everyone being an artist. [4] Duchamp had done nothing more than buy a ready-made unit from a manufacturer (J. L. Mott), produced by workers whose productivity was bought on the labor market. He rotated it 90 degrees, signed it R. Mutt, and submitted it to an exhibition. It was then sold to an art collector (Walter C. Arensberg) using a blank check, enabling Mutt to pay his credits to Mott.

The check was never cashed, and Duchamp remained independent of the forces of capitalism. However, this independence should not be mistaken for a romantic view of the artist. The introduction of the check into the masquerade is important to our understanding of how Duchamp treated the changes in

the production system, as it indicates a possible transaction of 'shit' into an infinite amount of money. In showing how to make art/money from shit, he was an entrepreneur, a 'phynancier,' as de Duve calls him, inventing a new market that is neither art nor business in a traditional sense. Though Duchamp never pocketed the money, the value of *Fountain* (or rather its reproductions, authorized by Duchamp) on the art market today says something about the potential of the artist's business innovation and speculation in the market.

Toywar: Mobilizing a community of taste

Works such as *Fountain* indicate situations where artistic disruptions in a market create new markets. Much later, within the field of net-art, this was experienced again. Around the turn of the millennium, the artists' group, etoy, disrupted the power relations of financial shares. Through their website, www.eto.com, etoy had for years played with a corporate identity on the Internet. Faced with lawsuits over their domain name registration by the toy retailer, eToys, etoy used the World Wide Web to mobilize their supporters in fighting eToys. Many activities took place, but most famous was the game *Toywar*. *Toywar* was very simple, and mostly a satire of corporate discourse. For example, it screened new players with questions such as: "Have you ever dreamed of being the opposite sex?" and "Did you ever wake up at night and realize you had real sick dreams?" [5] Some of etoy's actions, including an attack on their web servers during their Christmas sale, had direct consequences for eToys, but mostly, the success of etoy's actions rested on mobilizing people (almost 2000 enrolled) and the media attention it gained, affecting the broader public's taste and opinions. Ultimately, the most important score in the game was the stock value of eToys. This dropped drastically, resulting in eToy's collapse, and 'History's most expensive art performance.'

etoy had a remarkable ability to respond creatively to the sudden situation in which eToys put them, and demonstrated not only the strengths of an artistic business model, but also the dangers of ignoring it. Their activist war played on new markets with a taste for networked public participation, which inverted the power relation between the corporate and civic spheres. Though common in today's corporate communication, mobilizing people 'virally' through the Internet, using media tactically, was novel at the time. With the growing appearance of social web media in the last decade, this new market has proved itself a playground for marketing and new business ventures. Not only was *Toywar* critical of the power of global enterprises, it paradoxically also showed how to develop new markets on the Internet. How do artists respond when marketing appropriates art? [6]

ArtWar(e): Exploiting the hype-curves of taste

A decade later, net artist Christophe Bruno observed how his works, *Fascinum* (2001) and *Google Adwords Happening* (2002), had been appropriated by marketing. These works critically address the semantics of the web, and how Google takes over 'the market of the language,' but were echoed in Nicholas Sarkozy and Ségolène Royal's presidential campaigns in 2007. In concordance with how Google has capitalized semantics, for example, Google AdWords combines words with a monetary value, politicians are now using a 'panoptic ideology' and a 'remix of ideology' to assume control of 'a market of ideologies.'

In collaboration with the philosopher Samuel Tronçon, Bruno has applied mathematical logic, ludics and network theories to explain this transformation from art to market. In their project, *ArtWar(e)*, [7] they analyze how works of art (including *Toywar*), independent of their aesthetic value, enter a "scale free

network" where their popularity is dependent on laws of attraction, as opposed to randomness. The website essentially consists of a number of 'hype curves,' a term originally used to graphically illustrate the enthusiasm for new technologies over time – from over-enthusiasm, to disappointment, to economic implementation. "Hype cycles aim to separate the hype from the reality, and enable CEOs to decide whether or not a particular technology is ready for adoption," [8] it states on their website. The term is now used more broadly in marketing. In other words, *ArtWar(e)* reflects how businessmen are farming concepts and evolutions in the communities of taste.

The artist's response is to take control by making hype-curves for works of art, predictions of developments in taste communities. With some humor, Bruno even claims that *ArtWar(e)* is art, and hence implicitly suggests that the real response to the appropriation of net-art by marketing is to become a joking businessman. He employs the discourse of a CEO, and offers an opportunity to do "artistic risk management" and "computer aided curating." Bruno's art no longer involves working with the semantics of the web, which briefly characterized his earlier work, and was exploited by marketing. In order to avoid becoming an alienated laborer in an immaterial economy, the artist must become a businessman.

The three examples present the artists as businessmen. Duchamp reflected mass-production by creating an art market. etoy criticized the digital economy by assuming a fake corporate identity, and, caught in the act, they managed to employ a disruptive counterstrategy that, paradoxically, showed the world how to develop markets based on networks. As a meta-reflection on the appropriation of art by marketing, Christophe Bruno assumes the role of a stockbroker, calculating the stock value of taste. [9]

References and Notes:

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6. Website for Toywar by etoy <http://toywar.eto.com> (accessed September 2, 2011).
7. Website for ArtWar(e) by Christophe Bruno and Samuel Tronçon, <http://www.artwar-e.biz> (accessed May 27, 2011).
8. *Ibid.*
9. This research has been funded by the Danish Council for Strategic Research, 09-063245, (*Digital Urban Living*).