

## **Art Market Practices A Move towards Practice-Based Arts Marketing Research**

by

Hanna Niklasson

University of Gothenburg, School of Business, Economics and Law

hanna.niklasson@handels.gu.se

*Abstract.* The research field of arts marketing has been growing since the 1990's and there are today journals, textbooks and conferences entirely dedicated to the field. Relatively absent within arts marketing research, however, are theoretical and methodological approaches that explicitly direct its attention to practices. This conceptual paper suggests a move towards a practice perspective in arts marketing research. As art markets constantly change mainly in terms of technology, competition, collaborations, legislations and etcetera, it could be assumed that networks within the art markets too are in constant flux. The paper stresses that market studies informed by market practice theory can provide an appreciation of the constructing and reconstructing mechanisms of different art markets. Practices can broadly be defined in categories of exchange, normalizing and representational practices. The purpose of this conceptual paper is hence to discuss and suggest a practice approach to arts marketing research that studies market practices in order to understand how they involve in shaping different art markets. Questions that become important to ask in future research are: how are these networks constructed, who are the key actors, what are the practices, how are they performing marketing and how is marketing reconstructing the art markets? It is concluded that studies on practices in art markets will enrich the understanding of how art markets are constructed and will contribute to the body of knowledge in arts marketing literature and marketing theory in general.

*Key words:* arts marketing, market practice, art market practice.

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### **1 Introduction to arts marketing and market practices**

The area of arts marketing research has been growing since the 1990's (Fillis, 2011) and there are today journals, textbooks and conferences entirely dedicated to the field. Arts marketing research includes a broad spectrum of expressions, professions and settings ranging from visual arts to literature to performing arts to the film industry (O'Reilly, 2011). There is no single stream of research but many, and the scholars are to be found within various disciplines. Sociologists, economists, humanists, management and marketing researchers have contributed with different aspects to art markets phenomena. The empirical setting, the focus on certain actors or processes and the disciplinary and ontological perspectives, to a large extent define the conditions for research.

Arts marketing scholars have previously addressed different theoretical and empirical aspects such as arts consumption experiences

(Ahola, 2007; Sullivan, 2010), arts as part of brand culture (Schroeder, 2010; O'Reilly and Kerrigan, 2013), consumer culture theories (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982) market strategy (Bagdadli and Arrigoni, 2005) and ritual processes in art auctions (Herrero, 2010). Moreover, within the stream of research that studies contemporary markets of fine arts, which this paper pays particular attention to, there are theoretical and methodological approaches ranging from structuralism (Zorloni, 2005), positivism (Kottász and Bennett, 2013; Moreau and Sagot-Duvaurox, 2012), institutionalism (DiMaggio, 1991; Velthuis, 2003; Jyrämä, 2002; Khaire and Wadhwani, 2010) to poststructuralism (Ahola, 2007).

Relatively absent within the arts marketing literature, however, is theoretical and methodological approaches that explicitly direct its attention to practices, which is an emerging stream in market research (Skålén and Hackley, 2011). The practice perspective within market studies is advocated by scholars in economic

sociology (Callon, 1998), science and technology studies (Callon *et al*, 2007) and marketing (Kjellberg and Helgesson, 2006, 2007; Hagberg, 2008; Araujo *et al*, 2010). It is here argued that marketing research's role is to observe how markets are constantly constructed and *reconstructed*, which can be done by studying practices performed by actors.

The practice approach is critical to the marketing research tradition influenced by Kotler and Levy's (1969) well-cited article on the broadened concept of marketing and the following generic understanding of marketing as the concept of exchange. By promoting a practice-based attention to markets instead of the dominating pragmatic focus on exchange activities, an increasing group of market researchers now aims at what should be central to marketing theory: the markets (Skålén and Hackley, 2011; Araujo *et al*, 2010; Helgesson and Kjellberg, 2007; Callon *et al*, 2007). This stream of research argues for a revised perspective on marketing that observes how markets are constructed and reconstructed.

The definition of markets in this paper builds on the conception provided by Callon (2010), which includes all the actors who participate in the markets' functioning and dynamics. The concept of marketing should hence rather be understood as practices of *market-making*, and not solely as the activities performed by marketers at marketing departments. Actors involved in the art market could be assembled in various forms in non-profit organizations, for-profit organizations and hybrids of both. The aim of this paper is to discuss how art markets and arts marketing can be better understood by studying how market practices perform the markets.

The market practice approach finds its ontological and epistemological roots in actor-network theory (ANT) (Latour, 2005), constructivism (Helgesson *et al*, 2004; Hagberg, 2008) and performativity (Callon, 1998; Araujo, 2007; Cochoy, 1998). Within ANT and market practice literature, it is hard to find a water-proof consistency in the vocabulary that defines the terms, notions, processes and concepts. The notion of actors includes terms such as actants,

agents and acting entities. Czarniawska (2007) addresses the practice turn in contemporary social science studies and notes that a "practice is usually performed in cooperation among humans, things and machines" (2007:8). Hence, the practice perspective conceives practices as performed by both human and non-human actors. However, since the word *actor* is often associated with human beings, Latour (2005) suggests *actant* as a more appropriate word-use. The multiple and heterogeneous actants constitute networks of actants (Araujo *et al*, 2010) and these networks could further be conceived as collective *actors*, hence why this approach is called actor-network theory (Hagberg, 2008).

Kjellberg and Helgesson (2007) and Diedrich *et al* (2013) point to a paucity of empirical studies on practices in settings other than financial and everyday markets. This conceptual paper stresses that market practice studies in the contemporary field of fine arts can provide an appreciation of the constructing and reconstructing networks of art markets. As the multiple art worlds (Marshall and Forrest, 2011) constantly change mainly in terms of technology, competition, legislation and collaboration (Dominguez-Rubio and Silva, 2013), it could be assumed that *networks* in the art market too are in constant flux. How are these networks constructed, who are the key actors, what are the practices, how are they performing marketing and how is marketing reconstructing the art markets?

The driving force in this constructivist perspective of market practices is to study how art markets *become*, rather than what art markets *are* (Hagberg, 2008). The multiple art markets that exist are not seen as stable and set with distinct changes that transfer them from one fixed market structure to another. Rather, they are seen as constantly in the making. Consequently, this paper stresses that the practice approach may respond to questions on the many, complex, and constantly changing art markets. Thornton (2009:256) metaphorically describes the ongoing construction of the art world as a "complex beast mutating all the time".

The paper is structured as follows. First, it introduces the reader to the concept of market practices, with references to the primary scholars in this field of market research. Second, a brief overview of previous research on arts marketing is discussed with particular attention to some of the works that consider market practices in their research. The paper ends with some concluding remarks and suggestions for future research.

## 2 Market Practices

The market practice approach finds its logic in the intersection of marketing, economic sociology and the sociology of science and technology (Araujo and Kjellberg, 2011), to a large extent influenced by Callon's (1998) "The Laws of the Markets". When conceptualizing market practices, this paper builds on the definition provided by Kjellberg and Helgesson (2007), who first of all state that practice should not be confused with praxis. Second, the understanding of practices should not build on theoretically informed *a priori* categories of marketing activities. Third, when doing fieldwork it is necessary to turn to the actors who involve in marketing activities, and trust that they may identify the relevant activities (see also Czarniawska, 2007).

The concept of marketing goes for all activities that contribute to create markets. In Helgesson *et al* (2004) it is claimed that market activities not only include economic exchanges, although they are fundamental. But always underlying economic exchanges, however, are other practices such as rules, laws, norms and images of the market. These practices are continuously creating and recreating markets, why there are many and differently constituted markets. Thus, the perspective postulates that when studying markets, researchers do not study ready-made markets but markets in the making. In *Reconnecting marketing to markets* Araujo *et al* (2010) are critical to the abstraction of markets that often occurs in marketing theory. When taking the market practice approach, markets are seen as active and ongoing constructions and hence not as passive backgrounds to marketing

activities. This emphasizes the question of how markets are *becoming* and not what markets *are* (Hagberg, 2008).

Helgesson and Kjellberg (2007) claim that market practice is *all there is*, whether the focus is on market-making activities that shape markets, or on (the conventional perception of) market-*ing* activities performed by marketers. Consequently, the "definition of market practice should be taken to include efforts to shape markets as well as efforts to market in markets (to promote, advertise, sell, etc)" (Kjellberg and Helgesson, 2007:142). Moreover, Helgesson and Kjellberg (2006; 2007) together with other market researchers (Callon *et al*, 2007; Cochoy, 1998; Araujo, 2007; Araujo *et al*, 2010) argue that marketing research too often assumes that marketing is almost exclusively what *marketers* do. This traditional approach to marketing often neglects to study what these marketers actually do in practice (Hagberg and Kjellberg, 2010). Moreover, marketing is not alone responsible for creating markets; other professions are for example accounting and law, whose practices too are market-making (Araujo, 2007).

According to Kjellberg and Helgesson (2007) there are, broadly defined, three main categories of market practices. *Exchange* practices are concrete activities that relate to the consummation of individual economic exchange, for example specifying and presenting products, negotiating prices, advertising, distribution of goods and product testing. *Normalizing* practices are conceptualized as activities that constitute guidelines or rules for how a market should work according to some group of actors. Examples are general rules of competition and marketing as well as voluntary standards, such as codes of conduct and eco labels, but also norms stemming from theory and research. *Representational* practices are producing images of markets and/or how they work, for example by analytical models, market strategy visualization or sales statistics.

As is previously stated, market practice research bases its arguments within the methodological and theoretical framework of ANT, which assumptions rely on the notions of symmetry and

translation (Latour, 2005). The symmetry concept means that the researcher cannot know in advance what actants or actions that will be relevant to include or exclude in the study. Quite the opposite, it is the actions of the actants themselves that will direct the researcher forward. Moreover, symmetry means that both humans and non-humans are perceived as potential actants that perform actions. These actions are translated into new practices (Latour, 2005) and it is thus the translations of practices that shape markets. Kjellberg and Helgesson (2007) exemplify by describing how legislation on competition (normalizing practices) may affect (by translation) firms' advertising activities (exchange practices). Hence, normalizing practices influence exchange practices which influence representational practices which in turn affect market norms and so on.

The practice perspective also adopts the performative approach to markets and marketing, well explained by Callon (1998), Araujo *et al* (2010) and Kjellberg and Helgesson (2007). They argue that economics in a broad sense, including the discipline of marketing research, has a performative role in market practices. In other words, marketing theories affect market activities such as price setting, customer relations management, product development and legislations. Marketing research is thus not only observing and analyzing marketing activities, but also partakes in performing markets. The performative aspect becomes clear in the ANT idea of translation. Normalizing practices such as marketing theory's "marketing mix" are translated into exchange practices when a company makes a decision on how to promote a new product to a new customer segment. This new product might in turn produce a revised picture of this market and is such translated into representational practices. Marketing theory both *discusses* and *performs* marketing.

Bajde (2013), building on Latour (2005), describes human and non-human actants as any human, natural, artifactual or inanimate entity who can exert a force on others, that is, entities

that mediate or translate action. The actants are approached and analyzed in accordance with the flattening concept, which is part of the symmetrical view of actants, meaning that there is no a priori determined hierarchy between them. Hierarchies between actants in a network might indeed exist, but the researcher cannot ascribe hierarchies to the actants before they are empirically studied. This stance also requires a subversion of the Cartesian dualism of *subject* and *object* (Latour, 1999; Bajde, 2013).

Studies on market practices indeed show that marketing practitioners, or, market actants, are heterogeneous in terms of who they are (what constitutes them), what they do (their functions), and their capacities (their competences and abilities) (Hagberg and Kjellberg, 2010). The market actant could be a computer, a car, a web-based consumer community, a credit card, a meeting room or other different human and non-human actants that constitute networks that involve in market-making. The networks thus include sociotechnical devices. The role of physical objects as active devices in market-making is what Callon *et al* (2007) refer to as market devices. A device is as much a technical object, such as metric scales, apparatuses, machines, scripts and protocols, as it could be a theoretical concept such as pricing models (Bajde, 2013). An alternative term for these heterogeneous networks that are revealed is *assemblages*.

It is argued by Czarniawska (2007) that the methodology of the practice turn benefits by ethnographic field work and observations. In rephrasing her formulation on organization scholars' field work (2007:9), this could be expressed as *marketing scholars go to the field to see how marketing and the accounts of marketing are produced*.

### 3 Arts marketing research

A decade into the new millennium, there were several authors who found it useful to summarize the existing research within arts marketing in literature mappings (O'Reilly, 2011), evolutionary accounts of the research (Fillis,

2011), axiomatic reviews (Bradshaw, 2010), state-of-the-art kind of overviews (Pérez-Cabañero and Cuadro-García, 2011) and anthologies (O'Reilly and Kerrigan, 2010). Special issues of journals such as *International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality* (vol.4 no.2, 2010), and *Consumption, Markets and Culture* (vol.12 no.3, 2009) were dedicated the status of arts marketing research. In 2011, a new journal was born with the title *Arts Marketing: An International Journal*, claiming in the first issue's editorial to be the "world's first academic journal dedicated to the burgeoning field of arts marketing" (Dennis *et al*, 2011:5). Based on these works it is possible to conclude that arts marketing research has evolved from initially being a sub-discipline to marketing and subject to the traditional and managerial marketing mix perspective, to become a complex topic (Lehman and Wickham, 2014) where conventional instrumentalist and rationalist market and economics approaches are not enough (Harrison, 2009) in order to understand the mechanisms of art markets.

Fillis (2011) presents an introduction to the evolution and development of arts marketing research. He argues that although arts marketing research should acknowledge its foundation in the application of the marketing mix, it is necessary that the research move forward based around the interplay of market creation. This could be interpreted as a call for research studying actual market-making, by looking at market practices rather than approaching the empirical setting with traditional (arts) marketing theories. Moreover, Fillis (2011) suggests that future arts marketing research should turn to historical sources such as biographical methods, in order to understand how individuals have practiced their own forms of marketing. The biography approach could possibly be applied to ANT, where the acting entities surrounding specific artists constitute the networks that construct the market of that artist. Fillis (2011) further claims that improved understanding of arts marketing should contribute to understanding of a wider domain of marketing research.

Another paper presenting a literature mapping of arts marketing research across a wide range of disciplines and journals is O'Reilly (2011). According to him there are two ways of talking about arts marketing: either as a discourse on the marketing management of artistic organizations, which is the narrow way, or as a discourse on the relationship between the arts and the markets, which is the broader way. Screening abstracts of 1516 journal papers on arts marketing, O'Reilly's outcome is a territorial mapping of 17 different areas within arts marketing, basically organized in genre categories such as performing arts, fine arts and literature. From each main area are extending streams with additional sub-streams. This mapping, although O'Reilly admits it is not a thorough systematic literature review, provides a picture of the arts marketing field as very diversified in terms of empirical setting.

This mapping is less useful from a practice perspective as it does not cover theoretical and methodological approaches. However, O'Reilly (2011) briefly mentions the (performative) role of arts marketing research in affecting higher education such as Master's Programs in arts marketing, as well as policy makers and practitioners in the arts field. Bradshaw's (2010) axiomatic review, on the contrary, takes a grip on the methodological assumptions underlying the existing contributions to arts marketing research. In this paper Bradshaw mentions the discussions on commerciality and commodification of art, and how artists balance between retaining artistic integrity and making a living, which is also part of the conversations in O'Reilly and Kerrigan (2010) and Cowen and Tabarrok (2000).

The financial side of arts marketing has attracted economists since the 1960's. Recently, cultural economics has mainly theorized on price settings and investments (Gérard-Varet, 1995; Cowen and Tabarrok, 2000), value measurements (Armbrecht, 2012) supply and demand (Throsby, 1994) and other economic devices that are indeed part of art markets. In general, standard economics' approach to markets is positivist and deterministic. However, Martin (2007) as well as

Velthuis (2003) and Jyrämä (2002) claim that standard economics' essentialist view on markets cannot explain the coordination of actors and the organizational structures of art markets. As arts exist in multiple contexts simultaneously (Marshall and Forrest, 2011), there is assumed to be conflicting market views promoted by the different market actants. However, although this might be a question confusing the actants involved, the interesting question for market practice research does not concern how a type of market should be defined, but rather what practices are involved in shaping these market views and how they affect market-making.

#### 4 Arts marketing approaching practices

Among the literature on art markets, there are papers that more or less apply practice and ANT oriented approaches. Several works have attended to the contemporary art markets. One paper that has rewarded much attention is Jyrämä (2002) and her study on the marketing of contemporary art galleries in four European capitals. Her aim is to study the structures and actors creating the contemporary art market. Jyrämä's point of departure, however, is that the art market is due to human experience and perception, why this approach is different from ANT which treats humans and non-humans symmetrically in the analysis of those involved in market activities (Czarniawska, 2007). In a more recent paper, however, Jyrämä and Äyväri's (2010) approach to art market practice is partly influenced by performativity in that "practice is a system of practices in which knowing is inseparable of doing" (2010:726). However, although they refer to institutional practice (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991) and the practices they account for with no doubt involve material objects, the authors conceive practice as solely human actions.

Two related articles are Martin (2007) who studies career structures and networks of contemporary artists and Rodner and Thomson (2012) who study artworks' value mechanisms and networks on the contemporary art market. Martin concludes that the network is an

important factor for market entrance, and he states that networks of producers (artists) and distributors (gallery owners) of art are not purely social. In the actor-network approach, networks are indeed seen as being both social *and* material (Latour, 2005). Martin refers to Callon's notion of techno-economic network, in which technical objects are used to structure relationships. He uses the concept to describe how the links of the artistic relationships between producers and distributors could be understood as the technical objects of the network.

In a conceptual rather than empirically informed paper, Rodner and Thomson (2012) develop the idea of an art machine, where the conceptualized *cogs* are essential for an artwork's financial and symbolical value increase. The mechanical nature of the art market is here described as a network of interdependencies of each cog, which are defined as different (overlapping) stages in an artist's career: art schools, art dealers, critics, auction houses, collectors, art fairs and events, and museums. However, although these papers certainly develop interesting theoretical frameworks of the interdependent mechanisms of art networks, structures and the contributions by each cog or career phase, they differ on some points to market practice theory. First, the Rodner and Thomson (2012) paper stresses a conceptualization of agents as being exclusively *socially* constructed which in this case means being human. No explicit attention is paid to non-human agents. Second, as opposed to what is suggested in ANT, the links and hierarchies in Martin (2007) and Rodner and Thomson (2012) are just assumed. They are not revealed by the researcher who follows and explores the networks of human and non-human actants based on the actions. Hence, the flattening and symmetry view and the translation concept of practice/actor-network theory conflict with the approaches by Martin (2007) and Rodner and Thomson (2012) who theorize on pre-defined agents in the art world.

Discussions that indeed relate to market practice theory are also offered in these papers, however. The constructivist perspective of the market practice approach denotes markets as ongoing

constructions and reconstructions, which implies that the cogs in Rodner and Thomson (2012) cannot be deterministically defined, nor their hierarchies. The authors do support this view and exemplify with the “art critics-cog” and argue that as the influence of art criticism has declined, consequently the role of art criticism in the art machine changes. At the same time, the paper also addresses the general roles that the cogs play as *essential*, hence it seems to be more in line with standard economics than performativity, which rejects essentialist ontology. However, regardless of the inconsistency in the coherence with practice theory, Rodner and Thomson’s paper highlights the complexity of the art fields in terms of multiple contexts and how they influence each other. They show for example how the context of an art museum as a normalizing institution affects the economic market of contemporary artworks (and vice versa!), which makes the museum a market actor according to Callon’s (2010) conception of markets.

Other practice-oriented contributions are Velthuis’ (2003; 2013) papers on the globalization of contemporary art markets. He aims to study organizational practices, which here are equally understood as market practices. Velthuis (2003) discusses, for instance, how prices on contemporary artworks come to represent images of art markets and thereby he is partaking in the discussion on how exchange practices of pricing affect representational practices of producing images of markets. A similar approach is given by Herrero (2010) who analyzes specific practices of auction houses operating in international art markets and describes how the actions by the art bidders (exchange practices) affect how the auction houses strategically organize their bidding settings (normalizing practices).

The works, however, that to the most extent acknowledge materiality as an agent in constitution of art fields, are Dominguez-Rubio and Silva’s (2013) and Strandvad’s (2013) papers. The former explicitly pays attention to the material aspect of arts and use the physical condition of an artwork to follow its trajectory in

order to explore competition, collaboration and repositioning among the agents involved in the processes. Dominguez-Rubio and Silva (2013) stress that artworks are both operating within social forces and are social forces in themselves. Although the authors do not explicitly discuss trajectories in markets but trajectories in *fields* and field practices, this conversation is still part of the same epistemological and theoretical framework of market practices. The authors recognize materials as “key players in defining the stakes of the social game” (Dominguez Rubio and Silva, 2013:175). In a similar manner, the sociologist Strandvad (2012) approaches the process of an artistic product’s development with the framework of actor-network theory and socio-materiality. This paper also addresses the agency of non-human actors and the mutually constituting power in both human and non-human actions.

Among the papers focusing on practices, the prevailing methods and data sources are interviews and secondary data. Almost no paper bases its epistemological argumentation in actor-network theory or materiality, or which could also be the case, the papers simply do not account for their methodological approach. Practice theory and ANT, however, suggest both observations and interviews in order to see how practices are translated into constructing networks (Latour, 2005; Czarniawska, 2007).

## **5 Concluding remarks: why study arts markets practices?**

Although this conceptual paper does not provide an empirical argumentation for the practice-oriented method of market studies, it offers some concluding remarks and suggestions for future research. Building on the market practice perspective developed by Kjellberg and Helgesson (2006; 2007), Callon *et al* (2007) and Araujo *et al* (2010) the paper stresses that studies on practices in art markets will enrich the understanding of how arts markets are constructed and thus contribute to the body of knowledge in the arts marketing literature and marketing theory in general. Ethnographic field

work conducting both observations and interviews are suggested in order to study practices appropriately. A practice based study on art markets would be attentive to exchange practices, normalizing practices and representational practices (Kjellberg and Helgesson, 2007).

The paper concludes that there are at least three reasons for why it is interesting to study market practices in the fields of arts. First, arts marketing research is itself addressing the need for new perspectives and research approaches to understand the phenomena of arts marketing and art markets. Second, when observing people working with arts it becomes apparent that they are not always sure or sometimes even reluctant to perceive their working environment as being part of a market. The purpose of this research is not to define markets or market types, but it clearly shows the need for studying practices that happen in these organized settings where artworks are exhibited *and* for sale, whereas the actors involved in the very same setting are disagreeing whether it is a market or not. The practice approach is thus very apt for empirically studying practices and based on them see how art markets are constructed. Third, within the emerging market practice literature, there is a paucity of research studying other empirical settings than financial and everyday markets. In adding to the market practice literature and thus enrich the understanding of the multiple ways practices enact on markets, the field of arts is an empirical contribution as well.

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### Authors description

Hanna Niklasson is a PhD Candidate at the Department of Business Administration (Marketing) at the School of Business, Economics and Law, University of Gothenburg. She graduated at Uppsala University and holds a MSc. in Business and Management and a BSc. in Art History. Her research focuses on how different art markets are constructed and reconstructed by studying market practices in the field of arts.