



I Don't Make Objects, I Make Projects: Selling Things and Selling Selves in Contemporary Artmaking

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Abstract

What role do artists play in the valuation of their activities? Theoretical perspectives on art have assumed that such value is closely linked to the prices of art objects and have minimized the place of content providers in the creation and definition of value. Through analysis of the writings of American, Canadian, and Swedish artists from 1967 to 2015, we find that artists move discursively from an object-oriented market logic to a market logic based in the provision of services, promoting new ways of accounting for value as they do so. Our findings suggest new ways to look at extant literature: 1) dominant theories treat artists as either structurally or intentionally insulated from the pricing of their work, while we show how artists act to define the value of artistic practice; 2) we show how terminology may remain stable while underlying meanings and institutionalized strategies aimed toward the accomplishment of goals evolve, and argue for the analysis of discursive practices beyond the search for stability or change in the usage of key terms; and finally, 3) we argue that analysts should look beyond price when aiming to understand the valuation of artistic practice.

Keywords

valuation, visual artists, institutional logics, professionalization, pricing

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How is value established in the contemporary visual art world? To date, work on artistic valuation has taken an approach centered on art objects, looking to gallery sales (Thompson, 2008; Velthuis, 2003, 2005), auctions (Beggs and Graddy, 2009; Khaire and Wadhvani, 2010), and economic returns on collector investments (Agnello, 2010; Banks, 2010; Renneboog and Spaenjers, 2013) to understand the value of art. In turn, since the programmatic interventions of Hirsch (1972) and Becker (1982), the sociological study of culture industries has treated artists as minimally involved in defining and establishing the value of their work. In these perspectives, artists are acted upon by systems of conventions in order to get things done (Becker, 1982), or by industry, organizational and market constraints (Peterson and Anand, 2004). Visual artists are, in these dominant theoretical paradigms, decoupled from the ‘business’ side of art markets, and sometimes intentionally so, as they provide the artistic ‘inputs’ before others engage in the humdrum labor of pricing and sales.

More recent perspectives, particularly those that follow Viviana Zelizer in challenging ‘hostile worlds’ approaches (Zelizer, 2000), question such assumptions but continue to focus on art objects and on the roles and accounts of non-artists in the pricing of them (Fine, 2003; Gibbon, 1987; Velthuis, 2003, 2004). Yet there are strong reasons to suspect that artists themselves play a role in defining the value of their work, and that this ‘work’ does not consist solely of the production of objects. In this article we look to artists’ own public advocacy regarding the valuation of their labor from the early 1960s through 2015. We do so across three national contexts (Sweden, Canada, and the United States) selected to control for varying levels of direct state intervention in artistic markets.

Our findings suggest that artists play a more active role in the valuation of artistic activities than has been traditionally assumed. We uncover a shift in artists’ public advocacy for the valuation of their labor from an emphasis on the concrete products of their work to an emphasis on service provision across contexts. Finally, we note that this shift in ‘frames’ (Baumann, 2007) or ‘logics’ (Thornton et al., 2012) occurs despite the fact that artmaking looks much the same in these three national contexts as it did 50 years ago: artists mostly continue to make things and either show or sell them to others in gallery settings. Against that stable backdrop, however, we show that visual artists have actively reconstructed the tasks, meanings, and value of visual art work. We close by discussing the implications of our work on the study of artists’ careers and the value of contemporary art and consider why the decoupling we document between artistic activities and claims-making occurred when and how it did.

Artists as Workers

High artmaking was for hundreds of years a more or less straightforward trade – the ‘picture trade’ – employing artisans and master craftsmen in contractual relationships with men we now remember as patrons (Baxandall, 1972; Haynes, 1997; O’Malley, 2005). Artmakers prior to the 1400s nearly always produced anonymously, holding little if any special status as workers (Haynes, 1997). As craftsmen, artists were not much different from today’s electricians or plumbers: they were providers of services who calculated costs and negotiated fees based on materials and time.

The Renaissance saw the slow birth of ‘the artist’ as we know this figure today. As the bourgeois began to collect artworks, artists were able to create commodities for purchase rather than filling custom orders, and the notion of the individualized artist-as-creator became widespread (Baxandall, 1972; Bryan-Wilson, 2009; Haynes, 1997; O’Malley, 2005; Roberts, 2007). As a rejection of rationalism, didacticism, censorship, and the instrumentalization of artistic practice, the rallying cry of ‘art for art’s sake’ first emerged in the early 19th century. By 1850 it was widespread, and with it notions of the artist as special, different, and unique from the ‘regular’ labor force have dominated our ideas of the artist and their work ever since (Bell-Villada, 1986; Burwick, 2001; Guérard, 1936; Roberts, 2007; Singer, 1954; Wilcox, 1953).

In canonical social theory artists figure as ‘art for art’s sake’ Romantics who hope to avoid the conventional constraints of working life (Arendt, 1998: 127–29; Durkheim, 1984: 13; Weber, 1968: 191). Contrary to this typification, empirical evidence dating back to the early modern era of painting and sculpture shows that artists themselves have long felt otherwise (Bradley and Esche, 2007; Bryan-Wilson, 2009; Harrison and Wood, 2003). More recent sociological theorizing, rather than treating artists as isolated geniuses, has situated them in complex webs of social relations based on competition in fields (Bourdieu, 1993), cooperation in worlds (Becker, 1982), or constraints in industries (Peterson and Anand, 2004). As White and White (1965), Lang and Lang (1988), Battani (1999), and Menger (2014) have shown, artists are less romantic, elusive, and unknowable than early social theories made them.

Despite these advances, in the most prominent sociological theories artists are actively separated from such base concerns as valuation and pricing. Instead, the valuation of artists’ work is treated as a form of ‘humdrum’ labor (as distinct from creative labor; see e.g. Caves, 2000) that is engaged in by support personnel who price artistic objects according to standardized conventions reflected through size, materials, the reputations of their representatives, and so on (Becker, 1982; Velthuis, 2005). Not simply at arm’s length from such base concerns as valuation and pricing, artists here may even have an ‘interest in disinterestedness’ in thinking about remuneration at all (Bourdieu, 1993: 40; 1996). Despite this theoretical treatment of artists as autonomously artistic and shielded from humdrum work, in general, being a serious artist entails considering art ‘work’, as a ‘job’, a ‘profession’, and artists speak of their practice as such (Bain, 2005). Studies on artists as professionals have shown that while artists’ professional status is a problem for researchers, it is relatively unproblematic for artists themselves, who tend to have a strong professional identity and often have high levels of education, as well as sharing other features of the professions (Bryan-Wilson, 2009; Markusen, 2013; Singerman, 1999). The conversations about art-as-work considered here emerge from a long tradition in the art world that has gone without adequate attention in the literature.

Studies of occupational legitimacy outside of the arts show clearly that individual workers are deeply involved in legitimizing their occupations and promoting the value of their products and services (Berman, 2006; Fine, 1996; Luker, 1984; Sherman, 2010). As we show, artists are no different in this regard: they actively advocate for their status as workers and professionals, as well as the appropriate metrics of compensation for their labor. If anything, these types of legitimating activities may be particularly important for artists given the lack of stable employment in their trade.

In this view, artists are workers with occupational identities who sometimes create or embed themselves within organizations in order to better legitimate and disperse their ideational claims (Baumann, 2007). Shifts in claims-making, therefore, may or may not signal shifts in underlying practice, but do signal changes in sense-making around those practices, as artists advocate for and debate conceptualizations of what it means to be an artist and the concomitant rules of compensation that result from those debates. The institutional logics literature, building on Friedland and Alford (1991; see Thornton et al., 2012 for review) has documented these cognitive shifts in orientation in related cultural arenas such as academic publishing (Thornton and Ocasio, 1999), architecture (Jones and Livne-Tarandach, 2008; Thornton et al., 2005) and *nouvelle cuisine* (Rao et al., 2003). As fine artists change how they talk about themselves as workers, they make agentic and normative claims by questioning ‘what is legitimate, which issues and problems deserve attention, and what solutions and answers are appropriate’; they shift both symbolic orientations and rule structures in the process (Thornton, 2004: 13–14).

In documenting one such shift in the fine arts we orient our analysis through studies in economic sociology concerned with issues of value in social life, and especially those focused on monetary valuation. Investigation of monetary valuation in varied fields has shown how fluidly economic ideas interact with others, including insurance markets (Zelizer, 1978, 1981); bodily and genetic material (Almeling, 2007; Anteby, 2010; Healy, 2006); care and intimate work (Bernstein, 2007; Macdonald, 2010); and nature itself (Fourcade, 2011). All of these analyses show how market norms interact with others, and suggest routes to and away from market valuation. A few studies look to artists in order to illuminate broader issues of valuation, but (as discussed above) tend to focus on market prices for objects (Cowen and Tabarrok, 2000; Velthuis, 2004). Taking an object-based approach, we argue, overlooks a key transition in how artists themselves conceptualize and advocate for the value their work: the transition to a services- and project-based system of accounts.

Data and Methods

Our data were collected from three national contexts: Sweden, Canada, and the United States. These contexts were selected along Esping-Andersen’s (1990) typology of states to include variation along the dimension of direct state intervention in the arts as an element of the welfare state. In the liberal United States, individual artists have little hope of ever receiving funding directly from the state for their work; in Canada, somewhat more is available along with other forms of social insurance that influence artists’ careers, while in social-democratic Sweden individual artists can expect direct state intervention in their careers and art markets generally.¹ While we set out to understand the effects of varying levels of state intervention on fine artists’ sense-making and valuation claims for artistic activities, instead we found a shift in claims-making by artists occurring at roughly the same time across all three contexts, which we discuss further below.

Across these national contexts, our data come from archival documents on artists’ public and private sense-making, meaning-making, and advocacy on the topics of remuneration and professional identity as they relate to artmaking and artistic practice. In line with prior studies of sense and meaning-making within quasi-bounded groups such as Luker’s

(1984) study of abortion activists and Spillman's (2012) study of business associations, we rely primarily – although not exclusively – on newsletters and related documents created by and for artists. While these publications might in other contexts be understood as deriving from organizational actors, this image is complicated in the case of artists' organizations and artists' writings. The organizational form can be self-consciously performative in artists' activities; writings and other publications are as likely meant to be understood – and remembered – as instrumental or goal-directed aesthetic statements written both by and for the broader community of artists. As Hunn and McAnally (2016: n.p.) recently summarized the field and primary data sources we rely upon:

Artists' publications are intimate appendages of the ideas of artists [...] they represent a particular crystallization of the ideas being proposed in the moment. They are the primary site for the arguments over the objects, structures, and actions the artists' ideas inhabit [...] Artists' publications, particularly from the 1960s to the present, expand on the idea of the publication as a site of exhibition, exchange, criticism, and subjective, self-historicizing commentary.

Given that the types of publications we rely upon were and are primary hubs for the exchange of ideas between artists, they are crucial not only to the preservation of artists' ideas for historical study, but also, as we show, for the adjudication and diffusion of ideas among artists within the broader art world (Allen, 2011; Pindell, 1977). For this article, we consider artists engaged in discussion about appropriate remuneration. As we show, our data are part of a transnational conversation in contemporary artmaking both between artists and between the organizations that artists create to legitimate their sense and claims-making about artistic identity, practice, and remuneration.

In Canada, data were collected beginning in 2009 with a research trip by the first author and include a database of newsletters, correspondence, unpublished submissions, meeting minutes, annual reports, cartoons, poetry, budgets, and other documentation associated with Canadian Artists' Representation/le Front des artistes canadien (CARFAC; 1968–present), today a federally recognized National Arts Service Organization and the leading representative body of and for fine artists in the country. The bulk of this data was collected thanks to the organization offering generous access to their archives and was supplemented by documents held by the Canadian National Archives. Data on the Swedish case were collected beginning in 2010 with a research trip by the first author to the Stockholm City Library and the National Library of Sweden to collect newsletters, email blasts, op-eds, and secondary sources related to the Swedish Artists' National Organization (KRO; 1937–present), the primary artists' association in that country, as well as the Institute for Artists and Art Mediators (IKK; 2003–2009), an upstart organization that challenged KRO's legitimacy for a time. Data on the US case were also collected beginning in 2010 with the publications of and secondary sources on the Art Workers' Coalition (AWC; 1969–1972) – a short-lived but influential loose coalition of artists – as well as publications, art objects, email blasts, and the first author's field notes regarding Working Artists and the Greater Economy (WAGE; 2008–present), a collective turned nonprofit organization that today aims to regulate the payment of artists through institutional certification. Inclusive of all sources, data collected span from the 1967 through 2015 and collection

of data associated with CARFAC, KRO, and WAGE is ongoing. Our data are inclusive of published, self-published, and submitted-but-not-published letters, essays, cartoons, and other media by artists, which allows us to control for selection biases in newsletters at the organizational level, though we found no meaningful evidence on this topic. Furthermore, our attention to secondary sources – op-eds written in local and national newspapers *against* the artists and organizations that are our focus – as well as notes from fieldwork with one organization, round out what might otherwise be an analysis too closely focused on organizational actors.

We began our data collection with data from 1967 in order to capture a wave of activity in and around formal and informal organizations beginning that year, and continuing through approximately 1971. This time period is important in both practical and art historical terms, because it includes the rise and fall of the Art Workers' Coalition in New York City, the development of Canadian Artists' Representation, and changes in the leadership and direction of the Swedish Artists' National Organization. Extra consideration was given to now-canonical texts that have a significant public life – texts that are widely reproduced and circulated nationally and internationally – as these texts can be assumed to represent widely shared normative arguments. Examples of such texts discussed below include Jack Chambers' 1967 letter to institutions, referenced continually through the life of CARFAC and cited 40 years later in texts and performances by WAGE; and Andrea Fraser's 1997 text on services, widely circulated in several manifestations through journals, art criticism, art academy curricula, and monographs.

As our central interest was in how artists, over time, conceptualize artistic labor and the concomitant valuation of their labor, we focus in our analysis on signed first-person and policy statements, which included arguments for artists' legitimacy as workers, delineations of problems, proposed solutions, and so on. In journalistic print media these types of documents would be referred to as 'opinion editorials', which are good data sources in that they not only advocate positions, but also unearth underlying logic structures in the advocacy for those positions, and are therefore relatively straightforward to code and rarely inconsistent (Binder, 1993). Our database consists of just over 1250 pages of primary documents dated from 1967 through 2015. Using a grounded-theory approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Miles and Huberman, 1994), the iterative processes of analysis ultimately resulted in 20 major codes, which were folded into four families. The first family of codes reflects artists' sense of themselves as workers, as discussed above and as has been well documented in other studies. We focus below on the second through fourth families of codes on artists' changing sense of the value of their activities over time (code family two based upon objects, and code family three based upon services), with our final code family based upon changing ideas over the concept of 'services' rather than simple advocacy for service-based accounts.

Notably, we found little if any variation in these three code families across national contexts. There are significant differences between the experiences of practicing artists in the three countries for which data were recorded, but we find that these differences concern local strategies rather than divergent meanings or sense-making around the valuation of artistic work. As we show below, across this time period, artistic practice has been globalized and has included for many a good deal of travel and international exchange, and ideas and individuals move easily between these three countries. Private

communiqués between cross-national actors and cross-referenced publications in our database, such as the aforementioned Chambers and Fraser texts, show that the artists' groups and publications we study are, as Hunn and McAnally pointed out, a primary channel through which ideas about artistic work and valuation are diffused among artists.

Findings

Our findings are divided into two temporally bounded subsections: from the 1960s through the late 1970s and from the early 1980s to the present. From the 1960s through the late 1970s artists took an object-based approach to the valuation of their work; they argued that their labor was worthy of remuneration because they had *made things*. In the second period under consideration here, beginning in the 1980s, artists have shifted from object-centered logics of remuneration and have reconceptualized themselves as providers of services; they argue that their labor is worthy of remuneration because they have *done things*. In the discussion section we consider possible reasons for this shift and the wide diffusion of new meanings, while our conclusion is concerned with implications and broader sociological theorizing.

Artists Making Things

From the 1960s through the early 1980s, artists argued that the value resulting from their work resided in the multiple uses of the products that they created and distributed. The 'job' of being an artist was therefore one in which artists made things that have value; the core tasks involved production and distribution. This argument developed over several decades. While it is no longer the dominant logic by which artists value their work, it is still instrumentalized by artists in efforts to enforce copyright law, create new copyright provisions, and to obtain royalties and resale rights. During the 1960s and 1970s, however, this was the dominant, almost singular logic by which artists operated. For example, in 1967, Canadian artist Jack Chambers wrote an open letter to art institutions that would later be widely circulated, cited, and republished across national contexts:

The painting or sculpture etc. is a MATERIA PRIMA, the raw product from which many business concerns derive profit [...] The artists should be the first to benefit from his own work in this process but in fact, he has no place in the present arrangement. (Frutkin, 1987: 2)

Six years later, a group of artists in Canada including Chambers described the aims of the organization they were trying to start as working 'to uncover the means, implicit in the works themselves, for providing revenue to the practicing artist [...] there are various means of recovering income inherent in the works themselves' (Chambers et al., 1973: 2). This letter continues with a call for exhibition fees, colloquially referred to here and elsewhere as 'rental fees' (Chambers, 1973; Perreault, 1969: 120; Tateishi, 1985: 4). The belief that the value created lay in the objects produced led artists to argue primarily for better copyright provisions; they argued extensively for both reproduction and exhibition royalties. A proposal from 1969 in the United States which demanded that 'the museum, collector or

publication would compensate the artist for use of his art' is generally evocative of artists' understandings of the value of their labor during that time (Lewitt, 1969: 54).

Artists conceptualized their practice as being based in the provision of objects for use – objects that consisted of both physical and intellectual property. As a result, artworks during this time period were regularly referred to as a 'resource'; an object that has value (Canadian Artists' Representation, 1975b). Copyright provisions were seen as the key both to artists' control over their own work and to reimbursement for their efforts, and enforcement of existing law and expansion of copyright law were seen by the vast majority as appropriate goals in defining the value of artistic labor. Demands were made in two arenas in particular: artists demanded control over reproductions of their work, operationalized as royalty payments, as well as rental fees when their works were shown, whether or not the work had been sold.

The demand for control over reproductions was, relatively speaking, straightforward: in most cases, it involved only enforcement of existing law. In 1969, an American artist suggested that artworks were primarily intellectual property: he argued that artworks were like manuscripts for popular novels and that after purchasing the work, 'the owner can keep it, or show it to his friends, but the artist continues to hold the rights of reproduction, including the right to collect royalties if he wants them' (Gordy, 1969: 98). The argument for rental fees was seen as an extension of the logics behind reproduction royalties, and terms like 'royalties', 'rental fees', and 'exhibition fees' were at the time interchangeable. The aforementioned proposal from that year suggested that as artworks were both physical and intellectual properties artists should be compensated for their use even after sale: 'this is a rental, beyond the original purchase price ... the principle of a royalty would be used' (Lewitt, 1969: 54). This author, like many others, hoped that even after the sale of an artwork the artist would be entitled to some measure of control over the artwork and payment for its use. In 1971, a Swedish artist argued in a speech during a union demonstration that 'the artist should be given an exhibition fee for the right to use the work' (Suttner, 1971a: 9).² Another, ten years later and after significant changes in the union's leadership, still argued that 'full payment for constant access to the fruits of our labor' (Petré, 1981: 4) was both legitimate and necessary.

Well into the 1980s, artists were explaining to other artists that the work they did was the creation of objects that had value. In an article from an artist's newsletter titled 'Copyright: The Profitable Practice of Protecting Your Right', a Canadian artist explained copyright law in explicit terms:

When an artist creates an original work of art, s/he really creates two separate and distinct pieces of property. One is the work of art itself, which the artist may sell, trade or otherwise dispose of as desired. The second property is the copyright, or right to reproduce the work of art [...] stop thinking of copyright as valueless and unimportant. Make it a commodity separate from the work itself in your own mind, then treat it with the care and consideration that you would give any valuable property that you own. (Amundson, 1982: 10)

At the time of this writing, such explanations were apparently still necessary and in demand as part of artists' professional education. Yet during this time period the ways in which artists advocated for the valuation of their labor began to change.

Services Then, Services Now

Starting in the early 1980s artists begin to reconceptualize themselves not simply as suppliers of objects, but as service providers. Within this new logic, value was not just dependent on an art object. Whereas an artist creating, say, a sculpture in the 1960s was oriented toward the object itself and the value that flowed forth from it – a value contractually protected through right of sale and physical and intellectual copyrights – by the end of the 20th century, artists creating apparently similar artworks increasingly saw themselves as providing valuable services to institutions when they cooperated with them to exhibit artworks. As a Canadian artist explained in 2005, '[rental] fees are meant to partially compensate for the time and cost of the production of the actual art works. Artists are not compensated for the preparation costs' (Beveridge, 2005: 5). That in this later period 'preparation costs' should be considered on top of the rental fees for objects signals a wider shift in how artists valued the time they dedicated to artistic labor, in addition to the objects they created. To be clear, while discussions of the provision of artistic services existed across both time periods, what constituted 'services' and the relationship between objects, services, labor, and value had changed. To illuminate the shifting meanings of 'service' we will look at usage of the term among artists publishing in the CAR/CARFAC newsletters over time.

Throughout the 1970s members of CAR argued that their basic principle was 'fair exchange', which they further described as 'payment for services' that they instrumentalized, rationalized, and advocated for as rental fees; the 'service' they provided was the provision of objects for rental. An example of this thinking reads:

The fair-exchange principle is one which society already acknowledges for its multitude of dealings, and is simply understood as payment for services. Everyone performing a service in our society is paid in return. The cultural basis for society is created by artists; and we are agreeing with the rest of organized society that services do in fact require payment. Hence our suggested fee schedule. (Chambers, 1973: 38)

The fee schedule referenced was an outline of recommended rental fees for the provision of objects; 'services' were not added to the fee schedule for another ten years. Artists in the 1970s offering their 'services' offered not their time or experience, but the temporary use of objects already made. Early CAR fee schedules included rental fees only: the first distributed schedule, in 1975, breaks down rental 'fees' for ten types of exhibition, from international one-person exhibitions to local juried exhibitions offering less than \$750 in prize money. The fee schedule in this time period included no mention of more abstract services, time, skills, or hours (Canadian Artists' Representation, 1975a). An artist writing a few years later remembered the early years of CAR quite simply: 'We said, "we would like rental fees" and we explained the reason – everybody gets paid for their work' (Crean et al., 1978: 5). By the late 1970s artists did recognize some of the limitations of reliance on copyright, but saw this as a need for expanded notions of copyright rather than an argument for another model, as is clear from a brief presented by CAR in 1978 on new copyright legislation. The document read:

By temperament, logic, and product, the visual artist shares few, if any of the protective adaptations either in custom or legislation available to the author or composer. Even the largest series of 'multiples' does not compare to an edition of an unsuccessful novel. Most often, a work of art is a single item. It can be sold but once, or as a very limited edition. [...] While on display, it can be seen, for free or a nominal fee. By any standard of comparison it can easily be seen that the visual artist is most vulnerable, and requires special and individual consideration in the reform of copyright law [...] Legislators must look behind the various rules in order to determine the underlying principles. When those principles are understood, it will then become clear why the visual artist is entitled to a public lending right, *droit de suite*, and stronger and broader remedies in cases of infringement. (James, 1978: 7)

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the organization remained concerned with artists' rights as the creators and owners of intellectual property. But as early as 1983, the first suggestions that artists' time might have value in itself were visible with the publication of the 'Applebaum-Hebert Report', a federal cultural policy document that received wide attention in the Canadian artistic community. Soon after the publication of the report an artist wrote, in translating the report to her contemporaries: 'Canadian visual artists will not be surprised to learn that the largest subsidy to the cultural life of Canada comes not from government, corporations or other patrons, but from the artists themselves, through their unpaid or underpaid labour' (Yates, 1983: 2). She noted that artists were described in the report as 'highly specialized working poor'. Later that same year, for the first time, 'professional fees for consultations' were quietly introduced to CAR's fee schedule. The notion of time spent in service to an institution, distinct from the production of art objects, as a measure of artistic labor was finally visible in CAR documents. Although in the early 1980s these ideas were not yet widespread and did not appear at first to resonate widely with artists, over the years artists slowly learned to bill for their time and expertise in exhibition negotiation, preparation, and installation, and in other situations where their 'consultations' were of value, such as workshops and conferences (Canadian Artists' Representation, 1983). The strongest articulation of these ideas in the archive appears in 2005, in an editorial in the CAR newsletter strongly arguing for a notion of 'services' that valued artists' time as well as their products. An argument that would not have been made, or been comprehensible, in the 1970s was, in this later period, entirely rational and appropriate. We quote at length due to the clarity in expression of the point:

One area of work has rarely, if ever, been discussed: the unpaid labour artists contribute towards the preparation and installation of an exhibition. [...] Speaking as a professional artist, I calculated roughly the number of hours I typically spent on correspondence, supplying images and descriptions of works, writing statements and texts, negotiating terms and conditions, designing, consulting and working on the installation. I included hours spent packing and shipping the work, and everything else involved in getting and setting up an exhibition. [...] I estimated that 100 hours labour might be a reasonable average. The next question is the dollar value of this labour. A professional salary can run anywhere between \$25 and \$125 per hour. Since artists usually bottom out when it comes to pay, let's estimate 100 hours at \$40 per hour, i.e. \$4,000. On average, then, an artist subsidizes an exhibition to the tune of \$4,000 per exhibit. (Beveridge, 2005: 4–5)

It is notable that this artist did not argue that the time artists spend making their artwork – thinking, looking, constructing – should be included in this estimate, and his writing illustrated a central conflict among those in this latter period who advocated for the value of artists' time. This artist's strategy – to focus on administrative and logistical tasks carried out directly in service of an organization, to the exclusion of the majority of the tasks of artmaking – remains common today. Extant fees in this context – rental fees – as well as, presumably, sales, were understood to 'cover' artmaking time – though as noted here, such sales and rentals can only rarely be counted on for income – but did not cover the time spent preparing completed artwork for exhibition, work now conceptualized as a form of 'service'.

Members of CAR/CARFAC have made significant concrete gains over the past 50 years. Among other things, they succeeded in pushing for changes to national copyright provisions that should have served to ensconce 1970s thinking in an institutional framework. This could have strengthened artists' identities as the producers of objects, increasing incentives for artists to produce works that could be protected by copyright and to think of themselves as primarily producers of intellectual property. But even within this incentive structure, members came to argue that the 'service' artists provided was no longer the provision of objects for purchase or rental. Rather, the 'service' provided by artists today includes their time and the hours they spend in service to institutions that they consider employers.

Examples of these shifts abound outside of the Canadian context as well. In the United States an artist wrote in 1997 that 'all artistic work, or labor, that is not compensated through the sale of a tangible product must be considered a form of service provision' (Fraser, 1997: 112). This passage and text are today still widely reproduced and well known among artists and its author, now a professor, sits on the board of WAGE.

The shift from object to project and the changing meaning of service can also be clearly seen in Sweden, where in the early 1970s, as elsewhere, artists' 'cultural contribution' was understood as the production of exhibitions. An artist then argued explicitly that the primary 'service' artists provided was the production of exhibitions, that fair pay came in the form of attention to the objects that artists made and maintained intellectual property rights over (Suttner, 1971a: 7, 1971b: 5). But by the 1990s in Sweden, artists were arguing that their practice had gone 'from being primarily oriented toward the production of products to, to a much greater extent, being about skills, experiences, and other processes' (Ewald, 2002: 1). By 2004 an artist there wrote a long debate article on the difference between rental fees and other forms of payment, arguing that the rental principle was not appropriate; that 'what artists expect and demand payment for is their efforts, their labor', and suggested that a contract based in labor law – not copyright – regulating hourly payments is appropriate 'when artists produce exhibitions on assignment' (Nordwall, 2005: 6). This language of producing exhibitions 'on assignment' in service of institutions that request them had, by the mid-2000s, spread across the three national contexts considered here. Artists use it to point out that they ask not for some kind of citizen's wage or special treatment but, rather, ask simply for payment when their services are in demand by others.

Attention to the changing meaning of the word 'services' shows clearly how radically artists reconceptualized the core, value, and tasks of their practice, even as the words

they used remained stable. While artists continue to ask for copyright protections and other benefits related to their material output, they now also think about the value of artistic practice differently, and instrumentalize new ideas in arguments for hourly wages. An American artist explained why she demanded payment for her time, and like others she framed her demands as entirely reasonable:

We're not asking for the world, we are asking simply to be paid for our labor. Museums want performance art for free? What do they think? That we dream it up while we are watching TV during the commercials? That's work. That's days, or weeks or months of work [...] We need our city's institutions, public and private, to take artists' labor into consideration when using it. We need to let them know that what is making their culture institution 'rich' is the product of months or years of labor. (Hardy, 2008)

In some ways artists have returned to a professionalized version of the craft logic that dominated artistic labor prior to the Renaissance period. In a return to this craft logic of service provision, artists have, unsurprisingly, also divorced themselves of the 'special status' of artistic labor that dominated from the Renaissance period through at least the 1960s. Rather than privileging the status of the artist, in framing the value of their work today's artists advocate for considering themselves as no different from the other 'humdrum' laborers who get paid hourly wages to put on shows. As a group of Swedish artists wrote in a 2006 editorial:

We increasingly question the fact that, though we have the greatest role among all who work with exhibitions, our work is still not paid. Everyone else – directors, curators, technicians, guards, art handlers – who is a part of the work of an exhibition sees it as obvious that they should be paid for their work. Why is our work not valued in the same way? (Backman et al., 2006)

The 'work' here is that involved in mounting an exhibition – as above, the activities involved in making the artworks themselves are understood to be remunerated separately. This framework of valuation displays little difference from the Canadian editorial from 2005 quoted at length above, though we find no evidence of that editorial's circulation beyond the CARFAC mailing list or any suggestions that it reached European shores. A Swedish editorial from a few years later made the same argument again, pointing to exhibitions at municipal galleries in which artists 'carry out unpaid work for the state and local governments worth 300 million crowns per year', work that 'is in demand, but is not remunerated in proportion to the work carried out' (Reichert et al., 2007). In these cases, in which artistic practice is conceptualized as hourly labor on behalf of presenting institutions, artists ask not for copyright protections or resale rights but hourly pay, taxed and otherwise treated the same as other workers' wages and salaries. Back in the United States, in 2009 three artists similarly argued quite plainly that they were 'asking [for hourly wages] to be factored into our own equation, paid fees for honest work, to be equal participants in the economy' (Nguyen, 2009).

The craft logic of the 21st century has become highly professionalized. Artists have stopped comparing themselves to composers or writers – individual owners of intellectual

property – and instead reach towards professional workers, comparing their skills and training to dentists and librarians. In 2006, two Canadian artists wrote in an editorial:

While artists represent a diverse professional demographic, they nonetheless share an acute understanding of the value of their time and skills ... artists statistically have more education and training than the average Canadian worker but earn less than half the income. As Di Dabinett, a painter and textile artist, wryly noted, ‘I have as much professional training as a dentist – yet I earn one-eighth of what a dentist makes’. (Fleet and Kemp, 2006: 6)

Another Canadian artist compared artists working in the public sector to the civil servants they worked alongside, pointing to the problems of receiving money in the form of stipends, awards, and fellowships – not salaries or wages:

All the library employees get a free flu shot because they are employees, but Dave Margoshes does not. [...] Library employees have a pension plan, paid sick days, workers’ compensation and a variety of benefits that come from being a worker, and a member of a union. [...] Flu shots and who gets them is a small sign of a hidden reality: creators do not have much support and workers do. (Graham, 2002: 3)

It is worth noting that artists’ practices have changed relatively little over the past 50 years, a point we consider more fully below, and the language they use to make claims about themselves as workers has remained largely stable as well. Artists speak of the value of their ‘services’, their ‘work’, throughout the period considered here. Yet close attention to artists’ claims shows that their sense of themselves as workers, and particularly the way that they promoted the value of their efforts, has changed significantly over the past 50 years. Artists’ demands to be remunerated for their ‘services’, once imbued within objects and used to ask for rental fees, over time have shifted to a logic in which those ‘services’ have been disaggregated from artistic objects.

Discussion: Exploring Exogenous and Endogenous Causal Factors in Shifting Logics

Over the past 50 years visual artists practicing in the US, Canada, and Sweden have moved from an object-based market logic to one based in services when promoting the value of their activities – this despite instrumental gains that should have served to solidify artists’ identities as producers of objects for use and sale. Attention to the valuation of practices shows how artists actively construct the value of visual art work through their claims-making and highlights the vast range of activities not captured by analysts who focus on the prices of art objects to understand the value of art.

We propose several hypotheses as to why the changes we highlight occurred. The most frequent explanation among artists for the changes outlined above is changes to artistic practices. We argue, however, that such aesthetically oriented developments cannot explain changing valuation. Over the periods considered here, very few elements of artistic practice have changed, with perhaps an increased visibility for project work. As

such the foregrounding of ‘new’ practices, as some artists do when they argue for artists as service workers, is primarily a strategy of justification to legitimize claims. The sorts of process, project, and event-based practices cited by artists as causing these changes are neither ‘new’ – they were already significant in the 1960s and 1970s – nor are they currently dominant. As during the era of an object-based market logic, the vast majority of artists today continue to make things – objects – and show them to others. Even those committed to social practice, relational aesthetics, performative projects, and public practices are well aware of the importance of artifacts, images, and other gallery-ready objects, and are generally willing to produce and attempt to sell them. Such practices lend themselves to the production of material products and intellectual property as easily as more traditional painting practices; if anything, artists working in ‘immaterial’ forms are often more well-read in the workings of the market for objects than those who came before them.

Likewise, although the service-based logic adopted by artists bears a striking resemblance to the ‘craftsmen’ role of artists prior to the Renaissance period, we see little evocation of this deep history in today’s artists’ sense and claims-making. While many artists are no doubt aware of the shifting historical role of the artist, this history is not regularly evoked in today’s advocacy. Put another way, rather than advocating for a ‘return’ to craftsmanship, today’s artists frame their desired status as service providers through other channels. They do not reach back to a better time, but point laterally to other professionals in their claims-making. In lieu of these two explanations, which we see little evidence for, we offer three more likely factors which may operate in concert.

First, endogenous to the fine art world and concomitant with shifting valuation logics among artists is the rise of the MFA (and, today, the studio art PhD). As higher education in the arts became widely available, art as a profession (distinct from art as an entrepreneurial market activity) has developed in new directions. The increasing necessity of the MFA for the professional artist over the past 50 years allows for the revaluation of practice seen above through interrelated processes, including an expansion of professional identity and an expansion of opportunities for full-time work as an artist, including but not limited to increased opportunities for college teaching (Childress and Gerber, 2015). While the data presented here do not show a clear link, it seems likely that the rise of the MFA is a strong ecological force in both the shift in valuation considered above and in professionalization in the arts more generally.

Second, the data sources we employ – most often, opinion pieces from newsletters by and for artists – illuminate the ways a shift in logics might have diffused across these national contexts. For the past 50 years artistic practice has been highly globalized and has involved, for increasing numbers, extensive travel and international exchange. Ideas, too, have moved across national borders – both with these artists and through increasingly fast, easy, and cheap communications technology. In our newsletter data we see influential pieces translated, republished, and referenced across national contexts, and in our data on artists and organizations themselves we see actors monitoring one another across contexts, communicating with one another, and collaborating across national borders.

Last, in addition to these endogenous factors we also note a force for change exogenous to the art world: a real shift in Western economies away from manufacturing and

towards growth in the service sector; the changes we identify may be part of a general shift towards the valuation of time rather than tangible production. To take the United States as an example, in 2008, 79.5% of civilian employment in the US was in services, compared to 58.1% in 1960. The OECD reports that ‘the services sector now accounts for over 70% of total employment and value added in OECD economies. It also accounts for almost all employment growth in the OECD area’ (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 2005; for a discussion of some of the ramifications of valuing products versus valuing time, see Biernacki, 1995). A global exogenous force of this nature might explain why artists across three Western national contexts operating under different governance structures come to the same conclusions roughly during the same time period. In support of an account of larger exogenous forces in this shift, similar shifts to normalizing labor can be found in the accounts of film and television writers (Banks, 2015; Fisk and Szalay, 2016), and among stand-up comedians in Los Angeles during the short-lived ‘Comedians for Compensation’ union which picketed in front of the Comedy Store in 1979. In a rhetoric that was strikingly similar to that of visual artists of the time, the group’s leader, comedian Tom Dreesen explained, ‘You pay the waiters, you pay the waitresses, you pay the guy who cleans the toilets. Why don’t you ... pay the comedians?’ (Zoglin, 2008: 196).

These three factors – an ecological growth in service-related work that opened an opportunity structure for artists to advocate for themselves as such; a professions-based framing of art institutionalized through higher education in the arts and, especially, MFA programs; and the diffusion of these ideas through artists’ networks and publications – work together in cementing the change from an object-based market logic to a services and time-based market logic among artists.

Conclusion

Starting in the early 1980s, artists began to change the ways that they talked about the value of their work. Although their goals remained stable – remuneration for their labor, or ‘fair exchange’, as they put it – their understanding of what constituted ‘fair exchange’ shifted from an object-centered logic to a time, skill, and service-based logic of market exchange for artistic activity. These findings suggest three new ways to reflect on extant literature.

First, dominant theories of artmaking and selling treat artists as creatives who are kept at both a structural and symbolic remove from the valuation processes of pricing of their work. Contrary to this dominant narrative, we show that at least since the 1960s artists have been active players in negotiating the value of their labor. Second, the majority of literature on the valuation of art treats prices as appropriate proxies for the value of artistic labor. We argue that analysts should look beyond price when aiming to understand the valuation of artistic practice, and take account of how artists draw on multiple bases of value alongside objects and their properties. Finally, we argue for the analysis of discursive practices beyond the search for stability or change in the usage of key terms that are more traditionally captured in analyses of institutional logics. We show how terminology may remain stable while underlying meanings and institutionalized strategies aimed toward the accomplishment of goals evolve.

The institutional logics literature suggests that changes to logics will lead to changing goals, but the case under consideration here suggests that goals may remain the same ('fair exchange') while ecological and cultural change has promoted evolution and change within the market logic in this field. In this case, changes to the meanings relevant to the market logics promoted a shift in appropriate means of attaining goals. A market practice once centered on the sale of property became one in which an occupationalized vision of market work was laminated onto the older object-oriented discourse. Artists aiming to be remunerated for their efforts suddenly focused on the time they spent in service to institutions, rather than looking to develop and protect new forms of property – the exhibition rights, reproduction rights, and resale rights so important to earlier generations.

Social scientific analyses of art worlds that focus on gallery pricing leave open the question of whether and how artists themselves turn to such markets to define the value of their work. We know well that commercial galleries are not the only institutions presenting contemporary art, that much of the art seen by publics is housed outside of such galleries, and that an exclusive focus on commercial galleries and their pricing distorts our image of the art world (e.g. Favell, 2012; Kwon, 2004; Sholette, 2010). The findings presented here support a perspective on contemporary art that looks beyond galleries and museums in describing the landscape of the art world, and one that thinks beyond the pricing of art objects in investigations of value in order to accommodate immaterial bases of value and non-gallery markets.

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Notes

1. By way of example, compare the National Endowment for the Arts in the United States with the Konstnärsnämnden, the Swedish Arts Grants Committee: In 2015 in the United States (population 318 million), 50 artists in total received \$25,000 awards from the NEA (National Endowment for the Arts, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c, 2016d). That year in Sweden (population 9.6 million), if we look only to the awards most similar to those awarded by the NEA (arbetsstipendium and projektbidrag), 617 individual artists received awards averaging \$14,000 (Konstnärsnämnden, 2016a, 2016b). While in the United States only an elite few ever hope to receive NEA funds directly and artists cannot count on such funds, in the Swedish context essentially all working artists have either received such funds or are closely acquainted with artists who have. Although see Childress and Gerber (2015) and Childress (2017) for *indirect* state intervention in the US case.
2. Here and throughout the document all translations from Swedish to English are our own.

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