

A photograph of a gallery space. In the foreground, a large, voluminous white dress is displayed on a mannequin, its long, flowing skirt cascading down. The floor is made of light-colored wood and is covered with numerous rolls of white paper, some of which are unrolled and spread out. In the background, there are white walls, a white pedestal, and a doorway. The lighting is bright and even.

sociology of the arts

Art and the Challenge of Markets Volume 2

From Commodification of Art to Artistic
Critiques of Capitalism

EDITED BY
VICTORIA D. ALEXANDER,
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Sociology of the Arts

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Victoria D. Alexander • Samuli Hägg
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Editors

Art and the Challenge of Markets Volume 2

From Commodification of Art to
Artistic Critiques of Capitalism

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Preface

The volume at hand, *Art and the Challenge of Markets: From Commodification of Art to Artistic Critiques of Capitalism*, is a continuation of the volume *Art and the Challenge of Markets: National Cultural Politics and the Challenges of Marketization and Globalization*. It forms the second volume of a book in two volumes. Although it can be read on its own, we conceived of the two volumes as companions that link together to form a greater whole.

The first volume of *Art and the Challenge of Markets* considers the development of cultural policies and art worlds in Western countries from the 1980s and 1990s to the present, after which it describes the structure and functioning of international and transnational art worlds. The contributions also address questions such as the extent to which individual countries have preserved their traditional cultural hegemony against the current pressure of globalization. This second volume deals with contemporary cultural politics and art worlds from a slightly different point of view. Here, the chapters are more theoretical and art-philosophical in nature. These contributions focus on several topical questions and themes that arise from the market-based turn in society, which has so profoundly influenced art worlds.

A key theme is the fate of art's autonomy. In Western countries, the degree of autonomy has doubtless decreased during recent decades. The notion of autonomy in the arts developed in the late eighteenth century,

and this ideal subsequently provided the basis for the functioning of modern Western artistic culture. In the West, the sphere of art attained a relatively autonomous position, particularly with respect to political and religious authorities, as well as freedom from the practices and principles of modern (industrial) capitalism. The situation with respect to artistic autonomy outside the Western world was different, for in non-Western civilizations, traditional means of livelihood and ways of production were preserved often up to the nineteenth or into the twentieth century, even while these civilizations found a certain place in the modern capitalist world system. Therefore, the sphere of art in non-Western civilizations was usually more closely connected to other aspects of social and cultural life, and these civilizations may have never experienced a long tradition of relatively autonomous art, in the Western sense. And conversely, it is precisely in the Western world where the contrast between art's traditionally wide autonomy and the current situation strikes many observers as notable, astonishing, or shocking.

Western and non-Western countries approach the current situation from different historical perspectives. What they have in common, however, is the ubiquitous influence of capitalism. To date, most of the former "underdeveloped countries" have undergone an internal process of capitalization, bringing them closer to the economic systems of Western countries. Nearly all nations are today, in a very concrete sense, participants in the capitalist world order. Questions concerning contemporary capitalism and its relationship with art are, therefore, universal in today's world. Our first volume shows how even in Western countries, different national art worlds and cultural policies do not approach these questions in a uniform way. This volume, in turn, shows that the rise of non-Western art worlds has, to a certain extent, changed transnational and global art worlds' structures and operations. It aims to consider these changes and to explore the position of non-Western countries in transnational and global art worlds, although, primarily, it concentrates on those art worlds' general or common properties.

Contemporary art does not merely reflect the capitalist economy and the rest of society, in a passive way. On the contrary, it is capable of reflecting *on* the contemporary world order and its own position and role in this order. In its reflexive capacity, art continues the legacy of society-

critical practice in new and fresh ways, and, at the same time, it elaborates on alternative ways of producing and mediating art. In challenging contemporary norms or power structures, however, critical art can end up as an object of political and juridical control.

The authors in this volume are mainly sociologists, but contributors are also philosophers, aestheticians, and scholars from cultural studies. Though these authors do not share a common theoretical or political background, all are interested in the contemporary market-based turn in society and its effects on, interactions with, or responses from art worlds.

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London, UK
June 9, 2017

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Part 1

Introduction

1

Capitalist Economy as a Precondition and Restraint of Modern and Contemporary Art Worlds

Erkki Sevänen

Introduction

During recent decades, several social and cultural theorists have thought that, from the 1980s and 1990s on, the societal–cultural developmental process has taken a new course. Accordingly, if modern (Western) civilization was characterized by the structural principle of *functional differentiation*, then the contemporary societal–cultural reality has, in part, turned into the opposite direction: the principle of *dedifferentiation* is, thereby, more typical of it than the principle of functional differentiation. Richard Münch (1991, 135–36, 172–74) points out that this process of dedifferentiation has been ongoing both at a global and at a national level. Although the modern world system had already emerged by the turn of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, as Immanuel Wallerstein

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and Niklas Luhmann have emphasized, for several centuries, it consisted of single empires and nation-states that were capable of controlling their boundaries relatively effectively; to be sure, a generalization such as this holds chiefly true only for Western states and other noncolonialized states. Today, this situation has, however, changed. On a world scale, single national societies have now become more and more open with each other, and within these single societies, different functional subsystems (economy, politics, law, science, art, education, religion, mass media) are now increasingly interlaced (see also Lash 1992, ix–xi, 5–11). Through this, the age of *classical* or *simple modernity* that lasted from the mid-eighteenth century to the 1970s has given way to the contemporary phase of the societal–cultural development.

The thought in question is not, however, the whole truth about the contemporary societal–cultural reality, for in a certain sense also, functional differentiation is still an ongoing element in this reality. Undoubtedly, national societies and their functional subsystems have lost a considerable part of their former sovereignty and distinctive hallmarks, but at the same time, there have emerged new kinds of global or transnational systems, for example, in the area of economy, politics, science, education, art, mass media and sports. This development has, actually, continued the process of system formation and functional differentiation. On the other hand, because most of these systems have evolved and strengthened in a close interaction with capitalist markets and economic goals, the concept of dedifferentiation is, to a certain extent, applicable to them as well. In this respect, both “dedifferentiation” and “differentiation” are necessary conceptual tools in descriptions of the contemporary world.

The contemporary phase has been conceptualized in several different ways. In particular, concepts such as *postmodernity*, *late modernity*, *reflexive modernity*, and *global modernity* have been utilized in social sciences and cultural studies. The volume at hands does not reflect on these concepts systematically, although this introductory chapter, as well as the concluding chapter at the end of the volume, takes them up and certain kindred concepts. Our starting point is the perception that the process of dedifferentiation has, first and foremost, occurred under the conditions of capitalist economy. This economic system has been powerful from the

1980s on, when leading Western countries began to realize neoliberalist politics that demanded that the entire society must follow rather similar principles of operation as the private enterprise sector has followed in capitalist economy. In this sense, Western societies have moved toward a market-based model of society, and after the collapse of the socialist world system in the early 1990s, a comparable process of marketization has, in part, been ongoing in the rest of the world as well. Today, questions concerning capitalism are, therefore, relevant across the world, even if different regions of the world have arrived at contemporary capitalism via different historical–societal developmental courses.

The process of dedifferentiation also concerns the contemporary system of art, with the result that since the 1980s and 1990s, this system has increasingly fused with capitalist economy. Today, there are, between these two systems, that is, the system of art and the system of economy, several common or overlapping areas. In Western art theory, the difference between the modern and the contemporary system of art has been seen as sharp, since in classical Western modernity, art obtained a *relatively autonomous position* in society. In contrast, the contemporary system of art possesses a low degree of autonomy with regard to economy and other subsystems, and today, the layer of relatively autonomous art forms a shrinking branch in the system of art. On the other hand, in the non-Western world, the shift from the previous to the contemporary sphere of art looks often different. For example, Japan was opened up to Western influences only in the mid-nineteenth century, and in China and (South) Korea, a similar process started still later, that is, in the twentieth century. Before the dates in question, these three societies lived a traditional feudal–agrarian life in which the sphere of art was closely associated with handicraft, social rituals, moral–practical self-education, and aristocratic ceremonies. In these societies, there did not emerge a widely accepted urge to elaborate on an idea of autonomous art. This idea has neither ever been rooted in China, for before the current situation, China was a communist country in which art and popular culture were subordinated to serve political–ideological goals defined by the party organization.

The next sections describe the birth of the modern Western system of art and its relatively autonomous position in society. After this, I consider

the shift from the modern to the contemporary system of art. These sub-chapters are based on the thought that the modern system of art would not have been possible without the spread of capitalist ways of action in society. Capitalist economy was once a necessary precondition for the emerging of a relatively autonomous sphere of art, but capitalism's subsequent development and its tendency to spread into all subareas of social life have increasingly questioned this autonomy. Depending on how we value this development, we can see it either as a threat or as an opportunity for the sphere of art. Or, if we think "dialectically," we can see it to include both threats and opportunities from the standpoint of the systems of art.

The Emergence and Establishment of Capitalist Ways of Action

Social sciences do not offer us a coherent picture of the birth of capitalist ways of action. For example, according to Max Weber's *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (Economy and Society, 1921–22), capitalist ways of action were, to a certain extent, in use already in ancient civilizations, although they did not dominate, at that time, the production and distribution of goods, nor were they capable of releasing the sphere of art from its close connection to handicraft, religion, and social rituals (Weber 1956). In contrast, perhaps more often, social scientists used to date the birth of capitalist ways of action to the Middle Ages. In this alternative view, capitalist ways of action first emerged in Italy in the eleventh and twelfth centuries in the areas of trading and banking, and their maintainers were chiefly wealthy princes. As Fernand Braudel (1985a, b) has shown, these new sorts of economic phenomena and their subsequent development in Italy were part of a more general historical process in which a wide trading area, with Venice as its major center, took shape in the Mediterranean region by the late fourteenth century. Through this, the princes in question became economically and politically powerful, and gained a certain independence from the Catholic Church. Because they also began to act as generous patrons of art, this development released the sphere of art, in part, from the spiritual–ideological control practiced by the Catholic

Church and made possible the flourishing of the Italian Renaissance from the fourteenth century on. Both the birth and spread of capitalist ways of action and the breakdown of the spiritual–ideological monopoly of the Catholic Church were, thereby, important historical preconditions for the emerging of a relatively autonomous sphere of art.

In his well-known study, *Sozialgeschichte der Kunst und Literatur* (Social History of Art and Literature, 1953), Arnold Hauser states that, already in the Italian Renaissance, philosophers and artists worked on the idea of art's autonomy; to be clear, for them, “art” chiefly meant architecture, painting, and sculpture. Yet, from the late sixteenth century on, the Catholic Counter-Reformation abolished the relatively autonomous position of these three visual kinds of art for about three centuries, not only in Italy but also in Spain and several other Catholic countries (Hauser 1983, 352–55). On the other hand, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, French and English artists' spiritual–ideological freedom was wider. In France and England, the practice of the arts was closely connected to court life and to the aristocratic way of life. In addition, in France, in particular, the artists were forced to follow the goals that the absolutistic monarchy set for the arts, which brought a strong element of political–ideological control into the emerging new art life. For reasons such as these, the next time the idea of art's autonomy became central in art theory or aesthetic theory would only be in Immanuel Kant's philosophy, Friedrich Schiller's aesthetic writings, and German Romanticism at the end of the eighteenth century.

Early capitalist ways of action in Italy stand for the prehistory of capitalism. The subsequent development of capitalism has been divided into four major phases in a manner that comes up in Table 1.1. At the beginning of the first phase, capitalist ways of action stood for a dawning economy inside the aristocratic estate society. A wider and deeper institutionalization of these ways of action took place in the course of the first phase, which lasted from the fifteenth century to the eighteenth century. The first phase was also important in the sense that, in Europe, there emerged during its course several politically centralized and territorially large states that standardized the administration of law and taxation, as well as the treatment of people, within their territories. The power of these states exceeded the power of local authorities, and, in fact, the states

Table 1.1 Capitalism's historical development phases

-
1. *From the fifteenth century to the eighteenth century: the phase of original accumulation and the emergence of farming and trading capitalism.* The birth and formation of the modern world system took place in this phase. From the very begin, this system has been dominated by Western countries that have exploited other continents' human and natural resources. During the seventeenth century, England became the most powerful country in this world system. In this phase, the economic life in Europe was regulated by the states that practiced a mercantile economic policy
 2. *From the beginning of the nineteenth century to the 1920s and 1930s: the phase of classical liberal capitalism or laissez-faire capitalism.* At the same time, farming and trading capitalism gave way to industrial capitalism. After the First World War, the United States took the leading position in the world system
 3. *From the 1930s to the 1970s: the phase of organized capitalism and the expansive welfare state.* President F.D. Roosevelt's (1933–45) New Deal politics in the United States and Social Democratic governments in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden in the 1930s were early manifestations of the welfare state politics. More widely, Western states began to realize it after the Second World War. In this phase, the states adopted an active role as the regulators of the rest of society
 4. *From the 1980s and 1990s onward: the shift to the neoliberal world order and contemporary global economy, which is dominated by finance capitalism.* At the same time, immaterial factors have become more and more central in economic value production. In this phase, the welfare state has, in part, transformed into the competitive state. Likewise, the states have lost a great deal of their capacity to control and regulate their own "national economy." In this sense, national economies have increasingly been interlaced with the global economy
-

Sources: Braudel (1985a, b), Lash and Urry (1987)

subordinated local authorities through their power. In the first instance, Portugal, Spain, France, England, Scotland, the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, Russia, Switzerland, Austria, and Prussia belonged to these states. Modern or "rational" capitalism benefited from this situation, since it needed large market areas, unified administration of law, and legal norms that regulate economic activities and make the functioning of economy, as far as it is possible, more predictable. On the other hand, modern capitalism itself also accelerated the formation of wide states, because it created a structural pressure on the formation of states like these. Somewhat later, that is, from the late eighteenth century on, modern European nation-states, then, began to take shape on the basis of

these politically centralized and territorially wide states. In this long-term process of nation-building, the estate privileges were abolished and lower classes—or, the “mob”—as well as women were gradually formally accepted as the members and citizens of these nation-states.

By the late eighteenth century, capitalist ways of action achieved priority over traditional and premodern ways of economic action in Europe’s leading countries, above all, in England and the Netherlands. In Karl Marx’s (1974), Max Weber’s (2010), and Karl Polanyi’s (2001) sociological and economic–historical studies, a characteristic feature of capitalist economy is that entrepreneurs do not manufacture products for their own or personal use. Instead, capitalist activities are directed toward markets in which different goods are treated as commodities, that is, as products that can be bought or sold. In this respect, capitalism differs from a traditional economy, in which the role of markets was limited and the results of productive activities were, primarily, meant for producers and their possible masters’ own use. All of these classics also held that capitalism is deeply steered by the motive for profit-seeking: when selling their products on markets, capitalist entrepreneurs expect to receive considerably more monetary value or exchange value than the manufacturing of these products demanded from them. To be sure, as Weber pointed out, there was “sporadic” or contingent profit-seeking also in traditional society, but in modern capitalism, profit-seeking and surplus value production are systematic and based on the utilization of technology and science on a large scale.

For Marx, the first phase was, primarily, an era of original or primitive accumulation. During this long era, traditional independent workers, in particular peasants, were usually violently separated from the means of production (landowning, farming) by powerful landowners, who took these lands into their own possession. After this separation, some of these workers became vagrants and vagabonds, whereas others, or the descendants of these others, often ended in towns and cities in which private enterprises, manufacturers, and factories could use them as a hired labor force. In this way, the modern or “free” working class was created in Europe. In Marx’s theory, this class is a necessary precondition for a capitalist economy, for it is able to produce, for capitalists, more value than its maintaining demands in the form of wages. In Marxist thinking, the

private ownership of the means of production and the antagonism between the capitalist class and the working class belong to the distinctive marks of capitalism.¹

Weber (2010) had a more optimistic view of the first phase, for he saw it as an era of a religion-based enterprise culture that evolved in Protestant regions. For him, the first phase stood for an ideal period in the history of capitalism, since during it, religious values could still widely regulate the activities of entrepreneurs and, in this way, soften the impacts of capitalism on the rest of society. After this “value-rational” period, a capitalist economy mainly began to develop, in Weber’s theory, according to the rules of “formal” or “instrumental” rationality, which are rather indifferent in regard to substantial or qualitative value dimensions. Thus, Weber did not have an opportunity to see that the classical Western welfare state restricted the power of capitalism and markets in society, and, to a certain extent, subordinated them to a political regulation. Through this, substantial or qualitative values (social solidarity, equality, justice) gained a central place in the politics practiced by Western states in the phase of organized capitalism.

Art’s Relative Autonomy in Classical Modernity

In sociological theories of modernization, the era of classical or simple modernity usually comprises the end of capitalism’s first phase, as well as the phases of classical liberal capitalism and organized capitalism: that is, this era covers the time lag from the mid-eighteenth century to the 1970s. The most characteristic structural feature of classical modernity was, as we stated previously, functional differentiation. Consequently, in classical modernity, society consisted of functionally differentiated subsystems that were relatively autonomous in regard to each other. These subsystems were, of course, dependent on each other and on the rest of society, but each of them had its own specific function in society, as well as its own principles of operation or codes. To a certain extent, already, Marx, Émile Durkheim, and, especially, Weber elaborated on this sort of theory of modernity, and later, sociologists such as Talcott Parsons, Niklas Luhmann, and Jürgen Habermas, as well as Scott Lash and John Urry,

Table 1.2 Modern functional subsystems according to Niklas Luhmann

Functional subsystem	Its function in society	Its medium	Its medium code
(Capitalist) economy	Production ... of goods	Money	Payment/Nonpayment
Politics	... of collective decisions	Power	Owner/Object of power
Law	... of social order	Legality	Legal/Illegal
Science	... of new knowledge	Truth	True/Untrue
Education	... of qualified actors	Qualification	Qualified/Nonqualified
Art	... of world contingency	Beauty	Beautiful/Nonbeautiful
Religion	... of existential security	Faith	Mundane/Transmundane
Intimate relationships	... of emotional affection	Love or intimacy	Beloved/Nonbeloved
Health care	... of health	Illness	Healthy/Ill
Mass media	Dissemination	Information or attention	Information/ Noninformation
Sports	Physical exercise	Match	Win/Loss

Sources: Luhmann presented his own macrosociological theory of modern society above all in his work *Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft* (Society's Society, 1997). In addition, in the 1980s and 1990s, he published several studies of single modern functional subsystems. I have constructed Table 1.2 on the basis of all of these works

have formulated their own versions of it. Table 1.2 shows how Luhmann understood modern society's functional differentiation.

As such, functional differentiation can be understood as a complex historical process whose different dimensions influenced each other reciprocally. The spread of capitalist ways of action and the formation of politically centralized and territorially large states were the main factors in this process that created new centers of prosperity and power in society. Due to these two large-scale changes, different subareas of social action could, then, detach themselves from the medieval Christian order of life, after which they began to transform, in society, into relatively autonomous subsystems. In Protestant countries, the Reformation renewed the ecclesiastical life from inside, and at the same time, it adjusted this life to better correspond to the moral and spiritual chal-

lenges that the societal–cultural developmental process aroused. As Weber shows in his well-known work *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus* (The Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism, 1904–06), it was, in particular, by creating a new kind of attitude to work and entrepreneurship that the Reformation also actively accelerated the spread of a capitalist entrepreneurial mentality in society (see Weber 2010).

Due to the process of functional differentiation, universities and natural sciences also became released from the ecclesiastical control and began to practice empirical and experimental research, which often included an idea of technical utilization. This, in turn, created a basis for modern technology and, from the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries on, for the transformation of farming and trading capitalism into industrial capitalism.

Society's new economic–political structure created a cultural–political constellation in which artists were able to be emancipated from the direct control of churches and guilds, and later, also from the patronage of kings, courts, and wealthy patrons. These employers or commissioners were gradually replaced by cultural markets and an anonymous public, for whom artists, to a growing extent, now began to work. Through this, the premodern indefinite sphere of art transformed into the modern institution or system of art, as Habermas shows in his *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (Transformation of the Public Sphere, 1987a, published originally 1962). Unlike the premodern sphere of art, modern mediation institutions of art have aimed at reaching a wide public. In the eighteenth century, they included, among others, publishing houses, bookshops, public libraries, galleries, public museums, public concerts, permanent theaters, the press, art criticism, and public discussion on art. Institutions like these were mainly born in the late seventeenth century and, in particular, in the eighteenth century, and most of them were market-based by nature; that is, within certain limits, they treated products of art as commodities. Their public, in turn, increasingly consisted of people belonging to the estate of burgesses or the bourgeoisie that had become wealthy by farming and trading.

Habermas (1987a, 25–28, 60–94) points out that these newly born markets for art and the commodity form of art were historically progres-

sive phenomena, since it was due to these that artists were now able to express their own personality and their own view of the world more directly. In his art-theoretical magnum opus, *Die Kunst der Gesellschaft* (Art as a Social System,² 1995), Luhmann, in turn, thinks that, originally, the modern subsystem of art focused on the production of beauty and “world contingency.” Thus, by creating aesthetic and fictional worlds, modern works of art have showed that the real or existing world is not the only possible world; other kinds of worlds, for example, more beautiful ones or socially more just ones, are possible as well. This was, according to Luhmann, for a long time the main function of the modern system of art in society. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, this kind of connection between art and beauty has, however, gradually lost its former self-evidence, but the creation of fictional or alternative worlds is, Luhmann continues, characteristic of contemporary art as well.

To this we may perhaps add that, quite obviously, the alliance between modern art and the contingency function has been ambiguous. On the one hand, by means of modern art, social actors have been capable of better questioning existing social arrangements and worldviews, but, on the other hand, this feature in modern art has also encouraged devotees of art to be mentally flexible and helped them to adjust themselves to the dynamics of modern society, that is, to continuous societal changes. In this sense, modern art has possessed both a critical and an adjusting side function in society.

Although the sphere of art constituted already by the late eighteenth century a differentiated subsystem, it was not until the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that the idea of art’s autonomy began to become important in this subsystem and the rest of society. In this respect, Kant’s *Kritik der Urteilkraft* (Critique of Judgement, 1790), Schiller’s letters on aesthetic education (1794), and the art-philosophical writings of German romantics were important for the spread of autonomy thinking in European societies. Before this, the eighteenth century’s European art life was divided into two major branches, of which the aristocratic branch used to treat works of art as sources of entertainment and aesthetic pleasure or as symbols of the aristocratic class power. In contrast, the bourgeois Enlightenment culture regarded art and philosophy as a means for a radical moral–political education; in this situation, the bour-

geois branch had, thus, mainly an instrumental attitude to art and philosophy. However, after the collapse of the aristocratic society and the breakthrough of industrial capitalism, this social class began to give up its previous instrumental conception of art and, instead of it, to lay stress on art's independence of "external" goals. In this phase, Kant, Schiller, and German romantics gained a central position in Western thinking about autonomy.

Sociological theories of art have usually thought that the modern sphere of art was a relatively autonomous system from the late eighteenth century on. For Weber (1979), modern art's autonomy, primarily, meant that this art formed a *relatively independent value sphere* in society. Pierre Bourdieu (1992, 201–08) has later specified that this sort of autonomy includes the norm that aesthetic or artistic values cannot be reduced to economic or political utility or, more generally, to nonaesthetic or nonartistic values. Consequently, an aesthetically or artistically valuable work can be incompatible with established moral or religious values, and a work such as this might also lack a clear-cut economic or practical function. In his "Hymne à la Beauté" (Hymn to the Beauty, 1861), Charles Baudelaire expressed the core content of this aesthetics of autonomy in an elegant manner. In this poem, the speaker of the poem categorically says that he does not care whether the beauty comes from God or Satan; all that matters is the fact that it makes the days of our life more meaningful.

"Hymne à la Beauté" came out in the second edition of *Les Fleurs du Mal* (The Flowers of Evil); the first edition of this collection of poems was published in 1857. This work and its public reception show how a differentiated sphere of art had achieved more freedom of expression by the mid-nineteenth century, but at the same time, how it could be driven into a conflict with other spheres of society, in this case with law and morality. After the publishing of the first edition of the work at issue, Baudelaire was brought before the court "for the disparaging of moral and good manners." As a result, French court imposed a fine on him, and certain poems in his work got a ban on publication that continued, in fact, until the year 1949. Hence, for example, Baudelaire's poems on lesbian love came out almost a century later than they had been written.