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Édition électronique

URL : <https://journals.openedition.org/etudesphotographiques/3437>

ISSN : 1777-5302

Cet article est une traduction de :

Élites économiques et création photographique - URL : <https://journals.openedition.org/etudesphotographiques/2815> [fr]

Éditeur

Société française de photographie

Édition imprimée

Date de publication : 9 novembre 2009

ISBN : 9782911961243

ISSN : 1270-9050

Référence électronique

Raymond Darteville et Michel Poivert, « Financial Elites and Photographic Creation », *Études photographiques* [En ligne], 24 | novembre 2009, mis en ligne le 21 mai 2014, consulté le 09 juin 2022.
URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/etudesphotographiques/3437>

Ce document a été généré automatiquement le 9 juin 2022.

Propriété intellectuelle

Financial Elites and Photographic Creation

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- 1 Most of the essays in this issue were originally presented as papers at a recent conference entitled *Les élites économiques européennes et la création photographique* (Europe's Economic Elites and Art Photography).¹ United around a common aim, they seek to open new fields of research by analyzing the relationship between art photography and money, and by examining how, from the middle of the nineteenth century to the present, the former is incorporated into the general economy.² Inspired by a vital, ongoing interdisciplinary dialogue, the ideas put forward by these contributions are central to analyzing present experience and inquiring into the monetary stakes involved in modern images.
- 2 Professional historians are much preoccupied by the ubiquity of money and of images in contemporary society. It is important to remember here that the study of certain complex problems was revived at the beginning of the 2000s, following the example of medievalists and scholars of antiquity.³ One such problem is 'the constructed nature' of the image and 'the circulation of visual contents ... characterized as symbolic goods and advertised or exchanged within a cultural field structured like an economy.' Other conferences have discussed the stakes involved in the production, the dissemination, and the social and political uses of images: the image as a historical object.⁴ Lastly, the importance of 'the economic dimension which appears from the start as an essential factor' (André Gunthert) was heavily emphasized at a recent conference on the history of 'public images,' the illustration of current events in the press.⁵ In this context then, what can be the contribution of a study of the past and present behavior of the elites, which presided over the invention and the dissemination of the photographic medium? How can we evaluate their role in comparison with what lies at the root of the new economy of the image: technological advancements leading to the development of the photography industry, the commercial impact of a real market opened up by mass reproduction, the consumption of images, and the acquisition of an exchange value

through their use in advertising? In short, shouldn't art photography be grappling with the socioeconomic dynamics of the culture industries or indeed with their current financialization? We feel that this question needs to be addressed because French economic and cultural historians, seemingly more interested in money matters concerning the press, literature, film, theatre, and music, have only rarely turned their attention to the objects considered by photography studies despite the fact that, from the very beginning, these objects have been developed in a capitalist system.⁶

- 3 Historians have used the term 'elite' ever since Vilfredo Pareto defined the concept as a social category (*Traité de sociologie générale*, 1916; English translation *The Mind and Society*, 1935) that Pierre Bourdieu and his followers call the 'dominant class.'⁷ There are several reasons why they have embraced this concept as a methodological tool. To begin with, it is both a pliable and a complex concept, which makes it possible to bring together a variety of social categories that are differentiated by observation scales, allowing for several levels of analysis. Furthermore, the study of the role of elites, particularly in art photography, benefited from the epistemological break of the 1980s and 1990s. This was brought about by the reexamination of the social divisions and predetermined analysis grids, and resulted in a wider inclusion of those social actors who make up the elites, which interact as much in the political field as in economic and social fields.⁸ In addition, the fruitful dialogue between historians, economists, and sociologists led to the construction of 'new categories of the social' (Alain Desrosières, Laurent Thévenot), which have contributed to the development of the subjects studied by economic history, specifically by giving more room to organizational analysis and the study of businesses and innovations.
- 4 In light of the above, the social actors who, in the middle of the nineteenth century, ushered in photographic techniques, can be viewed in terms of certain criteria (influence, prestige, power) as well as in terms of their 'mental tools,' their level of education and cultural practices. Originally, art photography blossomed at the heart of the business class, but its desire to emphasize its difference from an 'industrious culture' (the photographic industry) placed it also at the centre of an 'aristocratic culture' (Paul-Louis Roubert). These 'forms of re-appropriation or the permeability of social groups' raise the issue of 'the high stakes always involved in establishing social and economic differences.'⁹ The issue thus raised, implies an approach that is of particular interest to the history of photography because historians seldom use concepts such as artistic taste, technical innovation, and forms of consumption, which shape the social identity and the imagination of an economic elite. In considering the shaping of social identity, two further factors must be taken into account: sociability¹⁰ (membership in clubs, circles, salons, and learned societies) and networks; and the political dimension, including public educational initiatives and public support for creative endeavors. This is particularly relevant in view of the fallback onto private initiatives (philanthropy and patronage) that we will discuss.
- 5 Matters of commercial and monetary exchange cannot be dissociated from geographical dimensions (regional, national, international) and territorial reconfigurations. Therefore, a better understanding of the transformations that occurred in the field of photography and the role of economic elites is to be gained by expanding the interaction between fields of inquiry (socio-economic and political). These dimensions emerge quite clearly in the essays dealing with the disruptions (wars, social and political crises) that have marked the second half of the twentieth century.

The memories of the reconstruction of West Germany after 1945 (Anaïs Feyeux) and those of the spatial transformations of the former GDR after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 (Raphaële Bertho) are relevant examples that give us a better grasp of the political redefinitions, of the structuring of the photographic industry (training, building, innovation, dissemination), as well as of the close relationship between a state in the process of reconstruction, the fragmentation of a territory, and the development of a market for the new industrial practice of photography.

- 6 Instead of making political use of the past, photography takes, as it were, the opposite direction and finds itself at the core of the loss of memory. Since it is associated, just like 'German memories,'¹¹ with a history of tremendous upheavals – territorial and religious – and radical political breaks,¹² and also with the combined action of the governments of the *Länder*, local groups, businesses, and foundations, it becomes both a means of capturing the 'embodiment of enduring givens' (*des paramètres de cristallisation persistants*) (Pierre Nora) and of understanding the new stakes involved in the modern era at hand. It is clear how much the relationship between art photography and the German elites¹³ is nourished by a set of emblematic, symbolic, memorial, and economic values.

- 7 The second major axis of our reflection is the question of the role of money in the creation of modern images and the pressing need for an economic reading of modern art. Money 'is not only the foundation upon which most economic practices rest; it is also the basis for most social exchanges; it shapes various representations, thus making a notable contribution to the forging of mentalities.'¹⁴ Notably, it has been studied by such pioneer sociologists as Georg Simmel (*The Philosophy of Money*, 1900) and more recently by economists who are attempting to construct an anthropology of money (Michel Aglietta and André Orléan, in particular), as well as by historians. Nevertheless, in the realm of artistic practice, research on the subject has been mostly concerned with price fluctuations (money as a measure of value) and with various monetary transactions (the acquisition and exchange of goods). Above all, the role of money is studied so as to allow for a better understanding of the construction of the idea of the market (economy, society, and culture) in which photography is offered. Considerations on the passage from a traditional economy of the image, based on 'commodification' and 'reproducibility' (Estelle Blaschke), to a new economy of the Web, based on electronic data processing and free-exchange, extend the scope of our reflections to present day conditions (André Gunthert).¹⁵

- 8 Any discussion of the market leads inevitably to questions regarding the alliance, strengthened in the twentieth century, between photography as art, commerce, and patronage. In Germany, the origins of the role played by foundations, whose names evoke such families as Bosch, Krupp, and more recently Mohn (Bertelsmann), are found in the relationship between the 'Protestant ethic' and 'liberal philanthropy' fostered in the nineteenth century by the powerful liberal bourgeoisie of the great cities. In the United States, foundations (the Carnegie before 1914, the Rockefeller since 1917, and the Ford after 1945, to name the most famous) are inextricably linked with the development of the country and its international influence.¹⁶ Since the beginning of the twentieth century, American philanthropy has organized itself by building a very flexible and innovative network of knowledge that brings together the public and the private.¹⁷

- 9 This systemic approach, so characteristic of the United States, and so weakly developed in France, has obvious repercussions in the field of photography, for no one can deny that United States, in the twentieth century, played a leading role in commercial know-how, market development, the development of institutions devoted to the art of photography, and in the 'evolution of taste, to say nothing of the global industry and culture of images.' The alliance between 'art and commerce' (Julie Jones) occasions an examination of the close ties established between artists and dealers, as well as distributors and advertising executives. Central to this study then is also the 'ideology of marketing'¹⁸ with its strong socio-cultural connotations, given the social representations and the shared beliefs of the different players in the market.
- 10 In this issue of *Études photographiques*, contributions to the question of the role of the economic elites, which are at the heart of an expanding market, sometimes present a 'decentered' view, which allows us also to analyze the history of photography in terms of international exchanges.¹⁹ The latter reveal a creative and, at times, conflictual dialogue between aesthetic, institutional, and critical models, which expresses 'a vision of photographic modernism permeated by European works and practices.'²⁰ This, of course, raises the question of the relationship between the European cultural model and American modernism, which relies on the crucial support of foundations for the teaching, creation, and dissemination of works of art. In turn, this question raises others, namely, what is the place of art photography in an art market which henceforth abides by the rules of the economics of convention (André Orléan), and what are the reasons for the contemporary transformations of patronship, both in terms of the forms of investment in culture that it represented in the past for economic elites,²¹ and in terms of the changes in the system of values espoused by our societies that it reveals.
- 22
- 11 Our era, therefore, is no longer one in which the connection between photography and economic power can be described by three prevailing types of relationships: the commission (often public), the market (understood as speculation), and collecting (often subject to the sole dictates of taste). The analytical frameworks provided by these categories made the history of photography heir to the history of art. However, since the 1980s, a history of photography critical of the collusion between research, collecting, and the market has put a dent in the figure of the learned collector by revealing certain vested interests that, for a long time, were passed over in silence.²³ The refutation of certain myths does not indicate the return of a materialist history where only contextual determinations can be taken into account. Rather, it is the hallmark of a cultural history of artistic creation where money becomes apparent within mechanisms whose social complexity and various forms have already been alluded to. The salient aspect of current research is the interaction between economic and artistic phenomena. Thus, historical accounts can no longer be content with a vertical reading, the impact of money on the production of images; they must consider the dialectal relationship between artistic creation and acquisition in a context where the economic elite, whatever its socio-historical form, knows that it can only identify itself as such by being attentive to artistic innovations.
- 12 The phenomena of the interdependence of artistic creation and economic elites are strong historic markers, but their analysis does not take away from the irresistible power of images. The research undertaken and the results presented in this issue demonstrate the extent to which the value of photographs fluctuates, and this not only

in terms of their exchange value, but also in terms of all the criteria according to which they are judged, and, in particular, those of aesthetics and cultural heritage. Be they snapshots or prints by masters of photography, scientific or press photographs, visual material online or an image bank, all photographic images are given a value whose fluctuating nature stems from historical conditions.

NOTES

1. The conference took place at the Institut national d'histoire de l'art (INHA) on November 13, 2008. It was organized by Histoire culturelle et sociale de l'art (HiCSA), Université Paris I, and the Institut européen de la mémoire économique et financière (Imef). The proceedings were videotaped by the Archives audiovisuelles de la recherche (AAR) of the Escom (Équipe sémiotique cognitive et nouveaux médias), Fondation maison des sciences de l'homme (FMSH), and are available online at www.archivesaudiovisuelles.fr
2. This research project is the result of an in-depth exchange of ideas I undertook with Michel POIVERT at the invitation of Guylaine DARTEVELLE, art historian and researcher at the Imef. The exchange began with a reflection on the relationship in art photography between painting and photography, markets and commerce, images and modernism.
3. See Laurence Bertrand DORLÉAC, Christian DELAGE, and André GUNTHER, 'Image et histoire,' *Vingtième siècle: Revue d'histoire* 72 (October-December 2002).
4. Christian DELPORTE, Laurent GERVEREAU, and Denis MARÉCHAL, eds., *Quelle est la place des images en histoire?* (Paris: Nouveau Monde Éditions, 2008).
5. See Thierry GERVAIS and A. GUNTHER, 'La trame des images. Histoire de l'illustration photographique,' *Études Photographiques* 20 (June 2007).
6. There is no mention of photography in Patrick EVENO and Jacques MARSEILLE, eds., *Histoire des industries culturelles en France aux XIX^e -XX^e siècles* (Paris: ADHE, 2002). See also P. EVENO and Nathalie SONNAC, eds., 'L'argent des médias,' *Le Temps des médias* 6 (2006).
7. See 'Élite(s)' in *Dictionnaire critique de la sociologie*, ed., Raymond BOUDON and François BOURRICAUD, (Paris: PUF, 1994) (1982), 225–32; and Guy CHAUSSINAND-NOGARET, 'Élites,' in *Dictionnaire des sciences historiques*, ed. André BURGUiÈRE (Paris: PUF, 1986), 242–5. For approaches other than those of sociologists and political scientists (chiefly Pierre BOURDIEU and Ezra SULEIMAN), see for the nineteenth century Patrick VERLEY'S concise presentation, 'À propos de la 'prosopographie' des élites économiques: un retour à l'anecdote, une sociologie du patronat et/ou une nouvelle entrée dans le champ de l'histoire économique?,' *Nouvelles approches en histoire économique. Revue d'histoire du XIX^e siècle* 23, (2001): 202–10. The methodological contribution of Christophe CHARLE, *Les Élite de la République 1880–1900* (Paris: Fayard, 2006) (1987) is a useful complement to VERLEY'S approach.
8. 'Histoire et sciences sociales. Un tournant critique?,' *Annales E.S.C.* 6 (November-December 1989); and C. CHARLE, ed., *Histoire sociale, histoire globale ?* (Paris: MSH, 1993). For the fallout of problematic questions in the history of economics see Dominique BARJOT and Patrick FRIDENSON, 'Où va l'histoire économique?,' *Historiens & Géographes* 378 (mai 2002).
9. See the introduction by Sylvie APRILE and Judith Lyon-Caen to *La bourgeoisie: mythes, identités et pratiques*, *Revue d'histoire du XIX^e siècle* 34 (2007): 7–17.

10. See Jean-Pierre CHALINE, ed., *Élites et sociabilité en France* (Paris: Perrin/Fondation Singer-Polignac, 2003).
11. Étienne FRANÇOIS and Hagen SCHULZE, *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte*, 3 vols. (Munich: C. H. Beck Verlag, 2001–2003). French translation *Mémoires allemandes* (Paris: Gallimard, 2007).
12. For recent research on the GDR, see Emmanuel DROIT and Sandrine KOTT, eds., *Die ostdeutsche Gesellschaft. Eine transnationale Perspektive* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2006).
13. Regarding German elites, see Hervé JOLY, *Patrons d'Allemagne: sociologie d'une élite industrielle: 1933–1989* (Paris: Presses de la FNSP, 1996); and H. JOLY, ed., *Formation des élites en France et en Allemagne* (Paris: Éditions du CIRAC, Université de Cergy-Pontoise, 2005).
14. See Alya AGLAN, Olivier FEIERTAG, and Yannick MAREC, eds., *Les Français et l'argent, du XIX^e siècle à nos jours*: Conference papers of the Association française d'histoire économique (Université de Rouen, March 29–31, 2007); see also Hubert BONIN, 'L'argent des banquiers et la culture: Entre mécénat et identité,' in *Histoire des industries culturelles en France aux XIX^e–XX^e siècles*, ed. P. EVENO and J. MARSEILLE (note 6), 259–82.
15. With regard to this question, see Franck AGGERI, Olivier FAVEREAU, and Armand HATCHUEL, eds., *L'activité marchande sans le marché?* (Colloque de Cerisy-la-Salle, June 4–11, 2008).
16. See Ellen CONDLIFFE-LAGEMANN, ed., *Philanthropic Foundations: New Scholarship, New Possibilities* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999); and Giuliana GEMELLI and Roy MACLEOD, eds., *American Foundations in Europe: Grant-Giving Policies, Cultural Diplomacy and Trans-Atlantic Relations, 1920–1980* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2003).
17. See Olivier ZUNZ, *Why the American Century?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).
18. On changes in marketing and the workings of the market in the twentieth century, see Franck COCHOY, 'Le marketing, ou la ruse de l'économie,' *Politix* 53/14 (2001): 175–201.
19. For a new look at this question see Pierre-Yves SAUNIER, 'Circulation, connexions et espaces transnationaux,' *Genèses* 57 (2004): 110–26.
20. See François BRUNET, Gaëlle MOREL, and Nathalie BOULOUCHE, eds., 'Paris-New York,' *Études Photographiques* 21 (December 2007); and Emmanuelle LOYER and Ludovic TOURNÈS, 'Les échanges culturels franco-américains au XX^e siècle: Jalons pour une histoire des circulations transnationales,' in *L'Histoire culturelle du contemporain*, ed. Laurent MARTIN and Sylvain VENAYRE, (Paris: Nouveau Monde Éditions, 2005).
21. See Jean-Pierre BABELON, J.-P. CHALINE, and J. MARSEILLE, eds., *Mécénat des dynasties industrielles et commerciales* (Paris: Perrin/Fondation Singer-Polignac, 2008).
22. Nathalie MOUREAU and Dominique SAGOT-DUVAUROUX, *Le Marché de l'art contemporain* (Paris: La Découverte, 2006); and Sylvère PIQUET and Jean-Michel TOBELEM, 'Les enjeux du mécénat culturel et humanitaire,' *Revue française de gestion* 167 (2006): 49–64.
23. See Abigail SOLOMON-GODEAU, 'Calotypomania: The Gourmet Guide to Nineteenth-Century Photography,' *Afterimage* 11, nos. 1 & 2 (Summer 1983): 7–12. Reprinted in her *Photography at the Dock: Essays on Photographic History, Institutions, and Practices*, 4–27 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).