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PROMOTION AND EXPECTATION - REFLEXIONS ON THE STIMULATION IN CREATIVE  
ART PROVIDED BY COMMANDS AND PATRONAGE

Sponsorship or patronage promote artistic creation by providing economical support for developing and executing innovations. On the same time any promotions means suggesting frames for the works in question, ideally by creating a specific climate of expectations, physically by offering a space for it in relation to which it has to function.

Being left without indications of what is expected from him the artist may seem perfectly free to fulfil his individual intentions, supported by the guarantees given. My thesis is however that he is almost inevitably exposed to indications and suggestions concerning the nature of his work, and that those indications may come from the sponsor or from tradition, even from the artist's idea about what may be expected from him - the difference is not decisive, and especially it is not consistently possible to make a distinction between the different levels of expectations, and sources of them. When making a command, a sponsor may refrain from giving any indications except those needed for locating the work and indicating economical limits. He can still be rather confident that the artist is reached by numerous conditions, and will have to work them through when developing his ideas. First, he has been chosen in a selection, giving relief to certain qualities in his work. Most often it is possible to figure out which qualities have given the command. Secondly, he has been assigned a specific space for his work, and this space is not neutral. If it is a collection, the nature of the collection may be an incentive - even the idea made about the collection unknown to the artist can function that way. A public space makes demands for formal interrelations, but it is also a social space, which makes demands for symbolical interaction. Local conditions mean further expectations.

In discussion different types of sponsorships and promotion of contemporary art we must, in my view, try to analyse not only the formal achievements, but also the interplay of expectations and responses to them which form the dynamism of any commission of art. When considering the liberty of creation of the artist we might as well assess his will end need for communication with the sponsor or public behind this one, as taking into



account whether or not there is possibilities for a creation in which expectations are not part of the dynamism.

Mostly AICA has met in discussions concerning thematical issue or questions concerning artistic development. The organisers have this time elaborated guiding questions which direct our attention to the structure of art life and its impact upon creation. We are thus given free choice whether we want to stay inside art production, considering different models of sponsorship to be as many ways to promote a self-contained art activity which consumes the support in realising its own independent goals - or transgress the border between artist and public in looking in the sponsors for direct stimulations related to the art production. My intention is to give attention to the latter possibility.

It may seem to be the objective of sociology rather than of art criticism to consider the directive effects of demand and patronage upon artistic creation, but when addressing ourselves to sociologists we mainly find that they decline to discuss matters of art in terms other than of immediate relations to society. But in our discussions here we will meet representatives of sociology and maybe we will find ways to discuss also the content of art works in its relation to society - which in my view would mean to reach from a sociology studying art to an art sociology.

In any case, the tradition of art critics to consider art works in their interrelation to other art works and to focus upon questions of development and originality, and of quality, do not facilitate our approach to this type of problem. No doubt, the development in the last twenty years has contributed to the opening up for a discussion which takes into account the active art public not only as a group of consumers, but also as participants in the art act. Maybe we will be able to discuss tradition and immanent expectations as part of the creative process as well as part of the present art situation. This is what my contribution is intended to argue for.

When analysing the present situation in art we certainly find common denominators - for instance I think many among us not in recognition when reading the formulation in the guiding questions of the organisers that truly creative artists in our days most often avoid producing objects and decoration, but question or frame of life. But do we do so because we share a survey of art developed inside some sort of well-defined "channel" typical of art life, and thus excluding from the very beginning other aspects of creativity and originality? Or is our reaction due to the possible fact that we by habit and expected functions in society are watching the areas in society where decoration and art objects are expected to figure and to be part of the novelty aspect? Or may it even be possible that we, in our relative symbiosis with the body of artists all over the world, really cover the field of possible manifestations simply by being able to supervise an entire professional category from its early recruitment at the art schools and onwards? So that we really know what is brought to the market?

My questions may seem rather rheoretical in relation to the substantial directory questions from which I depart. But when considering the impact of support and demand from private and public sponsors, we must be aware of the possibility that we do not cover the entire field of innovation and



fulfilment of aesthetic tasks and/or expectations. On the other hand, we might be fairly well informed about what sponsorship we have to count with, at least in the public sector. So we might have the basis for discussing the interplay between public sponsors and creative artists. I think our discussions will provide substance for further analyses in this area.

We depart from an implied doctrine of non-intervention from the side of the sponsor in the work of the artist: art is to be promoted, not made to order. Normally, an established artist when discussing a demand has not even to stress his need for free hands in his creative work; no responsible collector or representative of any public body would talk in terms of directives in this situation. And still it is most evident that there are developed very specific guide-lines for each art commission. It certainly happens that an artist receives the commission for something "unexpected" - as might for instance have been the case with Tinguely when making his selfdestructing devices at the Museum of modern art in New York more than a decade ago. But in examining his superb conceptions we easily find the relation to the sponsor's specific status and needs and the conception of the device as well as of its use. And we also find it related to Western tradition as well as rooted in a modern iconography. The point is not that his work was unexpected, but that it was sufficiently related to different concepts and types of expectations to be able to create the experiencing of something deviating.

It is expected that a museum of modern art offers us unexpected experiences, thus the Tinguely representation was in one way perfectly in harmony with the convention of the sponsor. Seen from another aspect his achievement stresses the convention of modernism and the meaning of an experiencing this: the artist can thus be seen as the maker of a symbol, and a symbol in the public field is always dependent upon conventions, even simplifications.

Hopefully there will be no misunderstanding: while the mere fact that Tinguely's device had unexpected aspects etc can be seen as part of the formation of a conventional symbol, the individual qualities of his device and the performance were still very much able to provide the sensation of something original, to create a dynamic experience and enchant the spectator sensually. Moreover, in the moment of creating an conventional symbol, creation is the main point, and not convention.

The situation is quite different when the work demanded for a public space has to be maintained, in eternity as we want to think at the moment of inauguration (if the work seems to be successful). We never get rid of the symbolical aspects, because the mere fact that authorities demand a work of art is symbol of something which is given distinction by the fact that most public spaces are not provided with art. It may be the symbol of conscience of culture, of the "humanity" in art as opposed to the mecanisation of our general frame of life, etc. Such symbolical effects must not be the concern of the artist, because by his mere activity he consistently is stressing them. But further, we know that most conscientious artists do have several very narrow looks at the spaces they are to work with, and discussion with representatives of the contractors. No doubt those investigations serve the sensual effect of his work as part



of the space, its visual interplay with the space. But to an extent which most often is inaccessible to our analysis the contacts also involve formation of the basis for the symbolical function of the work at the spot.

The problem is to find the guide-lines which are the real conditions for a non-haphazard relation between the sponsor's expectations and the result - and which at the same time must be of such a nature that the artist is able to work according to the laws of creation as he senses them, in a lack of constraint. Evidently, such guidelines must mainly be implicit, and in reading contracts we rarely find much of them. Still, the fact that there can be some confidence on the side of the sponsor makes clear that such implicit guidelines are near at hand, in some system of conventions about art or about art in public space.

In the case of the private sponsor, we might of course expect the intention of obtaining the "unexpected" to be a more dominating incitement than for the public sponsor. For the latter a non-sophisticated public will always create a pressure for some simple justification of the presence of a work of art and for its general features. The private sponsor might well be willing to follow an artist in his free explorations, and even find those explorations be a sufficient reason for his interest. We also find a tendency in the art life related to exhibition life and to the intimate frame of life to stress the unlimited freedom of artists, and not infrequently to do so in contrast to the conditions for art in public space. According to my initial reservations concerning our possibilities really to discern what is original in art now, I should refrain from stressing any historical tendencies. But in the early 60s, we witnessed in several cases that an active and privileged public accepted to experience the artistic act as the fundamental fact, and to retain just a fragment witnessing of it as the material result, a relic rather than an art object. And certainly there are still going on art activities in which the private sponsors are part of the game rather than acquirers of produced objects.

Still, as we may consider while having the privilege of visiting so many outstanding private collection in Switzerland, it is easy to see that even in a very qualified frame it is not primarily the unexpected which directs the interest and the acquisition. Unnecessary to say, most collectors follow a very defined line of preferences. To what extent does this line converge with defined expectations, and to what extent does it leave a field open for real innovation in art? What is included in the manifest preference for certain artists, and even for certain periods of those artists' works? And when such preferences are shared by many private sponsors, what does such a preference amount to as an emission of "guide-lines" for the artists in question, and for other artists? This question could of course be translated into a purely economist question: to what extent does preferences among collectors direct art production? And if this question is answered by a general affirmation of their importance, we may ask to what extent and under which conditions private sponsors have shown ability to promote creation in clearly deviating directions.

This question cannot be discussed without the implication of the role of art galleries, especially vanguard galleries. It has been debated



from a critical aspect in relation to the problem of the commercialisation of art. There is more to be said on this issue, but one feature common to most commerce is a wish for basic harmony with the values of the customer. To some extent the galleries summarise their collectors' common ambitions, and one among those is want for original achievements. Art galleries form a channel for original art achievements, but they have to judge originality from the aspect of a system of reference common to sufficiently many amateurs. Already in this precondition is inherent a tendency for institutionalising original features, and still more for formalising the frame inside which they are expected to appear.

The tendency among artists to change from making art objects and decorations towards achievements which question our frame of life, which is stressed in the guiding question, certainly has to be seen in relation to the extreme limitation of the frame of functioning offered to artists by a commercial system of promotion and mediation. Systematically to market something, be it just for the sake of promotion or for economical benefit, means grouping and typifying the product whichever it is, to invite for standardisation of production and thus to make exploitation more important than creation. Partly this process is inevitable because of the need to reaching a potential public with structured proposals, attractive even to the one who has no immediate familiarity with the art in question. But this tendency has made the creative artist as well as the critic all the more shy of any formulation of expectations and exigences related to the artist's work: once the formulation given there is a basis for standardised production.

And still: expectations do come through, and most often in a much more structured and complex way than in the cases just discussed - cases where the alledged total freedom of the artist are supposed to be axiomatic. The rising interest for public art, expressed e.g. by the continuous work of the AICA group under professor Kuhirths responsibility, directs our attention to an area where expectations and tradition must be assumed in most cases to form a rather consistent mass of indications to the artist, no matter whether or not those expectations reach verbal formulation. In following series of artistic enterprises for the public space in our country, I have been able to observe how the artist himself most often applies rules of the tradition even when the commissioner has not been aware of them. Not least general symbolical functions are normally respected and exploited by the artists, and in cases of obvious deviation it is often question of a voluntary contrast to tradition, thus intended to be seen. Of course there is a fundamental distinction between the artists' intentional application of tradition in his choice of subject matter, type of object-symbol in relation to the offered space, genre and ambience in relation to the function of the space etc, and prescriptions forcing the artist from the beginning to follow certain ideas. Only, the more common public commissions become, the more implicit expectations must be present behind the commissions. When an artist after having received many commissions suddenly don't obtain any, this may induce him to revise his own development and to make comparisons - in other words the pressure for selection of means for expression typical for the art market may also enter the area of public commands.



Finally, not infrequently artists are faced with rather defined demands which may concern as well subject-matter as formal features. It seems to me that it has become much more easy, less delicate, to discuss defined exigences with artists possibly because they have grown aware of the fact that liberal commissions just may be more undistinct without being less imperative than the command in itself.

As a contrast to the situation in relation to a public commissioner, at least one asking for contributions for the publicspace, it is of course possible that the private sponsor may offer possibilities for research and unlimited development to the artist - under the condition that there is an understanding between the sponsor and the artist about that. I am eager to listen to colleagues who have experiences in this direction to share with us. Especially would I find it interesting to know whether it is question of a neutral financing and undirective encouragement - or of a collaboration between artist and sponsor.

What I have given here is perhaps more questions than answers, and my questions are intended to invite my colleagues for a discussion to what extent and in which forms there is a dialogue between artist and commissioner in the development of a command - and to what extent this dialogue is stimulating respectively harmful to artistic creation and development. I think that when discussing different models of patronage and sponsorship we will have to resort to this dimension of relations. It cannot be axiomatic that any possible constraint laid by implication or straight talk upon the artist by his commissioner, public or by a tradition which he feels to share with the public, is experienced as harmful to the creative activity, or to art in a timeless meaning. It might also be a possibility that the artist wants a dialogue, and that he accepts, positively, certain framing conditions for his work in order to reach a field of real communication with his public. Certainly, it will then be a question which public he is able to communicate with, and which public is apt to receive his communication in a meaningful way.