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A MARKET IN VOGUE

Fashion photography in Sweden

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ABSTRACT: The aim of this study is to understand and explain what I shall call aesthetic markets. A particular market of this kind is analysed, namely the market for fashion photography in Sweden. To understand and analyze a market from a sociological perspective, I argue, one primarily needs to perceive the construction of meaning within the market. The actors in this specific market construct what may be called 'aesthetic values'. The market also distributes status of identities as a result of the interactions between producers and consumers. Photographers develop personal styles, and when a style intersects with status an identity is constructed in the market. The status distribution also structures the prices in the market. The conclusion of the article is that aesthetic markets can be conceptualized as status distributors of identities. The conclusion also suggests that this approach to aesthetic markets may be useful for studies of other markets as well.

Key words: economic sociology; markets; status; aesthetics; fashion and photography

Introduction¹

Markets are key components in today's capitalism and in the economic sphere in general. As a result, sociologists have showed great interest in markets (e.g. White 1981; Swedberg 1994; Lie 1997; Fligstein 1996, 1997;

1. The author is grateful for comments by Richard Swedberg, Reza Azarian, Olof Dahlbäck, Christoph Deutschmann, Johan Heilbron, Javier Izquierdo, Karin Knorr-Cetina, Wendelin Reich, Árni Sverrisson, Laurent Thévenot, Harrison White, and two anonymous reviewers. I also would like to thank all the people in the market for fashion photography who have contributed to this study. My research has been financed by a grant from the Swedish Foundation for International Cooperation in Research and Higher Education (STINT). An earlier version of this article was presented at the conference New Economic Sociology in Europe, 2–3 June 2000, in Stockholm.

Callon 1998).² This article focuses on how we can understand markets in general, but its more specific aim is to perceive what I shall call 'aesthetic markets'. The example that will be used is the market for fashion photography in Sweden, which is a market in which aesthetic values play a key role. In my opinion, other markets can also be studied and understood with the same approach as used in this study.

American sociologists dominate the discussion on market, and quite a few of the studies conducted by North Americans draw on the works of Harrison White (e.g. 1981, 1988, 1992, 1993b, 1998, and White and Eccles 1987). North American economic sociologists have basically approached markets from a structuralist position. In this article, however, I draw on a type of sociology which has been inspired by a classical European tradition, phenomenology. This essentially denotes that meaning construction becomes a central question. To study aesthetic markets means, moreover, to focus on the intersection of the aesthetic sphere and the economic sphere. As a result, the article melds with a broad sociological tradition which began with Nietzsche, Simmel and Weber, and according to which there exist different spheres in society, each with its own values and internal logic.

The article is organized in the following way. I will first make a quick presentation of the market for fashion photography. Then Harrison White's theory of markets is presented. The remainder of the article is devoted to an empirical account of the market for fashion photography, which I treat as a so-called production market. The article ends with a discussion of the role of meaning for understanding markets.

An overview of the market for fashion photography

The focus in this section is on the types of actors that can be found in the market for fashion photography, and how these are related to each other.³ I conceptualize the field of fashion photography in Sweden as a market

2. Ever since Adam Smith, economic theory has viewed the market as a natural mechanism orientated to price (Smith 1981 [1776]; Neale 1957; Hausman 1992; Swedberg 1994: 260–3; Lie 1997; McLean and Padgett 1997: 216–23). On the whole, however, economists' interest in markets has been rather limited (cf. Baker *et al.* 1998: 147–78). Some important contributions to a sociological theory of markets have been made by economists, for example, Alfred Marshall (Swedberg 1994; Aspers 1999). For empirical studies of markets by sociologists, see e.g. Smith 1981; Baker 1984; Abolafia 1996.
3. The empirical part of this study draws on the following material: discussions with informants, thirty-five interviews (mainly photographers, art directors and fashion editors), participant observation during 1999 to 2000, and numerous interviews with photographers found in photographic magazines. For more detailed information about the research methods as well as general information about this market, see Aspers (forthcoming 2001). To repeat, my approach is phenomenological (cf. Schütz 1976 [1932], 1962, 1964, 1966, 1996; Aspers forthcoming 2001). It must be underlined that

because of the economic transactions that take place between the producers and the consumers of the pictures. I use a broad market definition, which means that I take much of the 'social system' of the market into account. The producers (i.e. the photographers) hold the key role within the market for fashion photography. The photographer takes pictures, for which there are two different but distinctly recognizable consumers: magazines with a section on fashion and advertising agencies.

The photographer is in contact with what may be called co-producers since fashion photography is a collective process (cf. Becker 1982).⁴ The photographer, for example, usually has an assistant (cf. Rosenblum 1978). The assistant is like an old-time apprentice, and the economic reward is usually modest; in some cases the salary is below the minimum wage. The assistant has access to the studio and camera equipment on weekends and in the evenings however, and may also have free access to film and printing materials.

Many established photographers have an agent who represents the photographer in dealing with the customers. The agent takes care of practical and economic matters and is much less involved in the aesthetic decisions of the photographer. Agents usually receive a fixed percentage of the income of the photographer: about 20 per cent.

A fashion photographer also uses models, hair-stylists, make-up artists and stylists in order to produce photographs. The stylist is perhaps the most important person in the whole production team, with the exception of the photographer. The task of the stylist is to put the 'right' clothes on the models, steam the clothes and make sure that they are chosen, picked up and returned. This, however, does not mean that the stylist always decides what clothes the model should wear.

The model is absolutely central to the business of fashion photography, and with the logic of fashion being what it is, it is important for a photographer to have a model in vogue. Today many models do not look like a 'classical beauty', and the period for which a model with a special look is popular is quite limited, sometimes to only a few months. The hair-stylist and make-up artist are usually less important than the stylist for the process of production. The stylist, the hair-stylist and so on are all, so to speak, on the same 'level' in the production process. They all take part in the production of the photographs. In the market for fashion photography

phenomenology in itself is not a theory about markets, but a scientific approach used to study social phenomena, such as markets. Limited space makes it impossible to outline the phenomenological approach here, but a detailed text on this approach will be sent upon request to the author.

4. Some sociological studies have been made of photography (e.g. Bourdieu 1990 {1965}) of the market for art photography (e.g. Giuffrè 1996, 1999), and of photographers (e.g. Rosenblum 1978; Becker 1982).

it is the custom that the photographer decides who will be part of the production team. The photographer, however, is also a consumer. She buys the film and the photographic material, and orders deliveries and so on from actors who operate in other upstream production markets, in which the photographer is a consumer. The roles in all these markets, it should be added, are stable over time.

So far in this article only the producers' side of the market has been discussed, but what about the consumers' side? How do the photographers get their assignments for the magazines and the advertising agencies? First of all, these two types of customers – the magazines and the advertising agencies – must be treated separately. The photographer gets no money at all for her publication from some magazines, or so little that it is not even enough to cover the production costs. Only a few magazines in Sweden pay the photographer so much that there is an economic profit involved.

Most magazines demand a certain 'look' in the pictures they want, that only cheap (or expensive) clothes from certain clothing companies are used, that the model is of a certain age, has the typical 'look', and so on. The photographer will realize how much freedom a magazine will grant her simply by looking at the pictures it publishes. Furthermore, in most cases the photographer herself has to make the contact to get a chance to publish in the magazine in the first place, after which the fashion editor says 'yes' or 'no' to the proposal. The advertising agencies run commercial campaigns for clothing companies, and for the pictures they need to hire photographers.⁵ In most photography for advertising purposes the photographer has very little aesthetic freedom; the economic rewards on the other hand, are good. A well-known Swedish fashion photographer makes about \$2,700 (24,000 Swedish Crowns) a day plus expenses when she is working for an advertising agency. In editorial fashion photography the price is the same for everyone; but it may be only one-third or even less of the going rate in advertising photography.

The photograph that is being produced is of course the goal of the process. The picture is defined through a process of negotiation before, during and after the shooting. This interactive process can best be seen during the actual shooting. The way the photographs will look in print is usually the result of a compromise, which reflects the relative strength of the actors. When an art director is involved she is in a strong position, because she represents that final customer and has developed, as well as sold, an idea to that final customer (who has put money into the project). Seen from the perspective of the art director, however, the fashion photographer is only one actor in the production team of fashion pictures.

⁵ For a discussion on advertising agencies and their market, see Baker *et al.* (1998).

The client, the copywriter and others who work with the art director are also important.

To some extent, much of what has been said above may be reduced to two basic dimensions: the economic and the aesthetic (e.g. Bourdieu 1998: 109–12). There is, for example, a relation between the economic benefits and the aesthetic freedom of the photographer to decide what and how to photograph, which can be formulated in the following way: the more aesthetic freedom, the less money. It is furthermore clear that there exists a huge gap between advertising, on the one hand, and editorial pictures in magazines, on the other. Advertising photography pays in general much more than editorial photography.⁶ An interesting sign of this is that editorial fashion stories typically include the name of the photographer and the other participants in the shooting. This is much less common in advertising, where the name of the photographer is not always displayed in the byline unless she is so famous that it is an asset in itself.⁷

Given all this complexity of the market for fashion photography, what theory is most suitable for approaching this market? I argue that Harrison White's theory of markets represents the natural point of departure for a sociologist studying markets. What follows is an overview of White's theory of markets, and constitutes the theoretical inspiration for this study. Not all aspects of White's theory are covered in my discussion however, but only those that will help us to understand the market for fashion photography.

An approach to production markets

Harrison White's theory of markets aims at explaining the type of markets that constitute the bulk of the economy, so-called production markets.⁸ White argues that the theory of markets used by the economists does not account for two important empirical circumstances of production markets: namely that the number of firms in a market seldom exceeds a 'dozen or so', and the way that firms manoeuvre to conquer market shares in a specific market (White 1981: 517–18, cf. 541). He defines markets as 'self reproducing social structures among specific cliques of firms and other actors who evolve roles from observing each other's behavior' (White 1981: 518).

6. This phenomenon should be connected to the idea of craft versus art (e.g. Becker 1982; cf. Rosenblum 1978; Bourdieu 1996 {1992}).

7. In one campaign, the clothing company GAP used the lead singer of the Red Hot Chili Peppers, Anthony Kiedis, and not only stated this in the advertisement, but also said that the picture was photographed by the star photographer Annie Leibowitz (Slemmons 1998: 131).

8. For a presentation and an interpretation of White's market theory, see Wächter (1999).

White follows classical economics in identifying two sides, or two *roles*, in any market: producers and consumers. Even though White's theory is largely occupied with the producers' side, it should be emphasized that the consumers' side intimately affects the undertakings of the producers; and in this sense the consumers play a key role in his theory (e.g. White 1988). The driving force behind the evolution of markets is the differentiation of the producers' products, and via that the differentiation of their identities (White and Eccles 1987: 985). A key point in the theory is that producers relate to each other; or as White and Eccles express it, producers' 'primary focus is each other' (White and Eccles 1987: 984). It is also in the process of focusing on each other that firms differentiate themselves from one another.

The consumers discriminate between the different producers in the market 'in ways summed up as *quality*, but no one can quantify this in advance or independent of volumes shipped' (White and Eccles 1987: 984; emphasis added). Another way of putting this is to say that firms place themselves in niches, thereby acquiring identities (White 1992, cf. 1993b). The firms try to control their identities, but this can only be done in relation to other producers, whose niches and identities they also try to control (White 1998). According to White, it is through this process that the social structure of the market is constructed.

One reason for the preoccupation of a firm with its 'competing' firms is that this is how it acquires knowledge. The producers see themselves and their competitors in the 'mirror' of the market, but the producers cannot see through the mirror to the customers (White 1981: 543–4). The market is consequently a mechanism that provides firms with knowledge about other firms. It is 'a mirror', to use White's metaphor, since the result is only seen after the firm has presented its own terms of trade to customers. White defines terms of trade as the revenues received for the volumes shipped from the different firms which operate in a market (e.g. White and Eccles 1987: 984). The production of a market, White notes, is an unintended consequence of this 'internal' orientation among the producers (White 1993b: 168). From this perspective, supply and demand are simply by-products of the process of finding and reproducing identities in the market.

Information and knowledge play important roles in White's model. The information necessary for the decisions of a firm (for example, the situation of the market, the positions of the other firms in the market and so on) comes not only from observations within the market itself, but is obtained 'over luncheons with others in the trade, from trade associations, from one's own customers, and so on' (White 1981: 519). White has later called this 'gossip' (White 1993b: 167, 1995: 62). He consequently assumes that the producers are well informed and know who their competitors are. The

market is also defined in terms of its boundaries: the producers can tell who is in the market and who is not (White and Eccles 1987: 985).

However, what about the other side in the market, which so far has been discussed only indirectly, namely, to the consumers? The consumers, according to White, do not know each other, nor do the producers know them. The consumers can basically say 'yes' or 'no' to what the producers offer, i.e. the terms of trade of the producers. Consumers react passively to the acts of the producers. They react to what White calls the quality of the products, since the consumers can compare the commodities with the commodities of other producers. This, says White, means that quality is related to what is in 'the eye of the beholder' (1981: 522).

According to White, prices are set in relation to the relative competition of the producers within a market. The profit may be higher in some markets than in others, that is, the absolute level of price cannot be affected by the actors themselves within the market; only the relative prices are part of what can be negotiated. Service and transaction costs may also be the result of historical traditions. As White and Eccles phrase it: 'prices are not something that mysteriously emerge from "the market"'. They are part of the terms-of-trade and are socially constructed by the actors involved in the exchange' (White and Eccles 1987: 985).

A market as White formulates it in another place is an interface where the producers are 'jockeying for relative positions', something which means that the market is made up of actors from both sides of the market who hold positions relative to each other (White 1993b: 166). To repeat, the market is a social construction which is unintended and self-reproducing; producers reproduce the niches they have created. A market is consequently an outcome of the acts by the actors, who all share the same perception of the market. When the actors orient themselves in this way, they also reproduce the 'social fact' of the market (White 1988: 227–9). But not only is the market reproducing itself; the actors also reproduce themselves in the network of interaction that makes up the market (White 1995: 67–71). On a more general level, White is talking about a social order driven by a wish for control of identities, and this produces a kind of pecking order (White 1992).⁹

White's theory of production markets is in my opinion very innovative and a natural point of departure for sociologists who study markets.¹⁰ But

9. It is not only White who sees a parallel between the notion of the market and other spheres of society; Bourdieu also stresses this point and relates 'market' to 'field' (e.g. 1984 [1979]: 85–6, 95–6, 1991, 1996 [1992], 1998).

10. Some sociologist who have studied markets draw upon White's thinking. The examples include Baker *et al.* (1998), Faulkner (1983), Faulkner and Anderson (1987), Baker and Faulkner (1991), and Podolny (1993, 1994). Some of these studies have also focused on markets in which aesthetic values are important.

is it also possible to apply this theory to the market of fashion photography? Several aspects of White's theory do not seem to fit. As I see it, one is that, contrary to what White argues, both the photographers and the consumers of pictures, by and large, are known by the actors in the market. Another difference in White's theory is that the producers are clearly more than 'a dozen or so', and one cannot really say that the photographers hold market shares in the sense that White suggests. The dual structure of the consumers' side is definitely not covered by White's theory. Moreover, I study individuals, not firms. Finally, meaning construction is not central to White's theory, even though he acknowledges the importance of Husserl (White 1992: 21).

To sum up the argument so far: markets are social constructions. Different types of markets exist; I also follow White and reject the idea that all markets are exchange markets. The market for fashion photography shares many of the assumptions of a production market, and it is to this market that photographers orient themselves. The consumers of photography, on the other hand, often use photographs as an input, together with other inputs, in order to produce what they sell. This means that the consumers of photographs are not only oriented to the photographs, but also to other producers, who operate in different production markets. Furthermore, photographers interact with companies in their respective production markets, that is, 'upstream' in the flow of production.

The interface between the 'upstream' producers and the photographers is especially noticeable in commercial campaigns. Camera producers such as Hasselblad have often used well-known photographers (consumers) to promote their cameras. The consumers in this production market supply the producers with an identity through this interaction. Furthermore, a consumer in one market is a producer in another. In this sense a firm has many different roles and identities in the various markets (interfaces) in which it operates. In most markets they are consumers, but in at least one market they are also producers; and it is through this that their identity is most strongly defined. All in all, there are many reasons for speaking of production markets, defined from the perspective of the producers (for a graphic summary of the argument, see Figure 1).

Fashion photography as a market

How are we to understand the particular market of fashion photography and other aesthetic markets? I suggest that this market can be seen as a status distributor of identities, but how does this market come about and how can we understand the process and the way in which this market is constructed? Since this study deals with the production market of fashion

Downstream⇒

⇐Upstream

Figure 1. The market for fashion photography (one production market upstream and one production market downstream)
Note: Every actor holds a stable role as a producer in her own producer market, but she is always a consumer when facing another interface. She then hold two roles (C = Consumer, P = Producer). The market for fashion photography is only one market in the stream of markets. Three main categories of actors can be found in the market for fashion photography: photographers, advertising agencies, and magazines. A dotted line represents a relation in the market.

photography, the main focus is on the photographers. The analysis consequently takes its departure in the role of the photographers in the market. I will then move on to the fashion editors and art directors who pay for the photographs. I will finally discuss the market as an outcome of the interaction of the two sides of the market.

Entering the market

The market is clearly not a static interface since actors both enter and exit. The normal entrance is as an assistant to an already established photographer (e.g. Rosenblum 1978: 25–9). The assistant carries out some smaller assignments and may, for example, take test pictures of new models.¹¹ Once the assistant has enough jobs, or when she thinks that she can make it on her own, she starts her own business. This is not a major step for most assistants. Their former employer can provide some contacts, minor assignments that they pass on to their former assistants, and the like. New photographers do not need a large budget, but they definitely need a cellular phone so that they can be reached at any time. Later in her career the photographer can rent an office, a darkroom, and perhaps also a studio together with other people. Ten years ago, for example, every photographer was expected to have a studio, a darkroom and other photographic equipment; this is what it meant to be a ‘fashion photographer’. A consequence of this change is that a photographer today – if she does not have a studio of her own – can survive on fewer photographic assignments than in the past. This is also one of the reasons why today there are more fashion photographers than ever. One result of this change in the market for fashion photography, which is very noticeable, is that today each photographer has to develop her own distinct style. With the increasing number of photographers, personal style has also become more important in Sweden.¹²

Assistants often dress in a ‘cool’ way; their identities resides partly in the connection with the photographer for whom they work, but these identities are consolidated by her clothes, certain music, visits to special

11. Test pictures for models constitute a special ‘branch’ of photography. The best models are sent for, so-called ‘go-sees’ (see e.g. the book by the well-known fashion photographer Juergen Teller (1999)). Models whom the agencies do not believe in have to pay for their test pictures, and if they are lucky some may succeed, but most will not. Those who are ‘short’, ‘fat’, or just do not have the right ‘look’ may be included in the less glamorous ‘people section’ of the agencies.
12. Some older photographers, who used to say ‘yes’ to almost any kind of photographic job, find this problematic. When looking at their portfolios, one sees many different styles and types of objects. Some succeed in developing more distinct styles, though this is not an easy task.

bars and knowledge of who is working with whom. Furthermore, assistants typically read fashion magazines and can talk about the photographic light, what models 'their' photographers have worked with; they know the names and styles of the photographers, and so on. To be in the market is to know what is known by those who know. The assistants, however, are not only talking about their own photographs, partly because they have not yet had the time to build up a portfolio, but also because they have not yet been identified among the photographers in the market. They do not, in brief, yet have a distinct identity as a photographer. Still, by being orientated to the market, the assistants reproduce it, and in the process they also internalize the market and its structure of meaning. In short, one can view their activities as a process of socialization.

The market for fashion photography seen from the perspective of the photographer

The perception of the market, however, is not identical for all the actors. A new photographer typically orients herself to the best photographers in the market, international as well as Swedish photographers. This can be seen, for example, by the number of magazines the photographers read.¹³ The orientation to other photographers is largely indirect; the photographers look at their own and their rivals' pictures in fashion magazines, which are ordered by status. What the photographers mean by the status of a magazine can best be understood in terms of aesthetic freedom. Aesthetic freedom especially means the possibility of publishing one's pictures in magazines printed on high-quality paper, without the pictures being cut to pieces by the layout and the like; but aesthetic freedom is also connected to the social aspect of status. High-status magazines are those in which photographers who are seen as high-status photographers publish their pictures. In most cases trends in fashion photography emerge in the interactions between high-status magazines and high-status photographers. Moreover, this interaction contributes to the status of the photographer and the fashion editor of the magazine (and the magazine itself) who interact with one another.

The process of photographers sorting themselves into various segments in the market does not imply an economic stratification (cf. Bourdieu 1998: 109–12). In fact, the magazines that are likely to promote the career

13. All those who are involved in the market read a vast number of fashion magazines. If one visits a photographers' agent, a fashion magazine, an advertising agency or a photographer, one cannot avoid seeing a huge number of fashion magazines. It is clear that 'insiders' buy a substantial number of magazines. This is well-known fact in art worlds (e.g. Becker 1982: 53).

of a photographer are in many cases those who pay the least. The social arena of the magazines is perhaps best viewed as an enormous advertising board, on which the photographers are posted. Actors in the market see the 'observables', i.e. the photographs, and the styles of the photographers published in the magazines. Thus, connections emerge between the styles and the status of the magazines. Consequently, style is aesthetic, status is 'social', and identity intersects the two (cf. White 1993a: 64–6).

The market for fashion photography is separated into two parts: magazines and advertising agencies.¹⁴ When it comes to the magazines it is also worthwhile to talk of a commercial dimension and an aesthetic dimension. The distribution of the identities of the magazines is what makes it possible to distribute the identities of the photographers. To take an example, some fashion photographers accept every offer and work with commercial magazines and those who are low on the aesthetic dimension. It may, for example, be a magazine for teenagers that publishes pictures with cheap clothing, and which demands that the details of the clothes must be easy to see. The models that the photographer is restricted to use in cases like these are the less popular models. The best models are 'not allowed' to work for magazines with low status. In this sense, the model agencies contribute to and stabilize the status order of the market. In sum, a low-status photographer works for low-status magazines, with low-status models and low-status stylists. It is important to point this out, since the photographer, who is the leader of the photographic production 'team', is judged by the result of the entire team. Even if the photographer herself does an excellent job, but someone else in the team makes a mistake, the photographer will be blamed. The photographer stands and falls with the pictures, since they are the 'end-product'. This is the meaningful unit that is judged in the market.

A photographer may also be forced to take pictures for economic reasons. This clearly restricts the possibilities of the photographer having a successful career. To deal with low-status magazines typically leads to the production of pictures that are not highly valued by other photographers or by potential art directors. In this sense one may speak of publications that may *harm* the career of a fashion photographer. A further consequence is that if a photographer says 'yes' to every client who calls her, she will have to produce pictures over which she has little control, and this may also erode her ability to 'build' a style. These pictures will be published, looked at and talked about by others. Extensive involvement in this kind of photography not only takes time from producing 'good' pictures; many photographers also think that it affects their capacity to take pictures

14. This separation is a simplification. A more detailed analysis cannot be made here, but the reader who is interested may want to correspond with the author, or look my forthcoming book (Aspers 2001).

that are less 'commercial'. This phenomenon is also found in the art worlds (cf. Becker 1982: 96). A result of this process is that a differentiation takes place between high-status and low-status photographers.

Thus, the photographer's identity in the market is contingent on the magazines in which she has published. A photographer may become identified with a particular magazine, or a group of magazines. This identification may be positive if it is a high-status magazine, but also negative. Photographers think of other photographers largely in terms of their pictures. Another way to phrase it would be to say that it is styles that are distributed. Styles, however, do not exist in their own right; a style is always connected to a name and to a certain photographer's identity in the market. The more that is known about a photographer, for example, from interviews in photographic magazines and gossip, the more is added to the stock of knowledge that the other actors have of the photographer in question. Not all photographers are known personally by the other actors in the market; it is rather so that identities of photographers in the market are known. Style is consequently a key component of the identity of the photographer.

Style

The notion of style is quite complex, but very important. Style is necessary for the differentiation of an aesthetic market (Gombrich 1968: 353). One may say that style in aesthetic markets resembles the notion of 'quality' in White's theory (White and Eccles 1987: 984–5; cf. Podolny 1993). Style is a personal identification marker of the photographer. Style, I argue, is a multidimensional self-referential picture system produced and extended over time.¹⁵ A style may include a variety of items, such as angle, choice of model, pose, background, composition, light, hair-style, make-up, tone, and references to the content of the picture. At the same time, the notion of style in visual culture is nearly impossible to express verbally. The word 'style' is often mentioned in interviews, but when respondents are asked to explain what they mean by this term, they typically show pictures or have problems in describing what they mean. It is, for example, easier to talk of other people's styles than your own. Agents, who have to judge the economic values of the styles of the photographers they represent, sometimes say that they have to have a *feeling* whether or not the style can make money in the market. Despite the problem of how to

15. This notion of style is different from the historical notion of style as used by art historians. For additional definitions of style, some of which are more 'collective', see e.g. Gombrich 1968: 352–61; Goodman 1978: 23–40, 1984: 130–1; Bourdieu 1991; White 1992, 1993a.

verbally describe styles, most choices made by an art director or a fashion editor are made on the base of style.

Photographers and other actors in the market also talk of *trends*. A photographic trend can be defined as a collective phenomenon, in the sense that many photographers are grouped together by an audience, which largely consists of photographers and other actors, for example, stylists. The so-called 'heroin chic' photography is an example, of a trend (see e.g. Nickerson and Wakefield 1996). A style may, consciously or unconsciously, be turned into a trend if enough people start to use it.

Style is personal and may follow the wave of a trend. Some photographers may surf on a trend, and drown when it declines. To have a strong identity in the market means that one has been able to live through several waves of trends. Only a few photographers manage to do this and become the 'icons' of the market whom everyone 'knows'. In the international market photographers such as Richard Avedon, Irving Penn, Steven Meisel and Helmut Newton are examples of such icons. In a local market only a few manage to do this, but those who succeed are recognized by everyone in the market and very much talked about.¹⁶

The styles of famous photographers who work for the well-established fashion magazines have a considerable impact on what is regarded as 'good' fashion photography. Other photographers and potential customers recognize what these photographers do; this audience is very important for their fame (White 1993a: 121–2). Certain photographers' styles consequently affect the market more than others. It may not be enough just to publish in a high-status magazine to affect the style in vogue; it is also important that one's pictures are 'talked about'. Eventually, when elements of a style start to appear in other magazines, a trend may emerge. A certain style will thereby – unintentionally – affect other photographers, who have similar styles, so that they also ascend in the status order. Through this process the meaning of good fashion photography is reconstructed in a process of interaction.

How can a photographer succeed in becoming someone whom everyone recognizes within the market? Obviously she has to be a 'good' photographer, but as many photographers are good this is not enough. Some photographers stick to their own style and work with it, and may eventually get a chance to shoot for the magazines that define what type of fashion photography is in vogue. Nevertheless, no photographer can

16. In this context see Fligstein, who speaks of big actors (e.g. companies) as contributing to the stability in a market (Fligstein 1996: 667). Well-known photographers are like orientation markers: they can be references for discussions, or an unknown photographer may be described in a conversation as being similar in style to a known photographer. These icons create narratives of the market; these narratives cover, for example, how they work, how they treat the models, the assistants and so on.

decide on her own if the market will appreciate her style. The interface always implies that the value of a certain style is decided by 'the other side', in particular by the magazines. This is not done intentionally by the magazines, and that the photographer is endowed with status is an unintentional outcome (cf. White 1981: 543–4, 1993b: 168). There are few objective criteria for what is in vogue, and since these will change, the photographer cannot simply imitate. To imitate makes the photographer a second or third rank photographer, and creativity is what this market celebrates. Some fashion photographers who shoot for mail order companies and low-status magazines view, in contrast, imitation as a natural part of their photography.

The market for fashion photography as seen from the perspective of the consumers

Fashion editors of magazines orient themselves primarily to other fashion editors. They are, however, defined by themselves and by others in the market in relation to the magazine they work for. 'Their' magazine has an identity in its production market; that is, the market for magazines. The fashion editor can only transcend her role to a certain extent, and thereby affect her identity. What attracts photographers is the track record of the fashion editor and the magazine in question; that is, what photographers the magazine has published. The higher the status of the photographers, the less eager they are to publish in a low-status magazine. The fashion editor of a low-status magazine knows this, and there may be no point in contacting high-status photographers. The reason for this is that if a high-status photographer works for a low-status magazine, she may lose the jobs she does for other magazines. In cases where an unknown photographer gets published in a high-status magazine, it is of course positive for the photographer. The outcome for the fashion editor, however, is not that easy to determine. If the photographer later becomes famous, the fashion editor will receive recognition for having picked a good photographer early on, but it is also risky to work with a new photographer. Fashion editors may therefore try to control the photographers they work with. Even if no Swedish magazine writes a contract with their photographers, many do use the strategy to tell the photographer not to shoot fashion pictures for competing magazines. If the photographer breaks this agreement she will not get any additional assignments.

The advertising agencies (in practice the art directors who decide which photographer to use for their campaigns) see the pictures of the photographers that are published in the magazines. The byline in a magazine contains the name of the photographer, the stylist, the models, and others

involved in the process of the production of the fashion story. This fact makes the magazines function as a big advertising board for the actors involved, and from which art directors can choose the photographers they find interesting enough to study more carefully, and perhaps also ask for their portfolios.

What the consumer essentially buys is the style of the photographer as presented in her portfolio. The portfolio itself can be seen as an aesthetic narrative which shows the style of the photographer. The consumers expect the narrative to continue as a trajectory into their own projects, but, in addition to this, they sometimes hope for a surprise. The photographer, in brief, is expected to add something to the idea of the art director (cf. Rosenblum 1978: 83–4). However, as only a few of the photographers get the chance to work for a big client, the market for commercial campaigns – propelled by advertising agencies – is much smaller than the market for fashion editorials. The number of photographers who actually are candidates for making campaigns is smaller than the number of photographers who are published in fashion magazines. In this sense only a few photographers, often with high status, are candidates for the big campaigns.

The art directors, like the fashion editors, are distributed along a status order. Their status is largely due to what clients they have, and have had, as well as the campaigns they have made, and the number of prizes they have won in advertising competitions. They are oriented to their own production market, and their status is largely achieved in the interface with the clients of the agencies; that is, upstream in the chain of production.

The market as an unintended outcome of interaction

No single actor sets out to create a market. The market is rather there for everyone to enter, and all the actors who operate in the market affect it, but to different degrees. Especially at the beginning of her career an actor in a market is oriented to other actors who play the same role. Photographers try to get published in magazines that give them freedom enough to do what they want. This gives them pleasure and gains them respect from others who take part in this 'game'. Finally, they also make money out of this. They position themselves in relation to each other in the process of interaction with the 'other side'. The photographer perceives the status of the other side, and the consumers are consequently not (as in White's model) simply a mirror that reflects back decisions, but can be clearly identified. The status orders are reconstructed, if only as 'confirmation' of the present status orders by this interaction. The interaction, which results in publication, is made in broad daylight and is visible to all

the actors in the market. By saying 'yes' or 'no' to the proposed interaction partner, both producers and consumers can to some extent control their own identities in the market. Mobility in the market is a consequence of this process, and one can therefore talk of careers in relation to markets (e.g. Faulkner and Anderson 1987).

Yet is not the strategy of photographers to create an identity with a narrowly defined style simply a rational strategy to make more money? This is certainly part of the story, but not the main part, since even if a photographer succeeds in creating a unique identity with her style, success is not guaranteed, as she has no control over the other key aspect of her identity in the market, namely status. A photographer can only acquire status through the process of interacting with the other side (even though the reference group, so to speak, is always other photographers). Style itself is therefore no guarantee of fame. Only a few will succeed, while others may photograph for mail order companies or stop doing fashion altogether. The less glamorous route is much easier to take, but it is not what the young and aspiring photographers are dreaming of, and they do not orient their activities in this direction.

The interaction of the two sides in the market is what produces the product. What both the producers and the consumers do is important for the end result, since a demand for high standards from consumers contributes to the quality of the pictures. The product, as mentioned above, is also constantly being constructed. Meaning is constructed in this process, ultimately the meaning of what fashion photography is. The interface between high-status consumers and high-status producers is what counts for most in the market, but meaning is reconstructed in every interaction. The fact that low-status actors (for example, some photographers) watch the activities of high-status actors means that the high-status actors are confirmed in their role. The less successful photographers function in one sense as a seamless background against which successful photographers flash their fame.

Price is an outcome of this whole process. In economic terms demand equals supply, but this is a tautology, since they are equal by definition (cf. White 1993b: 170). In contrast to this argument, I have presented a different view of how prices are produced. Aesthetic differentiation, I argue, is combined with the status distribution of styles, identities are generated, and it is out of *this* that prices emerge. Prices are not the result of a purely economic process; they are rather the outcome of a social process.

The findings presented in this article support White's theory. Thus the producers, i.e. the photographers, orient their actions to other producers through the manifested pattern of interactions between photographers and consumers which they observe in the fashion magazines. Moreover, the photographers' identities are generated in their own production

market. Three things in this market, seem not to fit White's theory however: the consumers are not anonymous to the producers, the notion of quality is not particularly useful for a market with aesthetic values (such as this one), and finally, the producers are not only 'a dozen or so'.

Concluding remarks

To understand a market, I argue, means first of all to understand how meaning is constructed in the market. The micro-based approach used in this study takes perspective of the subjects as its point of departure (cf. Schütz 1976 [1932]), and in this way it proceeds to an understanding of the market for fashion photography. It is the actors who reconstruct and reproduce the market. The market for fashion photography is consequently, as in all production markets, an outcome of the interaction which includes an economic transaction between the two sides: producers (photographers) and consumers (fashion magazines and advertising agencies). It is the interaction between these two that produces meaning, for example aesthetic meaning. For the photographers, the status order among the photographers is deeply meaningful. The status order, as already noted, is only understandable in relation to the aesthetic differentiation of styles. The differences in style between the photographers are stratified into a status order, due to interaction with the consumers' side. Identities are also created in this process. The distribution of status is furthermore turned into money, since price functions as a stabilizer for the status order in the market rather than the other way around. This way of conceptualizing a market is very different from the economists' notion of the market as simply a mechanism for the formation of prices. Price is of course produced at the end of the process, I argue, but it is always preceded and driven by the construction of meaning (cf. Bourdieu 1998: 109–12).

My results also indicate that the identities of agents (individuals and companies) are largely defined in relation to what they produce. The identities of photographers, art directors (and the advertising agencies) and fashion editors (and the fashion magazines) are mainly created in their respective production markets. Rental companies, camera and photographic equipment companies operate in their respective production market as well, and orient their activities to the consumers of their products, such as photographers (see Figure 1). Status is important in this market, and becomes increasingly important when the meaning of the 'product' (or the 'quality' of the product) is not 'entrenched' in the market (cf. Podolny 1993).

An additional point is that markets like the one discussed in this article have usually been studied as labour markets. To approach markets for

artists as production markets may, however, help to understand these 'puzzling' labour markets (Menger 1999). Notions such as identity, status and style are important tools in this effort. It should also be noted that the idea of aesthetic markets as outlined in this article is not so different from academic markets. The market for sociologists, for example, is similar to an aesthetic in the following sense: publication in high-status journals does not give so much money as status. Depending on their status, sociologists will or will not be employed by prestigious universities, get grants or not, and achieve high or low salaries. The idea of thinking of certain labour markets in terms of production markets may therefore be a useful one.¹⁷

Finally, even though the market for fashion photography is basically situated within what Weber called the 'economic sphere', it has a meaning structure and a construction that resembles traditional art markets rather than traditional economic markets (cf. Giuffrè 1996, 1999; Moulin 1987 {1967}; Plattner 1996; White and White 1993 {1965}). This indicates that the market for fashion photography is situated at the very intersection of the aesthetic and economic spheres. This suggests that the revised version of a production market that I have outlined in this article may also be helpful in understanding other markets.

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17. At the same time this way of looking at the issue represents a rejection of the idea of 'superstar' markets, as proposed by some economists (see e.g. Plattner (1996: 12–18) for a description of these theories).

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