

**Katarzyna Matul**

University of Lausanne

## **The Cultural Legitimization of the Poster after 1945**

The objective of my doctoral thesis is to analyse the process of cultural legitimization of the poster during the second half of the 20th century. The study focuses on the case of Poland while including elements of comparison with Switzerland and France. The research questions are: does the poster become a work of art in the second half of the 20th century? If the answer is positive (which is our hypothesis), what criteria are used, what artistic and political factors influence this change in the status of the poster? What role do different categories of actors play, individual or collective, but all interdependent with each other, in this process of enhancing the poster? Finally, how do the posters themselves, through their form, content and technique of realization, reflect this new status?

My hypothesis is that although the process of cultural legitimization of the poster is closely linked to the promotion of this medium by the communist authorities supported by curators, critics, art historians and publishers linked to the system, this process could not be possible without the active role of the artists. Their disagreement with the criteria imposed by the Communist Party, especially during the socialist realism, were crucial for creating evaluation criteria based more on artistic than political judgment. This objection of Polish poster artists was decisive in the transformation of the poster to a work of art and for its artistic international recognition.

Resorting to works of art sociology in an art history research proves to be extremely revealing in the case study of the Polish poster after 1945. In this context the works of Pierre Bourdieu are pioneer<sup>1</sup>. Yet Bourdieu's theory has been criticised in recent years regarding its' determinism, especially in Bernard Lahire<sup>2</sup> and Natalie Heinich's works<sup>3</sup>. The latter, together

---

<sup>1</sup> P. Bourdieu, *La Distinction. Critique sociale du jugement*, Les Éditions de Minuit, Paris, 1979 ; Pierre Bourdieu, *Les règles de l'art : genèse et structure du champ littéraire*, Seuil, 1992.

<sup>2</sup> B. Lahire, *La culture des individus. Dissonances culturelles et distinction de soi* [*The Culture of Individuals: Cultural dissonances and self-distinction*], Paris, La Découverte, 2004.

with Roberta Schapiro, suggest a theory, named by the *artification* neologism, supposed to surpass the deterministic aspect of Bourdieu's theory and describe the process of the transformation of an object into art in a dynamic way, while taking into account the actors' active role – who are no longer condemned to be solely occupants of positions that are assigned to them because of their social status. Our research fits within this dynamic perspective of *artification*, with a particular emphasis on the configuration of the different actors interdependent of each other. Thus, the theory of configuration, borrowed from Norbert Elias, proves to be particularly useful<sup>4</sup>.

---

<sup>3</sup> N. Heinrich, *Pourquoi Bourdieu* [Why Bourdieu], Paris, Gallimard, coll. Le débat, 2007; N. Heinrich, R. Schapiro (dir.), *De l'artification* [Artification]. *Enquêtes sur le passage à l'art* [Study of the transition into art] Editions de l'Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales, Paris, 2012.

<sup>4</sup> The configuration theory is developed in the seventies by the German sociologist Norbert Elias. Elias apprehended the society as a network of interdependences between individuals. The individual would never know to be isolated from the chains of interdependences which he fits into. N. Elias, *Qu'est-ce que la sociologie?*, Paris, Pocket, 1970 ; *La société des individus* [translated from German to French by Jeanne Etoré], Paris, Fayard. 1991 [1987].