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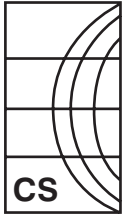
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# Contextual Knowledge

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**abstract:** The contemporary economy is characterized by design and marketing as means to create brands and market niches. An aesthetic economy is made up of many aesthetic markets that are distinguished by changing products and lack of an entrenched quality order to evaluate them. Aesthetic creative work plays a central role in this type of economy. This work includes design of the products sold in markets. The purpose of this article is to study what is here called contextual knowledge. The suggested approach enables us to better understand and research creative aesthetic work and aesthetic workers' knowledge. Three qualitatively different dimensions of contextuality are discussed. First, contextuality is related to the network of actors who contribute to the production of the items or the activities. Second, contextuality is related to various arenas of aesthetic expressions, such as visual art, which can be used as a source of inspiration by aesthetic creative workers. The third dimension of contextuality refers to the final consumer markets. Contextual knowledge must be seen against a backdrop of a shared lifeworld and it involves interpretation. This article draws on material from two empirical studies, one on the garment industry, and one on fashion photographers.

**keywords:** aesthetics ♦ creative work ♦ fashion ♦ garment ♦ knowledge ♦ photography

A large section of the contemporary economy is made up of aesthetic markets, characterized by design and marketing as means to create brands and market niches (Aspers, 2001).<sup>1</sup> Aesthetic markets lack a principle of order; it is instead taste, or what I call 'Nietzschean aesthetics', that matters for evaluating products. Order in an aesthetic market is a result of identities positioned in the social structure (Aspers, 2005b). Alfred Marshall (1920: 300–2) could see this tendency, and it was made central in the works of Edward Chamberlin (see Chamberlin, 1948). The unique market identity of an actor or a firm is not only a result of product differentiation, but should also be seen in relation to the way, for

example, the firm advertises and creates a visual appearance, in addition to the perceived 'quality' of the products. Moreover, the individual identities of the firms must be seen in relation to competitors in the market. Together with its market competitors a firm shares a collective identity (see White, 2002).

The creation and maintenance of a firm's unique market identity demand much from its staff, but I focus on the creation of the aesthetic side of the identity and those who do this in practice, here called creative aesthetic workers. This I do because creativity as a means to produce aesthetic differentiation is of great economic importance, but also because I think aesthetic work highlights the complexity of knowledge (see Matusik and Hill, 1998).

The purpose of this article is to study what I call contextual knowledge. The suggested theoretical approach enables us to better understand and research the activities and encounters of actors operating in the aesthetic economy. This means, in practice, to study the knowledge designers and fashion photographers' 'need' in order to operate in their respective industries. I claim that knowledge must be seen as a process, and that interpretation and understanding are essential components of knowledge. Contextual knowledge is here defined as the capacity to do what it takes in a situation. I study contextual knowledge in fields where creative aesthetic work takes place. To have knowledge in these fields boils down to know what to make in order to sell in a final consumer market.

The point is to study the conditions of knowledge that are needed in these industries, rather than the content of knowledge. Hence, the article looks at contexts in which creative aesthetic workers acquire and use knowledge to produce for their customers. This is not a static analysis. The knowledge generated is only possible to understand as a process, which is to reject the simple theory of knowledge than tending to see it as an 'object' that can be transferred. More specifically, I discuss three dimensions of contextual knowledge. First, contextuality is related to networks of actors, in addition to creative workers, who contribute to the production of the items or the activities. Second, contextuality is related to various arenas of aesthetic expressions, such as visual art, which can be used as a source of inspiration by aesthetic creative workers. The third dimension of contextuality refers to the final consumer markets. These dimensions must be seen in relation to a backdrop of meaning structure within a lifeworld that is used by the creative workers for interpretations.<sup>2</sup>

Creative aesthetic work is central to many different industries. I discuss the knowledge aspect in two specific industries, and more specifically within two groups: fashion garment designers and fashion photographers. The focus is on the knowledge needed to design for customers, and to take pictures for fashion stories (for advertising or advertorial use).<sup>3</sup>

This way of viewing knowledge neither denies the role individuals play, nor their status as pegs of knowledge. When an expert leaves a company she or he takes part of their knowledge along. In this respect human capital theory is valid. However, in order to explain how it comes that certain actors 'possess' knowledge, one must bring in social structure. But though positions in social structure may explain how it comes that individuals can acquire knowledge (Burt, 1992), it fails to connect to the everyday activities of actors. In other words, the purely structural account of the social networks actors operate within fails to provide explanations based on understanding of culture and values (Emirbayer and Goodwin, 1994). Thus, the structural approach cannot explain the situation in which actors in structurally equivalent positions act differently. To account for this one must consider the way, and the tools, used by actors to interpret these situations, and consequently how they will act.

The findings of this article, I suggest, can also be used for analysing other creative industries. One can also draw on the difference between design work at large garment retailers in developed countries and the design that is done in developing countries. The latter discussion can contribute to the important issue of upgrading among manufacturers in developing countries (see Palpacuer et al., 2005: 412).

### **Empirical Material and Methods**

The empirical material comes from two separate studies of creative industries, on fashion photography (Aspers, 2005a) and on design of garments (e.g. Aspers, 2006) – one may thus speak of 'two fields in one' (Hannerz, 2001). The material included covers the two sides of the market, i.e. buyers and sellers. This strategy does not isolate actors; instead the demands, interrelations and perspectives of both sides can be incorporated in the analysis. This means that the construction of networks and the cultural dimension of networks and domains are placed at the centre of the analysis (see Emirbayer and Goodwin, 1994; Mische and White, 1998). Sampling of people to observe and to interview was largely done to mirror actual industrial networks. I talked to various actors and as a result, the relations between them, and the way they talk about each other, provide a foundation for interpreting the interviews and the observations I made. The study on fashion photography is based on material generated in New York and in Sweden (mainly Stockholm), and the study on the global garment industry draws on material from fieldwork in Sweden, the UK, India and Turkey, as well as documents. The focus is on larger chain stores like TopShop, Marks and Spencer (M&S), Zara and H&M, as well as those less well known. These firms have a design department of their own. All in all, 58 interviews are included, though not all of them directly address

creative work. The main categories of creative workers I interviewed were fashion photographers and designers. Added to this material is participant observation and texts from, and on, the two fields.

The fact that I have drawn on material from two industries makes it easier to analyse creative work and knowledge. The two different sets of data were coded and analysed using N-Vivo. The three dimensions of contextual knowledge, which are theoretical concepts, are the result of a differentiation of the initial category 'knowledge'. This broad category was included in both the original studies. This differentiation is initiated by discussion in the literature (see later), but validated by the empirical material. Quotations are integrated in the results of the analysis presented in the following sections.

The first-order constructs, i.e. the constructs of the actors in the field of study, are the starting point of the analysis, but the second-order constructs, i.e. the constructs of the researcher, are the goal. It is the latter type of theoretical notions that form the basis of the main argument of this article (Aspers, 2004, 2005a). This short article only allows me to outline the ideal types, and connect them to a few examples taken from the field. Most of the notions I use are second-order concepts, which means that less of the ethnographic material is included.

## **Creative Aesthetic Work**

As mentioned already, in this article I focus on a certain group, creative aesthetic workers. Creative aesthetic work is separated from other kinds of work because it is both aesthetic and creative. Creative aesthetic work is distinguished from other forms of aesthetic work because it demands innovation and adaptation to current trends (this may include the 'design' of knock-down versions of designer brand wear, or copying the photographic style of a famous campaign). Also, peasants producing handicrafts do aesthetic work. A difference is that handicraft production is not evaluated according to the same principles as designer wear; it is to a larger extent than design a reproduction of tradition, which is almost the antonym of creativity.

There is a large literature discussing creativity (for an overview, see Burt, 2004). There are also bodies of literature studying the psychological (e.g. Sternberg, 1988; Amabile et al., 1996) or organizational aspects of creativity (e.g. Woodman et al., 1993). In addition to these texts, Schumpeter's notion of entrepreneurial action, which is characterized by combining essentially known elements to make something new, contributes to our understanding of creativity.

Creativity is here defined as the production of novel ideas that are seen as useful. It is according to this definition not enough to produce novel

ideas; they must also be seen as valuable by potential 'users'. A consequence is that the same idea can be seen as novel in one context, but not in another. This approach should be contrasted with those claiming that creativity is something individuals possess, and which can be judged independently of the situation.

By talking about work, I see it as an economic activity, i.e. something for which you are paid. That is, the activities I refer to are separate from art because they are part of the capitalistic economy; hence evaluated in terms of profit. Design of garments, for example, must be related to the activities of these firms in economic markets, where profit is the ultimate goal. Pure art revolves around values of uniqueness, innovation and creativity (without money as an end goal). This represents creative aesthetic activity, though not work. Creative aesthetic work, thus, can be seen as a mixture of these two 'pure types' of activities, artistic and economic.

### **Activities in the Aesthetic Economy**

What characterizes creative aesthetic work? And more specifically, what does it take to be creative? I begin by addressing the issue of inspiration, i.e. how are creative workers inspired? I then ask how they can determine, among the things that they are inspired by, what actually to do; and finally, I discuss the role that consumers play in the aesthetic workers' decisions.

Designers and photographers seem to be inspired by roughly the same things. Moreover, I have often heard them saying that they are inspired by 'many different things'. Some designers refer to books, magazines, movies or music when talking about what inspires them.<sup>4</sup> Photographers also refer to art and music videos. In both groups there seems to be resistance to refer to other peers, i.e. designers or photographers, as sources of inspiration. This is typical of 'creative workers'; among them there is a strong norm of uniqueness, and copying is not acknowledged, or even mentioned. In reality, 'creative' persons copy, or at least sample, a lot from the history as well as from the contemporary scene.

Many photographers, for example young ones who normally lack identities in the market, spend hours reading fashion magazines (Aspers, 2005a). This has a direct and an indirect effect on how they think about pictures, and how they make pictures. Moreover, photographers' pictorial styles are shaped by being around other members of the industry, their pictures and yet other photographers' pictures that are published in the magazines that 'everyone' reads.

How do aesthetic workers determine what they will do? The following story, told by a head of a women's wear chain, shows the process of

collective production of a fashion line within her firm. It also indicates how they get inspired and how this is related to the decisions they make:

The designers are the key actors in the start up of the process. They go to fashion and fabrics fairs, and we buy trend books, produced by different trend scouts, and the designers also attend many trend seminars. Obviously, they also check out international fashion shows, and what the big fashion designer names are doing. Out of this the designers make what we call a 'trend board'. This includes the trends we are going to work on the next season; it is like a source of inspiration with different pictures, colours, fabrics, that feel right for this season, and from this one starts off.

The process from idea until the line is for sale in the stores may take more than a year, and towards the end, only very small changes can be made, i.e. the window of opportunity gradually closes (Gronow, 1997). The aesthetic decisions are made, first within the larger frame that includes the general trends, and later on within the frame that is restricted by the identity and the corresponding market niche of the firms. The final result, the fashion line, is thus a result of a multitude of actors, inside and outside the firm. A similar pattern can be observed among photographers.

The design process, for example, may start with brainstorming, out of which a few concepts emerge. One or more concepts, such as 'sacrifice', can be the starting point in the creation of a fashion line. When I asked people involved how the ideas got into the design process, I was typically told: 'It is so difficult to talk about this'. Fashion photographers are involved in similar processes, though things usually go quicker. Furthermore, fewer people take part in the making of fashion pictures than in fashion garments. Photographers, art directors or fashion editors, who are the three main players in the making of fashion photography, often start out with an idea, but this idea is modified as a result of the interaction with other people who take part in producing the fashion story.

The production process includes many decisions on what to do. The aesthetic opportunity structure of what one can do aesthetically, i.e. for example in terms of taking fashion pictures, is immense. It is the knowledge of how to combine these components, of, for example, settings, models, makeup, narrative and so on, into a creative fashion story that is the difficult aspect (in addition to the practical knowledge of actually doing it). That is, information is usually not the problem; it is the knowledge of what to do with this information, or in more theoretical terms, how to turn information into knowledge, that is the crucial aspect.

This can be analysed also in the case of fashion design. To determine what fashion garments one should produce is not easy. Fashion fairs (see Skov, this issue, pp. 764–83) are not necessarily the best place for these actors to look for ideas. One buyer said that what is shown in these fairs

is 'old news', and something that they have already shown to the customers. How, then, does this actor know what is going on? I got the following answer: 'It is more [from] different trend institutes, different shops . . . in London or New York, and [I] check out what is coming out of the brand names.' There is plenty of information available in this industry, but to know how to interpret and how to put the different pieces together is the real problem that designers and photographers face.

What is the role of the final consumers in the fashion industry? Though West European garment firms have centralized design departments, they often use design input from their manufacturers, and staff in production countries can operate as scouts. However, it is unlikely that scouting is made by locals, simply because it would be to 'difficult' for them, as I was told. It is indeed a precarious task to decide what kind of fashion may interest the final consumers (see Entwistle, this issue, pp. 704–24). Only a person who knows the market in which the firm operates can make these decisions. Attempts are sometimes made to educate suppliers. So when suppliers' representatives visit the country where the retailer is based, or any of its markets, they may be urged to go and visit the retailer's own stores as well as their competitors'.<sup>5</sup>

What kind of knowledge do good suppliers have? It is important that they cater to the market that the buyer operates in. A buyer explains that good suppliers know the fashion in the final consumer market and that 'they are aware of the dos and don'ts of that country'. This includes also basic knowledge of 'what kind of things you run in summer, [and] what kind of things you run in winter'. Given this knowledge, a supplier is in a better position to offer what their buyers demand, as explained by a buyer: 'based on the new forecasts of colours, they mix up the colours, and they give us a range, suitable for this market'. This information that manufacturers and their designers sometimes get from their buyers does not include the details, but it nonetheless narrows the range of opportunities that are relevant. A designer working for a garment manufacturer clarifies this: 'Basically they are informing us what colors to be used for the coming season, what fabrics will be used . . . we have all this knowledge and we are designing according to this, so that they buy it.' If a supplier has a long-term relationship with a buyer, and because of this has received information and knows the final consumer market, it has a competitive advantage. This relation is an advantage for the buyer too, since the firm may get design input into their fashion lines for free. Design of garments is usually made based on the aforementioned 'trend board' (or 'mood board') that directs the general style, including types of fabrics as well as colours of a season. This more detailed information of the company, and the information about the fashion line, is not passed on to the manufacturers.



It is difficult to know about the final consumers, and it may be practically impossible if one is in a totally different context than the consumers. A garment vendor exemplified this: during an interview he mentioned what he thinks it takes to design for European consumer markets: 'one has to have IQ and an eye to see what people like; it must look nice'. He also says that one must be able to know how to make a designed item such as a shirt fashionable. This may not be easy, and later in the interview he said, 'some of the things that do sell in Europe . . . I do not understand. I don't like them.' It is, as White (e.g. 1981, 2002) has pointed out several times, not easy to see across the market interface, and this problem is aggravated if the actor is not in tune with the market he caters to.

To account for this 'knowledge' of garment designers, one must also bring in those who actually buy and wear the garments, or pay for the magazines. In the end, these people are at least indirectly involved in defining 'creativity' in concrete markets, though also co-workers and others in the networks of actors usually play an important role (Becker, 1982). Thus, the relation between those purported as creative and their audience, or consumers, is an intricate one.

### **The Isolated Creator**

I have now, though in brief, described the work process of aesthetic creative workers using actors' first-order constructs and my own descriptions. How, then, may one account for this theoretically? More specifically, how is it possible to further our insights into the knowledge that is needed to generate aesthetic commodities? The phenomenological perspective implies that one must account for the constructs actors involved in creative aesthetic work use. But the preceding description, including actors' first-order constructs, is neither a scientific account nor a scientific explanation of the sources of inspiration, the activities and what one must know about the final consumers. Explanations in the social sciences demand more than the quotations and excerpts included in the previous section.

Before I present what I consider to be a valid and fruitful account, I discuss the anti-sociological perspective on creative aesthetic work, which stresses the role of individual genius. This perspective argues that creativity is located in the individual. This discussion also helps to clarify the sociological perspective on creative work.

There are two slightly different versions of the individualized actor approach: one is that genius can be traced to the brain; the other is that it is located in the body of the person. I start with the idea of the isolated mind. Kant introduced the idea of the artistic genius, who owed his or her talents only to nature, since his or her knowledge is a priori (Kant, 1968: 307–8, see also Gadamer, 1990: 48–87).

Another German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche, also emphasized the individual and criticized everything that even remotely reminded him of collectivism. Nietzsche, in contrast to Kant, does not believe in natural born geniuses. He argues, instead, that geniuses acquire knowledge (Nietzsche, 1986: 87; §164), which means that a person may become an artist by working hard, and by being different. Nietzsche defines genius as follows: 'To will an exalted end and the means to it' (Nietzsche, 1986: 295; §378). He clarifies his point, talking about two kinds of geniuses, those who 'draw on resources that are their own', and the more 'dependent nature, the so called talents', who are 'full of recollections of everything imaginable' (Nietzsche, 1986: 88; §165). What they possess is time and patience to learn step by step how to make great art.

The artist, according to Nietzsche (1986: 250–1; §169), is an exceptional creature, able to do something radical. Moreover, she or he is not hindered by social conventions and social roles. Seen in this light, creativity can only be hindered by others, never promoted. But Nietzsche has little to say about the working process of aesthetic production in addition to this.

How do artists, and I add, others involved in creative aesthetic activities, know when something is good? According to Nietzsche (1986: 240–1; §119), 'the taste for work of arts' is not something that has a social origin, as for example Bourdieu (1984) argues. Nietzsche states that it is rather artists' judgement that is important. He does not, however, follow Kant's a priori approach; instead artistic communication should ultimately be related to the body, and biology. It is argued that one sees this communication most clearly in music and dance (Higgins, 1986: 666, 670).<sup>6</sup>

To summarize, both Kant, who stresses the mental side, and Nietzsche, who stresses the body, describe the idea of the atomized artist, who is endowed with charisma (see Weber, 1972: 753). The discourse about artistic geniuses has propelled the celebration and mystification of the individual that is reflected not only in the theories of art and creativity, but also in the practice of artists and creative actors.<sup>7</sup> What the individualistic approach misses is the context in which creativity emerges, and most of all, the situations in which it is seen as creative.

Moreover, the philosophical and individualistic approach cannot explain why there only appear geniuses in some parts of the world. Moreover, why do people who know key-players in an art world, or with a certain class background, become artists to a greater extent than other group in society?<sup>8</sup> To account for this, and obviously for the more concrete questions discussed in this article, one must analyse the context of knowledge needed to be 'creative'.

## **Contextual Knowledge**

In this section, I build on sociological tradition to analyse the concrete examples of garment designers and fashion photographers. I hope that these concrete cases will show the validity of the three dimensions of contextuality presented here: network of actors, provinces of meaning (arenas of aesthetic expressions) and final consumer markets. In practice, I focus on the contexts in which creative workers, who use their bodies and minds, operate.

Within the sociology of art there is a rather big literature that has debunked the aforementioned views held by some philosophers and many art historians about the individual genius (e.g. Becker, 1982; White, 1993; Bourdieu, 1990: 66; 1996, 1993). Sociologists tend to highlight the importance of social structure and the collective production. This sociological approach, as indicated, comes with a downside; there is a risk of cutting out the experience and the phenomenology of artists and creative workers if the focus is too strong on social structure. Bourdieu (e.g. Bourdieu, 1996) has showed that it is possible to combine a study of individuals, though still taking the social structure into account.

Bourdieu's explanation must be seen in relation to his notion of field. Bourdieu (1990: 66) uses the term *prolepsis* to define a component of knowledge that persons acquire by being in a specific field. This 'knowledge' can be used to anticipate what will happen and how to react to that. Though Bourdieu's notion is useful, and represents an improvement over the philosophical and psychological perspectives, it can be developed. Bourdieu's description, for example, leaves out the taken-for-granted background of the field.

To understand this dimension of knowledge, one must bring in the idea of the lifeworld, and the corresponding meaning structure that people share and which they use in processes of interpretation. Thus, all forms of knowledge are based on interpretation, which by necessity draws on the lifeworld and more concretely on the preunderstanding of the interpreter (Heidegger, 2001: 152–3).<sup>9</sup> The interpreters may, or may not, have acquired different lifeworlds, which will result in different interpretations of the same 'information'. In the following, I discuss the three dimensions of contextual knowledge, all of which must be seen in relation to the lifeworld that supports them with a foundation.

### ***Knowing Those Who Know: Networks of Actors***

The first dimension of contextual knowledge refers to the network in which creative workers operate. To a sociologist this may appear as obvious that what one person is accredited for may not be the result of only that person's efforts. In fact, most creative aesthetic industries are

characterized by collective production (e.g. Becker, 1974; Faulkner, 1971), which is often geographically concentrated (see Rantisi, 2002; Scott, 2005). Not all of those who take part in the production are aesthetic workers; they may, for example, be economists or technicians. Nonetheless, a designer or a photographer must have supporting elements in order to perform.

A garment designer working at a large garment chain needs buyers who can locate vendors to produce the clothes of the fashion line. Buyers also provide designers with designer input. This they do by bringing back items from their business trips to suppliers. They pick up things especially from the fashion line of the suppliers they are using, since they have some knowledge of what the buyers may be looking for. Moreover, the head of the department must have confidence in what the designers do, and they must have aesthetic freedom; if not it is impossible by definition to be creative. In addition to the 'in-house' network, a designer usually has friends who are designers, with whom she or he communicates. There are yet other examples of actors who may support the designer. Here I have restricted the network to direct contacts and left out staff such as assistants, suppliers and so on, all of whom may be supporting the designer.

The situation for a photographer is in most cases quite similar, though the scale is smaller. A photographer I assisted hardly knew how to load a camera, and he of course depended on assistants to do this. Also models, makeup artists and others take part in the production of pictures; each of them contributes with her or his knowledge that the photographer lacks. The buyers of the pictures, such as art directors at advertising agencies, often take an active part in the production of pictures (Aspers, 2005a), and they must be included in the network. They have knowledge of how pictures should appear to please the customer, who may be a garment firm.

In sum, the knowledge that is needed to produce (for a specific firm and specific markets) is not something that is concentrated in one person, but is a result of the cooperation of the members of the network. This means, in other words, that one person's knowledge can only be used if backed by others.

### ***Knowing How to Interpret Provinces of Meaning***

The second dimension of contextuality refers to what broadly could be defined as 'sources of inspiration' for aesthetic work. Different art worlds, such as painting or music, are examples of sources. Actors in aesthetic industries, as mentioned, use information from fashion, movies, art and other forms of aesthetic expressions in their own production processes. Theoretically, each of these activities, such as visual art or music videos,

can be seen as a so-called 'province of meaning' (Schütz, 1976: 74; 1975: 5, 116–32).<sup>10</sup> These provinces of meaning of different art worlds enable aesthetic activities.

Each province of meaning offers an enormous amount of information that can be used by creative workers. To make good use of this information is not only to have a certain position in the Burtian sense (see Burt, 1992). One must also have the knowledge how to interpret this information – hence positions are not everything – and how it can be used to solve tasks (see Bourdieu, 1984), for example to design clothes that will sell well. This can partly be learned in the process of socialization, for example by attending art schools.<sup>11</sup> Thus, in this socialization process information is turned into what Schütz called a 'stock of knowledge'.

An interpretation is based on the lifeworld of the actor. If an actor has a long experience of a lifeworld, she or he may use this experience to produce a design or to make the kind of pictures that she or he likes. This also means that the designer or photographer may use, more or less explicitly, their own experience, interpretation and perhaps also taste in their creative work. This is possible because they frame (Goffman, 1974) the situation and what a fashion garment should look like in a similar way to the potential buyers, i.e. the final customers of the firm they work for. This is what some metaphorically call 'gut feeling'. But I have here tried to disentangle this embodied knowledge from other kinds of knowledge. It is important to realize that I refer to knowledge as a process, based upon interpretation of information.

### ***Knowing the Final Consumer Market***

The third dimension of contextuality is the closeness to the final consumer market. This means that aesthetic workers must have at least some knowledge about the final consumers, who eventually say 'yes' or 'no' to what they have done. In some cases, there is a fairly straightforward feedback mechanism. Designers, for example, get informed about the sales figures, and it is at least possible to evaluate the performance of the designer or the design team of a retailing chain.

The situation is slightly different for photographers. Photographers are seldom in direct contact with the final consumers of the pictures, namely the readers of magazines and buyers of the clothes that the pictures help to advertise. This means that they know less about the consumers. The reason is that they are located 'upstream' in the production chain (White, 2002). Thus, photographers are partly protected from direct feedback in terms of sales volume. It is also hard to ascertain how much the picture contributes to the sales figures, given that it is only part of the entire offer that the market is judging, which includes the perceived quality, price, design and so on.<sup>12</sup>

Designers' and photographers' work, which includes development and production of things, is valued in social settings. This is to say that the value or success of their work, as well as their competitors' work, cannot be assessed without a social system of, for example, peers, and more often, customers. The market provides this evaluation (White, 2002).

The market informs sellers what is in demand and what is not. It feeds back information to, for example, garment retailers. It takes, however, knowledge to know what to do with this information, and this emerges in an interpretative process in which the different pieces of information are put together to make sense, and to respond to problems given the situation the actor is in. It means, put in more concrete terms, to understand why things are happening, i.e. why some garments are doing well in the market, and ultimately, to use this knowledge in order to design, or develop a photographic style, that will make it in the market.

To be able to generate this knowledge, which to some extent changes with the situation, one must be 'close to the market'. Moreover, this knowledge is only useful in the context of the particular market. This is also the case for most design industries. I asked one head of a buying office of a European garment chain that operates in several countries if his staff specialized in different markets. He replied: 'I would say "yes"', which means that some merchandisers 'take care of the Scandinavian market, and [others] are taking care of Italy and Spain'. That also merchandisers specialize in different markets emphasizes the segmentation of the final consumer markets that firms cater to.

Even if production of clothes, for example, is outsourced to cut costs, design is still something that is done close to the final consumers. A CEO of an Indian firm expressed the dilemma her designers face: 'We cannot do it [the design] on our own; we do not know the market over there.' It is very hard for designers operating from countries that are not well connected, culturally or economically, to the final consumers to design according to these consumers' preferences.<sup>13</sup> This is so since designers' output is partly a result of how they perceive reality; which to a large extent can be traced back to their lifeworld and how they interpret things. One may trace this even further back to the process of socialization (Bourdieu, 1984). Designers also have to struggle against the perceptions of buyers that have more or less well-funded preconceptions about the design in typical 'production' countries (Skov, 2002).

Another problem if one is located far away from the consumer market is that trends are more difficult to follow. While most of the issues discussed here concern knowledge in general, it is fairly obvious that the contextual knowledge of fashion is more short-lived than, for example, knowing how to grow fruit. One must, in sum, possess technical skills, but also have the knowledge to understand the cycles of the industry.

## Summary and Conclusion

This article addresses the issue of knowledge without starting with the question of what knowledge is. Knowledge is a key element in the often mystified process of creative aesthetic work. To have the capacity to do what it takes, for example, the design process characterizes knowledge of aesthetic creative work. This 'capacity' emerges in contexts, and can be applied to situations that develop in these contexts. It has, in other words, restricted scope, and must, following typical symbolic arguments, be related to situations. A further consequence is that one cannot refer to knowledge in an abstract way (as one may do with information). However, the idea of judgement or practical wisdom (*phronesis*) as used by Aristotle cannot be left out of a discussion of knowledge. Also, ideas about implicit and embodied knowledge are useful. This part of the argument is general, and is not only of specific relevance to the empirical material discussed in this article.

I have tried to outline the dimensions that make it possible to do what it takes in situations where we find creative aesthetic workers. This I have done by studying the contexts in which this knowledge is structured, and I outline three different dimensions of contextuality. A key idea is that understanding is a precondition for knowing. In other words, knowledge, or 'the capacity to know what it takes in a situation', implies that actors understand the situation. In order to make a difference, an actor, of course, needs resources to 'do' what it takes.

This article is in line with others who reject the idea that knowledge is identical to information. Thus, my article is in line with the literature that aims to 'deconstruct' the conception of incorporated atomized knowledge of art and aesthetic works. The suggested approach is also critical to the strictly structural approach. Though I have studied the things that structure knowledge, this does not mean that the structural position (e.g. Burt, 1992) suffices as an explanation. The social position is one dimension, but knowledge is also a result of the lifeworld that is used to interpret, to posit values and meaning, as well as access to and experience of various provinces of meaning that can be used as sources of inspiration.

There are implications in this article for the discussion on upgrading by vendors located in developing countries. It can be argued that for a region or nation to generate firm-based aesthetic creative work, independent art, film and other forms of aesthetics and perhaps also political expressions are of great importance. This calls for more research on the role of independent arenas of art and politics for the development of the aesthetic economy.

## Notes

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1. Aesthetic economy is different from 'cultural economy', which is imprecise since virtually everything is part of 'culture' (see du Gay and Pryke, 2002). The notion of 'aesthetic economy' (Entwistle, 2002), as I see it, captures several more or less interlinked aesthetic markets (Aspers, 2005a).
2. Schütz, who follows Husserl, describes the natural attitude in the lifeworld: 'we can speak of fundamental assumptions characteristic of the natural attitude in the lifeworld, which themselves are accepted as unquestionably given; namely the assumptions of the constancy of the structure of the world, and the constancy of our ability [*Vermöglichkeit*] to act upon the world and within the world' (Schütz, 1975: 116). Actors who live in the same lifeworld are socialized in a similar way, which means that they therefore are likely to react in similar ways to what they experience and perceive.
3. This study does not directly include the practical side of designers' or photographers' knowledge.
4. Slater and Tonkiss (2001: 176–81) argue that designers are inspired by many things and utilize information from fairs, catwalks, shows, local street fashion, films and music videos.
5. Education takes place inside the organization as well. Education can, for example, be an integrated part of what is called a 'trend-meeting', i.e. a meeting where a retailer's representatives such as the heads of buying offices in different countries come together and are informed about recent trends, and the firm's interpretation of these.
6. But though the body is a crucial means, Nietzsche claims that there is no need to socialize and sensitize the body, it is a natural effect (Higgins, 1986: 671). This is a way in which Nietzsche 'ground art in the life of the body' (Heidegger, cited in Farrell Krell, 1976: 381, 387).
7. This idea was obviously appreciated by artists and should be seen as part of the discourse that made it possible to create an autonomous sphere of art, as argued by Weber (see Aspers, 2005a: 148–50). Even though not all designers and photographers view themselves as artists, some do. To follow the spirit of traditional art theory implies that the artist, or the designer, is seen as an individualized actor. One should separate two ideas that are interrelated, though not identical. The first is that the actor operates as an atom, and the second is that the knowledge is embodied and largely implicit.
8. As a way of explaining this, I find it is too common in the scientific discussion to fall back on conceptions that inscribe knowledge into the body using terms such as *Fingerspitzengefühl* (Tollhagen-Åkerhielm, 2002), 'gut-feeling' (Aspers, 2005a: 45–6), 'feel for the game' (Bourdieu, 1990: 66) or the broad notion of 'intuition' and to see these metaphors as explanations. While these terms give some idea as to what is going on, they also mystify and individualize knowledge by referring exclusively to the body.



9. The preunderstanding should be connected to the socialization and internalization of a specific meaning structure.
10. Schütz explains what he means: 'All these worlds – the world of dreams, of images and phantasms, especially the world of art, the world of religious experience, the world of scientific contemplation, the play world of the child, and the world of the insane – are finite provinces of meaning' (Schütz, 1962: 232). Each of them has a separate logic, which means that there are different things that are valued in them.
11. A further consequence is that to have creative aesthetic work in a nation, there is a need for developed art worlds (Becker, 1982). Many developing countries lack art worlds. Moreover, it is clearly the case that the art worlds in countries like Turkey and India are restricted, compared to the UK or Sweden. In yet other countries, they are also politically controlled. Designers, as well as photographers, may not only be inspired by different art worlds, they may also take an active part in them. Some photographers among those I interviewed have had exhibitions, not to make money, but to show their own, and more personal, pictures.

One may argue that there is an underlying need for 'freedom of expression' in an art world. Consequently, for an art world to exist may in fact demand more than material resources and other art worlds, it may also demand democracy. 'Artists' in non-democratic countries can hardly express themselves in a way they determine, and in this sense it is not even possible to speak of independent art worlds. This is an issue that could be studied further.

12. Some high-ranked photographers are also autonomous in the sense that they can afford to say no to offers from clients to 'protect' their identity (Aspers, 2005a). There are, of course, ways of finding out what consumers think, and focus groups are frequently used for this purpose.
13. This indicates the role of globalization. It shows the repercussions of final consumer markets upstream of the production chain in the mainstream garment industry, as well as the problem that many designers located in countries far from the final consumers face.

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