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# **Cultural production and the morality of markets: popular music critics and the conversion of economic power into symbolic capital<sup>1</sup>**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This article examines the strategies through which cultural producers may convert their market success into a form of symbolic capital, that is, into a range of distinctive moral values and symbolic boundaries. This question is explored in relation to the rise of popular music criticism in Italy. Drawing on Bourdieu's field theory, this article reconstructs the field's historical genesis and examines the strategies of a heteronomous organisation (the music weekly *Ciao 2001*). In doing so, it counterbalances the focus of field studies on small scale cultural production, and argues that commercially-oriented producers may contribute to the broader legitimation of market imperatives. Further, this article argues that producers' position in the global cultural field is likely to shape their understanding of heteronomous forces, and thus the way they mobilise and convert different capitals. This article provides an empirical contribution to debates about the impact of market forces on cultural production, and to the growing scholarship on global cultural fields and cultural criticism. Theoretically, it argues that autonomy and heteronomy should not be addressed as mutually exclusive ideal-types, but as dispositions embedded in concrete practices and fields of relations, which may co-exist in the work of both avant-garde and large-scale cultural organisations.

**KEYWORDS:** Bourdieu; cultural production; critics; music; symbolic capital; globalisation

## **1. Introduction**

During the last two decades, Bourdieu's field theory has become increasingly popular among scholars concerned with the study of contemporary cultural production, particularly in fields such as cultural sociology (Regev 1994, Santoro 2002, Prior 2008) and media studies (Benson 1999, Hesmondhalgh 2006, Bolin 2009). In this respect, there has been considerable debate about the potentialities and limits of field theory vis-à-vis the study of contemporary media industries. This article contributes to this debate addressing the field of popular music criticism. Despite a growing scholarship on music criticism (Lindberg et al. 2005, van Venrooij and Schmutz 2010, Varriale 2014), the impact of market imperatives on this field has rarely been explored. This article will

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<sup>1</sup> The data and excerpts on which this article is based are available from the author on request.

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focus on the field's historical genesis as it took place in Italy, as Italy's peripheral position in the global field of pop-rock (Regev 2013), and the strong influence of the state on national cultural production, significantly shaped critics' understanding of market pressures and other heteronomous forces. The Italian case, then, makes it possible to explore how critics' position in the global cultural industry shapes their understanding of autonomy and heteronomy, and the way they mobilise different capitals.

I will explore the strategies of a group of critics which obtained significant commercial success among Italian young people. I will look at the ways in which critics working for the most popular music magazine of the 1970s - the weekly *Ciao 2001* - mobilised their field-specific economic power to draw symbolic boundaries (Lamont and Molnàr 2002) between market-driven and politically-controlled cultural production, and more specifically between independence and control, professionalism and lack thereof, social authenticity and elitism. Put otherwise, this article analyses how critics *converted* their economic capital into a range of moral principles, that is, into a form of symbolic capital. This article argues that field scholars should pay more attention to heteronomous forms of cultural production, that is, explicitly market-driven organisations. Moreover, I will contend that such actors should be studied taking into account their position within a broader space of national and global actors (Regev 2013). These questions remain underappreciated in contemporary field studies, as they usually focus on small scale production and actors pursuing symbolic autonomy from market pressures (Hesmondhalgh 1998, Lopes 2000, Moore 2007, Heise and Tudor 2008, Prior 2008, Craig and Dubois 2010, Elafros 2013, Oware 2014). While this line of research remains important and worth pursuing, it leaves unexplored the heteronomous pole of cultural fields, and the strategies through which producers attempt to legitimise

both their economic power and market imperatives at large.

This article will first discuss field theory and the place of heteronomy in Bourdieu's framework. It will then look at the ways in which recent field studies have questioned Bourdieu's oppositional understanding of autonomous and commercial cultural production. Subsequently, the paper will discuss the rise of critics in the fields of popular art (Lopes 2000) and will introduce the case of Italian popular music criticism. This article's empirical sections will provide: a) a socio-historical narrative about the genesis of the field; b) an analysis of critics' position-takings (Bourdieu 1996) vis-à-vis Italian cultural, economic and political institutions; c) an exploration of the 'loose' aesthetic boundaries supported by heteronomous critics in their music coverage.

## **2. Market imperatives in contemporary cultural production**

### *2.1. Bourdieu's field theory*

For Bourdieu, cultural production is a 'field of struggle' (Bourdieu 1996) shaped by asymmetries of power between different organisations and producers. Producers occupy different 'positions' in the field, as they are endowed with different amounts of economic, cultural and symbolic capital.<sup>3</sup> Cultural fields are thus internally diversified spaces animated by struggles over the legitimate definition of artistic value. A field is shaped both by 'objective' differences - as producers possess different kinds and amounts of capital - and by cultural differences (Benson 1999: 486, Lopes 2000). The latter become manifest through what Bourdieu calls 'position-takings'. These 'manifestations' of field actors can take the form of 'political acts or pronouncements,

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<sup>3</sup> Bourdieu defines 'symbolic capital' both as recognition received by critics and peers (1996) and as 'disavowal' of economic transactions (1990). This latter, broader sense indicates any 'symbolic economy' based on non-economic values, which, nevertheless, works according to a logic of exchanges and conversions. In this article I expand this latter definition (see section 2.2).

manifestos or polemics' (1993: 30). It is through such identity claims that objective differences in capital possession take the form of creative differences (Bourdieu 1996: 128).

The existence of positions endowed with different capitals and historical trajectories represents what Bourdieu calls a field's space of possibles (Bourdieu 1996). Indeed, newcomers willing to create a position have to face a pre-existing structure of privileges and the field's collective history. As recently stressed by Sapiro (2010), Regev (2013) and Elafros (2013), cultural fields are situated within a broader network of national and global actors. As I shall discuss below, this space of possibles informs producers' 'categories of perception' (Bourdieu 1996). As a result, it shapes how they perceive the influence of economic and political forces over their practices, and how they mobilise different capitals.

## *2.2 Field theory and the study of contemporary cultural production*

According to Bourdieu, large scale production is the region of cultural fields occupied by organisations with market success and high economic capital. By contrast, small scale producers are equipped mostly with cultural and symbolic capital. This latter space constitutes an 'inverted' economic world (Bourdieu 1993: 29-73), one in which artistic innovation and 'symbolic autonomy' from the market are the values mostly praised by producers and their audience. For Bourdieu, the opposition between commercial and non-commercial art is a general property of cultural fields (Bourdieu 1996: 161), albeit his later work focuses on the impact of private television on the field of journalism (Bourdieu 1996b). This work has been frequently criticised by scholars, as its empirical exploration has been received as too succinct (Bolin 2009) and methodologically weak (Hesmondhalgh 2006). Nevertheless, the impact of economic

imperatives on cultural production, particularly small scale production, has become a concerning issue for field scholars, and has fostered discussion about the validity of Bourdieu's distinction between small and large scale production. For instance, it has been argued that 'heteronomous forces' are almost inescapable in contemporary cultural production (Hesmondhalgh 2006, Banks 2007), as even underground producers (Oware 2014) and institutions committed to the values of high culture, such as film festivals (de Valck 2014), have to deal with the demands of market gatekeepers. On a similar note, it has been argued that the rise of omnivorous consumption practices (Peterson and Kern 1996) does force cultural organisations to cross the boundaries between different publics and niche markets (Kersten and Verboord 2013). In essence, while forms of autonomy have certainly not disappeared in cultural production (Moore 2007, Elafros 2013), there is growing empirical evidence about the strong influence of heteronomous forces on cultural fields, especially on actors concerned with preserving some degree of autonomy from economic necessity.

However, this situation has not led to the dismissal of field theory. Quite the reverse: Bourdieu's approach is considered by many researchers as a work in progress (Benson and Neveu 2005), one amenable to conceptual refinement and theoretical improvement (Prior 2008, Elafros 2012). In this respect, some scholars have problematised the opposition between autonomy and heteronomy by focusing on a range of meso- and micro-level practices that Bourdieu himself had overlooked in his work on cultural production. For instance, Santoro (2013) has argued that researchers should focus on the 'circuits of practice' connecting different regions of cultural fields. Indeed, a field can be sustained by dynamics of collaboration between producers possessing different amounts and kinds of capital. From this perspective, institutions of artistic consecration, such as the Italian *Club Tenco*, are not simply defenders of symbolic autonomy, but

contribute, through their consecrating power, to the popular success of new and unknown singer-songwriters. Similarly, de Valck (2014) has explored the contradiction between the 'principles' and 'practices' of film festival organisers. Although their work is informed by highbrow values, such as originality and autonomy, festival organisers have to maintain good working relations with production companies and advertisers to make their work of artistic promotion economically sustainable. More generally, it has been argued that contemporary cultural institutions, such as some quality newspapers (Benson and Neveu 2005), can possess both cultural and economic capital, thus occupying more contradictory positions in their respective fields. This is also the case of what Lopes calls the sub-field of popular art (2000). Indeed, younger and 'semi-consecrated' cultural traditions, such as jazz (*ibid.*) and rock (Regev 1994), do not reject market imperatives in toto, but have developed specific strategies to cope with them. Overall, recent field studies have pointed to the fuzzy boundaries between small and large scale production, and have focused on meso- and micro-level practices as a vantage perspective for understanding contemporary cultural production (see also Dowd et al. 2009). As a contribution to this perspective, this paper explores the *strategies of conversion* through which some Italian music critics, during the 1970s, turned their economic power into a symbolic capital. My aim is to expand (rather than dismiss) Bourdieu's theoretical work studying actors and practices to which he paid little attention. While his work (and field studies) provide a comprehensive picture of the struggles which animate the 'avant-gardes' of cultural production, we still know relatively little about how field dynamics (including strategies of conversion) work for producers who enjoy significant market success.

According to Bourdieu, economic, cultural and social resources are all amenable to conversion, albeit such a possibility depends on a field's structure and symbolic

economy. For instance, the consecration of an artist by critics and peers could lead, in the long run, to market recognition (Bourdieu 1996: 148). Moreover, artists possessing high symbolic capital (that is, recognition and prestige) could employ their cultural authority to effectively intervene in the political arena (*ibid.* pp. 129-131). Economic capital does not escape this logic of conversion. Indeed, Bourdieu acknowledges that organisations closer to the commercial pole of cultural production can pursue their economic interests only ‘by avoiding the crudest forms of mercantilism and by abstaining from fully revealing their self-interested goals’ (1996: 142). The suggestion, then, is that forms of ‘disavowal’ of economic relations might be important also for market-oriented cultural producers (*ibid.*). However, Bourdieu's later work on television (1996b) does not expand on this suggestion, and field studies usually provide little evidence on how market imperatives are legitimated, or at least justified, by producers and intermediaries enjoying positions of economic power. This is why I will focus on an organisation (the weekly *Ciao 2001*) which occupied a position of economic power within the Italian popular music press, and which was explicitly concerned with representing the broadest possible segment of the youth culture. Before turning to this article's empirical sections, I discuss the growing scholarship about popular cultural criticism. I will clarify why this field and the Italian context provide a productive case study to analyse the strategies of market-driven cultural producers.

### **3. The rise of criticism in the fields of popular art**

In recent years, scholars have both explored the role of critics in traditional cultural fields, such as literature (Berkers et al. 2011), and documented the emergence of criticism in different fields and markets, such as popular music (van Venrooij and Schmutz 2010, Lindberg et al. 2005), film (Baumann 2001), television (Bielby et al.



2005), cuisine (Johnston and Baumann 2007), and hardware and software products (Blank 2007). As I argued elsewhere (Varriale 2014), these new evaluative institutions, albeit embedded in broader cultural fields, can become semi-autonomous fields in themselves, that is, they can become internally diversified and develop dynamics of competition, distinctive stakes and beliefs. The concept of field, then, makes it possible to investigate the ways in which criticism, as a cultural category, is *struggled over* by competing groups of experts and audiences. While other studies have focused on critics' power of consecration (e.g. Schmutz 2005), I focus on the contested nature of such power and the diversity of evaluative institutions. The field of Italian popular music criticism, which I explore in more detail below, has been characterised by struggles over the meaning of criticism as a social practice, as critics developed competing views on the cultural and political purposes of their work (*ibid.*).

The expanding literature on cultural criticism has paid attention particularly to the highbrow discourse through which critics evaluate cultural products. Drawing on Bourdieu (1984), the highbrow repertoire has been conceptualised as critics' major asset - a cultural capital through which they exert their authority and consecrating power (Schmutz 2005, van Venrooij and Schmutz 2010). Despite being relatively young from a historical point of view (Lopes 2002, Lindberg et al. 2005), criticism has become an important institution in the fields of popular art, one that has contributed to the 'semi-legitimation' of genres such as art-house movies (Baumann 2001), jazz (Lopes 2002) and rock (Regev 1994). However, the impact of market forces on new fields of cultural evaluation, such as popular music criticism, has not been explored yet.<sup>4</sup> The Italian case, then, is particularly useful for an exploration of this issue. Italy's role as an importer of Anglo-American music trends (De Luigi 1982), and its peripheral position in the global

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<sup>4</sup> See Varriale (2014) for a broader discussion of this literature.

field of pop-rock (Regev 2013), had a significant impact on critics' categories of perception and strategies. This structural arrangement deeply shaped their understanding of both economic resources and the relations between economic capital and symbolic autonomy. The Italian case, then, makes it possible to explore how critics' position in the global cultural industry does shape the way they use and convert capitals. The paper's empirical sections will address this question focusing on the years in which popular music criticism was developing as a semi-autonomous and diversified field (1969-1977). Indeed, the 1970s music press was animated by ongoing discussion about the social purposes of popular music criticism vis-à-vis other cultural, political and economic institutions. As a result, questions of material and symbolic autonomy became an issue of debate among critics and between critics and their audience, with such a debate taking place through the pages of newly-launched music magazines. The next section discuss the methodology through which these materials, along with other historical sources, have been sampled and analysed.

#### **4. Data and methods**

This article's empirical sections draw on broader research about the emergence of Italian popular music criticism between 1969 and 1977. The project is based on a two-year archival research: it employs music magazines as primary data and different historical sources as secondary data, such as published interviews (Casiraghi 2005), critics' public biographies (see Section 5.1) and quantitative data about broader social trends (*ibid.*). Drawing on field theory (Bourdieu 1996), the research provides a social history of the music press, and a thick description of the writings of critics and their readers. I used historical sources to collect data about the social trajectories of critics and their audience, and the history of three magazines which occupied different positions in the

field: the weekly *Ciao 2001* and the monthlies *Muzak* and *Gong*. Working on complete archival collections of these magazines,<sup>5</sup> I focused on samples of three editorial formats: music features (297),<sup>6</sup> cultural politics articles (192) and readers' letters - including critics' replies (487).<sup>7</sup> This paper focuses on cultural politics articles and critics' replies to readers. I coded as 'cultural politics articles' regular editorials discussing the organisational and cultural choices of magazines, and features discussing major issues in cultural production: such as changes in the policy of radio and television, trends in the journalistic field and music industry, and so on.<sup>8</sup> These articles were inductively analysed via discourse analysis (Alvesson and Kärreman 2007), which was used to identify the symbolic boundaries (Lamont and Molnàr 2002) that different magazines drew in relation to other field actors and Italian institutions. In other words, discourse analysis was used to identify critics' position-takings (Bourdieu 1996). In line with Bourdieu, I conceptualise position-takings as a practice (Bourdieu 1990) through which critics mobilise their resources and draw boundaries. Indeed, it is through discourses, as well as other forms of social interaction, that people and organisations do effectively 'put into practice' their resources (Lamont and Lareau 1988). I used non-structured schedules to collect, for each article, relevant excerpts and analytical notes. This work made it possible to identify enduring themes in the magazines' articles, and thus coherent position-takings. Later on, I revised the schedules through the software NVivo, which allows for the digital coding of documents. As a result, I could revise and

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<sup>5</sup> The research was conducted in the following Italian public libraries: *Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze* (Florence), *Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense* (Milan) and *Biblioteca Centrale - Palazzo Sormani* (Milan).

<sup>6</sup> While Italian music magazines used to publish short reviews in 'review sections', music features were longer pieces focusing on individual musicians, bands or music trends at large. I focused on this format in my research.

<sup>7</sup> The sample focuses on the years 1973-1977, as all three magazines were active during these years.

<sup>8</sup> Music magazines also published articles about other social and political issues (for instance the rise of new social movements and changes in Italian education policy). While they used to take strong positions on these questions, I did not include them in my analysis, which focuses on articles addressing cultural production issues.

strengthen the analytical themes that emerged via discourse analysis. Discourse analysis was conducted in the archives working on original copies of the magazines. Sections 6 and 7 focus on three themes emerged from the analysis of *Ciao 2001*'s articles: ideological independence, professionalism, social authenticity. All excerpts quoted in these sections have been translated by me.<sup>9</sup>

## **5. The genesis of Italian popular music criticism**

As anticipated above, the research focuses on magazines that occupied different positions in the emerging field of popular music criticism. Since 1969, the Italian music press went through a process of increasing diversification, with a high number of new 'specialised' music magazines being launched throughout the 1970s. In contrast, the publications active during the 1960s, following the growth of a distinctively youth consumer culture, addressed a broader variety of consumption choices (Grispigni 1998). These changes were made possible by the transition of post-war Italy from a rural society with high rates of illiteracy, to an urban society reshaped by economic growth and patterns of social and geographical mobility (Ginsborg 1990). In this context, a key pre-condition for the emergence of a specialised music press was the higher educational level of Italy's youngest generations (Cavalli and Leccardi 1997). Both music critics and their readers had educational qualifications higher than the middle school (*scuola media*). According to a series of surveys commissioned by the magazines *Ciao 2001*, *Muzak* and *Gong* between 1974 and 1977,<sup>10</sup> about 70 per cent of their readers were either students (that is, secondary school or university students) or working students

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<sup>9</sup> Excerpts in Italian are available on request.

<sup>10</sup> I am summarising data that have been published by *Ciao 2001* (n. 22, 6 June 1976), *Muzak* (n. 12, October 1974; n. 12, April 1976) and *Gong* (n. 6, June 1975; booklet enclosed with the issue). The magazines collected these data through mail questionnaires.

(*studenti lavoratori*), with workers representing the smallest group of readers.<sup>11</sup>

Similarly high educational qualifications characterised the profile of critics working for the same magazines. An analysis of 34 biographical profiles<sup>12</sup> shows that most of them (14) were *liceali* (i.e. they had diplomas from sciences or humanities-based high schools), university students or graduates (12).<sup>13</sup> By and large, the growth of ‘mass education’ (Ginsborg 1990) provided the popular music press with a sufficiently vast audience, one that possessed sufficient cultural capital to appreciate distinctions between different ways of producing and consuming popular music. However, as I show in the next section, the high cultural capital of Italian critics did not lead them to reject market imperatives. On the contrary, for the critics who enjoyed the strongest economic position in the field, highbrow values and free market competition were natural allies against the national popular culture supported by public television and radio (that is, by Italian political elites). As a result, while British and American rock criticism were defined as a space of relative autonomy from the market (Lindberg et al. 2005), Italian music criticism was also defined as autonomous from the state and its cultural apparatus (see sections 6 and 7).

Another structural transformation shaping the music press was the growth of an increasingly globalised recording industry. In this respect, the opening of the Italian divisions of WEA and CBS in 1972 marked the peak of a longstanding trend, which had seen, during the past two decades, the entrance of Decca, EMI, Phonogram and RCA in the Italian market (De Luigi 1982: 30-36). As a result, since the introduction of rock 'n' roll in the late 1950s, Italy had been a regular importer of Anglo-American music trends

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<sup>11</sup> Given the age of readers (between 15-25), it is very likely that the majority of workers had at least a secondary school diploma - a title that was already high in comparison with the average educational level of former generations (Cavalli and Leccardi 1997).

<sup>12</sup> Critics' biographical profiles were collected through bibliographical and online sources. This convenience sample represents the majority of founders and regular writers of the three magazines studied. A list of names and sources is available on request.

<sup>13</sup> Only two critics indicate a form of secondary education different from *liceo*, whereas six biographies do not provide any information on educational qualifications.

such as British beat, folk-rock and progressive-rock (De Luigi 1982). On one hand, this arrangement provided critics and their readers with a strongly Anglo-American musical ‘education’ (Carrera 1980, Portelli 1985, Prato 2010). On the other hand, it enhanced new forms of classification and distinction, particularly in relation to the growing market for long-play albums.<sup>14</sup> From the late 1960s, LPs started being defined as the original creation of ‘artists’ in Italy. Both Anglo-American and Italian musicians, such as singer-songwriters (Santoro 2002) and rock bands (Facchinotti 2001), contributed to this process. The popular music magazines launched during the 1970s, then, must be seen as part of this strongly redefined musical field, one in which magazines worked as competing agents of legitimation, both for new forms of Italian popular music, and for the international music trends introduced by the recording industry.

In this increasingly diversified and competitive field, the weekly *Ciao 2001* gained a position of economic leadership around 1973 (Casiraghi 2005), selling approximately between 60 000 and 80 000 copies per week (Rusconi 1976). The magazine was able to maintain this position until the early 1980s (Gaspari 1980: 88-89). By contrast, the monthlies *Muzak* and *Gong*, both launched as an alternative to *Ciao 2001*, used to sell 35 000 and 15 000 copies per month, respectively (Rusconi 1976, Bolelli 1979). Despite their lower popularity among the Italian youth, the monthlies acquired the status of ‘alternative’ and ‘charismatic’ magazines during the 1970s (Prato 1988, 1995). Indeed, they have received some degree of recognition in Italian historical scholarship (Carrera 1980: 208, Prato 2010). By contrast, *Ciao 2001*, whose editorial line was frequently mocked as inconsistent and commercial by the monthlies and their readers (section 6.1), has been defined as a ‘generalist’ (Sibilla 2003: 222) and ‘paternalistic’ magazine (Prato 1995: 131), and as a publication which passively followed the trends imposed by the

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<sup>14</sup> Between 1969 and 1979, the selling figures of albums rose from 4 to 20 million of copies (De Luigi 1982: 53).

recording industry (Carrera 1980: 208; Angelini and Gentile 1977: 16).

## 6. Position-takings: the virtues of economic power

As I discuss in this section, the economic capital of *Ciao 2001* was converted by its editorial board, particularly by the founder and co-owner Saverio Rotondi, into a form of symbolic capital. More specifically, critics used the magazine's market success to justify a range of moral distinctions, such as ideological independence versus external control, professionalism versus incompetence, and social authenticity versus elitism (table 1).

**Table 1 - Economic power as symbolic capital**

	Position-takings		Strategy
<i>Ciao 2001</i>	<i>Positive values</i>	<i>Negative values</i>	Inclusive coverage
	Ideological independence	Political/economic control	Loose aesthetic boundaries
	Professionalism	Incompetence	
	Social authenticity	Elitism	

Moreover, these values were used to justify a strategy of music coverage marked by inclusivity and ‘loose’ aesthetic boundaries, one that between 1975 and 1977 gave considerable space to genres such as soul and disco music (section 7).

### 6.1. Ideological independence

*Ciao 2001*'s economic power was problematic both for some of its readers and for other field actors, as it was perceived as a form of ‘selling out’. For instance, *Gong* and *Muzak* used to compare *Ciao 2001* to Italian tabloids, that is, what critics considered as the lowest expression of Italian popular culture.

We envy 2001 as much as we envy Grand Hotel and Novella 2000. We sincerely envy them, as we think it must be pleasing and relaxing to passively follow popular fads without being worried about the counter-educational value (*valore diseducativo*) of one's own writings.<sup>15</sup>

Since the critics of *Ciao 2001* could not claim distance from the market, they framed their economic strength as a proof of ideological independence. According to this argument, the revenues generated selling copies and space to advertisers were not simply a material resource, but a guarantee of journalistic freedom and independence of judgement.

[Some readers] easily assume that we make huge profits from this magazine [...]. Keep in mind that our magazine is not subsidised by anyone. Readers frequently ask why we publish advertisements, and we always reply, with frankness and honesty, that ads give us freedom of expression, one that we wouldn't have without them. Try to imagine a different kind of funding, such as funding from industrial and political groups. You can clearly imagine how limited our freedom of intervention would become.<sup>16</sup>

This strategy of conversion was made possible by a specific historical conjuncture. During the 1970s, the Italian journalistic field was going through a process of strong concentration: several newspapers were being bought by companies operating across the industrial and chemical sectors (such as *Montedison*), and part of the press received 'hidden' financial support from political parties (Forgacs 1990: 130-151). Rotondi's

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<sup>15</sup> Editorial Board, Answer to Corrado Vitale, *Muzak*, n. 13, November 1974, p. 62.

<sup>16</sup> Rotondi, Answer to Emanuele Papa, *Ciao 2001*, n. 15, April 1974, pp. 5-7. This was an ideological argument of course; a position-taking which did not necessarily represent the 'real' relationship between the magazine and advertising companies.



negative view of ‘industrial and political groups’ as sources of economic support, then, depends on the fact that *Ciao 2001* was published by a small firm (*Leti Editore*), which had specialised in publications about popular music, such as *Ciao 2001* and biographies of popular musicians (Prato 1988). Since the magazine embodied a field-specific economic power, its critics conceived of external (and more powerful) economic actors as a threat to their own position. Critics could thus draw a distinction between ‘pure publishers’ and those ‘controlled’ by economic and political powers, which were external to the field.

Press freedom looks like an increasingly remote possibility in the Italian publishing industry. Indeed, while the pure publisher wouldn't have any interests in concealing or manufacturing a given piece of information, it is clear that Monti, Agnelli or Cefis, who is Montedison's president, have huge economic interests to defend. And they use [their] newspapers precisely to do so.<sup>17</sup>

Here, Rotondi and his collaborators were arguing for a distinctive kind of purity, one based on a more ‘authentic’ way of being within the market, rather than on distance from market imperatives (Bourdieu 1996). This suggests that the heteronomous pole can be as diverse as the autonomous one, as organisations willing to maximise revenues can possess different amounts of resources, implement competing strategies and justify them according to different principles. The idea that economic capital is a means to ideological independence was stressed also when the magazine's price had to be increased to meet growing production costs, both in 1974 and 1975.

We hope that readers will understand this extremely difficult situation, which is affecting our

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<sup>17</sup> F. Montini, *La stampa in Italia, Ciao 2001*, n. 28, July 1975, pp. 13-14.

magazine and other small and med-sized publishing firms. Today more than ever, it is difficult to make a magazine based on independence of judgement and political autonomy. [As other publications] we received economic and political offers. They would certainly help the magazine, as we could maintain the current price and limit the number of ads. But we refused such offers for respect to our professional dignity and the readers' trust. Accepting them would be an insult to our readers.<sup>18</sup>

Economic power, which derived from the magazine's ability to attract a growing audience of young music consumers (De Luigi 1982), was thus mobilised in support of a moral distinction between independent and other-directed cultural production.

## 6.2. Professionalism

Critics mobilised the market success of *Ciao 2001* also as a proof of their own professional capabilities. More generally, Rotondi and his team argued that free market competition naturally rewards the best products, that is, products embodying high standards of quality and expertise. As with ideological independence, this argument has to be considered within a broader space of possibles. Italian popular culture was not, by definition, a completely free market. This is why *Ciao 2001* frequently attacked the RAI - the public company holding the monopoly of broadcast frequencies. During the 1960s and 1970s, RAI was the most important promotional vehicle for the recording industry (De Luigi 1982, Gaspari 1981). Moreover, it was the major channel of popular entertainment, as by 1975 its radio and TV shows were able to reach 92 per cent of Italian families (Monteleone 2003: 372). For popular music critics, then, RAI was a symbol of political control over popular culture, and it was perceived as lacking field-specific capital, that is, expertise in musical issues and questions of interest to the youth

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<sup>18</sup> Anonymous, Il prezzo del giornale, la libertà di stampa...e noi, *Ciao 2001*, n. 24, June 1974, pp. 5-6.

culture. This view is expressed by Rotondi in the following position-taking, which addresses RAI's then director Giovanni Salvi.

Salvi has proven with facts (that is, TV shows) that he is not exactly an expert of his sector [...]. Dear Salvi [...] a magazine needs to be the best possible product in order to 'sell'. It must give the readers something more than its competitors. This is why a magazine does not employ people who are not experts. On the contrary, on television you can keep working on musical shows, even though you could not distinguish the sound of a violin from the noise of a train. After all, the payment of the television tax (*canone*) is compulsory and the audience can only get what you make. It does not matter if they will stop watching *Canzonissima*, you will still be able to keep your position [in RAI].<sup>19</sup>

According to this view, the fall in popularity of musical shows such as *Canzonissima* and *Sanremo* (both produced and broadcast by RAI) was a direct result of their poor quality. By corollary, Rotondi argues that quality and popular recognition mutually sustain each other. The poor quality of RAI shows, then, was seen as the result of an organisational culture in which professionals were chosen according to a purely political logic, rather than for their skills. This view is expressed also by the following article about RAI's 1976 reform.

Once again, a principle of wild allotment (*lottizzazione selvaggia*) prevailed [...]. The administrators showed to be more engaged in fighting between them, rather than seriously taking into account the skills of the people they had to hire [...]. That quality TV programmes could be possibly produced by the same people who created 'Canzonissima', 'Teatri Dieci', 'Sim Salabim' [...] is an issue raising doubt.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Rotondi, Si... SALVI chi può!, *Ciao 2001*, n. 6, February 1974, pp. 15-16.

<sup>20</sup> Anonymous, Rai-tv: e' cambiato tutto... anzi niente, *Ciao 2001*, n. 20, May 1976, p. 4.

RAI managers were also seen as removed from the latest music trends and, crucially, from the international trends shaping the Italian charts, such as rock and disco. Being an institution which addressed a diverse popular audience (Monteleone 2003), and which gave space to a variety of musical traditions - including classical music and opera (Bolla and Cardini 1998) - RAI did not focus specifically on the growing market of LPs, and on more recent tendencies shaping the 45s market, such as disco music.

If RAI managers consider these singers [Massimo Ranieri, Gianni Morandi, Milva, Nicola Di Bari] as 'big' names, it is clear that they don't read the weekly charts published by their own *Radiocorriere* [RAI's entertainment magazine]. Otherwise, they would find out that their 'big' names are simply gone. Like *Canzonissima*, indeed.<sup>21</sup>

As an alternative to the 'defunct' names of Italian light music, the same article indicates a list of 'successful' acts including very different genres, such as disco (Barry White, Gloria Gaynor, Carol Douglas), Italian singer-songwriters (Edoardo Bennato, Antonello Venditti, Riccardo Cocciante), and both Italian and foreign rock acts (Banco del Mutuo Soccorso, Rick Wakeman). I shall return to the role of such loose aesthetic boundaries in *Ciao 2001*'s strategy of coverage (section 7). Here, Rotondi's argument can be interpreted as a cultural-populist approach to cultural production (Negus and Pickering 2004). This approach does not conceive of creativity and commerce as opposing social forces, but sees the latter as 'the condition that inspires creativity' (*idib.* p. 47). For the critics of *Ciao 2001*, RAI embodied the negation of such a principle, being a company sustained by a compulsory tax (the annual *canone*), and controlled by the Italian

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<sup>21</sup> Rotondi, *Canzonissima: Requiescat in pace*, *Ciao 2001*, n. 25, June 75, p. 9.

government and, after 1975, the parliament.<sup>22</sup> By contrast, the selling figures of *Ciao 2001*, while being very modest if compared to the Italian tabloid industry (Sfardini 2001), could be converted into a form of symbolic capital. The magazine's market success could be framed as a direct outcome of professionalism and expertise. As I discuss further below, *Ciao 2001*'s positive market performance was also converted into a proof of social authenticity. Indeed, RAI's distance from the charts was considered also as distance from the magazine's audience, that is, young people interested in pop-rock music.

### 6.3. *Social authenticity*

As argued by Lopes (2000), social authenticity is one of the concerns of producers working in the fields of popular art, as they could represent marginal social groups and alliances between them. However, the critics of *Ciao 2001* had a peculiarly populist understanding of social authenticity. Being a successful product, the magazine could be promoted as the most authentic voice of the Italian youth culture. Such an equivalence between market success and social authenticity is emphasised by the following article, in which Rotondi stresses the high number of responses which the magazine received for its 1973 survey about readers' opinions.

The survey shows that *Ciao 2001* doesn't have hundreds of thousands of readers [...] but hundreds of thousands of friends. *Ciao 2001* belongs [...] to hundreds of thousands of young people who [...] identify with this magazine. [In *Ciao 2001*] they find advice and, in some instances, spiritual guidance. They put into this magazine, consciously or otherwise, their desires, hopes, resentment and discontent with the world around them. Given the survey's

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<sup>22</sup> This view was due to critics' habitus and position in the cultural field. As far as we know, RAI could have been perceived differently by other cultural producers. Similarly, some of its TV shows could have been considered as middle or highbrow by less privileged social groups.

evidence, it's not an exaggeration to claim that today, in Italy, *Ciao 2001* is a unique magazine, the first one to have such a strong readership.<sup>23</sup>

Here as in other examples, readers are not simply defined as buyers, but as 'friends' who 'feel' the magazine as if it was their 'family'.<sup>24</sup> It is significant, then, that the editorial board mobilised this repertoire when it had to increase the magazine's price. Since a similar decision could be read as one of the 'crudest forms of mercantilism' (Bourdieu 1996: 142), it had to be framed as a moral question about the magazine's honesty and bond with readers.

We tried to resist, but the growing price of paper, among other rising costs, didn't leave us choice. We could have reduced the number of pages to cut costs (as other publications did). But that would have meant giving you a magazine not worthy of what you expect and deserve. [...] there is a special relationship between us and the majority of you, one which can't be compared with other magazines and the way they deal with readers. [...] You will keep receiving stickers and posters, as well as devotion. That same devotion that you always show to our (and your) magazine.<sup>25</sup>

The magazine's social authenticity was emphasised precisely to reject accusations of commercialism. As already discussed, these came both from readers and other field actors. However, occasionally they came also from external institutions, such as newspapers. As usual, critics' used high selling figures as evidence of social authenticity. In the following article, which discusses the negative publicity that *Ciao 2001* received by some Italian newspapers (such as *Il Manifesto* and *Il Borghese*) social

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<sup>23</sup> Rotondi, Cari lettori e cari amici, *Ciao 2001*, n. 48, December 1973, p. 5.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Anonymous, Perché abbiamo dovuto aumentare il prezzo, *Ciao 2001*, n. 1, January 1974, pp. 5-6.

authenticity means also that the magazine is not an elitist product, such as publications ‘read only by those who write them’.

Since no one wastes his time with dead publications [...] the fact of being criticised, and so meticulously, it's a proof that we are alive. Given that so many publications are read only by those who write them, this is undoubtedly something. [...] [These allegations] betray acrimony, perhaps because this magazine doesn't belong to anyone, and because we are free to say whatever we want. We are able to address the problems of young people moving from their own perspective. And this happens because the magazine is made by people who are young themselves, whereas the authors of the ‘investigative reports’ discussed here are close to their intellectual senility.<sup>26</sup>

As discussed in this section, critics, and particularly the person who both managed and co-owned *Ciao 2001*, used to convert their field-specific economic power into a form of symbolic capital. This capital was based on distinctive symbolic boundaries and moral values, such as independence, professionalism and social authenticity. Put otherwise, the magazine's economic power had to be ‘made authentic’ through an ongoing strategy of discursive conversion, which was pursued through the publication of editorial articles and answers to readers' letters.<sup>27</sup> As I show in the next section, *Ciao 2001*'s symbolic capital was mobilised also to justify a strategy of coverage based on adaptability to market changes and loose symbolic boundaries.

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<sup>26</sup> Rotondi, Noi e... gli altri, *Ciao 2001*, n. 42, October 1975, p. 4.

<sup>27</sup> Claiming symbolic autonomy, of course, does not mean that such autonomy is recognised by other actors. *Ciao 2001*'s claims were indeed received as false by other magazines and their readers. However, the weekly's market leadership throughout the 1970s indicates that its ‘strategy of conversion’ was successful at least with its audience.

## 7. Strategies: the coverage of soul and disco music

Between 1975 and 1979, performers such as Barry White, Donna Summer and Gloria Gaynor, as well as the soundtracks of *Saturday Night Fever* and *Grease*, figured consistently within the top ten positions of the Italian charts (Sfardini 2001). As a weekly devoted to the musical taste of Italian youngsters, *Ciao 2001* gave considerable space to this trend, known both in Italy and the US as disco music (Lawrence 2003). The magazine covered both disco acts and performers, such as Diana Ross and Ray Charles, who critics considered as soul music, that is, as historical precursors of disco. Critics writing for both *Ciao 2001*, *Muzak* and *Gong* expressed concerns about the commercial nature of disco and soul, especially in comparison to rock and jazz.

The technical and industrial nature of disco-music inevitably empties its main protagonists of any content. What could Roberta Kelly and Donna Summer ever tell us, shiny puppets in the hands of their producer, Giorgio Moroder. But do not believe that Moroder himself could say anything surprising. This music industry, no matter how inventive it could be, remains strongly attached to the concept 'I do what people like to sell more and more'.<sup>28</sup>

However, in contrast to *Muzak* (two features) and *Gong* (one feature), *Ciao 2001* gave considerable space to this trend, publishing regular weekly features about acts such as Gloria Gaynor, Diana Ross, Labelle, Roberta Kelly and so on. Indeed, the editorial board's intention was to make *Ciao 2001* 'the Italian magazine giving most space to soul music'.<sup>29</sup> The inclusion of these names in *Ciao 2001*'s coverage required a considerable amount of symbolic labour on the part of critics. For some readers, this was further proof of the magazine's commercial inclination, while others saw in the

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<sup>28</sup> M. Ferranti, Ah, questa disco music, *Ciao 2001*, n. 16, April 1977, pp. 66-67.

<sup>29</sup> Anonymous, Answer to Salvatore D'Aliberti, *Ciao 2001*, n. 24, June 1977, p. 7.



coverage of disco a betrayal of the magazine's identity as a specialist rock magazine.

When I see a page about Yes [prog-rock British band] and hundreds of articles about disco music and other sorts of muzak, my impression is that I am reading a non-specialised magazine, one of those we used to mock three years ago.<sup>30</sup>

To address these allegations, Saverio Rotondi mobilised the symbolic capital discussed in the previous section. In other words, he stressed the magazine's value as an independent, professional and socially representative journalistic outlet.

You say we are the first ones among the betrayers of rock. Well, let's be clear: we make a magazine, and we do that to inform the readers, not to tell them every week the history of rock from ten years ago. If music changes, and if there is nothing new to say about Yes, it is not our fault. As professionals, we are the observers – not the makers – of the current situation. Your allegations are meaningless, as we are just journalists.<sup>31</sup>

Here, professional expertise is represented by an 'objective' approach to music criticism, one that resembles the logic of the journalistic field (Benson and Neveu 2005).<sup>32</sup> According to this perspective, critics have to report about changing musical trends without imposing their own taste.

It's ridiculous to hear that we've sunk too low from people who have not understood that times have changed, and that music and the taste of music fans have changed as well. [...] A magazine doesn't rule over music trends, neither could it. A magazine reports, as objectively as possible,

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<sup>30</sup> Gaetano Bottazzi, *Ciao 2001*, n. 9, March 1977, pp. 5-6.

<sup>31</sup> Rotondi, Answer to Bottazzi, *ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> The choice of this repertoire was not accidental, as Rotondi spent more than a decade working as a journalist before becoming managing editor of *Ciao 2001*.

on the things happening in the world. This is its sole role. Allegations that we have changed our tastes are really ridiculous.<sup>33</sup>

The idea of criticism as objective reporting was in stark contrast with the highly normative forms of criticism developed by the Italian monthlies (Varriale 2014). In contrast to their position, *Ciao 2001* framed the coverage of soul and disco as an open debate, one in which critics and readers could express diverging opinions.

The most striking event of 1976 is the rise of discos, with their stereotypical rhythms, the computerised orchestras and voices, and other consumerist gimmicks. The phenomenon can be either alarming, intriguing or exciting, depending on the point of view.<sup>34</sup>

Adopting this non-normative stance, the magazine could pursue its ambition at representing the broadest segment of the Italian youth. However, while these position-takings give the impression of an extremely inclusive strategy of coverage, it would be a mistake to conclude that aesthetic boundaries did not matter at all for the editorial board. The inclusiveness of *Ciao 2001* was based on clear, albeit not always evident, aesthetic distinctions. As Rotondi himself explained to a reader asking for more variety within the coverage.

We always try to address every new phenomenon of the international music scene (but of course it needs to have *a minimum* of artistic dignity to be considered).<sup>35</sup> [my emphasis]

This minimum of artistic dignity implied the exclusion of Italian light music from the

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<sup>33</sup> Rotondi, Answer to Bartolo Da Fiore, *Ciao 2001*, n. 4, January 1977, pp. 5-6.

<sup>34</sup> E. Caffarelli, 1976, *Ciao 2001*, n. 3, January 1977, pp. 31-36.

<sup>35</sup> Rotondi, Answer to Daniele Baldini, *Ciao 2001*, n. 21, May 1977, pp. 5-6.

magazine's coverage. As argued elsewhere (Varriale 2014), the field of popular music criticism was based on a shared rejection of light music and other forms of Italian popular culture, such as public radio and television. In other words, critics rejected what they considered as the 'lowest' expressions of Italian popular culture. This position emerges in the following reply to a reader complaining about critics' frequent mocking of light music.

No one here wants to denigrate a certain kind of culture (?) or music, but we want to analyse and report on what we think is authentic music and culture. This is, of course, an explicit choice. I don't understand why we should take into account things which, frankly speaking, are objectively debased. I am thinking of celebrity culture (*divismo*), a certain kind of sugary light songs (*canzonettismo mieloso*), and the regrettable habits that we [Italians] have inherited thanks to the RAI. Everyone, if willing, is free to follow this way or any other way, but we are as free to try to support culture, or at least what we consider authentic culture.<sup>36</sup>

This argument was not in contradiction with the magazine's heteronomous strategy. As already argued, one has to situate this strategy vis-à-vis a broader space of possibles. *Ciao 2001*'s most successful years (between 1973 and 1980) coincide with the growth of the album market (De Luigi 1982), that is, a market of consumers interested in 'quality' popular music. To address this market of young consumers interested in rock and (to a lesser extent) jazz, the magazine had to define aesthetic boundaries based on highbrow values. This is why it rejected low forms of popular culture. Moreover, although *Ciao 2001* was trying to maximise its impact on the Italian youth, its editorial board was still composed by a fraction of culturally and socially privileged young people. Critics, then, could not easily question highbrow values, partly because

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<sup>36</sup> Rotondi, Answer to Annibale Angelozzi, *Ciao 2001*, n. 37, September 1975, pp. 5-6.

they were embodied in their own habitus, and partly because they were essential to the *doxa* of the field (Bourdieu 1996). However, while a highbrow appreciation of disco was problematic, critics could still use the magazine's symbolic capital to frame the coverage of disco as a coherent choice, one in line with the magazine's history and identity. In other words, critics could still claim that their role was to address disco in a *critical way*, that is, retaining their autonomy as professional and independent cultural intermediaries.

Our aim has never been to impose a certain music style, but to report on avant-garde music, [such as] pop, rock, jazz... Since there are new music trends today, it is unfair to say that we have changed. And we can't be accused of being commercial either, as this phenomena [disco music] is everywhere and we are just a magazine, not a music label. I agree that the past is important, and we keep discussing it with the usual passion. But we also have to live in the present, perhaps to criticise or refuse it. We just can't pretend it doesn't exist.<sup>37</sup>

It was thus possible to 'critically discuss' (and hence cover) music styles whose artistic value was considered problematic, such as disco but also 'tenny-bopper' acts (e.g. Gary Glitter, Slade, Suzi Quatro) and 'hard rock' acts (e.g. Black Sabbath, Alice Cooper, The Kiss), all of which received coverage through the publication of features between 1973 and 1977.<sup>38</sup> In this respect, *Ciao 2001*'s strategic inclusiveness can be considered a historically and context-specific form of 'omnivorism' (Peterson and Kern 1996). As other varieties of omnivorism, it was based on key symbolic

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<sup>37</sup> Rotondi, Answer to Paolo 59, *Ciao 2001*, n. 10, March 1977, pp. 5-6.

<sup>38</sup> It is worth stressing that these styles could still be framed as part of a broader Anglo-American tradition, hence their inclusion in the coverage was not at odds with *Ciao 2001*'s editorial strategy. Indeed, for *Ciao 2001* the key opposition was between pop music (*musica pop*) and Italian light music (*musica leggera*). More generally, the opposition between pop and rock, in 1970s Italy, did not have the same meaning than in the Anglo-American context (Regev 1994), and in *Ciao 2001* rock was frequently used as a synonym of pop.

exclusions (Savage and Gayo 2011), and hence on the definition of a 'lower' popular culture including both cultural forms (Italian light music) and their (presumed) publics (older generations). Critics' omnivorousness thus implied both aesthetic and social distinctions (Bourdieu 1984).

## **8. Conclusions**

This article has explored the strategies through which a market-oriented organisation (the music weekly *Ciao 2001*) converted its field-specific economic power into a symbolic capital based on distinctive boundaries, and on moral values such as ideological freedom, professionalism and social authenticity. I have argued that this conversion from economic to symbolic capital was made possible by a broader space of possibles, one in which the state, showing some continuity with the Fascist years (Colombo 1998), had retained significant control over the production and promotion of popular culture. Within this context, economic power could support an argument about the virtues of market-driven cultural production vis-à-vis the low quality of a popular culture controlled by political elites. Further, I have argued that Italy's peripheral position in the global field of pop-rock (Regev 2013) also played a significant role in shaping critics' strategies and categories of perception, as it made 'foreign' music genres, such as rock, jazz and soul, an appealing alternative to national popular music. Focusing on popular music criticism, this article contributes to the growing debate about the impact of market imperatives on cultural production - a debate that is also about the utility of Bourdieu's field theory for addressing such a question. While recent studies have focused on small scale cultural production, I have argued that scholars should focus also on heteronomous actors, that is, organisations which praise economic imperatives and could contribute to their cultural legitimation. The findings of this

article are obviously limited to a specific national and historical context. However, other scholars could further explore the strategies through which cultural producers convert economic power into a symbolic capital. Expanding the scope of this article, they could shed further light into why economic imperatives are not simply resisted by producers, but embraced and praised. Moreover, while this article has focused on inclusive music coverage and loose aesthetic boundaries, other studies could further explore the range of practices which are legitimised through appeals to market imperatives. Bourdieu's field theory can still play an important role in this line of research. Comparing different national contexts, it can explore the impact of global and national arrangements on the views and practices of cultural producers, and can unravel the conditions under which market success is successfully turned into a moral value.

From a theoretical point of view, the article has not addressed autonomy and heteronomy as mutually exclusive ideal-types, but as 'dispositions' (Bourdieu 1990) embedded in concrete practices and fields of relations. *Ciao 2001*'s argument about 'pure publishing' shows that cultural producers may have very different ideas about what 'being autonomous' means, and about the role of the market in cultural production. These views are likely to depend on the history of different fields and national societies, but also on the history of specific organisations and the 'position' they occupy in a wider field of national and global actors. Indeed, autonomy and heteronomy can only be relational (and hence relative) tendencies. As a result, we should expect struggles and 'autonomy claims' also at the heteronomous end of cultural production, while appeals to the market are likely to be found among some contemporary avant-gardes. This is in line with recent research showing that media workers have developed complex understandings of autonomy in a market-driven media system (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011). More importantly, it is in line with Bourdieu's relational view of society

and reflexive sociology, which requires 'sensitising' conceptual categories to empirical evidence in order to revise them (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). By and large, this may be a more useful approach to explore the complex relations that shape contemporary (global) cultural fields.

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