

EDN: LDJNHS
УДК 7.01:316.653:159.9.018

Artistic Institution: Causes and Consequences of Silence

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Received 16.02.2022, received in revised form 19.03.2022, accepted 23.01.2025

Abstract. This article presents the potential application of Noelle-Neumann's Spiral of Silence to the Institutional Theory of Art. Our main hypothesis is that this application is doable. The basic premise is that being art a cultural product with problems of objective definition and evaluation, certain groups in the art world act as a social group of reference. On the contrary, those agents outside it, choose to silent their opposing opinions not to be rejected and, in turn, to carry out a process of snobbish imitation. It is important to remark that the tools used in this article are mainly theoretical. The argument is presented through an inductive argumentation using propositional logic. As a consequence, the results are different than the ones obtained through another kind of argumentation, such as the deductive. Because of this, the results will be plausible. The conclusions are not empirically or statistically proven. The main conclusion of this text is that, confirming the initial hypothesis, the Spiral of Silence seems applicable to the Institutional Theory of Art. At least, is likely applicable in a generic and global context. On the other hand, further analysis, both quantitative or qualitative, could help to confirm if this plausibility is true to reality.

Keywords: contemporary art, elites, institutional theory of art, sociology of art, spiral of silence.

Research area: Theory and History of Culture and Art.

Citation: Adrià Harillo Pla. Artistic Institution: Causes and Consequences of Silence. In: *J. Sib. Fed. Univ. Humanit. soc. sci.*, 2025, 18(2), 338–353. EDN: LDJNHS



Художественная институция: причины и последствия молчания

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Аннотация. Статья рассматривает возможность применения «Спирали молчания» Ноэль-Нойман к институциональной теории искусства. Основная гипотеза заключается в том, что такое применение потенциально осуществимо. Основной предпосылкой является следующее: поскольку искусство – культурный продукт, имеющий проблемы объективного определения и оценки, некоторые группы в мире искусства действуют как референтная социальная группа. Напротив, те агенты, которые находятся вне его, предпочитают замалчивать свои противоположные мнения для того, чтобы их не отвергли, и, в свою очередь, осуществлять процесс снобистского подражания. Важно отметить, что инструменты, использованные в этой статье, в основном носят теоретический характер. Аргумент представлен с помощью индуктивной аргументации с использованием логики высказываний. Как следствие, полученные результаты отличаются от результатов, полученных с помощью другого вида аргументации, например дедуктивной. Благодаря этому результаты будут правдоподобными. Сделанные выводы не подтверждены эмпирически или статистически. Главный вывод предпринятого исследования заключается в том, что, подтверждая первоначальную гипотезу, «Спираль молчания» может быть применима к институциональной теории искусства. По крайней мере, применима в общем и глобальном контексте. С другой стороны, дальнейший анализ, как количественный, так и качественный, может помочь подтвердить, соответствует ли отмеченное правдоподобие действительности.

Ключевые слова: современное искусство, элиты, институциональная теория искусства, социология искусства, спираль молчания.

Научная специальность: 5.10.1. Теория и история культуры, искусства.

Цитирование: Адриà Арильо Пла. Художественная институция: причины и последствия молчания. *Журн. Сиб. федер. ун-та. Гуманитарные науки*, 2025, 18(2), 338–353. EDN: LDJNHS

Methodology

This text is intended to extend the content presented under the title of “Artistic institution: causes and consequences of silence” during the “V Congress Between Clio & Euterpe: Art and Power”. The mentioned congress – March 22/23, 2018 – was held by the Department of Philosophy of the University of Santiago de Compostela. The specific presentation took place on Thursday, March 22 in the Assembly Hall of the Faculty of Philosophy of the aforementioned university and, more specifically, in Table I, under the

moderation of Abel Lorenzo. At this point, it must be added for informational purposes only, that the thematic block in which it was inserted was entitled: “What do intellectuals think about? Interpretations of art and its function.”

After that initial communication and its subsequent development, this text presents a work of a mainly conceptual nature.

(S 0) Summary: This conceptual paper is based on the theory of the “Spiral of Silence” proposed by the German author Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann initially in 1974 and

its possible (or not) application to the “Institutional Theory of Art”. This now classic theory is mainly taught in disciplines that focus their efforts on what is called “public opinion”. More specifically, it is especially used from a political perspective – although also from Media and Communication Studies. (Chen, 2018; Hopkins, 2015; Katz, 1981; Sohn, 2019) Nevertheless, this theory has not been linked – or not clearly – to the “Institutional Theory of Art” field. This potential relationship between the “Spiral of Silence” and the “Institutional Theory of Art” is intended to be the main academic contribution of this text.

(S 1) Initial observation: Like any academic and scientific work, this conceptual paper is based on an initial observation susceptible of being analyzed in greater detail. This observation is that, in a contemporary art world with great information problems, this institutionalized art world increasingly acts as a socio-economic system made up of superstars and with few agents acting as a reference social group. Due to these factors, the “Spiral of Silence” seems to be a theory of possible application.

(S 2) Hypothesis: Consequently, the main hypothesis of this text is a hypothesis of a general and theoretical nature. This hypothesis can be put in a brief but clear statement: **(MH)** the “Spiral of Silence” plays a role within the mechanisms of interaction used by some agents of the art world.

(S 3) Experimentation: If our general and theoretical hypothesis is proven to be right in a coherent and plausible way, it is important to bear in mind that the results will be in a conceptual and pre-experimental stage.

If any individual or group is interested in testing the validity of this hypothesis in an experimental way, they can do so using the quantitative or qualitative instruments typical of the Social Sciences that they consider the most appropriate, which may include but are not limited to surveys or interviews.

Due to the nature of the “Spiral of Silence”, but also of the interviews or surveys, the experimental researcher might have to face, predictably, some potential issues. One of them is the lack of honesty due to the self-report of

data. This self-report would be the one provided by the interviewees and respondents. However, this negative factor and others that the experimental researcher may have to face could be significantly reduced with a good planning of the experimental tests.

Two other important steps of the scientific method have to be referred here.

One is that of creating **(S 4) a theory:**

As this is a theoretical embryo, even if the hypothesis is shown to be coherent and plausible, it will be far from a theory. Many subsequent processes, analysis, and discussions will be necessary to obtain a solid and proven knowledge that can be titled as a theory.

The other step is the one of contributing with **(S 5) representative conclusions.**

The conclusions will be presented in the final part of this paper. However, it is critical to specify the order on how the content will be presented to obtain such a conclusion.

In the first place **(1)**, we are going to present the “Spiral of Silence” in a contextualized way, and we will make a brief schematic summary of its main contributions. We do so by considering that it is one of the two key theoretical frameworks for this text and that, consequently, the object must be clearly delimited and defined.

Secondly **(2)**, we will do the same with the Institutional Theory of Art for the same reasons.

Finally **(3)**, we are going to interrelate what is presented here to observe if our theoretical and general hypothesis is logically plausible or if, on the contrary, the hypothesis is null or an alternative hypothesis must be sought.

We will finish this article with the necessary conclusions **(4)** and bibliography **(5)**.

Note: Any translation from Spanish, Catalan, or French into English has been made by the author of this text, unless otherwise indicated.

Note 2: This is a general and theoretical article. Consequently, any analysis of some individualized institutional micro-system could reflect different results.

Note 3: Any linguistic definition quoted literally corresponds to the Cambridge Dictionary in its latest edition, unless otherwise indicated.

1. The Spiral of Silence

As previously stated, we must start by specifying and defining what is the “Spiral of Silence.” By “Spiral of Silence” (from now on **SoS**) we refer to the theory presented and developed by Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann using the same expression. She did so through two texts published in 1974 – one in German and one in English. (Noelle-Neumann 1974) Afterwards, she published a book developing this theory. (Noelle-Neumann, 1993)

Such a theory supports that human beings – as social agents – do not want to be excluded from a collective environment and its mechanisms although, sometimes, there may be occasions and moments in which this is not possible. (Cacioppo et al., 2011; Cacioppo and Hawkley, 2009; Weiss, 1975) The way in which – according to Noelle-Neumann – individuals would try to avoid being separated from the social collective would be, simply speaking, by considering the opinions and actions of the perceived majority; next, individuals decide to act imitatively. (Noelle-Neumann, 1974; 1993)

It appears to be true that the proposal of Noelle-Neumann has an especially important application when opinions refer to moral or sentimental judgments and, consequently, not necessarily to rationally created ones. (Pollock and Cruz, 1999; van Roojen, 2010) As will be further specified, this maximizes its possible application to the Institutional Theory of Art.

However, beyond this elementary presentation of Noelle-Neumann’s work, it is also indispensable to specify the sub-hypotheses confirmed in the So S. To achieve this, we will follow the order used by one of the experts in her work, Dr. Thomas Petersen. The reason for doing so is in the first place because his criteria is shared after comparing it with the original text. Secondly, because the analysis of Noelle-Neumann’s work carried out by him along his career are analyses in greater depth.

That being said, Petersen (Petersen, 2015) summarize Noelle-Neumann’s proposal as follows:

1. *Most people are afraid of social isolation;*
2. *Therefore, people constantly observe other people’s behavior in order to find out which opinions and behaviors are met with approval or rejection in the public sphere;*
3. *People exert “isolation pressure” on other people, for instance, by frowning or turning away when somebody says or does something that is rejected by public opinion;*
4. *People tend to hide their opinion away when they think that they would expose themselves to “isolation pressure” with their opinion;*
5. *People who feel public support, in contrast, tend to express their opinion loud and clear;*
6. *Loud opinion expressions on the one side and silence on the other side sets the spiral of silence into motion;*
7. *The process is typically ignited by emotionally and morally laden issues;*
8. *In case of consensus on an issue in a given society, it is unlikely that a spiral of silence will be set into motion. The spiral is usually elicited by controversial issues;*
9. *The actual number of partisans of an opinion is not necessarily decisive for their weight in the spiral of silence. The opinion of a minority may actually be perceived as a majority in the public sphere if their partisans act assertively enough and publicly defend their opinion with emphasis;*
10. *Mass media may have a decisive influence on the formation of public opinion. If the media repeatedly (in a “cumulative” way) and concordant (in a “consonant” way) support one side in a public controversy, this side will stand a significantly higher chance of finishing the spiral-of-silence process as winner;*
11. *Fear of and threat with social isolation operate subconsciously: Most people do not consciously think about how their behavior is oriented by public opinion;*
12. *Public opinion is limited in time and space. Wherever people live together in societies, public opinion will function as a mechanism of social control. However,*

what specifically public opinion approves or rejects will change with time and differ from place to place;

13. *Public opinion stabilizes and integrates society because conflicts will be resolved through spirals of silence in favor of one opinion. This is what is referred to as the integration function of public opinion.*

Said this and as a partial summary, it can be said that Noelle-Neumann's theory postulates that individuals have fear of social sanction. In consequence, people have three chances:

1. To unify their opinions and attitudes with the ones of the perceived public majority;
2. to stay silent with the will of not being socially penalized;
3. to prioritize freedom of thoughts and speech over fear of social punishment¹.

Noelle-Neumann's proposal is considered a scientific theory because, firstly, it fits with the definition of theory provided by Cambridge Dictionary, according to which a theory is "*an idea or set of ideas that explains something.*" But not less important because there are numerous studies carried out from Social Psychology and Sociology that confirm the hypotheses established by Noelle-Neumann. Some classics are the cases of Solomon Asch, Philip Zimbardo, or Stanley Milgram. (Asch, 1956; 1951; Blass, 2009; Zimbardo, 2004) From a strict perspective of public opinion and its evolution, it is recommended the academic production of Hans Speier (2001). To understand the networks of public opinions the work of Watts and Dodds (2007) is of high value, and the research of Carroll J. Glynn (1989) is of high interest to understand the differences between real and perceived public opinion.

These three elements: the historical, relational, and real vs. perception are significant to thoroughly understand that a public opinion is, precisely:

1. An opinion: "*a thought or belief about something [art in our case] or someone*";

¹ This is only applicable to countries which recognize freedom of speech. In cases in which freedom of speech can be penalized with jail or physical punishment, it could be different due to the coercive factor.

2. Being this "thought" something epistemologically of subjective nature with a low sense of certitude;

3. Which is public: so "*of, for, or concerning, the people (of a community or nation) in general*";

At this point, it is time to present the theoretical framework of the "Institutional Theory of Art" to observe how Noelle-Neumann's SoS is applicable to this field.

2. The Institutional Theory of Art

As we have stated, we are going to use the "Institutional Theory of Art" (from now on **IToA**) as a theoretical framework to which to apply the So S. Consequently, we must contextualize and delimit what we mean by IToA. Beyond ontological questions and specific details, the IToA is the theory mainly established by Arthur C. Danto (1964) and George Dickie (1974) from Humanistic fields such as Philosophy and Howard S. Becker (2008) from Sociology.

In a simplified but honest way, it could be said that according to this theory, a society names as "art" something that is within an "art world" with the aim of being presented to a public. (Dickie, 2005)

An explanation of what the "art world" is it is not easy. However, Gerard Vilar i Roca wrote one description that seems quite accurate. For the Professor, the "art world" is

"the complex formed by artists, gallery owners, museums, collectors, foundations, art critics, some magazines and other media, and some educational institutions. Some political institutions and some patrons that have social practices such as producing works of art, selling them, buying them, appraising them, collecting them, exhibiting them, writing about them, defending them, attacking them, enjoying them, being fascinated and obsessed with them." (Vilar i Roca, 2005, 80)

It is important to note that, this definition, does not provide us any kind of ontological knowledge, but rather shows us what a human community refers to as art and in what social environment this categorization is generated.

This was specifically clarified by George Dickie himself by stating that

“the set of institutions that make up an art world – artists, fine arts schools, galleries, collectors, museums, magazines, critics, auction houses, historians, experts, etc. – constitutes the necessary institutional framework for the existence of art but in no way explains enough what art is and what it does.” (Dickie, 2005, 26)

However, although some thinkers like Dife (1969) have come to postulate that this art world acts as a republic, in the next section of this text we will try to show with data that this is not the case. Consequently, the SoS is applicable, since there is no balance of power between those previously mentioned agents that makes up the art world².

3. Silence and Institutional Theory

According to Noelle-Neumann’s work and the analysis made up by Petersen, *“most people are afraid of social isolation”* (1). According to the World Health Organization, the definition of “health” – unchanged since 1948 – is *“a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not only the absence of diseases or illnesses.”*³ Health is, in consequence, also social. In fact, an incipient number of studies are coming to identify negative effects of isolation derived from the current pandemic situation worldwide⁴. (Banerjee and Rai, 2020; Hwang et al., 2020; Jeste, Lee, and Cacioppo, 2020) However, this current situation has only reminded us of something that we already knew since, previously, some significant studies had been carried out on how self-isolation has negative consequences physically but also psychologically. In fact, self-isolation is a significant cause of suicide in global terms.

² By power, we mean, according to the Cambridge Dictionary, the “control over people and things that happen”, being this control “the power to make a person or thing do what you want”. This seems consistent with the normative role that every institution has.

³ This definition can be found on the WHO webpage.

⁴ To observe points in common with the psychological-effects consequence of the self-isolation generated by the SARS pandemic, see: (Hawryluck et al. 2004).

(Cacioppo et al., 2002; Farmer, Ciaunica, and Hamilton, 2018; Fässberg et al., 2012; Heffner et al., 2011; Kobayashi and Steptoe, 2018; Kuiper et al., 2015; Lee et al., 2019; Leigh-Hunt et al., 2017; Steptoe et al., 2013; Xia and Li, 2017; Yu et al., 2020)

But not only medical and psychological disciplines have been in charge of defining human beings as social.

Abraham Maslow placed the needs of socialization only behind the ones purely physiological and of security, and a timeless thinker like Aristotle has already described humans as political animals, social animals. (Aristotle, 2013; Aronson, 2004; Maslow, 2013) In fact, for Aristotle, sociability was the natural condition of humans and, acting against this own nature would imply going against nature. (Aristotle, 2013)

From a demographic perspective and according to the World Bank data, the global urban population has increased from the 33,6 % in 1960 to the 55,7 % in 2019, confirming these statements⁵.

But while we confirm the statement of Noelle-Neumann when describing the human being as social and afraid of self-isolation, we are not using a naïf definition of “social.” In fact, when we describe humans as social, we do so using the definition from the Cambridge Dictionary according to which social means *“living in communities”*.

This specification is important since we have to consider that human beings have both pro-social and anti-social attitudes. These anti-social attitudes take place within a social community, and cannot be used as an example to defend that humans are not social. Linguistically speaking, note that the prefix *anti-*, shows opposition to something, which must be present. On the other hand, the prefix *un-*, shows absence or lack of something, and we are not using in here the term *unsocial*. (Eisenberg and Mussen, 1989; Miller and Eisenberg, 1988; Simmel, 2010; 2017)

The novelist Jane Austen, for example, considered in *Pride and Prejudice* that socia-

⁵ There are different criteria by which a city is considered a city, from having a cathedral in Poland to the size of the territory, for example. But one of the most used criteria is the amount of population, being a city a large human settlement.

bility had an insignificant importance. There, she stated that if we are living together is just to serve as entertainment to our neighbors, and laugh at them when we have a chance to. (Austin, 1992)

With the time passing, the understanding of humans in society has been improved, and it has been classified as individual, social and historical (Zubiri, 2006), or as rationally selfish (Rand and Branden, 1964) – but in no case as a non-social. In fact, the famous Latin polyp-toton “*homo homini lupus*” used by Plautus and popularized by Hobbes is a useful cultural resource to remind us that humans have tendencies both towards fission and to fusion with others. This fission and fusion processes were excellently represented by the Schopenhauerian dilemma of the porcupines. These porcupines, in search for body heat in winter, were close to each other. Nevertheless, this was only possible until their spikes were painful, and they had to search for distance again. (Schopenhauer, 2000, 2:651–52)

The second point extracted from Noelle-Neumann’s work is that “*people constantly observe other people’s behavior in order to find out which opinions and behaviors are met with approval or rejection in the public sphere*” (2). This attitude lies at the base of man’s imitative capacities, skills that the sociologist Gabriel Tarde analyzed and studied in greater detail. (Tarde, 2011) In more recent dates, some researchers in sectors such as Biology or Social Psychology have continued to work on human methods of imitation⁶. This imitation ranges from numerous activities: from evolutionary such as learning a language to merely symbolic ones such as fashion or smoking. (Brooks, 1995; Erner, 2020; Godart, 2016; Monneyron, 2006) However, the example of fashion is a significant case that illustrates how not all forms of imitation occur in society with the same validity. Pierre Bourdieu contributions are capital in this case. He distinguishes three universes of tastes: the legitimate one, the average one, and the popular one. (Bourdieu, 1999: 13–16) This

difference makes the imitation sometimes addressed to feel part of the same social group, to be identified as different (underground culture) or, sometimes, imitation is just intended to imitate social groups considered to have a most legitimate taste (aspiration group-disclaimant group). This is frequently called snob imitation. (Baudrillard, 2000; Veblen, 2004).

So far, we have tried to justify that human beings are social and imitative. Although they may sometimes have anti-social attitudes, they are only possible in society. We also stated that imitative processes can be motivated by different reasons and with different objectives, including those of assimilating to a certain social group of reference.

According to Petersen’s (2015) analysis from Noelle-Neumann’s work, “*people exert “isolation pressure” on other people, for instance, by frowning or turning away when somebody says or does something that is rejected by public opinion*” (3). This appears to be true. Human beings have different ways of expressing feelings and attitudes, often through language, although not always through verbal language. (Darwin, 1950; Frith, 2009; Goldin-Meadow, 2014; McCall and Singer, 2015; Serkerdej et al., 2018) However, it is relatively easy to find samples of this same rejection within the IToA. In fact, in the text that gives origin to the IToA properly speaking, Danto himself refers to the individual who does not share the opinion of the agents of the art world as Testadura. (Danto, 1964) Testa Dura, in Italian, means hardheaded, which already implies a series of negative attributes.

Other expressions frequently used to refer to those who does not share the criteria provided by the establishment of the art world are, just to put a few examples, that of provincial, uneducated or peasant. (Bourdieu, 1999; Shiner, 2001)

Art, nevertheless, is a political and cultural product. It means that since it is political, its “social value” comes from its “social use” as a consequence of being “*produced and developed in a social and cultural political framework, it is polytheia and expression of a polis or civitas.*” (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Geertz, 1976; Vilar i Roca, 2017: 145).

⁶ See: (Byrne 2005; Clay and Tennie 2018; Farmer, Ciaunica, and Hamilton 2018; Huber et al. 2009; Mengotti, Corradi-Dell’acqua, and Rumiati 2012; Nielsen, Moore, and Mohamedally 2012; Sakkalou et al. 2013; Subiaul 2016)

It is essential, then, to analyze how the structure of this art world looks like. It is necessary in order to understand who holds the ability to make use of these expressions of rejection and isolation pressure. (Bourdieu, 1993; 1996; Witkin, 1995) As Inglis put it: “*art is a label put on certain things by certain powerful interested parties*”. (Inglis, 2005a: 101)

According to Petersen analysis, “*people tend to hide their opinion away when they think that they would expose themselves to “isolation pressure” with their opinion*” (4). Meanwhile, “*people who feel public support, in contrast, tend to express their opinion loud and clear*” (5). Although this statement is complex due to its generalizability, it is certainly a possibility. Hiding an opinion that is considered socially unfavorable is a way of conflict avoidance. At the same time, it can also serve as a tool to not be seen as part of a certain group (the disclaimant one) and, thus, unify criteria with the aspiration group. (Bourdieu, 1999; Forgas and Fiedler, 1996)

In this framework, it is consistent that those who unify their criteria with the reference group – aspiration group for those who are not part of it, will express their opinion louder and clearer. This is because the recognition by the agents of that group, would carry a whole series of symbolic meanings socially seen as positives. (Caillé, 2008; Heidegren, 2004)

According to Petersen’s analysis of the SoS, “*loud opinion expressions on the one side and silence on the other side sets the spiral of silence into motion*” (6). If we accept as coherent the conceptual context until here presented, this seems to be its logical consequence.

Logically, if a sender transmits his message and finds no obstacle in the form of a contrary or opposing opinion, the message can be transmitted through the channel relatively easily and the message can reach the receiver without significant problems. Adding several interlocutors or multiple messages at the same time could interfere with the emission of the message, something that does not happen in this case following the theoretical framework presented. One way in which multiple messages and interlocutors would not necessarily imply an obstacle would be if the

communicative act were carried out through different channels.

However, in the art world, as we have already noted, it is key to observe its structure.

There are some powerful agents within the art world. Some of them, but not only, are Christie’s or Sotheby’s (auction houses). Gagosian, Pace Gallery or Opera Gallery (art galleries). Thyssen-Bornemisza, Louvre, Hermitage (museums). Art Basel, Frieze or Scope Art Show (art fairs). These agents are having every time more social influence and, some of them, are even expanding their activities both geographically and through diversification of their activities.

These agents act as a reference institutional group in which their decisions, messages, and rules have a definitive role within what a society refers to be art and what kind of attitudes are legitimate and which ones are not. Some data can help to confirm this fact:

According to Artprice,

“[in 2018] *the financial power of the Contemporary Art Market [was] focused on a relatively small elite of artists in a much larger pool: 89 % of the segment’s global turnover is generated by its 500 most successful artists in an overall pool of 20,335 Contemporary artists who sold at least one work via auction between end-June 2017 and end-June 2018. The leading trio – Basquiat, Doig and Stingel – alone accounted for 22 % of the segment’s global turnover*”⁷. (Artprice, 2019)

From his side, Fraiberger and his colleagues published an article expressing how important it is, for an artist, to be able to be linked and exhibited by a key institutional agent. (Fraiberger, et al. 2018) This data is supported as well by the work from Wickham and his colleagues (2020) and the data reported by the Center for Cultural Innovation. (2016) The study carried out by Fraiberger and his colleagues has shown that a scarce 14 % of artists

⁷ The same tendency was reported in 2019. (Artprice 2020) Most recent analysis come to confirm this, but they are not here referred due to the exceptionality of our times regarding the pandemic situation.

who are outside those reference agents remain active after ten years. Not less important: the paper has shown that if one of the five initial shows takes place in one of the reference institutional agents, the risk of ending up in the edges of this social system is only 0.2 %. (Fraiberger, et al. 2018)

This framework turned the art world in a social system where some agents act as superstars and as a reference group, meaning that “*small numbers of people earn enormous amounts of money and dominate the activities in which they engage.*” (Adler, 1985; Botto- more, 1993; Hunter, 1953; Mills, 2013; Quemin, 2013; Rosen, 1981: 845)

We said that “*the process is typically ignited by emotionally and morally laden issues*” (7), and art seems to be one of these issues. As we have suggested, what a society calls art is something purely cultural and is not subject to rules of another kind, such as natural laws. Even when art is approached from a scientific perspective, it is cultural. (Iaccarino, 2003) In fact, there are examples in which a human community has given a series of connotative values – artistic in our case – to an object or practice, while those same individuals were not giving those same meanings to those same objects in different contexts. Some examples – but not limited to – are the ones from Banksy, Martin Kippenberger, John Chamberlain, Gustav Metzger or Sara Goldschmied and Eleonora Chiari. (Bergareche, 2013; Burrell, 2004; Cascone, 2019; EFE, 2016; Gómez, 2011; Redaction, 2008; 2013a; 2013b; Squires, 2015)

This illustrates that it is the social framework and its agents, mechanisms, and interests that determine what is art versus what is not. This is since there are no universal and falsifiable criteria to categorize what is art through a series of pre-established methodological and qualitative criteria. On the contrary, in a discipline in which there was a certain falsifiability, it would be relatively easier to be able to unify criteria and to determine which are true, false, significant, or irrelevant. (Kuhn, 2012)

This, in turn, corroborates the fact that “*in case of consensus on an issue in a given society, it is unlikely that a spiral of silence will be set into motion. The spiral is usually elicited*

by controversial issues” (8). Even though some counterculture or social groups with a certain tendency to not follow the shared and common consensus can always be observed, problems and conflicts of authority are much less frequent in some contexts. Specially, when there is a pre-established work methodology, a well-defined corpus, and well-established conditions of possibility and necessity. (Bijker, Bal, and Hendriks 2009) Art, however, is not like that. This is why it is a controversial subject. In fact, on many occasions, different agents from the art world minimize the uncertainty inherent in the use of the word art through at least two easily observable ways (although as far as we know, not thoroughly studied):

1. Taking as a reference objects or practices that already have a privileged institutional position and on which, consequently, a significant community of individuals will not hesitate to refer to it as art or; (Dickie, 2005, 18; 43; 122)

2. Using the term in a polysemic or even unspecific way, holding discourses and discussions about the same term but referring to different or non-delimited things.

According to Peterson’s, “*the actual number of partisans of an opinion is not necessarily decisive for their weight in the spiral of silence. The opinion of a minority may actually be perceived as majority in the public sphere if their partisans act assertively enough and publicly defend their opinion with emphasis*” (9). As we have expressed, a few agents are those who occupy the center of influence of this art world. Consequently, in an environment with high uncertainty like this one, they are those who treasure the authority to stipulate, and the resources to transmit, what is art versus what is not.

Although numerous agents are acting on the edges of this social system, they have very little power of influence. Usually, they also act mainly at a very local level or to very specific niches. (Fraiberger, et al. 2018) There is another important element that must be considered. Due to the flexibility of what is called art and its lack of falsifiability, when an outsider agent obtains a significant role and manages to give a value to something that the center did not consider, this center expands itself. With that, the establishment includes it within the net-

works of its influence, acting through flexible responses, and thus, keeping its role as a reference group within the totality of the social mechanism of the art world. (Young, Welter, and Conger, 2017) This is illustrated by practices such as graffiti or nowadays well-known postmortem artists.

Based on Noelle-Neumann's work, Petersen stated that "*mass media may have a decisive influence on the formation of public opinion. If the media repeatedly (in a "cumulative" way) and concordantly (in a "consonant" way) support one side in a public controversy, this side will stand a significantly higher chance of finishing the spiral-of-silence process as winner*" (10). There are many studies that show the way how the media influences on public opinion, not only qualitatively, but also in the amount of importance that public opinion gives to certain things. (Dearing and Rogers 1996; Katz and Lazarsfeld 1966)

There is no reason to think that art is an exception.

It is also true that, the mass media, are mainly concerned with providing information about what is considered to be of interest to a significant number of individuals. This is why they mainly report what is already in the center of influence of this art world. (McQuail, 2010; Severin and Tankard, 2001) In addition, sometimes the content provided or the way in which it is offered, can be influenced by advertising or political influences, among others. (Compaine and Gomery, 2000) However, these agents who act in the center of the art world, already have institutional relationships with similar organizations. Their links with the media and private sponsors are much more powerful than those available to those agents on the edges. (Compaine and Gomery, 2000; Wu, 2002) This provides them with a greater power to transmit the message and obtain a greater diffusion of its influence. And by doing so, confirming its role as a minimizer of opposing opinions – through generating silence – and as a maximizer of the opinion established by those agents in the center of this social framework.

To finish, we must remind that according to Petersen's analysis – with which we agree – of the SoS, "*fear of and threat with social iso-*

lation operate subconsciously: Most people do not consciously think about how their behavior is oriented by public opinion" (11). As we expressed, this social fear of isolation exists because we are all social animals. Thus, we presented how silence and imitation are effective ways both to not fall under isolation and to try to be associated with certain classes and social groups as well. The fact that this process is more or less conscious does not affect the facts that we expressed here.

It is not less true that "*public opinion is limited in time and space. Wherever people live together in societies, public opinion will function as a mechanism of social control. However, what specifically public opinion approves or rejects will change with time and differ from place to place.*" (12)

As we have stated, these reference agents have a powerful influence and resources. We must not ignore the fact that, as institutional agents, they hold a normative power which has an impact on public opinion⁸. (Friel, 2017; March and Olsen, 1984; Scott, 2013, 55–85) However, the fact that these agents have that power does not imply that they sometimes cannot provide flexible responses – as we already stated. It does not mean, neither, that individual members who make them up do not have different kind of values, ending up internally modifying that institutional agent. (Williams, 1979) Other factors, such as morality, political changes, or the economic situation, are factors that can also significantly influence the configuration of these institutional agents of the art world.

To conclude and before the conclusions, we must refer to the last of the points made by Petersen. The one specifying that "*public opinion stabilizes and integrates society because conflicts will be resolved through spirals of silence in favor of one opinion. This is what is referred to as the integration function of public opinion*" (13). In this same line of thought, as we expressed, some societies call art to some products and practices within a social system and framework. As we also stated, there are no objective, pre-established and absolute methodologies to distinguish what is art against

⁸ If not, they would not have power, and they would not be an institutional agent.

what it is not. We can only see the position that this certain objects and practices occupy inside this institutional system. George Dickie, another of the fathers of the IToA shared this point by writing that: “*by institutional approach we understand the idea that art works are art as a result of position they occupy within an institutional framework or context. Institutional theory, therefore, a fortune of contextual theory.*” (Dickie, 2005: 17)

This kind of contextual and positional knowledge helps, nevertheless, to observe the usage that a certain reference group makes of the term art. And, through a process as human as the process of imitation, how those opinions and referential knowledge on what do we call art within our society are integrated. The issue is that a significant number of people is on the edges of this institutional system. Their voice is silenced through social coercion, and we “*must always realize that something only counts as ‘art’ because a particular powerful person or group has defined it to be. If ‘art’ is a label put on certain things by certain people, where this label come from*”. (Inglis, 2005b: 12)

Conclusions

In this theoretical article, we have started by exposing the methodological steps that we have followed for its preparation. We started with a contextual and content presentation on the Spiral of Silence, a theory presented decades ago by the German author Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann.

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The presentation of the content has been done by using the summarization from one of the main experts in her work, Dr. Thomas Petersen. We have done it this way because we agree with his summary after comparing it with the original, and because he has greater knowledge about the author and the totality of her production.

Subsequently, we have contextualized and synthesized the Institutional Theory of Art, especially based on the work of its three most important authors. In short, we could say that something is art when it is found within a social system (an art world) and depending on the position it occupies in that system composed by agents, mechanisms, and motivations.

After doing this, we have attempted to apply the Spiral of Silence to Institutional Theory.

The main conclusion obtained is that the Spiral of Silence is applicable, coherently, to the Institutional Theory of Art. However, from a theoretical perspective, it is not possible to obtain an axiomatic proof of this, being an experimental research necessary to verify if this conceptual possibility exists *de facto* or if it should be relativized.

Note:

The author does not work for, consult, own shares in, or receive funding from any company or organization that would benefit from this article. The author has disclosed no relevant affiliations that could involve a conflict of interests.

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