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## Culturalization of the Economy and the Artistic Qualities of Contemporary Capitalism

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### Introduction

The uncertain destiny of arts and culture in the face of pressures from contemporary capitalism has been a repeated concern in academic and popular discussions. Art, today, seems to be facing two separate, yet interconnected tendencies that threaten to undermine its autonomy and critical potential. On the one hand, the neoliberal reorganization of the nation-states, having its roots in the late 1970s and yet intensifying in the “postcrash” austerity of the early 2010s, has questioned the legitimacy of art as a public good that should be supported by state funding. On the other hand, the potential for critical art is denounced by the now hegemonic business doctrines that idealize creativity as a state-of-the-art paradigm of management, with art acting as the metaphorical torchbearer of their liberatory euphoria. Within this dichotomist frame, art is caught between the devil and the deep blue sea: it is simultaneously undervalued as a nonessential burden upon stagnant national economies, and overvalued as an indispensable trailblazer for new economic growth.

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Looking from a systemic perspective, it may well be argued that the global art world is being increasingly penetrated by the norms and practices of the global capitalist economy. Even in itself, the art world has grown into a huge marketplace that stands out with its exaggerated fluctuations, extensive speculation, the articulated role of the dealers, and the curious gazes of observing audiences. There is a strange blend of affirmation and criticism in the reactions from within the art world to these developments (Velthuis 2005a). Capitalism, and the commercialization of art in particular, has provided a good target for critical art practices. Simultaneously, even the same artists that have posed the critiques may well have been among the beneficiaries of the criticized system.

The mutual history of art and capitalism can be understood as a history of transforming interdependence. What has been common for humanist and sociological approaches toward art research is that they have typically assumed an unidirectional causation in which “capitalism” (or “markets,” or “the economy”) is the explanatory variable, the cause of effects, whereas “art” (or “culture”) is the one to be explained or, as the statistical term *regressand* aptly warns, the one that “regresses,” adapts, and submits to the compelling demands of the more powerful domain. This correlates with the commonplace understanding of arts and culture as private, feminine, subjective, and “soft” vis-à-vis the economy as public, masculine, and objective, representing the “hard facts” of life. Consequently, when the hard and the soft collide, the hard prevails.<sup>1</sup>

As said, there are good reasons to believe that this actually is the case; that the prevalence and pervasiveness of economic practices and economic discourses (Throsby 2001, 149) makes it hard not to see art as a victim of irresistible global processes. This chapter, however, takes a slightly different path. My aim here is to analyze the transmutation of the art–capitalism hybrid by purposely swapping the roles: by looking at how capitalism adapts and regresses, and how, correspondingly, art explains, exemplifies, and engenders this adaptation. Through this shift of focus, this chapter contributes to the growing body of literature on the social organization of cultural, informational, affective, and artistic capitalism.

The reason for turning the tables is twofold. First, an analysis of the changes in the art world as caused by the transformations of the economy is subject to a sort of methodological melancholy, which tends to roman-

ticize an idea of noncapitalist or precapitalist art as a field without power relations, and, respectively, to dissipate the critical potential still available within the ruptures between art and capitalism. Second, the analysis of “Economy” or “Capitalism” with a capital letter, as an independent actor or a self-standing social and sociological category, risks reifying it as a homogeneous totality, omnipotent but analytically void. Thus, more concern should be targeted at the internal contradictions of the current form of capitalism and toward the ways in which they put concepts in motion as new ingredients are poured into the “satanic mill” of the economy (Polanyi 1944).

My specific object of research is to examine how certain practices of postmodern art anticipated the reorganization of the capitalist mode of production after the “three glorious decades” of the Fordist–Keynesian reign (approximately 1946–75; see Fourastié 1979). The claim here is that the drastic shift from industrial manufacture to an age of services and to a creative economy can already be read through the ways in which the movements of historical avant-garde and, later, postmodern art sought to reinvent the production process of artwork. I will address the question by a contextual rereading, which approaches the problems of the present with concepts and materials from the past. In other words, the *presentism* of my analysis—reading the past through the looking glass of today—is fully intended. Nonetheless, I shall suggest that the parallels to be found between artistic practices and economic developments are not purely arbitrary, but that certain forms of art, even while not being openly “political,” may well anticipate the social changes, cultural climates, and economic developments of their own time.

The shared tenets of postmodern art and the postmodern economy can be examined as a set of qualitative transformations in the organization of the production process, referred to here as *the artistic qualities of postindustrial capitalism*. I will analyze three of these qualities that strive to disrupt and destabilize the foundations of the modern industrial commodity form: *ephemerality*, *relationality*, and *coproductivity*.

To elaborate the argument at a more concrete level, I will contextualize the analysis to the level a single work of art, the composer John Cage’s *33 1/3*, and the closely related intertexts of it (such as Cage’s diary notes). The works by John Cage (1912–92) have not been among the canonical

references in the sociology of art. However, as I see it, a notable portion of Cage's oeuvre is valuable not only as an inspiration for the philosophy of music (like *4'33"*) or musicology (like the early works for prepared piano and percussion), but also for a more general outlook on the aspirations of the post-World War II art world and its resonances with the concurrent economic developments. *33 1/3*, a happening piece "composed" and premiered in 1969, also fits temporally well with my argument, being situated in the years of growing social and cultural movements and the *artistic critique* (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005) of the late 1960s.

The chapter progresses as follows. First, I will introduce the discourse of *the cultural economy* as popularized in the policy debates of the last 15 years. This discourse provides a viable backdrop for my argument by proclaiming arts, culture, and creativity as the key drivers of growth in postindustrial economies. However, I will argue that the quantitative and sectoral understandings of culture in these debates are far from satisfactory, and that the role of art in the whole of the creativity hype is ambiguous. For a more comprehensive picture, the cultural turn of the economy should be interpreted as a qualitative shift in the mode of production, which is what I will pursue in the second part. In contrast to the statistical understandings of the cultural economy, *culturalization of the economy* is not confined to a single sector or to a set of creative occupations; instead, it penetrates the practices of production, distribution, and consumption transversally, throughout the industries. Third, I will go on to analyze Cage's *33 1/3* as a case of the artistic qualities first introduced in postmodern aesthetics and later translated into the organizational principles of the postindustrial economies. Finally, I will conclude my argument by discussing the capabilities of art to reinforce and resist economic discourses and developments on a more general level.

## The Political Promise of the Creative Economy

From the turn of the millennium, the predominant way to frame the question of the economic importance of arts and culture has undoubtedly been the debate on *creative industries*. Early instances of the debate appear in the policy discourse of the 1990s, first in the Australian Labour

government's Creative Nation initiative in 1994, and a few years later, in the United Kingdom, where a governmental body, Creative Industries Task Force (CITF), was established to assess the economic contribution of the cultural industries toward the national economy.

Creativity was to become the buzzword of prospected economic growth for the twenty-first century (Garnham 2005) and the policy discourse developed hand in hand with a rising academic and popular interest in the topic, with highly influential works such as John Howkins' *The Creative Economy* in 2001 and Richard Florida's *The Rise of the Creative Class* in 2002 spurring the discussion further. Adoption of the creative industries' terminology provided a way for cultural policy-makers to legitimize their concerns about arts and culture in the neoliberal hegemony by linking them to the core of economic development (Hesmondhalgh 2007, 144). Moreover, the discourse served to articulate the notion of creativity as the key factor of innovation policies. In the 2001 edition of CITF's *Creative Industries Mapping Documents*, the Secretary of the State Chris Smith writes:

I want all businesses to think creatively, to realise creativity is not an add-on but an essential ingredient for success. I want our creative industries in particular to continue to seize the opportunities of a fast-changing world, to think 'out of the box', to innovate, to be flexible and swift, and to strive to realise their full potential. (DCMS 2001, 00:03<sup>2</sup>)

In the European Union (EU), the promotion of cultural economy was one of the key themes of the Lisbon Strategy, a political process that hailed the concepts of an information society and knowledge economy, having a goal of making the EU by 2010 "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion" (KEA 2006, 1). In 2006, a report published by the European Commission to serve as a backdrop for the strategy process underlined the importance of culture for the growth of the European economy, stating that, in 2003, the cultural sector already contributed an annual turnover of €650 billion and a share of 2.3% of the total gross domestic product (GDP), figures that outweighed more traditional industries such as car manufacturing, information and commu-

nication technology (ICT), and real estate. In this report, the cultural sector also boasted a higher growth rate than the rest of the economy (Ibid., 1, 6). A more recent report commissioned by the French think tank Forum d'Avignon claims to confirm the results of the relatively high importance of the creative sector in Europe, estimating a GDP share of 4.4% (€ 558 billion) and an employment share of 3.8% (8.3 million jobs) for the “core” industries. For the “total” industries, the figures are evidently even higher (Forum d'Avignon and TERA Consultants 2014).

However, there is an interesting tension between the quantitative–sectoral approximations and the more ubiquitous understandings of the role of creativity in generating economic growth. In the policy discourse, the terms “cultural” and “creative” are used very flexibly and often almost interchangeably. This has led to a broadening of the already ambiguous category of the cultural industries, or “CIs,” to an amalgam of the cultural and creative industries, or the “CCIs,” a conceptual multitool that incorporates a batch of divergent and potentially contradictory connotations (Gibson and Kong 2005). The implicit definition of culture given on the webpage for European cultural statistics, Eurostat, is revealing for the point in question. Culture, here, is seen as an “utmost important aspect of human development for centuries, be it as an economic activity or as a potential for developing well-being and social cohesion” (Eurostat 2013). Similarly, the *Creative Industries Mapping Documents* in the United Kingdom define creative industries as those which “have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property” (DCMS 2001, 00:05). In other words, individual talent or even the long history of “human development” is articulated as a more specific and a more short-term function of capital accumulation through cultural commodities.

As a logical continuation for the economic expectations from commodified culture, the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) has introduced the notion of *copyright industries*—a category that serves as a catch-all for the most profitable parts of culture. The scope of the copyright industries is even wider than in the earlier definitions of CCIs: it extends from the “core” industries to the “interdependent,” “partial,” and “non-dedicated support” activities (WIPO 2003, 28–35). This four-

fold hierarchical model is supported by an elaborate methodological framework for assessing the economic performance of copyright industries at the national level (WIPO 2003). To date, local researchers have conducted over 40 national studies with the assistance of WIPO experts. According to a meta-analysis of the studies, the economic contribution of the copyright industries varies significantly across countries, from 2% of GDP in Brunei to 11% in the United States, with an average of 5.2%, and the share of employment averaging at a similar figure, 5.3%. The study also points out that there is a positive correlation between the share of GDP in copyright industries and the overall growth of the national economy (WIPO 2014, 2–3).

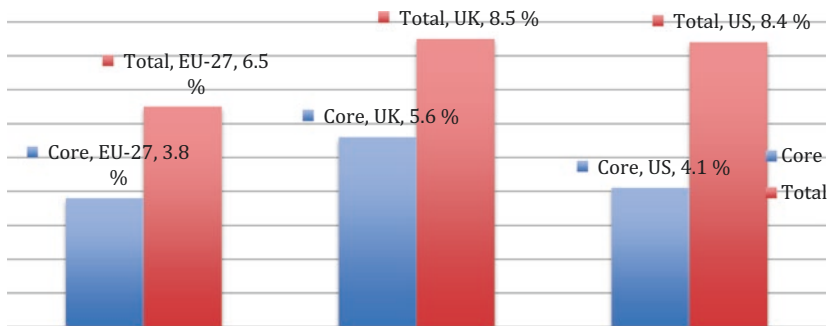
Even outside of the WIPO framework, the two most commonly used indicators for assessing the importance of CCIs are the added value for the national GDP and the share of employment attributable to them. Both of these measures rely on an understanding of the economy as consisting of discrete sectors or industries, which in the European context are typically mandated by the NACE (*Nomenclature statistique des activités dans la Communauté européenne*) classification utilized by the national statistics offices.

The limitations of the sectoral approach are well-known. First of all, it is often impossible to determine whether a single sector of data collection would count as creative or not (Cowen 2011, 120). A typical example of the problem is the publishing and print press industry, which includes very creative occupations and services (such as copywriting) and very monotonous forms of work (such as the more “industrial” occupations of the print press). Consequently, a definitional problem arises: which industries should be included, and by which criteria? (Throsby 2011, 158–59). The difficulties of demarcation lead to arguably overextended categorizations, aggregating highly dissimilar industries such as jewelry, fashion, and software development (Hesmondhalgh 2007, 179). Apart from the problems in classification, a lack of commensurable longitudinal data makes it difficult to evaluate the hypothesis of a cultural turn in the economy even in the scope of a national economy, not to mention in an international comparison (Towse 2011, 127).

Despite the considerable methodological doubts, there is at least suggestive evidence of the growing magnitude of the creative/

cultural/copyright industries (Hesmondhalgh 2007, 90, 181; Towse 2011, 127; Fig. 2.1) and their correspondence with economic growth more generally (WIPO 2014). But what is the more specific role of *art* in these debates, then? It is ambiguous, to say the least. On the one hand, art occupies a special role as a point of reference for the most symbol-intensive industries. On the other hand, the direct economic output of the traditional arts sector, in comparison with the broader cultural or creative industries, is rather modest.

For example, in the United Kingdom, a report commissioned by the Arts Council of England and the National Museum Directors' Council estimated a national GDP share of 0.4% for the arts and the culture industry in 2010, whereas the government statistics for the creative economy gave a figure of 5.2% (for 2012) (CEBR 2013; DCMS 2014). In other words, the share of arts and culture in the total added value of the creative economy would be less than 10%. In the United States, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) estimated the contribution of "arts and cultural production" at 3.2% of GDP compared with the figure of 11.3% for "total copyright industries" given by another study (NEA 2013; Siwek 2013).



**Fig. 2.1** Estimates of the share of employment in cultural, creative, and/or copyright industries, 2011–12 (Sources: Forum d'Avignon and TERA Consultants 2014 (EU-27); DCMS 2014 (UK); Siwek 2013 (US). Definitions: EU-27: Employment in the "core" and "total" creative industries of the current member states of the European Union, excluding Croatia, in 2011. UK: Employment in "creative industries" and "creative economy" in the United Kingdom in 2012. US: Employment in "core" and "total" copyright industries in the United States in 2012.)



Even categories such as “arts and culture” might be too broad to account for what their labels imply. Here, it is worthwhile to consider, for a moment, the subsectoral breakdown of the US arts and culture statistics. These statistics, produced by the US Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) in cooperation with NEA, are based on a system of satellite accounting that does “not change the official U.S. Economic accounts” but instead aims to “provide greater detail [...] and allow analysis of a particular aspect of the economy” (NEA 2013). The scope of arts and culture in these statistics is rather wide, consisting not only of traditional forms of cultural production but also of areas such as information services, design and advertising, and various forms of live entertainment (such as ice-skating shows). Consequently, the largest contributors to the economic performance are to be found in areas whose status as arts and culture would be most disputable. In the 2011 figures, the top arts and cultural commodity is the subsector called “the creative content of advertising,” which contributed 21.8% of the gross output. Cable television, film, and video industries contributed another 20.0%.<sup>3</sup> In terms of value added, the “information” sector (consisting mostly of the subgenres of media economy) had a share of 39.4%, while the share of performing arts, museums, and art education was at 11.6%, equaling only 0.4% of the national GDP—a figure comparable to that in the British report (NEA 2013, n.d.; BEA 2013).

The conclusion of this cursory review would be that what is portrayed as the economic triumph of “arts and culture” is, in more concrete terms, widely explained by the growing economies of the information sector, and especially by the turnovers of media and advertising. Whether this amalgamation of categories is defensible is not strictly an empirical question, but goes back to the more general issue of what actually is argued or implied with the political promise of the cultural economy. We could talk about the *political performativity* of statistics: the data generated for the cultural economy debate does not merely describe the world but also contributes to the efforts of changing it. In Habermasian terms, the *knowledge interest* behind the proliferation of the data collection and the reports on the cultural economy is not of a technical but of a practical kind, and can thus only be understood in tandem with the new political-economic role of culture. Quoting a UNESCO (United Nations

Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) report on the assessment methodologies of the cultural industries, the question on how to define, classify, and measure the economic contribution of cultural industries “cannot be answered independently of specific objectives of policy perspective” (UNESCO 2012, 29).

On the whole, it is evident that the direct economic output or the employment in the arts sector is not the key factor that would explain the alleged significance of art for capitalism today. Rather, as I will argue, it is the idealization of art as the vantage point of creativity, on the one hand, and its exemplary role in the creative organization of the production process, on the other, that make their relation comprehensible and significant.

## Culturalization of the Economy as a Qualitative Turn

Already back in 1994, sociologists Scott Lash and John Urry, in their book *Economies of Signs & Space*, anticipated a shift in a global organization of production that could be now labeled as *the culturalization of the economy*. This transformation has little to do with the quantitative and policy-focused framings of the cultural economy discussed earlier, but is more related to a qualitative and structural analysis of the shift from the Fordist to the post-Fordist mode of production, which occurred gradually during the 1960s and culminated in the 1970s and 1980s. While the Fordist regime was characterized by the mass production of identical material goods to the consumer markets within a vertically integrated firm (Lash and Urry 1994, 113; Neilson and Rossiter 2008, 55–57), post-Fordism, on the contrary, celebrates the unique, the aesthetic, and the immaterial, having its production process scattered geographically, temporally, and among a large number of individual microproducers.

If the leading mental image of the Fordism of the 1910s was the T-Ford assembly line circumscribed within the factory walls, the experience of post-Fordism in the 2010s could be illustrated with a picture from a cafeteria-like coworking space (preferably in an abandoned industrial complex) packed with freelance professionals, artists, and researchers, all

of them immersed with their personal laptops, schedules, and projects to manage, but still trying to maintain a degree of sociability to allow for spontaneous collaboration. The imagery of an industrial factory has been replaced by the one of a *social factory*, where artists, designers, and new media workers are supposed to take the lead as the model entrepreneurs of the creative class (Gill and Pratt 2008). Ideal types surely present an easy target for criticism, yet they also convey a grain of truth. The social nature of creative work may not be the everyday reality of the population as a whole, but it may still pose a paradigmatic figure for organizing work in postindustrial capitalism.

Lash and Urry argue that one of the major misconceptions in the cultural industry debate has been the overemphasized or misguided concern over the commodification of culture. The commodification argument assumes that in the course of capitalist development, the production of culture becomes more and more like a manufacturing industry. This conception is most clearly articulated in the Frankfurt School's notion of the culture industry as the mass production of false consciousness. Conversely, Lash and Urry point out that already in the golden age of industrial capitalism, the culture industries were more "innovation-intensive" than the rest of the economy, representing a paradigm that the later developments in the reorganization of production would follow. Thus, instead of arts and culture being subsumed by the logics of the market, ordinary manufacturing will resemble the production of culture: "It is not that commodity manufacture provides the template, and culture follows, but that the culture industries themselves have provided the template" (Lash and Urry 1994, 123). Certainly, commodification is still a key issue, but it is the copyright, not the assembly line, that sets the standard.

In accordance with Lash and Urry, Michael Hardt (1999) argues that the contemporary economy has become "postmodernized." This implies that the focus of economic valorization lies no more on producing material goods by processing natural resources, but on the production of *immaterial commodities* such as knowledge, experiences, affects, attitudes, and expectations. Contrary to the typical misunderstandings, the claim here is not that the domain of material production would have suddenly disappeared, but that it has nevertheless been pushed away from the core

of value creation to the periphery, where it will serve as a backdrop to the more precious processes in the value chain.

In terms of organizing labor, immaterial production deviates drastically from the norms, values, and practices of the industrial–Fordist phase of capitalism. Manufacture, generally speaking, expected workers to act in a predictable and monotonous manner, adapting to the pace of the assembly lines by which they stood. In stark contrast to this, immaterial production calls for originality, individuality, and the capability to constantly transform oneself according to the needs of the particular situation (Virno 2004). The new virtues of a worker are similar to those of a creative artist: to innovate, to improvise, to go against the grain, to find one’s unique style, and to convert oneself into a successful brand.

While there is a plethora of theories that resonates the idea of a cultural mode of production, they only scarcely discuss arts and culture as the specific site of this transformation. Recently, the French philosopher Gilles Lipovetsky and the film critic Jean Serroy have introduced the concept of *artistic capitalism* to describe the ever-more ubiquitous aestheticization of the world. Tracing the origins of the proliferation of the aesthetic domain from the 1860s onward, they argue that it is the *transaesthetic* phase of the last three decades, characterized by developments such as globalization, financialization, and deregulation, that leads the way for the unrestricted inflation of the aesthetic domain (Table 2.1). In the “hypermodern” capitalism, the world of markets has widely incorporated the logics that were previously understood as belonging to the world of art: styles, dreams, seductions, and entertainment. These features help to sustain contemporary capitalism as an “economic-aesthetic complex” (Lipovetsky and Serroy 2013, 37–39).

Extending upon these lines of thought, culturalization of the economy could be defined as the process in which cultural materials, practices, qualities, tendencies, norms, and values that were typically understood as belonging to the sphere of culture, and thus being relatively independent of market valuation or being “noneconomic” altogether, are increasingly being integrated into the production process. It is truly a “regression” for the modern notion of the economy, which by the Marginalist revolution of the nineteenth century had developed into the most autonomous form ever seen, leaving behind the chains of society, culture, and morals with

**Table 2.1** Three phases of artistic capitalism

| Phase of artistic capitalism | Historical period | Hallmarks   |
|------------------------------|-------------------|---|
| Restricted                   | 1860s–1950s       | Birth of departmental stores, industrial design, haute couture, advertising, film, and musical industry |
| Extended                     | 1950s–1970s       | Spread of artistic logics into economic and social domains through fashion, advertising, and so on      |
| Transaesthetic               | 1980s–present     | Cross-industry hybrids between art, fashion, design, and commerce                                       |

Source: Summarized from Lipovetsky and Serroy (2013)

the invention of *Homo economicus*, the nonpersonal rational agent. Now, with culture being subsumed in the domain of economy again, and not only as simple commodities but at the level of its more fundamental logics, the understandings of “the economic” are in flux and open to new interpretations. It is in this context that I will next present my discussion of the artistic qualities of contemporary capitalism.

## Artistic Qualities of Contemporary Capitalism: Lessons from John Cage

In the fall of 1969, composer John Cage set up a happening entitled *33 1/3*. This event, named after the standardized spinning velocity of the 12-inch vinyl record, took place as a part of the one-day festival “Mewantemooseicday,” codirected by composer Larry Austin and held at the University of California at Davis. In this work, 8 sound systems, 12 turntables, and some 300 records were arranged on tables in a room without any chairs to sit on. Loudspeakers were distributed around the space. The audience that entered the room did not get any instructions, but after a while, people started to play records, creating an uncoordinated and transitory assemblage of readymade sonic materials (John Cage Trust 2014b).

*33 1/3* has been attributed to the genre of *musicircus*, introduced by Cage two years earlier in a work with the same name. *Musicircus* (1967)

was an extreme example of an open composition, “an invitation to bring together any number of groups of any kind, preferably in a large auditorium, letting them perform simultaneously anything they wish, resulting in an event lasting a few hours” (Dickinson 2014). It has been considered as the most anarchic and antiauthoritarian of Cage’s works: there were no instructions, no distinction between performers and the audience, no form of prescribed coordination whatsoever—“neither ensemble nor counterpoint, but rather simple coexistence” (Brooks 2002b, 221). In the same vein, *Mewantemooseicday*, as the performance context of *33 1/3*, constituted a remarkable “circus” of music, even if in a slightly more organized form: there was a total of 18 hours of musical and extra-musical program, including a performance of Erik Satie’s *Vexations*, performances by the university orchestra and band, lectures given by Cage, and film presentations (Pritchett 1996, 158).

After the premiere, *33 1/3* has been seldom performed, never recorded, and only scarcely mentioned in research. Nonetheless, the work incorporates a set of distinctive features that project it as a relevant example not only of Cage’s own work in the 1960s but also of the experimental aspirations of postmodern art of that time more generally. And more importantly for the argument at stake, it anticipates the tendencies of ephemerality, relationality, and coproductivity, all of which would soon begin to reformulate the avant-garde of postindustrial economic practices.

## Ephemerality

LXXIV. Ephemeralization. Away from the earth into the air. Or: “on earth as it is in heaven.” More with less: van der Rohe (aesthetics); Fuller (society of world men). Nourishment via odors, life maintained by inhalation: Auguste de Comte (*Syteme de Politique Positive*, second volume). (Cage 1969, 152–153)

Lash and Urry (1994, 4) argue that in post-Fordist economies, objects are progressively emptied of material content. Economist Diane Coyle, in *The Weightless World* (1997), elaborates upon the same argument of immaterialization through an anecdote from a speech by ex-Fed chair-

man Alan Greenspan, in which he discusses the shift of focus in the economy from big physical objects (“steel, huge cars, heavy wooden furniture”) to small or even intangible things (“transistors rather than vacuum tubes, fibre-optic cables or satellite broadcasting rather than copper wire, plastics rather than metals”). The real punch line of the speech is here: “While the weight of current economic output is probably only modestly higher than it was half a century ago, valued added adjusted for price change has risen well over three-fold” (Quoted in Coyle 1997, viii). In essence, Greenspan remarks that the creation of economic value had become detached from the creation of physical objects.

A typical 12-inch vinyl record weighs between 140 and 200 grams. However, it is not this mass, or even this *material*, the engraved disk made of polyvinyl chloride, that explains the value of Cage’s artwork. It is not the score either: in fact, there was none, and the sheet music later published by C.F. Peters is only a half-page description of what once happened (Cage n.d.). *33 1/3* replaced the goal of producing a lasting, stable object of art with a temporarily staged artistic *process* in which the material domain of production—the exhibition room, the turntables, the vinyl records—only served as a backdrop to the immaterial production of a social arrangement.

As Jeremy Rifkin shows in *The Age of Access* (2000), owning things has become rather unattractive in current business practices. Real estate property, big stocks, or expensive machinery is not seen as an advantage but as a burden and a risk in an environment that requires the capability to react rapidly to unpredictable fluctuations. Thus, instead of clinging to the material, firms try to expel it, concentrating solely on the production of *ideas*. Rifkin’s argument is essentially the same as Cage wrote in his diary notes of 1965: “We are getting rid of ownership, substituting use. Beginning with ideas. Which ones can we take? Which ones can we give?” (Cage 1969, 3). The introduction of the genre of *happening* in the 1950s and 1960s resembles a similar shift, where the predetermined compositional materials are replaced by the “immaterial materials” derived from the collaborative situation itself, and the permanence of the artwork is replaced by the ephemerality of the performance.

As a happening piece, the most obvious predecessors of *33 1/3* are, in addition to *Musicircus*, the untitled event at Black Mountain College in

1952 (also known as *Black Mountain Piece*) and *Theatre Piece* in 1960 (Fetterman 1996, 125). *Black Mountain Piece*, widely considered as the first-ever happening (Fetterman 1996, 104), gathered a truly multidisciplinary group of artists, with M.C. Richards and Charles Olson reading poetry, painter Robert Rauschenberg playing scratchy records with an Edison phonograph, Nicholas Cernovitch projecting a film onto Rauschenberg's white paintings, Merce Cunningham dancing, and David Tudor playing the piano. The composer himself stood on a ladder, dressed in a black suit and reading excerpts from the "Juilliard Lecture" (Miller 2002, 151). In *Theatre Piece*, the nonsymbolic and nonpurposeful cooperation is achieved through a highly complex but abstract score that lets the performers choose a set of actions (in effect, a list of 20 nouns and/or verbs) while still strictly mandating their timing and juxtaposition (Fetterman 1996, 104–108).

The complexity approach was soon to give way for the more minimal, or even nonexistent, performance notes. William Brooks describes the development in Cage's compositional means as a passage from concrete to abstract descriptions. First, in the works of the 1950s, compositional structure was subsumed into the method while materials were still mandated by the composer himself or by circumstances. In the 1960s, materials were also subsumed, and neither sounds nor durations were predetermined. In the late 1960s, as in *Musicircus*, even the method had disappeared. That which remained was only the form, though not as an organizational principle but as manifested in the act of *naming* a piece. This was the limit of Cage's experimentalism: everything was to be liberated but the abstract categories of "composition" and "composer" themselves (Brooks 2002a, 129).

The detachment of the composer resonates with the post-Fordist reorganization of the production process where the capitalist-investor steps aside from the concrete realm of the shop floor to a virtual mode of control (Moulier Boutang 2011, 50), operating through the informational and financial layers of the economy. It highlights the role of human capital and innovation, giving the workers (or, in this case, the collaborating audience) the freedom to decide on the details of getting things done. As Cage notes in his diaries, this calls for a new ideal worker with the new skills of flexibility and self-organization:



When our time was given to physical labor, we needed a stiff upper lip and backbone. Now that we're changing our minds, intent on things invisible, inaudible, we have other spineless virtues: flexibility, fluency. Dreams, daily events, everything gets to and through us. (Cage 1969, 51)

## Relationality

For Cage, the avant-gardist aesthetic production was integrally related to the contemporary metropolitan conditions, where the fragmented nature of the everyday experience correlated to the compositional forms in which the seemingly nonrelated sounds would coexist as an unexpected montage (Branden 2002, 143). The specific sonic content of the used materials was only of secondary importance, for what was highlighted was the potential for creating new combinations—relating the unrelated.

In the 1960s more generally, Cage's focus in composition shifted from organizing materials to a more abstract level of organizing processes (Williams 2002, 234), or what could be understood in economic terms as the reshaping of the means of production. For example, *Variations I–VI* (1958–63) do not include notated parts for individual players, but instead provide instructions for “parts to be prepared from the score” through processes that combine intentional and nonintentional elements, such as superimposing plastic transparencies with graphic notation on a map that was to be made by the performer for each context specifically. Composer Gordon Mumma, who collaborated with Cage on many projects, describes the curious tension between freedom and planning as follows:

[Normally] Cage set up the architecture but then allowed the internal decor to be subject to chance operations – [that is, there were] defined structures that permitted internal maneuverability. Cage was incredibly disciplined. He planned what he was going to do – or what was going to be done – the results of which were often beyond predictability. (Cited in Miller 2002, 159)

The “means of production” of *33 1/3* consisted of the amplified turntables (“machinery”) and the records with random contents (“raw materials”). Cage had experimented with turntables already in 1939 with

*Imaginary Landscape No. 1*, which is, along with Ottorino Respighi's *Pini di Roma* (1924), considered as one of the earliest electroacoustic works ever composed (John Cage Trust 2014a). In contrast to *33 1/3*, it required specific records to be played: two Victor “frequency records” (with a sweeping sound between low and high frequencies) and one constant note record. The turntables were accompanied by a muted piano and a cymbal (John Cage Trust 2014a).

As a work that employs technological “noninstruments” as sources of indeterminate sounds, *33 1/3* relates perhaps more closely to the various pieces composed for radio receivers, such as *Water Music* (1951), *Radio Music* (1956), and *Music Walk* (1958). One of the most well-known of the radio works is *Imaginary Landscape No. 4* (1951), which calls for 12 radios, with two performers at each: one dialing the stations, the other one controlling amplitude and timbre. The piece is written in conventional notation that indicates precisely how to control the radios, but since the content transmitted through the radio waves at a certain moment is independent of the performers, the end result is virtually indeterminate. Quoting Alastair Williams, the work is thoroughly post-modernist in the way it “produces sounds in space without providing a schema by which to understand them” (Williams 2002, 229). We could add that it is also thoroughly *relational*, as it only prescribes how to bring the elements together, without taking a stand on their contents.

The use of readymade materials in a nonintentional and nonrepresentational manner was confusing even for expert audiences. As the premiere of *Imaginary Landscape No. 4* took place late in the evening, most of the radio stations had already gone off. Thus, the performance had a lot of awkward moments of “nothingness,” which was a disappointment to some. Cage himself, however, was happy about the unintended silences and the lack of control of the result (Fetterman 1996, 18–19).

In *33 1/3*, Cage is “composing” (lat. *com + poner*) in the literal sense of the word: just putting things together and dealing with the heterogeneity of the available and emerging materials. He does not try to provide any specific product but rather the very circumstances and conditions in which production can take place. He provides the moment for an assemblage to emerge and a site for “a lot of people working together without getting in each other’s way” (Cage and Charles 1981, 180).

## Coproductivity

They taught us art was self-expression. You had to have “something to say.” They were wrong; you don’t have to say anything. Think of the others as artists. (Cage 1973, 17)

In giving primacy to the participating audience, Cage’s work anticipates the ideas of the blurring relations between the producer and the customer, or the supply and the demand, in postindustrial economies. Portmanteaus such as *prosumer* (Toffler 1980), *produsage* (Bruns 2008), *weisure* (Conley 2009), and *playbor* (Kücklich 2005) all serve to highlight the active role of the customer-user, who, instead of the investor or the foreman, is now seen as the primary agent in the production cycle.

During Fordism, the factory had a “mute” relation between production and consumption (as in the romantic–modernist relation between the artist and the audience), producing a certain amount of particular commodities regardless of customer preferences. In the organizational principles of *Toyotism* (Coriat 1994), the direction of the assembly line was inverted. The new goal was *just-in-time production*, where the initiative is always on the customer’s side and where the circulation of information becomes the central element in governing the production process (Hardt 1999, 93–94; Moulier Boutang 2011, 52).

With *33 1/3*, Cage went further from the Toyotist model, in which “each audience member’s observations structure the performance” (Fetterman 1996, 142), to a veritable model of coproduction. In the absence of the composer or professional performers, audience members are put onto the stage as the true protagonists of the story, who themselves have to make the necessary decisions and actions when constructing the piece. In this way, *33 1/3* was a culmination of the detachment of the creative genius, leaving space for the audience to take the lead.

Cage explicitly writes about the production of art as a mode of *social production* that does not emerge from disciplinary rule but from a more positive, constructive form of power. From this point of view, it is more important to encourage people to do *something* instead of discouraging them with detailed instructions. For example, in the diary notes of 1966–67, he remarks:

An audience can sit quietly or make noises. People can whisper, talk and even shout. An audience can sit still or it can get up and move around. People are people, not plants. “Do you love the audience?” Certainly we do. We show it by getting out of their way. [...] Art instead of being an object made by one person is a process set in motion by a group of people. Art’s socialized. It isn’t someone saying something, but people doing things. (Cage 1969, 51, 151)

For Cage, the liberation of the audience was not purely an aesthetic choice but also a political gesture with which the liberation of sounds (from their representational or intentional uses) and the liberation of people (from their prescribed modes of conduct) together could be seen to fulfill his antiauthoritarian ideals (Williams 2002, 231). Cage writes that he finds it unattractive to simply tell other people what to do, wishing activities to be “more social and anarchically so” (Cage 1969, ix–x). Some commentators, such as Charles Junkerman (1994, 40, 44–48), have pushed the point even further by underlining the anticommercial subtexts of Cage’s endeavors.

However, there is no reason to romanticize the musiccircuses or other happenings as utopian spaces of freedom. While leaving the details to the audience, Cage was still the mastermind behind the events, seeking to deliver to the audience not just anything but a certain kind of aesthetic abundance of his own liking (Pritchett 1996, 158). There is no paradox between freedom and control, but instead, there is a predetermined division of labor: the artist invests in the conceptual and material platform upon which people work autonomously, and later appropriates the work by giving it his or her signature. This procedure of harnessing freedom is not a curious exception but a paradigmatic model in contemporary capitalism. As economist Yann Moulier Boutang phrases it:

Entrepreneurial intelligence now consists in knowing how to convert into economic value the wealth that is already present in the virtual space of the digital. This is the definition of the “political” entrepreneur: that is to say, someone who is able to understand social networks and to take them directly as his starting point (like a surfer, who does not create the wave but knows how to catch it at the right moment). (Moulier Boutang 2011, 109)

## Conclusions: Reading Capitalism Through Art

In this chapter, I have examined some aspects of the parallel restructuring in art and capitalism in the latter half of the twentieth century. I have analyzed how John Cage's *33 1/3*, as an example of the genre of *happening*, reflects three key shifts in postindustrialization: from the production of material objects to the production of ideas and processes (*ephemerality*), from the concrete organization of contents to the abstract organization of relations (*relationality*), and from the dichotomy between the producer and the consumer to cooperation among the active audience (*coproductivity*). Also, I have argued that it is through this kind of *artistic qualities*, and not through the statistical categories of "cultural industries" or "creative occupations," that we can trace and understand the argument of arts and culture becoming economically valuable for contemporary capitalism. Art is valuable for capitalism in the sense that *capitalism itself has become "artistic."*

My argument, obviously, is not of a causal kind: I do not claim to have shown any kind of a unidirectional relation between historical artistic practices and contemporary economic practices. Still, I hold the belief that artworks are, not merely but *also*, products of their time: they condense and crystallize the symptoms of complex social processes, and also actively participate in these processes by helping to constitute them (Shaviro 2010, 2). Quoting Marshall McLuhan (1964, 70), the artist "picks up the message of cultural and technological challenge decades before its transforming impact occurs." Undoubtedly, this would equally apply to economic challenges.

According to Peter Bürger (1984), historical avant-garde art movements such as Surrealism, Dada, and Situationist International failed because of their inability to fulfill the promise of bridging the gap between art and life. It can be argued that capitalism has succeeded better in this revolutionary objective: in reassembling the social whole of production as a huge artwork. As Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello (2005) point out, the success of contemporary capitalism was largely driven by the workers' critique toward the alienating, mechanical, and bureaucratic practices of the industrial manufacture. *Artistic critique*, as they call it, sought to

transform production so that the workers could use their unique personal skills and creativity to express themselves in the production process. These demands were later translated into new doctrines of business administration that arose alongside the new regime of *flexible accumulation* (Harvey 1989).

Jeremy Rifkin (2000, 8) portrays cultural production “as the final stage of the capitalist way of life, whose essential mission has always been to bring more and more human activity into the commercial arena [and] to make all relations economic ones.” With no particular intention to subscribe to the dystopian tone of Rifkin’s argument, I have tried to show in this chapter how even the most experimental aspirations of art, such as Cage’s anarchic and antihierarchical experiments, are not only *against* capitalism but also *besides* it, contributing to the concurrent revolutions of art and capitalism.

However, two reservations must be made. First, the flexibility of the mode of production, or the “creativity” of the economy as a whole, does not guarantee more freedom or self-fulfillment at the level of individual jobs. Rather, for the large majority of people working or wanting to work in the cultural and creative sector, the labor market situation is characterized with monotonous jobs, temporary contracts, and overheated competition (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2010). Labor precariousness can be seen as an inevitable consequence of the postindustrial reorganization, but it is also a “laboratory of labor politics” (De Peuter 2011) that opens possibilities for collective organizations and policy proposals. Second, not all forms of art can be uniformly, entirely, and easily subsumed into the logics of capital. The parallels that I have suggested point out to a very general homology, not to the adaptation of discrete art forms. In addition, the extent to which the artistic qualities of postmodernism can or cannot be “translated” into the realm of concrete business practices is a matter of empirical inquiry that remains outside the scope of this chapter. Nevertheless, it is evident that some of the key tenets, such as trying to maintain a productive balance between freedom and control, are also the main challenges of the current commons-based digital economies.

In the case of John Cage, his anarchist legacy makes it difficult to see him *personally* as a good role model for business practices. As a vocal critic of the lifestyle based on mass consumerism, his diary notes and essays

from the times of  $33 \frac{1}{3}$  and beyond are full of remarks on overconsumption, global inequality, and the limits of ecological sustainability. While explicitly detaching his music from politics, in which he expresses “no interest” (Cage 1993, 115), he still laments: “U.S. citizens are six per cent of world’s population consuming sixty per cent of world’s resources. Had Americans been born pigs rather than men, it would not have been different” (Cage 1969, 145).

Characteristic of Cage’s ironic style of writing, the diaries from 1965 to 1966 are even titled “How to Improve the World (You Will Only Make It Worse).” But there is also a brighter side, inspired by a friend and intellectual guide of his, futurist architect Buckminster Fuller, who had comprehensive visions of the world’s ecological restructuring. Cage, too, subscribes to the goal of changing the world for “livingry”—of having the resources of the world “to the service of 100% of humanity at higher standards of living and total enjoyment than any man has yet experienced” (Cage 1969, 164; see also Junkerman 1994).

While it is still a mainstream conception that economy is a kind of hegemonic supersystem, which penetrates and colonizes all other spheres of the life-world, my argument, on the contrary, is that the economy, both as a conceptual system and as a practical form of governance, is thoroughly contaminated by artistic qualities. Just as a performance artist appropriates cultural inputs, recycles and reinterprets them, and finally puts the final product on the stage, the postmodern entrepreneur attempts to capture and manipulate flows of symbols and affects in order to recreate them in a spectacular form that will convert into the accumulation of capital. Voicing this resemblance is not a means of devaluating art, but, on the contrary, an affirmation of its subversive potentials.

Musicologist Charles Hamm once wrote: “I’ve experienced nothing in postmodern art that wasn’t anticipated in the music of John Cage, and I’ve read nothing in postmodern theory and criticism that I haven’t already read in his writings” (Hamm 1995, 384). Translating Hamm’s deep impression and appreciation of Cage’s work for the argument presented in this chapter, I could allude to his statement as follows: I’ve experienced little in postindustrial capitalism that was not anticipated in the art of the 1960s and particularly exemplified in the works of John Cage.

## Notes

1. This juxtaposition is discussed by Olav Velthuis (2005b, 24, 183) under the rubric of “Hostile Worlds argument.” This argument basically posits that (1) artistic and economic values are fundamentally incommensurable, and that (2) the contaminating influence of economic forces on the arts is continuously expanding.
2. The report uses an unusual system of page numbering that resembles the time codes commonly attributed to audio and video productions.
3. The aggregate figures given here are calculated by the author from the production data of the statistics, available from US Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA 2013).

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