



Fresh Perspectives: Paper 2

The Invisible Hand

Art in the transition to another economy

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SUMMARY

Part 1. The Social Economy

Behind the current economic downturn lies a deeper problem, namely that the type of exchanges facilitated by the economy are out of kilter with human and environmental needs. Mainstream politicians lack the vocabulary or authority to discuss this issue. Outlets for dissent and deliberation are found elsewhere within the economics profession, in activist movements and attempts to create alternative networks and organisations. In these exchanges some see the seeds of a new 'social economy'.

Part 2. The Invisible Hand

The connection between these counter-currents and art, featuring case studies from the IETM network in three parts: (i) the story of artists' attempts to escape markets (ii) the story of artists' assault on the power of economists and economics (iii) the story of artists and arts organisations attempt to create alternative economies. These stories are about art not as an input for productivity, or luxury made possible by economic growth, but rather as an 'invisible hand' setting the terms on which exchange in the economy takes place.

Part 3. Art In Transition

This concluding section suggests that artists who start questioning the economy, end up questioning the values of the cultural sector. From this flows an opportunity - to stake out a new, more useful position for art in society less wedded to vested-interests and the distorting influence of the art-market. The concluding recommendations are first, to create a networked discussion about morality and obligation in art and second to 'school' emerging alternative economic practice that sustains artists' livelihoods and third to continue to collect examples of artistic projects which can challenge thinking about the economy. These recommendations will be taken forward in the blog which accompanies this paper

ABOUT

This is a provocation written by Charlie Tims and Shelagh Wright of Mission Models Money, commissioned by The International Network for Contemporary Performing Arts (IETM) and The British Council. After much debate about how the state of the economy is affecting the arts, the aim of the paper has been to look at how art might be able to affect the economy. It began with a review of IETM member's work which was responding to the theme of 'economy'. We reviewed 72 submitted examples, categorised them and used them as a basis for a discussion with IETM members at the 2012 IETM conference in Zagreb, Croatia. After this interviews were carried out with Jazmin Chiodi (Tipperary Dance Platform), Florian Malzacher (Independent Curator), Marilli Mastrantoni (Theatre Entropia), Sergej Korsakov (Cardboardia), Sarah Spanton (Leeds Creative Timebank), Agnes Bakk (Fuge Productions), Alain Garlain (SMartEU), Claudine Van Beneden (Nosferatu) and the Skart Collective (Pesnicenje). The paper draws on the following recently published texts; 'Living as Form - Socially Engaged Art from 1991-2011' edited by Nato Thompson; Paul Mason's 'Why it's (still) kicking off Everywhere'; the 'Uneconomics' series of papers commissioned and edited by Will Davies for Open Democracy; the interviews conducted for 'Truth is Concrete' a 'marathon camp' which took place in Graz last year and Flora Michaels 'Monoculture: How one story is Changing Everything'. The paper also borrows from an ongoing Mission Models Money research project 'The Art of Living Dangerously' which looks at art and sustainable development and a recently published MMM paper 'The Potential of Engagement in Arts and Culture to Encourage Values that Support Well-being, Social Justice and Ecological Sustainability' written by Professor Tim Kasser.

IETM is a dynamic, engaged and forward-looking network for the performing arts sector as well as a resource and reference point for innovative contemporary art. IETM consists of over 550 subscribing professional performing arts organisations from more than 50 countries. They are engaged in innovative, contemporary performance work and are committed to cross-border artistic exchange and collaboration.

The British Council is the UK's international organisation for educational opportunities and cultural relations. It creates international opportunities for people of the UK and other countries and builds trust between them worldwide. It works in over 100 countries in the arts, education and English.

Mission Models Money is a passionate network of thinkers and doers whose vision is to transform the way the arts use their resources to support the creation and experience of great art. Its two latest programmes, *re.volution* and *re.think* are dedicated towards building the resilience of creative practitioners and organisations and realising art and culture's leadership role in tackling the huge global challenges we face.

The Invisible Hand

Art in the transition to another economy

The banks are fucked, we're fucked, the country's fucked. Cabinet Minister, London 2009¹

Introduction

The economic crisis has squeezed the cultural sector across the world. But cut-backs, closed theatres and moth-balled arts centres are only half of the story. When critics and historians look back to our times, they'll be less preoccupied with the art that wasn't made and more with the art that was. Art that could explain how we arrived here, art that could do something about it and art that showed the possibility of different ways of living. Not for the art that was shaped by the economy, but art that forged alliances with the people and forces that could reshape it. That's what this paper is about.

Inside IETM and beyond we found artists keen to explore what people value and whether the economy actually reflects it. We found fringe-institutions, networks and conferences attempting to open up a space to question and attack judgements made by politicians in the name of economy. We found artists active in their communities experimenting and rehearsing with their own 'micro-

economies' as co-operatives, time-banks and demonstrations of different forms of community. Where politics has been asphyxiated by a cadre of economists, art is administering a kiss of life.

But neither artists nor the cultural sector are separate from the economy. The answer to inequality, democratic disengagement and climate change is not simply *more art*. But rather a different place for art. Artists who question values of the economy, inevitably end up questioning the values of the cultural sector. In the face of more politically-engaged, socially-curious art, new networks, institutions and approaches are needed to support it. Art not just as an input or output of an economy, but art that challenges the assumptions on which the economy is based.

Part 1. The Social Economy

The economy is for us, we are not for the Economy.
Robert Reich

Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist.
John Maynard-Keynes

The word economy is derived from the Greek words *Ecos* meaning 'house' and *Nomia* meaning 'counting'. Economy refers to the act of 'sharing out the house'.

But in our times economy has come to mean much more.

Economic growth is the maxim of politics, pushing all other stories of progress into the shade. If GDP isn't growing, neither are we. In the pursuit of growth orthodox-economists are seen as providing objective

truths about the world, crowding out philosophers, religious leaders and artists. Their pre-received wisdom - that we are utility-maximising, self-interested individuals - has become a kind of folk common-sense in the workplace, trickling into the management of public-services, leaking through friendships, conventions and marital commitments. In the most market-orientated economies - all must prove to be 'economic', behaviour scientifically 'incentivised' and as far as possible, government should stand back and let markets sort it out. With economists consensus on what it means to be human, the advance of the market-economy is neither an idealistic nor a pessimistic way - it is the only way; *there is no alternative*.²

Since the financial crisis of 2008 questioning of the economics profession, economic theory, measures of growth and the extent to which markets benefit society has spread. It seems that we have never had more cause to suspect that the machinations of 'the economy' are out of kilter with human and environmental needs. Circumstances vary from country to country but common grievances reoccur. Those who have long believed that the market economy isn't fair - are today joined by others who now believe that it simply doesn't work. Their criticisms reoccur in five related areas.

(i) Socialised consequences of privately-made problems

The market-economy creates problems, and then enables the costs of those problems to be transferred to those who did not create them. Since the crisis, governments have used their powers to borrow and provide assurances to prop-up the financial system. The International Monetary Fund

estimates the cost of this 'global bail-out' at \$11 trillion.³ An immense, privately-created problem has been passed onto society and with it, the idea that an unaccountable financial system, separate from the 'real economy' can look after itself has been shaken.

Nicholas Taleb Nassim author of 'The Black Swan' blames the financial crisis on an absence of 'skin-in-the game combined with too much money and power at stake'.⁴ There are clear parallels here with the market-economy's inability to 'price-in' the natural resources, on which the planet's existence rests. The world's best models say we can afford to release 1440 Gigatonnes of carbon dioxide between 2000 and 2050 before irreversible climate change is triggered. So far this century, we have already released 420 – 28 per cent of that total. With global emissions currently rising at 3% a year, we will burn through our remaining carbon budget within two decades⁵. It is the high consuming richest fifth of global society (who consume on average six times more oil, minerals, water, food and energy than their parents) who will be best able to avert the consequences⁶. Once again the economy enables the burden of problems to be shifted to the shoulders to those least capable of bearing them, or deserving of them.

The problems of climate and the separation of finance from the real economy show the market economy at its worst - ineffective, unfair and actively *destructive*. Californian architecture critic Teddy Cruz sums up, 'we are now paralysed, silently witnessing the most blatant politics of unaccountability, shrinking social and public institutions, and not a single proposal or action that suggests a different approach or arrangement'.⁷

(ii) Inequality

The most free-market orientated economies are the most unequal. Captured in the imagery of the Occupy Movement's '99%', this is now the de-facto source of popular dissatisfaction with the market-economy. It is also a point which will be labored in a forthcoming film narrated by Robert Reich, Bill Clinton's former labour secretary, titled 'Inequality for all'. There is no shortage of statistics to draw on. In 1978 the typical worker in the United States was making \$48,000 a year - meanwhile the average person in the top 1% was making \$390,000. By 2010 the median wage had plummeted to \$33,000 but at the top it had nearly trebled to \$1,100,000.⁸ Such cleavage between rich and poor, makes it hard to argue that 'wealth trickles down' from economic growth and spreads out evenly.

(iii) Corrosion of norms, culture and tradition

Economists like to believe that economics is separate from culture. That markets simply sit on top of traditions, customs and beliefs without corrupting them. But for many, the economy just won't keep to itself. Canadian essayist F.S. Michaels argues that we are living in an economic 'monoculture' where 'being rational, efficient, productive and profitable' have become 'the ultimate expressions of being the world'.⁹ She fears the reign of one story.

'It's not that the economic story has no place in the world and in our lives - it does. But without these other stories that express other values we have found essential throughout history, we imprison ourselves. When the languages of other stories begin to be lost, we lose the value diversity and creativity that

keeps our society viable. We're left trying to translate something vitally important to us into economic terms so we can justify even talking about it...We end up missing what it means to be human.'¹⁰

American philosopher Michael Sandel trenchantly reasoned in his recent book '*The Moral Limits of Markets*' that the inappropriate introduction of fines, prices, and market segmentation can corrupt social relations. Lamenting the lack of public debate about the extension of markets into public services, leisure and political representation he says that we have slept-walked from 'having a market economy' to '*being a market society*'.¹¹

With greater concern others argue that economic ways of thinking actually determine our choices, and shape how we regard other people - perpetuating the beliefs that justify inequality. Cognitive psychologist Professor Tim Kasser believes that we have been supplanting the 'intrinsic values' of community, sharing and empathy with 'extrinsic values' of fame, success and power¹². Danny Dorling has taken this further, suggesting that orthodox economics subtly rests on a structure of unacknowledged beliefs namely that 'greed is good, elitism is efficient, exclusion is necessary, prejudice is natural, despair is inevitable' which in turn legitimise the inequality produced, 'it is beliefs which enough of us still hold that today underlie most injustice in the world' he argues.¹³

(iv) The rejection of unquantifiable goods

Economists struggle to value learning, care and the development of human relations, because we do too: in the moment, it is hard to know

the importance of our experiences. This becomes a problem as 'markets have a natural disposition to favor needs and wants that can be reduced to commercial criteria or economic measurement'¹⁴ giving rise to E.F. Schumacher's concern that 'if economic thinking pervades the whole of society, even simple non-economic values like beauty, health or cleanliness can survive, only if they prove to be 'economic'¹⁵. This isn't just a problem for economists, but also in management, as late counter-cultural management guru Russell Ackoff argued, 'managers who don't know how to measure what they want settle for wanting what they can measure.'¹⁶

The concern is that the illuminating measures of economic growth, cannot shine light on qualities we have always valued and, in the darkness, they have withered. Economist Tim Jackson argues that a more sustainable economy is one where we are less concerned about productivity and more with well-being: 'Avoiding the scourge of unemployment may have less to do with chasing after growth and more to do with building an economy of care, craft and culture. And in doing so, restoring the value of decent work to its rightful place at the heart of society.'¹⁷

(v) Hollow Politics

Unwavering faith in the economy and power of economics has drained the imagined and real power of governments. The more politicians refer to 'the economy' as the non-negotiable in all political decisions, the less people believe politicians have the power to take decisions that can make a difference to their lives. The result is a crisis of collective-purpose and into this vacuum the forces of anti-

democracy, indifference & extremism are drawn. As Danny Dorling argues, 'In the space of about 100 years we've gone from fighting for the right for women to vote to a situation where half the population in the most unequal of affluent countries are not exercising their right to vote'¹⁸. Right wing extremist party Golden Dawn in Greece now commands 7% of the popular vote, while the radical nationalist party Jobbik in Hungary holds 12% of seats in the Hungarian parliament. Where extremism has not taken hold, voters are turned-off, disturbed and baffled by their politicians. Others wonder plaintively whether, by viewing politicians as nothing more than the mid-wives of material-prosperity, that maybe we have come to be governed by the politicians we deserve.

Thinking has become impossible

And yet despite so much concern about measures of economic growth, unease at the unchecked advance of markets and the tension between capitalism and democracy - the economy and the logic of orthodox-economics reigns supreme. The Economist magazine continues to publish 15-page specials on new national 'growth-models' with no mention of how growth can be squared with climate-change. Politicians tremble before the supernal-judgement of credit-ratings agencies. And we are more likely than ever to have qualified economists as Prime Ministers.¹⁹

Meanwhile governments cling to the hope that printing money, austerity, cutting social-security, forcing down wages is what is required to return the economy to growth and ultimately spread-wealth. The debate in most countries is about the extent to which these policies need to be

pursued, rather than whether there are alternatives - today or in the future. Few politicians have the required candor with citizens, who have been conditioned to see them as managers, to try anything else. None are willing to clearly express the limits of markets in society. None will talk of whether environmental concerns can be squared with economic growth. Or whether growth can really ameliorate democratic and social concerns. None dare whisper the 'inconvenient truth' of the economy that 'no growth risks economic collapse and unemployment, full-on growth risks the ecological systems on which we depend for survival and increasing inequality'²⁰.

For many, economics has become a dogma to match the religious dogma that The Enlightenment and indeed, economics itself sought to expose 250 years ago. The difference between value-judgements and facts, between the interests of elites and the interests of us, between how the world is and how the world might be is harder to see - as the film-maker Adam Curtis reads it: 'thinking has become impossible'.

Light in the darkness

The lack of space in mainstream politics has forced debate elsewhere. Helped by an upswing in technical innovation - in some think-tanks, universities, in small social-movements and activist-groups a counter-culture that aims to surface the interests who benefit from decisions taken in the name of economic growth, to question the role of the economics profession and the place of markets in society is emerging.

It has its symbolic face in the Occupy movement which spread to 951 cities in 82 countries between 2011 and

2012 and continues in the Indignados in Spain, in UKUncut in Great Britain, the 20 million strong Avaaz network and in countless other small organisations and movements. The leaderless movement unites under symbols of a fairer economy, a suspicion of corporate power and collectively attempts to find and argue for alternative, more environmentally sustainable ways of living.

More prosaically, there is much soul-searching within the study of economics and amongst professional economists. Will Davies, editor of online journal *Open Democracy's Uneconomics* series of articles puts it so,

'It is time to acknowledge an uncomfortable truth about the public status of economics as an expert discipline: it has grown to be far more powerful as a tool of political rhetoric, blame avoidance and elite-strategy than for the empirical representation of economic life. This is damaging to politics, for it enables value judgements and political agendas to be endlessly presented in 'factual' terms. But it is equally damaging to economics, which is losing the authority to describe reality in a credible, disinterested, Enlightenment fashion.'²¹

In keeping with these sentiments the business magnate and philanthropist George Soros established the Institute for New Economic Thinking in 2009 - an international think tank that aims to rethink economics and incubate a new-generation of economists. This endeavor will undoubtedly pick up on threads in the thinking of the New Economics Foundation who were established in 1986 to advance the study of 'economics as if the people and planet mattered', and their sister

organisation *The New Economics Institute* which is growing in popularity across student campuses in America. The kind of alternative approaches to accounting for economic growth and measuring productivity they favour, achieved their most high-profile presence in a report commissioned by President Sarkozy conducted by Joseph Stiglitz and Amartya Sen in 2009, looking at alternative measures of GDP.

In addition to the front-lines in economics and activism others argue that the counter-culture is within the real economy itself. Paul Mason an economics correspondent for the BBC is optimistic that the continuation of the Occupy movement may not be a direct confrontation with politics and power, and wonders whether it may find form in new organisational forms emerging within the economy.

'What if - instead of waiting for the collapse of capitalism - the emancipated human being were beginning to emerge spontaneously from within this breakdown of the old order? What if all the dreams of human solidarity and participatory democracy contained in the maligned Port Huron Statement of 1962 were realizable right now?'

Robin Murray has argued in this vein that 'A New Social Economy' is slowly taking shape. According to Murray and the Venezuelan economist Carlotta Perez, the financial crisis was not a consequence of unregulated finance, but rather a fundamental shift in production and consumption in the real economy caused by deep technological and social changes. From these shifts a combination of the philanthropic third sector, social enterprises, co-operatives operating in the

market and the many strands of the reciprocal household economy, households themselves, social networks, informal associations as well as social movements, are moving to the centre of production and consumption. 'They are bound together by ethics (a moral economy) with multiple threads of reciprocity (a gift economy), and their production ranges from the micro-scale of domestic care in the household to the macro services of a nation state.'²²

Manuel Castelles has also recently written about how the current financial crisis has provoked 'non-capitalist' forms of economic behaviour. In a recent survey his research team identified 30% of people in Catalonia had lent money to non-family members at zero-interest rates. 'We're seeing barter networks, social currencies, co-operatives. Networks of providing services for free to others in the expectation people will do the same for you.'²³

So, economists are questioning themselves. Activists are on the streets. And maybe behind them there might just be groups of people who are forming networks, associations and constitutions that will re-shape the economy. It is hard to know now what these forces amount to. Is this a counter-culture that will identify and challenge power, a cyclical period of consternation prior to a resumption of old growth patterns, or the dent of a blunt protest as power trundles inexorably east to China, Indian and South East Asia? It isn't difficult to find those who will argue for all of these positions.

What is interesting for us, is the connection between these forces seeking to re-imagine the economy and currents within art and culture today. The

discussion of economy is multi-faceted - it is cultural, it runs through politics and it is about fundamental values. It forces people to think-differently and to see the subjective nature of what is presented as objective truth, and to locate what is valuable - all aims to which artists can be particularly well suited.

Part 2. The Invisible Hand

Money complicates everything. I have a genuine belief that art is a more powerful currency than money - that's the romantic feeling that an artist has. But you start to have this sneaking feeling that money is more powerful.

Damien Hirst

I went from making things, to making things happen.

Jeremy Deller

There are several ways of viewing arts' relationship to productivity. Looked at one way art supplies ideas that are commodified by firms, produced and sold. The painter paints the picture, the dealer sells it. Or in a more round-about-way, what a graffiti-artist sprayed on crumbling walls in The Bronx in 1981, today ends up on £75 trainers in *Office*.

Another way to think about art and productivity is to see art as a luxury afforded by productivity. A consequence of growth rather than a cause. In this model growth produces taxes that pays for the publicly-funded performances and galleries we can all visit, and surplus personal income we can spend on music, books and pictures.

These are the current, prevalent ways of thinking about art and the economy. They shape the codes of cultural institutions, frame the decisions of policy-makers and the nature of artistic education. Art as an input to

productivity, and a luxury productivity pays for.

But there is a third understanding too. In this third understanding art and cultural activity is a moral force that has the capacity to determine the shape of economic growth and systems of exchange that enable it - the real 'invisible hand' at work in markets.²⁴ Because art and culture enable us to learn about one another, value people and the environment, they have the power to shape where the market is and how it works. Lyrics and lines of songs that influence the moral imagination. Photographs, paintings and stories that galvanise people against suffering and injustice. Songs, traditions and folklores that shape cities and villages alike.

Read this way it will always be an anachronism to view cultural activity as something that can have a price in a market. Cultural Economist Dave O'Brien argues that because cultural activity deals with concepts like trust, love, friendship and identity, to value them in terms of price would reduce them to any other market quantity - interchangeable with other activities in the form of comparable monetary valuations. 'Such ideas are, by their very nature, valuable because they are things which cannot be priced nor can they be bought and sold in markets.'²⁵

Few artists, of course waste time agonising about how their work relates to economic productivity - they just point to what they believe to be valuable and get on with it, sometimes challenging, sometimes reinforcing prevailing ways of thinking, consciously and unconsciously, creating new ideas for markets to exploit and

challenging the values, ethics and morality on which markets operate. What's interesting today is the growing connection between the counter-cultural forces, identified at the end of the last section, that question assumptions about the economy, and what is simultaneously going on in art and amongst artists across Europe and the wider world. Put simply artists right now seem keen to point at the things the economy doesn't; the human qualities and values masked in market transactions, those who prosper and those who lose if the logic of government policy is to satisfy the markets at any cost, the other ways people can exchange and support one-another without resorting to money.

This is a spirit that comes from pragmatic artists threatened by recent cuts in art funding, disillusioned artists reacting to the unchecked advance of the market economy over a longer time period, and an age-old clash between arts' humanistic values, and those proposed by a cold economic rationalism that can only see art as an input or an output of a machine-like economy. This adds up to an attempt by large sections of the artistic community to symbolically and politically wrestle the artistic, artful intent from being seen as a cause or consequence of economic growth, to determining how and why growth happens. To corral the power of art towards society and democracy, away from sectional interests and possibly, to a more balanced political economy.

2.1 Artists escape the economy

'Companies may not be going directly towards political, social or economic themes in their work, but more and more they are proposing shows that are

more connected to the public - I can feel this change.'

Claudine Van Beneden is the director of Nosferatu - a theatre company based in Yssingeaux, France. She is currently producing a play - *The Collective Story of Women* - about a strike organised by the predominantly female workforce of an underwear factory in Anjou. The script for the play is being crafted in a series of workshops with the women from the factory and a play-writer (see box below). It is a parable about lives in the midst of an economic upheaval, who wins and who loses.

The Collective Story of Women In March 2010 Lejaby announced their intention to close their factory in Anjou, near Auvergne and relocate production to China. So began a two year struggle between Lejaby and the factory's predominantly female workforce, culminating in a one-month occupation of the factory during January 2012, shortly before the French presidential elections. The story of women standing up against the prevailing winds of globalisation captured the imagination of the French media, forcing the election candidates to compete to be seen to do the most to resolve the dispute in the women's favour. Eventually President Sarkozy brokered a deal with Louis Vuitton which would see the women switch making lacy bras for leather bags, with the government picking up the costs of retraining them. A faction within the striking women broke away, formed a co-operative and crowd-funded 80,000 Euros to open a smaller factory manufacturing luxury underwear for a range of companies including Lejaby. They began production in January this year.

One important purpose of the arts and culture is to truthfully connect people through ideas - whether that's in performances like the *Collective Story of Women* or in books, clothing, painting, music or conceptual art. Its goal is a social one - a process of people learning about one-another. When Claudine stages her play people in Anjou will find out more about the women in the factory, how they've organised themselves

and the nuances in their stories lost in the TV news and in the women's campaign messages. Artworks like this create the possibility of community. They're a sort-of ambient 'social-learning'. As David Gauntlett says, 'making is connecting.'²⁶

This purpose to connect with others is present in commercial activity but in firms, connecting is balanced with other goals: dividing and utilizing labour, segmenting and identifying customers and investing and maintaining capital. Running a sweet-shop, a recruitment-agency or a hotel might be similar to functioning as an artist, or running an arts organisation - but it is not the same as making art. Relationships are a means to profit in a business, but in art they are the means to make the art work.

Pesnichenje (trans: pugilism) is a poetry evening run by Skart, a Serbian collective of artist-designers (see box below), which takes place on the last Saturday of every month in Belgrade. Each month Skart take a 100 dinars (approximately 1 Euro) on the door from each member of the audience attending the poetry night. With around 150 people attending each month, this is just enough to fund the publication of a simple 28 page pamphlet featuring the poems performed that evening - which is then distributed to everybody who comes back the following month, in exchange for another 100 dinars. And so it continues. Since Pesnichenje started four years ago Skart have been able to publish 41 poetry pamphlets in this way. Their print run currently goes to 700. This is a helpful example of a 'minimal-money' approach, whereby money is useful in as far as it enables poetry to be distributed.

Skart are a cross-disciplinary collective of artist/architect/designers based in Belgrade, Serbia. In addition to their poetry night *Pesnichenje*, their projects include a series of unconventional see-saws that enable different combinations of people to balance each other, an association of single mothers they assist to make and sell political embroideries and a network of amateur choirs active across the former Yugoslavia who sing a mixture of old socialist songs, and others by new progressive poets and songwriters.

Some art critics have started to identify a 'social turn' in the arts, which has seen artists and producers like Skart and Claudine turn away from the distorted values of the art-market and towards more collaborative ways of working, less representative forms of production and ways to work with people.²⁷ This social turn in visual and performing arts is reflected in a similar emergence of the 'social' in design, policy-making and the creation of brands.²⁸

When Claudine says that she thinks that other artists in her network are trying to engage with the public she is putting her finger on a trend that many others feel.

Curator Nato Thompson describes socially engaged practice as taking 'living' itself as a 'form'. Practically this means that artists switch sculpting objects, choreographing dancers and constructing media for gathering people in their day-to-day lives. As he sees it socially engaged practice, is against distilling the world into objects to be interpreted by audiences, but rather seeks to be situated in the real-world, to operate in politics and involve groups and communities.²⁹

A well documented example of this practice is a project by Pedro Reyes the Mexican artist, who working in the Mexican town of Culican offered

residents vouchers for electronics goods in exchange for guns. He arranged for the guns to be steam-rolled and then had them melted at a local foundry and hewn into shovels. These shovels were exhibited and distributed to local tree planting projects. Another example of socially engaged practice might be *Learning to Love You More* - a website run by Miranda July and Harrel Fletcher between 2002 and 2009. The website enabled the artists to pose a series of 70 intriguing and quirky assignments with clear instructions - 'take a photo up a tree', 'interview someone who has experienced war', 'teach us an exercise' - and so on. Over the course of the project 8000 people completed assignments and the website has now been committed to San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Today the world is replete with examples of work like this, that blend symbolic, unusual acts, with real acts that aim to temporarily suspend, draw attention to or ameliorate social problems and injustices.³⁰

Some argue that socially engaged art is not 'representational' enough to be considered as art, others that it offers a false promise of social change and instrumentalises the people it claims to help. Others doubt whether it really is liberating people from the political and financial forces it seeks to critique and derides the 'hit and run' approach of artists coming into communities to make their project and leaving.

But it is the impulse and sentiment that motivate socially engaged art that are important. As the art-critic Claire Bishop puts it, socially engaged practice arises from a concern to '*rehumanise a society rendered numb and fragmented by the repressive instrumentality of capitalist production*' and to

heal '*the damaged social bond*'.³¹ socially engaged art, and this concern that many artists feel to actively work in society, and put social relations on a platform, should be seen as a fragmented, but significant 'social pressure' pushing against the economy and its view of people as competing, rational, self-interested, utility maximizers. It is these kinds of socially engaged art practices that have helped cognitive psychologist Tim Kasser to identify art's power to foster 'intrinsic' values.³²

It isn't easy though. Jazmin Chiodi is a choreographer currently working as an artist in residence in Tipperary. She runs an annual festival and hopes one day to establish a local centre for dance. It's a slow, but incremental process. She visits women's centres and mental health groups; works with schools and community organisations and she hustles for audiences in shops.

"I didn't necessarily set out to be working with the community, but I enjoy it and it's almost the most important part of our work here with the festival. If we weren't starting from where people are in their day-to-day lives people wouldn't be that interested - there would be no connection."

Put simply the message of this section is that artists, and particularly those who today choose to work in socially engaged ways value people, before profit. In this sense, they attempt to escape the economy. In Skart's poetry pamphlets, in Claudine's theatre projects, in Jazmin's efforts to use dance in an unusual context there is a working logic of trying to make maximum social-connection at minimum financial cost. It is unlikely that this dispersed 'social pressure', this way of doing things, will ever become a formalised political movement,

with a unifying set of demands. But just because its power is intangible and 'soft' does not mean it isn't present. What's more, this different approach to doing things might explain why artists are increasingly making more visible alliances with those other people, seeking to directly challenge the power base of the economy. And why art and culture, as they have been so many times before, could be the glue that holds people together as they make the transition to different patterns of living.

It is these two themes we will now turn to.

2.2 Artists attack the economy

"We have politicians who have stopped creating political thought - they have degraded themselves to the level of accountants. It's *unacceptable*."

Marilli Mastrantoni is the creative director of Theatre Entropia - a theatre company based in Athens. Her new project is a series of research forums in Ireland, Italy, Denmark, Portugal, Greece and Germany. They will climax in an unusual forum called Sotiria (trans: *Salvation/Rescue*) that will gather policy-makers, financiers in Greece in 2013. "If the politicians cannot, we need to produce this dialogue as citizens."

The global-financial crisis has brought a new tension to the relationship between capitalism and democracy. Across Europe voters are being asked to endorse governments to enact obscure policies, that few citizens can understand, but many economists demand, in what the sociologist Wolfgang Streeck calls 'the drama of democratic states being turned into debt-collecting agencies on behalf of a global oligarchy of investors.'³³

Marilli calls it “a crisis of democracy itself.” Her project is balanced on the fault-line between the votes of people, and the needs of markets. “It’s as if at one moment economy and politics are unrelated” she says, “but then, when a decision needs to be taken, they are very much related.”

The project is called ‘PIGS’ - the pejorative acronym used to refer to the struggling economies of Southern Europe. “Instead of condemning actions” she fumes, “you condemn a whole territory.”

Theatres, galleries and universities across Europe are full of artists making work riffing on the themes of money and finance, bringing important ideas to life. Plays such as *Money - The Gameshow* currently showing at The Bush Theatre London, Chris Kondek and Christiane Kuhl’s *Money: It Came From Outer Space*; Anna Moreno’s *Bamum Effect*; Katerina Kyriacou’s *Money Project* all deal with the theme of money, animating and giving life to the sentiments and feelings of journalists and commentators.³⁴

For Marilli raising direct questions about society, and engaging with political issues cuts to the heart of what it means to be an artist. “We are a public profession that belongs to the domains of public goods like education and health.”

Artists across Europe are increasingly involved in political actions and movements - many of which are challenging a political class who default to the needs of the economy. In the poets, singers and t-shirt printers in Tahrir square, in Pussy Riot’s calculated stand against Putinism, in the ‘bat-signal’ projected from Brooklyn Bridge at the start of the Occupy movement, in the reclaimed and

occupied Embros Theatre in the Psirri district of Athens - there appears to be a return to an old idea that art can speak for people against those who would seek to suppress them - be they autocrats, ideas, corporations or economists.

Just as we looked at how socially engaged artists are important because they are refusing to engage on the markets’ terms, artists in these movements are important because they are refusing to engage with power on power’s terms.

Galleries and theatres at the fringe of the mainstream public institutions brim with curators and artists, keen to explore the relationship between art and political change³⁵. One of the most notable recent attempts has been *Truth is Concrete* (TIC) - an 8-day 24/7 marathon of 150 hours of lectures, talks and debates about ‘artistic strategies in politics and political strategies in art’ that took place in Graz, Austria in October 2012 curated by *steirischer herbst*.³⁶ Florian Malzacher, one of TIC’s curators sees a shift in artistic practice, “Many artists now feel it’s not enough to say ‘this is political’ - we need to think also about a more direct link.”

Florian is currently co-editing a book based on TIC which will bring together 100 examples of tactics used by artists to engage with the political realm. It will include the Eclectic Electric Collective - a German artists collective who ship inflatables to protests, they claim in an interview for TIC that, ‘People who are smashing windows are easier to control because you can criminalize them; but a symbol of collective creativity is much harder to denounce - you can not give instructions to a gigantic inflatable puppet’.³⁷ The volume will also include David Van Reybrouck a Belgian

novelist and playwright who formed the G1000 movement in 2011, to bring back public-deliberation in Belgian politics through a system of 1000 person-strong national conversations. And Jeudi Noir a group of French artists who dupe landlords into letting them stage protest-parties in their flats. These examples lie somewhere along a line between exploratory art and goal-orientated activism. They are all artists who, in different ways are trying to open up real, imagined and psychological space for a politics that thinks it has all the answers.³⁸

This current ‘radical turn’ is a challenge to arts institutions and how artists view themselves - a theme we will return to in the final section of this paper. For Florian this radical shift should neither be a cue for artists to congratulate themselves, nor for institutions to re-explain their role as the birthing pool for a more equitable society or even for policy-makers to feel they have corralled the social power of the arts to progressive ends. Rather it should force artists to reflect on the grave moral weight they carry as the custodians of the emotional environment and those who have the power to shape human relationships.

“It might be a very thin line - on the one hand to stay independent, not being instrumentalised by outside political interests, but still recognising that the instrument of art exists for a very clear social purpose. It’s not ok to say that art can only be done to integrate minorities, but at the same time to say we have ‘a right not to care about society at all and we have a value in ourselves’ - that is also not an option anymore.”

2.3 Art replaces the economy

"I don't like the economic, social or political system in Russia; the exploitation of natural resources, there's no planning more than a year in advance. No thought given to the next generation. Somehow it still functions, but we need to change a lot".

Sergej Korsakov - or *Tyran* as he would like to be known - is the self-appointed leader and founder of Cardboardia - a country without land and money, made out of cardboard. Masquerading as a children's project, Cardboardia pops-up temporarily in towns and cities across Russia and is visited, inhabited and sellotaped-together by people living nearby. Sergej sees it as a place where the 'prisoners' of day-to-day life are set free.

"People drink in the bars and they say 'when I was a child I wanted to have a comic book shop, but now I'm an adult and I'm working in a bank' - this person can come to a cardboard town, open their shop for a week and see how it goes."

The temporary inhabitants of Cardboardia open shops, start small organisations, try out art projects and meet people they wouldn't normally - children, businessman, parents, shop-keepers. 'In a festival you just come to sell, in a cardboard town you have to think about relationships.'

This desire to create a 'sovereign' economy within the existing economy, is shared by many other artists and actors in the creative and cultural sector. For some this isn't just a characteristic of their art but is also part of the day-to-day process of maintaining a livelihood.

Sarah Spanton, an artist whose artistic practice is concerned

with public space helps to run the Leeds Creative Timebank - a network of people who exchange time and skills with one another, with units of time as a currency (see box below). Because timebanks require their members to openly share their exchangeable knowledge they make it easier to find out what people know about - by-passing the need for an introduction. They also start with an assumption that everyone's time is worth as much as everyone else's. This locks in a different set of values to those in the normal economy which encourage protection of knowledge, and the development of one single 'comparative advantage' over others in the market; as Sarah Says, "it fosters a certain kind of thinking".

Leeds Creative Timebank Leeds Creative Timebank has 44 members who mostly work as architects, designers and in the arts in Leeds in the North of England. Members of the Timebank trade one hour units of time with one another - these transactions are brokered through an online timebanking system which records how much time has been exchanged and accumulated. Members of the Timebank are not obliged to respond to requests for their time, but if they want to access other people's they will need to. Induction sessions are held each month to introduce members to the Timebank. The Timebank was started with a grant from Arts Council England - but now currently works without money - the administrators of the project put in time, which they redeem through the bank.

Sarah refutes the claim that the Time Bank is just about getting stuff for free, or another way of looking at things people are doing anyway.

"We've had people who say, 'oh this is just what I do with my friends'. But we vociferously argue against that. The whole thing is against homogeneity. If we remained closed, we'd get stagnant, we'd all get to know each other and it would all get too comfortable."

For reasons like this, a timebank, like any other economic system needs to be managed. Prospective members need to be found, applicants need to be vetted, and members need to be encouraged not to sit on their time. "It's like a water-wheel - you need to get a certain level of water to get the wheel to roll" says Sarah.

Time Banks have proved popular in artistic communities. In 2010 the artists Julieta Aranda and Anton Vidokle started 'Time/bank', which has 1,500 members from countries around the world who are 'interested in developing a parallel economy based on time and skills'. Much of the activity happens though an online platform hosted by the art journal e-flux, but several local hubs in galleries and community centres have been established around the world.

An Umbrella for the Creative Economy Creativity relies on close collaboration and intense relationships - it tends to happen in relatively small teams, companies and cliques. That's why organisations that prioritise creativity, grow differently to those that prioritise replicable activity - as a result, people who work in the 'Creative and Cultural Sector' tend to end-up working independently, or in very small organisations. While that's good for creativity, it exposes small organisations and sole-traders to risks that big-organisations are insulated from - late payment, exploitation, financial & legal mistakes, sudden changes in government policy and so on. SMart EU's a not-for-profit membership organisation with headquarters in Belgium, France and Sweden, which aims to fill this gap. In return for a levy on invoices (6.5% in Belgium, 8% in France) and a €25 membership fee (free in France), SMart EU offers a range of services to creative professionals including a 'Mutual Guarantee Fund' which guarantees timely payment of salaries, whether the client has paid the invoice or not. It also pays for the leasing, micro-credit and advance services. The more members SMart gathers, the better it becomes at representing creative professionals to policy makers across Europe - they are currently developing a 'European Mobility Information System' to

draw attention to inconsistencies in legislation governing the Creative and Cultural Sector across Europe. SMartEU currently has 50,000 members in France, Sweden and Belgium combined.

Sergej's cardboard country and Sarah's Timebank are the kind of projects that are both symbols and real attempts to create a more social economy. The work of Tessy Briton and Laura Billings, two social innovators from the United Kingdom, are another useful reference point here. They have documented the rise of Social Collaboration Platforms - sticky, easily replicable ideas that can be taken by one community and replicated by another. These platforms are gathered and documented in the 'Community Lovers Guide' - guides to innovative community-based projects, often lead by artists drawn together by a network of writers in towns and cities across the world.

On a grander scale SMartEU is a 'mutualised production house' for workers in the creative economy across Europe (see box above). They believe that 'rethinking our current economic system is no longer monopolised by those considered extreme or on the fringes of society. Non-profit, solidarity, co-operation are seen as ways to embrace the good of capitalism while acknowledging its failures'.

Operating as a not-for profit and with the values of 'Humanism-Democracy & Redistribution' SMart EU aims to insulate isolated artists, and small companies from general risks of being an artist and specific recent cut-backs in funding which have affected artists across Europe. 'Encouraging collective action, sharing information, and pooling means are natural reactions to a decimating policy that makes the creative sector's

individualistic mentality untenable.'

Jurayani Incubator House: *Fuge Productions was established in 2006 to act as an umbrella organisation for theatre companies in Budapest - the thinking was that not every theatre company needs its own separate administrator, pr person and website manager. Fuge could do the boring stuff, theatre companies could get on with putting on plays. The model worked - 4 years later Fuge acquired the lease from their local authority to two old school buildings and 650,000 sq ft of office space. What started as an umbrella, became an ark - and Jurayani Incubator House was born. Today the building offers cheap rents and enables 20 theatre companies to share rehearsal rooms, costume rental services and a set-design studio - all under one roof.*

The emergence of online crowd-funding platforms has been identified by some as a parallel economy of sorts, emerging within the arts. Steven Johnson has recently noted that Kickstarter now raises more money in the United States than is allocated by the National Endowment for the Arts.³⁹ But it is hard to characterise crowd-funding as creating a new economy by default, when there are so many different models of crowd-funding. At worst crowd-funding replicates the prevailing logic within the economy encouraging people to 'monetise' their friends - but in other examples such as Crowd Culture in Sweden, which combines personal donations, public funding and a voting system - crowd-funding makes it possible to blend values of institutions, local democracy and community donations to funding of creative projects.

The spirit of experimentation in Cardboardia, the mechanism in Leeds Creative Time Bank and the pooling of risk in SMart EU come together in Budapest's *Fuge Productions*. Fuge has grown from being an umbrella organisation for theatre companies, to providing office space and shared facilities to 50

small enterprises, including campaigning organisations, architects, designers as well as theatre companies, under one roof (see box above). Fuge is experimenting with a Timebank and is finding ways to help a series of organisations who are under increasing financial and political pressure get by.

Attempts to found sovereign territories within the economy are everywhere - but they are strong amongst artists, whose work is at the fringes and has to survive in a gift economy. What's important about these projects, is not that they offer a way to support 'artists' but their openness and willingness to make connections beyond their own artistic community. Despite the name Leeds Creative Timebank Sarah places no limits of age or profession on who can join, SMartEU are open to any small organisations or individuals seeking to join SMartEU. The Fuge building has NGOs and activists from beyond the strictly 'arts' community and Sergej is actively trying to make Cardboardia attractive to bored office workers. This openness might be the strength and power of these projects in the years to come.

Part 3. Art in Transition

It's time to start shorting some of this shit

Retiring art critic David Hickey in reference to artists Jenny Holzer & Tracy Emin

Art is a hammer to beat the world, not to reflect it.

Vladimir Majakovskij

This paper has been concerned with artists and practitioners who are more social, more political, more engaged with challenging the economy. They tread a path that leads to art schools that produce social-workers, teachers, politicians -

rather than just artists. Museums and galleries that naturally form alliances with hospitals, schools, community organisations and youth groups - rather than protecting and preserving knowledge. Festivals that re-imagine what spaces in cities can be used for, rather than just rebranding what is already known and happening. It is a path that could lead to a wider recognition of the moral-responsibility that goes with artists' command of emotions and feelings. It might even lead to an understanding of economic growth guided by different measures of productivity.

These ways of working, aren't just a challenge to the economy - they challenge the cultural sector itself. The cultural sector may provide real and imaginary space for attacking, escaping and replacing the economy - but it is not 'pure'. So, the concluding recommendation of this paper is not: *more art*. As the curator of Truth is Concrete, Florian Malzacher told us, 'Don't label your exhibition 'Arab Spring' without thinking properly about your organisation - you can't explore these things without questioning your institution.'

The critiques of the economy outlined in the first section all have manifestations within the cultural sector.

(i) *Socialised consequences of privately made problems*

Sponsorship of cultural institutions by energy companies, banks and other major corporations arguably diverts attention from their role in creating problems that are passed on to taxpayers. Occupy Museums have articulated this well.⁴⁰ It is unlikely that this sponsorship's cumulative 'good' balances the 'bad' of the taxpayers \$11 trillion bail-out of the financial system. This goes

beyond cultural institutions, and is a process at work in the cultural economy. As Teddy Cruz, writes of the high-profile architecture of the boom period; 'many of these high-profile projects have only perpetuated the exhausted recipes of an oil hungry, US style globalisation, camouflaging with hyper-aesthetics an architecture of exclusion based on urbanities of surveillance and control'.⁴¹

(ii) *Inequality*

The cultural sector is famous for its indifference to unpaid internships, low-wages and precarious existences. These are not restricted to artists who choose the life of an outsider, but people who want mainstream jobs in television, fashion, advertising and film-production. These barriers to work in the cultural sector limit what art is made, who would want to make it and who would be interested in it. Policy, broadly speaking has been interested in supporting art, but deeply unconcerned about who gets to make it. In doing so, it has made art appear more of an elite-concern and in times of reduced public spending, easier to dispense with. The money flowing into art through the contemporary art-market and the public commissioning of mega-artists have done little to make it easier for people from all social-backgrounds to work as artists.

(iii) *Corroded Norms + Crowding out learning*

It is hard to argue that the cultural sector, corrodes social norms. Amazing art and expression can still survive in the most commercial settings and if it cannot, then artists will move away. If they didn't it would be hard to argue that art and artists have the power to reform the economy. However cultural institutions arguably encourage ideas about artists - namely that they are mercurial,

lone-geniuses, separate from the rest of us - which, while encouraging reverence for artists (good for selling their work and promoting shows), is at the expense of other more mundane, but possibly more useful understandings of artists as teachers, activists, journalists and carers (bad for the rest of us). The more art is placed in a market, and governed by market norms, the more limited our understanding of artists becomes. If cultural institutions don't challenge this, they become part of the problem.

(iv) *Hollow politics*

The cultural sector has benefitted from a long-term loss of faith in politics, offering many people a more colourful way to live and experience their values - but the cultural sector has failed to offer an alternative vision of making the world better, or a description of how culture connects to politics. In 'Things Can Only Get Bitter' Alwyn Turner argues that a generation of British left-wing activists shunned careers in politics at the start of the 1990s for careers in the BBC, production companies and arts institutions.⁴² Many of these organisations have in-turn patronised artists, comedians and writers who have pilloried politicians. While this accountability is welcomed, it comes with a hap-hazard cynicism that undermines faith in democracy, and projects the glamorous illusion that film-makers, photographers and artists have real power to make the world better, when compared to politicians, they just don't.

At its worst the market-economy encourages wrong-headed thinking within the cultural sector, and supports processes that separate artists from society - owning the meaning of art, extracting money from it and distributing it to a select few.

The current squeeze on funding can entrench these ways of thinking, or it might be a way to break them.

The challenge now is to grow and extend the counter-culture amongst artists and organisations, in peer-networks like those supported by IETM, in ways that can challenge the cultural sector and the wider economy of which it is a part. Not more art, but a different way of fostering art. This needs to include a wider discussion of why art is made and the obligations of artists, how it can be organised and maintained. The mission, the model and the money. Escape, attack, replace.

1. Discuss the moral artist

Questioning the economy and the power of markets, forces us to think morally. What judgements are being made when an economist is parachuted in to be a Prime Minister, or when we orientate education to 'serve the needs of the economy'? Whose interests are being served, what judgements have been obscured and why? What is right, what is fair? During years of economic consensus the cultural-sector was able to grow without asking these questions. But now, with the fundamentals of the economy in question, these questions must be asked again. It's not hard to see questions about corporate involvement in museum sponsorship morphing into a wider backlash against the distribution of money within the art-world. What are the obligations of those who make money out of art, to the cultural world they came from and wider society? If artists have found ways to operate outside a dominant value system - to what extent are they morally obliged to take others with them? How much money can you make from art, before your art is corrupted? These are difficult

questions to ask, but they should be asked.

2. A school for artist livelihoods

This paper has shown artists attempting to form dissenting enclaves within the economy. Time-banks, co-operative structures, new umbrella organisations, shared work-spaces are simultaneously appearing in different locations within the IETM network and across Europe. There is a clear and present need to network and connect these different initiatives and experiments - and to document their impact on their wider communities and localities. They point to a different logic for public intervention - one that aims to sustain the social soup in which artists thrive rather than one that just supports artists once they have become artists.

This work has started in a collaboration between the New Economics Foundation, Mission Models Money and a community of artists in the North East of England.

3. The economy of audiences, and beyond

Many of the artistic endeavors in this paper that genuinely challenge the economy offer those that witness, see and take part in them, more than something to look at. They are a temporary and in some cases, an enduring, opportunity to be in a different value system. The poetry pamphlets which are sold for as much as the paper they are minimally printed on. The Timebank for artists to exchange skills and knowledge. The guns which become spades, which plant trees, which shelter schools. The more these projects contrast with day-to-day economic life, the more interesting they are and the more deserving of attention. There is plenty of work still to be done now to document, index and categorise more of these

models. Understanding them better will be good for artists, good for the legitimacy of art and good for a more social economy.

This final recommendation was informed by a discussion of a draft version of this provocation paper at IETM Dublin in April 2013. If you have thoughts or responses to this paper, please visit www.invisiblehand.eu to continue the discussion. It's supposed to be the start of a conversation, not the end...

NOTES

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- ⁷ Cruz, C 'Democratizing urbanization and the search for a new civic' published in Thompson, N ed *Living as Form - Socially Engaged Art From 1991-2011* (New York: MIT Press/Creative Time, 2012), p58
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- ²⁴ This is a riff on arguments made by Tony Judt *Ill Fares The Land* (London: Penguin, 2010) Art and Culture particularly in its more socially engaged forms probably fit into his 'communitarian practices'. p38. 'Markets do not automatically generate trust co-operation or collective action for the common good. Quite the contrary: it is in the nature of economic competition that a participant who breaks the rules will triumph - at least in the short run - over more ethically sensitive competitors. But capitalism could not survive such cynical behaviour for very long. So why has this potentially self-destructive system of economic arrangements lasted? Probably because of habits of restraint, honesty and moderation which accompanied its emergence. However, far from inhering in the nature of capitalism itself, values such as these derived from longstanding religious or communitarian practices. Sustained by traditional restraints and the continuing authority of secular and ecclesiastical elites, capitalism's "invisible hand" benefited from the flattering illusion that it unerringly corrected for the moral shortcomings of its practitioners.'
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