



revue des arts
et médiations humaines
Journal of Arts
and Human Mediations

Journal *Hybrid*, n° 2

« Realities of illusion »

Economic f(r)ictions

Economy raised to the level of the fine arts

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Abstract

Despite opposite paradigms and reversed constructions, art and economy nurture obvious resemblances that our postmodernity reveals, more than ever. Scripting practices, scenography or digital creation take part in shaping either a great praise for political economy within devices of heritage recognition, or, in the contrary, its infiltration through business-artists sometimes real, sometimes fictitious: the latest are likely to subvert or, to say the least, divert the logics of promotion and evaluation both artistic and mercantile. Exhibitions represent a privileged observation point for contemporary reorganization of a fiction-economy which major issues are not only aesthetic but still ideological, at a time when France is creating cultural and museographic institutions dedicated to popularizing economic activity, while a meaningful number of artists is forming as a critical enterprise.

Keywords: art, economics, fiction-economy, museum, heritage, digital creation, political philosophy, critical enterprise

Published: 23 october 2015

Full text (PDF file)

A reflection on the realities of the illusion leads to questioning the (artist) criticism of economy, and more precisely that of “economic fiction,”¹ the source of ideological frictions. First, because the latter articulates with no continuity solutions a practice (business), a regime (capitalism), a doctrine (liberalism) and a theory (economics); then, because it has a matricial dimension within our cultural imaginations, even when collective consciousness rejects it back to its repressed margins; and finally, because it closely associates the descriptive process of conjunctural “facts,” the prescriptive and normative approaches of the structural “laws” of the market and the prospective and predictive vision of “rational anticipation” of the evolution of economy. Far from confining itself to the empirical apprehension of the directly observable reality, economy aims to anticipate the future, trying, through the modelization of human behaviors, to inflect reality—in which these behaviors have taken root—by the intervention of performative statements produced by the “rhetoric of economics.”² It is on the consented illusion and the voluntary suspension of disbelief that relies the economic debt system—following a model similar to that of art and aesthetic judgement—, to which the simplest trust crisis in authentication systems and value certification proves fatal.

Relying on the denial, repulsion or euphemizing of social reality, especially where labor organization is concerned,³ the economic discourse does not stop at describing reality by offering a stylized model of it, it also aims to produce this model through powerful “self-fulfilling prophecies.”⁴ While some do not hesitate to introduce themselves as the “concerned prophets” of the “modern era,”⁵ a certain economic messianism (at times eschatological, at others apocalyptic, or apologetic) is finding its way back into the political, mediatic or scientific discourse of “ecomystification,”⁶ baring a certain teleology of history. Yet, seldom do we hear economists condemn this “economic illusion”⁷ occurring within an “economic literature” perceptible through a “narrative-

1 Martial Poirson, Yves Citton and Christian Biet (eds.), *Les Frontières littéraires de l'économie*, Paris, Desjonquères, 2012; Geneviève Sicotte, Martial Poirson, Stéphanie Loncle and Christian Biet (eds.), *Fiction et économie. Représentations de l'économie dans la littérature et les arts du spectacle (XIX^e-XXI^e siècles)*, Québec, Presses de l'Université Laval, 2013.

2 Deirdre N. McCloskey, “The Rhetoric of Economics,” *Journal of Economic Literature*, vol. 31, 1983, p. 434-461 and *The Rhetoric of Economics*, Madison, The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985. See Ludovic Frobert, “Si vous êtes si malins...,” *McCloskey et la rhétorique des économistes*, Lyon, ENS Éditions, 2004 and Éric Méchoulan, *La Crise du discours économique*, Montréal, Nota Bene, 2011.

3 Christian Marazzi, *La Place des chaussettes. Le tournant linguistique de l'économie et ses conséquences politiques*, translated by François Rosso and Anne Querrien, Paris, Éditions de l'Éclat, 1994.

4 Robert K. Merton [*Social Theory and Social Structure*, 1949], *Éléments de théorie et de méthode sociologique*, Armand Colin, 1998, chap. 4. The American sociologist opposes Self-fulfilling prophecy to Self-defeating prophecy.

5 Daniel Cohen, *Homo economicus. Prophète (égaré) des temps nouveaux*, Paris, Albin Michel, 2012.

6 Jean-Pierre Dupuy, *L'Avenir de l'économie: sortir de l'ecomystification*, Paris, Flammarion, 2012.

7 Emmanuel Todd, *L'Illusion économique. Essai sur la stagnation des sociétés développées*, Paris, Gallimard, 1997; Bernard Guerrien, *L'Illusion économique*, Paris, Omniscience, 2007.

conversation”⁸: it is presented as the telltale sign, according to the topical structures, of either an “economic horror,”⁹ or a “joyful apocalypse”...¹⁰ in a symmetrical fashion, numerous are the journalists who allude, by assuming the equivocal, to a “fiction-economy”¹¹ that could merge economic issues and artistic inclinations.

Postmodernity also attests of a new historical configuration—that might even prove to be unseen before in history—, through which economy, not without any sense of “cultural contradiction,”¹² innervates the domains of the arts and creation through an “economico-cultural system.”¹³ Professional *Ethos* and the artist’s personal justification system appear profoundly modified, may the latter try to be part of “businessman-artist” model or that he claims the position of “critical enterprise.” In both cases, he is anxious to “infiltrate” both the logic and the rhetoric of economy so as to better question, accuse or jeopardize the processes of mercantile appreciation and monetary assessment. The articulation of economy and culture thus bring out two opposite positions: on the one hand, the celebration of economy through the cultural validation process with patrimonial objectives; on the other, the continued economic subversion within the creation device. This article thus aims at casting a light on the way certain museographies attempt today to patrimonialize economy in order to legitimize it from the public opinion’s stand point, while certain artists start outlining the contours of the often ambivalent, highly subjective and sometimes truly subversive criticism of the finance mechanisms, at the risk of ironically and in a provocative manner becoming businessmen themselves.

(Paradoxical) praise of political economy

In a context where the weakening of cultural politics is obvious, economy appears as the exception: it inspires validation strategies that show a new and unexpected memorial consciousness towards the “industrial legacy.” It even becomes a source for inspiration by finding its way into a museum, through promotional events that try to recreate the bonds between artists and businesses, or didactic projects destined to acquaint further the population, and maybe make it more docile and accepting, of the cogs of a capitalist system supposedly overwhelming them.

Such is the case of the exhibition *The Art of Enterprise*, launched in 2013, the year of “Marseille European capital of culture” at the Palais de la Bourse, the oldest Chamber of commerce and industry in France. Through the “astonishing visual and olfactory paths” created by set designer Stephan Muntaner, it pays tribute to the “success stories” and “business successes” of fourteen local managers “that did not sell their dreams short.”¹⁴ It also is in line with a program named “Secrets and paths,” destined to lift the ignorance veil from the economic

8 André Fourçans, *L'Économie expliquée à ma fille*, Paris, Seuil, 1997 and *Les Secrets de la prospérité*, Paris, Seuil, 2011.

9 Vivianne Forester, *L'Horreur économique*, Paris, Livre de Poche, 1999.

10 Jean-Baptiste Fressoz, *L'Apocalypse joyeuse. Une histoire du risque technologique*, Paris, Seuil, 2012.

11 Jean-Claude Hazera, “L'économie-fiction,” *Les Échos*, 29 June 2007.

12 Daniel Bell, *Les Contradictions culturelles du capitalisme*, Paris, PUF, 1979.

13 Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, London, Verso, 1991.

14 *The Art of entreprise 13*, Palais de la Bourse, 2 September-7 October 2013.

cogs through a storytelling with very clear hagiographic objectives, greatly supported by business sponsorship:

The CCI (Chamber of commerce and industry) Marseille Provence wishes to pay a special homage to local entrepreneurs, from past or future, greatly efficient leaders, employment and wealth creators, respected and distinguished... exceptional beings that managed to put their creativity and business mind to the service of our territory's economy! Challenges and risks takers, through their business, some of which even are present worldwide, they shaped the modern economic history.¹⁵

A few months later, this unabashed apology of this spirit of enterprise and innovation is relayed, still at the Palais de la Bourse, through the *13 scenarii d'économie-fiction*¹⁶ exhibition, carried over every year under the authority of the Crédit Commercial et Industriel (CCI-Commercial and industrial Credit) Marseille-Provence, that owns one of the biggest collections of advertisements in Europe. Deeply rooted into the local culture of the Mediterranean harbor basin, the exhibition tries, in the wake of an artistic-capitalism concerned about the aesthetization of the world, to renew this industrial heritage that can be considered in crisis,¹⁷ or even wasted. In doing so, the exhibition commission has asked “13 journalists and exhibiting graphic designers duos to show the imaginary fate of 13 leading local businesses that have today disappeared.” This shows the ambition to create new bonds with the “economic saga [...] written on the Mediterranean coast, full of Men and names” that have “left their mark on the industrial and trade era on which Marseille has built its reputation” during the 19th century.¹⁸ The aim then is by submitting “to modern creators” the advertisement archives of products and services (posters, photographs, interviews, documents), to invent *scenarii* of “economy-fictions” that would be “poetic, unusual, moving, amazing.” “Retuning to the future” in a playful and corrosive way, is about giving “a second breath,” questioning “the codes and values” of advertisement campaigns placed in an alternate story line and envisioning what the “businesses of the third millennia”¹⁹ could look like. Production and consumption, management and marketing thus hold the center of the stage at the Bourse de Marseille, becoming for the occasion a genuine “place of remembrance”²⁰ sanctifying industrial, business, commercial and advertising heritages.

In parallel, cultural politics widely relay the private sector initiatives by programming in public buildings and institutions educational exhibitions aiming at raising the awareness of the general public to the “great stakes” of economy: in partnership with the Banque de France, *La crise, et après ?* (2009), *Contre-*

15 [Online] <http://www.palaisdelabourse2013.ccimp.com/programme/l-art-dentreprenre-n13/> [accessed 22 July 2015].

16 *13 scenarii d'économie-fiction*, Grand Hall du Palais de la Bourse à Marseille, 15 December 2013-15 January 2014.

17 Turcat-Méry cars, Couret Frères soaps, Théjy aperitif, Lagier radios, Frédéric Fournier candles, General Shipping Society, Caubet insecticides, Coste butter cookies, Casati bank, Trois-Six hats, Schlœsing fertilizer...

18 Translated from: [online] <http://www.palaisdelabourse2013.ccimp.com/programme/13-scenarii-deconomie-fiction/> [accessed 22 July 2015].

19 Translated from: Jacques Pfister, president CCI Marseille-Provence, event press kit, p. 2. [Online] http://www.ccimp.com/sites/default/files/dp_13scenarii_ld_0.pdf [accessed 22 July 2015].

20 In the meaning given by Pierre Nora, *Les Lieux de mémoire*, Paris, Gallimard, “Quarto,” 1997, vol. 1, “Entre mémoire et Histoire,” p. 23-43.

façon (2010); with the European Central Bank, *Euro, l'expo* (euro exhibition) (2011); and finally on over a 1 000 m² plateau at the Cité des sciences et de l'industrie in la Villette,²¹ *L'économie. Krach, boom, mue ?* (end of 2013). To put “a complicated and abstract subject,” served by a “jargon that only an insider can understand” back to the front of the public stage, is what the exhibition commission (Sophie Bougé, alongside with no less than four museographers and two researchers in economy) wishes to do, claiming that economic debates have “an impact on our day-to-day life.” The exhibition, presented as “playful, interactive and colorful, filled with experiences, and collective and individual games,” wishes to “translate into a language that everybody can understand, some notions and mechanisms so as to provide the key to grasp a subject that is more than ever at the heart of the news.” Through a participative device, it opens up a debate space aiming at presenting the actors of the economy (households, businesses, banks), explaining the mechanisms behind mercantile and non-mercantile exchanges (supply, demand, regulation) or the economic processes and their activity indicators (growth, development, crisis), destined to help visitors to “familiarize with certain concepts, way of thinking and data.”

The message is clear: you can leave the exhibition “equipped with the tools to interpret your day-to-day life, decrypt the financial news and understand the great debates of our time,”²² with a number of conferences for support. The walls of the multiple space settings are covered with economic concepts and formulas, interactive tutorials, role playing games and varied animations for an “unveiling” rhetoric, aiming at toning down the relationship with a science presented as hermetical, allowing to think that a mere work of cultural mediation would allow to master its secrets, following the example of a natural history, science and arts or civilization museum. The denial of the ideological dimension of an economy, that is yet the theater of clashes between orthodoxes and heterodoxes, liberals and interventionists, free-exchangers and protectionists, let us think that there might be a global, homogeneous and coherent place of economic intelligibility that could become unanimous. It tends to erase the original dimension of economy as a “moral science” and its plural goal, in favor of quantitative assessments, of statistic treatments and mathematical medializations precisely contributing to making even less clear what they are supposed to clarify, meaning the eminent and per se political dimension of economy.

Some economists²³ and journalists²⁴ have not missed this stance. It motivates their reluctance towards a more ambitious project of which the Villette exhibition would only be an experimental tryout: the opening, announced for 2015, of a museum-city for economy and money, housed within the neoclassical

21 *L'économie. Krach, boom, mue ?*, Cité des sciences et de l'industrie, 26 March 2013-5 January 2014.

22 Translated from: [online] <http://www.citedeleconomie.fr/L-economie-Krach-boom-mue> [accessed 22 July 2015].

23 André Orléan and Gilles Raveaud, “L'économie au musée ? Une exposition contestable à La Villette [Economics in the Museum? A questionable exhibition in La Villette]”, *Le Monde*, 28 August 2013: “This exhibition is based on the assumption that it is possible to offer a neutral description of the economic mechanisms, namely without no prior theoretical stance. This assumption cannot work. Such is the unsolvable difficulty that makes it so difficult to present an exhibition or a museum dedicated to economy.”

24 Laura Raim, “Alice au pays de l'économie merveilleuse,” Les blogs du *Diplo*, 16 April 2013.

building of the Hôtel Gaillard, under the authority of the main-contracting and neighboring Banque de France. The speech behind the memorandum of information of this important public project is exactly the same as that of the exhibition, announcing the creation of “a space dedicated to economic culture, presenting in a playful, educative and interactive manner the notions and mechanisms of economy, money and finances”; but also a “public place to find explanations to the questions raised by the news, to exchange and debate”; and finally a “space shedding a light on notes, coins and fabricating machine collections,” considered as both economy tools and significant objects.²⁵ Living and plastic material, economy, thus depoliticized, is presented as a creative resource and source for artistic creation. It enters the museographic space, where it imposed itself in a few years’ time, relayed by efficient incentive and subventioning systems.

Similar devices support the idea that one could, in a consecutive manner, apprehend the relationships existing between contemporary arts and the financial world. Yet, if economy becomes, in favor of such museographic uses, a legitimate exhibition object, it seems that in a symmetrical fashion modern art wishes, through the emerging curatorial practices, to develop exhibition methods that could be compared to that of science museums that were mentioned earlier. Such were the initiatives at the crossroads of curatorial art and business art taken by individuals such as the gallery owner Thaddaeus Ropac with his modern art foundation, situated in an old cauldronery in Pantin, launched in October 2012.

Such was also the case of exhibitions like *Économie humaine*, initiative of commissioners Paul Ardenne and Barbara Polla, inviting twenty-two artists in the modern art space at the business school HEC. Between 20 November 2014 and 6 March 2015, artists were invited into several campuses in Jouy-en-Josas and into the “*Petit Musée à durée indéterminée.*” This exhibition offered to make an inventory of the relationships between plastic artists and the business world and, more widely, economy at the time of globalization. Approaches were twofold: “the *plastician* understanding of the business, economy and production worlds; the play with economic indicators and the business universe.”

The objective is not only to “humanize the world of economy and business,” it is also about giving back to Man “a conscious and active role, lucid and concerned.” A public vision underlays this exhibition, that offers the spectator “a better look on the real economy,” through the artist’s intervention, “by mimicking and deviating it, by widening sometimes to the extreme its practices, by making it no longer a subject of tensions but of relaxation.” In an only apparent paradox, the artistic treatment of economy would then lead, not to derealization, but rather to over-realization: “Here, art produces a singular modulation of the relationship between the modern Man and materialism, it rematerializes economy in deviated forms.”²⁶ Thus rematerialized, precisely through its illusionist fictioning, economy becomes a plastic matter and as such, malleable at will.

25 [Online] <http://www.citedeleconomie.fr> [accessed 22 July 2015].

26 Translated from the memorandum of information [online]: <http://www.hec.fr/News-Room/Actualites/Economie-humaine-la-nouvelle-exposition-de-l-Espace-d-art-contemporain-HEC> [accessed 22 July 2015].

(Ambivalent) criticism of political economy

Outside such promotional events, driven by motivations at times mercantile and at times educational and often indirectly ideological, the question of the artistic intentionality and ideological finality of the processes of implementation of economy by fiction deserves to be asked. Various diversion strategies, or at times, liberal capitalism subversive, can be observed. The production of artistic value, as a social construct of assessment methods, maintains with economy a relationship of mutual configuration based upon a homological relationship rather than an analogical one between monetary and artistic value.

By creating fictions with a mercantile, or even speculative value, modern art not only introduces a critical relationship towards political economy, but also an auto-criticism towards its own assessment methods,²⁷ specifically through the assessment processes of a certain “iconomy.”²⁸ Thus the environmental and relational approaches developed by “eco-design,”²⁹ and even more so the critical perspective towards the “critical design”³⁰ wave tends, by rendering perceptible the gratuity rather than functionality of some objects, to put into light the potential “value fiction” power they contain. This tends as well, by neutralizing its “usage value” and usefulness, to unveil its worrisome “strangeness,”³¹ even if this means indefinitely renegotiating the debt pact that motivated its first use and based on its “exchange value”:

This approach is based on viewing values as raw material and shaping them into objects. Materialising unusual values in products is one way that design can be a very powerful form of social critique. [...] Fiction values cannot be too clear or they blend into what we already know. A slight strangeness is the key [...].³²

What needs to be determined is whether these enstranging and distancing processes, applied to the goods and services of the mercantile economy, have a real critical weight, at a time where the professional status, labor organization and the employment justification systems undergo deep changes—as so vividly shown by performing arts.³³ The artist *ethos* is indeed shifting from a “bohemian” or “romantic magician” lifestyle of the 19th century to the “businessman artist”, considered, within the globalized art market as a decision, relation and financing center which “should deal with the effects of the two dynamics, artistic and economic, of their own works production,”³⁴ following the examples of Takashi Murakami, Damien Hirst or Jeff Koons. Oxymoron at a time, the descriptive (independent-)contractor artist is almost considered as a

27 *Multitudes*, no. 57, special issue, “Art cent valeurs,” Fall 2014.

28 Translated from: *Multitudes*, no. 57, “Art cent valeurs,” Fall 2014.

29 Translated from: *Multitudes*, no. 53, mineure “Écodesign,” Fall 2013, p. 171-195.

30 Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby, *Critical Design, FAQ*: “Critical Design uses speculative design proposals to challenge narrow assumptions, preconceptions and givens about the role products play in everyday life.” [Online] <http://www.dunneandraby.co.uk/content/bydandr/13/0> [accessed 22 July 2015].

31 Jehanne Dautrey and Emanuele Quinz (eds.), *Strange Design. Du design des objets au design des comportements*, Villeurbanne, It: Éditions, 2014.

32 Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby, *Design Noir: The Secret Life of Electronic Objects*, Bâle/Berlin/Boston, Birkhäuser, 2001, p. 63.

33 Martial Poirson and Emmanuel Wallon (eds.), *Théâtre en travail: mutations des métiers du spectacle, Théâtre/Public*, no. 217, June 2015.

34 Translated from: Xavier Greffe, “Les artistes-entreprises,” *L’Observatoire. La Revue des politiques culturelles*, no. 44, “Vies et statuts des artistes,” Summer 2014, p. 51. By the same author, *L’Artiste-entreprise*, Paris, Dalloz, 2012.

redundancy today, in a world where the artist considers art and business as “calling upon different yet complementary forms of creativity.”³⁵ They multiply transitions, redefining the sharing of the added artistic value.³⁶ We thus witness a certain shift in discourse logic and a mutation of professional justification systems, under the influence of new personal artist mythologies bread on statutory revendications in times of crisis. Yet, one can question whether this businessman-artist position can induce, within the more and more weakened cultural ecosystems, the creation of “Critical Companies,”³⁷ following the example of initiatives such as that of Yann Toma, Sarah Rozem, Res Inglood, Dana Wyse or Maël Le Mée.

While the artist mythology is starting to merge with economy mythification, the businessman-artist claims a doubtful “return on investment”³⁸: as “service provider,”³⁹ he is in turns introduced as a “business fiction” and as a label⁴⁰, in the wake of artistic mythologization encouraged by the surrealists, then the situationists. One can, on the opposite, legitimately consider than these same businessmen-artists compete, consciously or not, to dissolve the creation act through a form of “artistic business”⁴¹, through which the creator is simply required to be a businessman himself, in a strictly congruent manner with the neoliberal injunction, in the image of parts of the Pop Art, Financial Art or Business Art. The ambiguity is constituent of the logic that is behind the business functionalization, firmly supported by efficient practices in storytelling capable of blurring the frontiers between illusion and reality:

The business-artist is a conjunction, a natural alloy of business form and artist. It is a bicephalous structure that has no predetermined shape and that evolves through its activity. The business becomes a dimension of charge, management and production. It accumulates potentialities and amplifies them. But the artist is an individual, a unipersonal structure but also of proposal power. Either this proposal is fictitious [...] or more real [...], it registers in a realistic field whatever its identity may give to expect. Fiction, in this context, appears as real and inevitably leads to real consequences.⁴²

35 Translated from: Pierre Estève, “Artiste-entrepreneur. La troisième voie,” *L’Observatoire. La Revue des politiques culturelles*, no. 44, “Vies et statuts des artistes,” Summer 2014, p. 53-55.

36 Wenceslas Lizé, Delphine Naudier and Olivier Roueffe (eds.), *Intermédiaires du travail artistique. À la frontière de l’art et du commerce*, Paris, Ministère de la Culture, “Questions de culture,” 2011.

37 Yann Toma (ed.), *Les Entreprises critiques: la critique artiste à l’ère de l’économie globalisée*, Paris, Chirat/Cité du design Éditions, 2008.

38 Such is the ambiguity of the *Return on Investment* exhibition, taking place in the Immanence gallery, 6 March-4 April 2015, commission Renaud Layrac and Yann Toma.

39 *La Vitrine art et marque* conversation: “L’artiste peut-il être un prestataire de services”, 19 March 2014, during the “Business Model” exhibition. [Online] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nJpSwWqRkuY> [accessed 22 July 2015].

40 Aurélie Herbet, “Fictionnaliser l’entreprise: entre acte mystificateur et statut d’entrepreneur” and Stéphanie Jamet-Chavigny, “Se nommer pour marquer? Une question d’identité,” in Yann Toma, Stéphanie Jamet-Savigny and Laurent Devèze (eds.), *Artistes et Entreprises*, Paris, D’ailleurs, 2011, *resp.* p. 62-68 et p. 21-30.

41 Translated from: SMartBe, *L’Artiste, un entrepreneur?*, Paris, Les Impressions Nouvelles, 2011; Norbert Hillaire (ed.), *L’Artiste et l’entrepreneur*, Paris, Cité du design Éditions, 2008.

42 Translated from: Yann Toma, Stéphanie Jamet-Savigny and Laurent Devèze (eds.), *Artistes et Entreprises*, Paris, D’ailleurs, 2011, p. 12.

The risk then becomes very important, with this movement born in the 1960s, to contribute unknowingly to reinforcing, or even legitimizing the reality that we pretend to condemn or blame, while in the same time, “artistic criticism” has widely been reintegrated by management and marketing.⁴³ Then it is in a specific organization that dwells the counter-productive dimension of the fictional economy. It especially expresses itself through a consumed art of “collection”:

My collection concept favors an art of scattering and infiltration with an array of possibilities that aims at linking together complementary operations. It constitutes and develops itself within a setting of our society through which I find in the end more reflections about modern art than in piece/objects.⁴⁴

Yet, collecting, though subtraction of endlessly erected objects to the utility order of production and consumption, is not without any economic preconceptions. It can even justifiably be considered as a “new form of capitalism,”⁴⁵ as an assessment process disruptor: it substitutes an enrichment economy to an industrial production economy, but also rearticulates the public and private sphere, while diluting the contours of the creative work. In this multiple partners overbidding play between the artists’ transgression, public indignation and cultural institution acknowledgments, contributing to indefinitely push further the frontiers of modern art,⁴⁶ the “artistic revolution” has become a permanent state within society: sanctifying “the ontological rupture of frontiers from what was commonly considered as art,” it induces a deep reshaping of “institutional, organizational, economic, logistical”⁴⁷ issues.

Artistic (im)pertinences

In a socioeconomic context in which art is often reduced to a mere signing role with an assumed and even claimed falsehood,⁴⁸ and in which on the contrary cognitive capitalism⁴⁹ and its attentional economy put in place powerful strategies to capture creative value,⁵⁰ the critical objective of political economy less resides in aesthetico-ideological predetermined devices than in postures (statements) and sometimes artistic impostures than can be heuristic or performative. As a third party included between illusion and reality, the spectator is called upon through immersive and interactive processes: he is required to question the construction of the artistic value itself, through which he is

43 Ève Chiapello and Luc Boltanski, *Le Nouvel Esprit du capitalisme*, Paris, Gallimard, 1999.

44 Ghislain Mollet-Viéville, *Art conceptuel, une entologie*, Paris, MIX, 2008, p. 465.

45 Luc Boltanski and Arnaud Esquerre, “La ‘Collection,’ une forme neuve du capitalisme. La mise en valeur économique du passé et ses effets,” *Les Temps modernes*, no. 679, July-September 2014, p. 5-72. See also Nathalie Heinich, *La Fabrique du patrimoine. De la cathédrale à la petite cuillère*, Paris, Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l’homme, 2012.

46 Nathalie Heinich, *Le Triple Jeu de l’art contemporain*, Paris, Gallimard, 1998.

47 Translated from: Nathalie Heinich, *Le Paradigme de l’art contemporain. Structures d’une révolution artistique*, Paris, Gallimard, 2014, *resp.* p. 49 and 34.

48 Martial Poirson, “‘Se servir d’un Rembrandt comme planche à repasser !’ : *Artketing*, industrie de prototype et signalétique artistique,” *Multitude*, no. 57, “Art cent valeurs,” Fall 2014, p. 76-86.

49 Yann Moulier-Boutang, *Le Capitalisme cognitif. La nouvelle grande transformation*, Paris, Amsterdam, 2007 ; *Multitudes*, no. 32, Spring 2008.

50 Martial Poirson, “Capitalisme artiste et optimisation du capital attentionnel,” postface by Yves Citton (ed.), *L’Économie de l’attention : nouvel horizon du capitalisme ?*, Paris, La Découverte, 2014, p. 267-287.

indivisibly presented as producer and receiver. From applied to visual arts, including performing and digital arts, a vast array of artistic impertinences impose themselves by seizing economy for an artistically perverting purpose, even if this means disturbing the usual referencing and giving a real consistency to the consented illusion: diversion of the economic matter; infiltration of production or consumption processes; disturbance of assessment methods; capture of attentional sources, these constitute some of the perverting strategies of the economic fiction with artistic purposes—and *vice versa*—within genuine performative protocols proceeding, in the most radical offers, to blurring the identification of the creating gesture itself.

The “net-artistes” collective born from the RYBN open source community, was created in 2000 in Paris through installation, live, multimedia interfacing performances, and specialized in the referencing of cognitive codification systems. Their artistic experiments aim at revealing “what lies behind” digital collection and the creation of databases. It is all but fortuitous that for the last five years the collective is participating, through the “Antidatamining” project, to the exploration of the financial world, contemplated through the robotization of market strategies and statistical processing of predictive models. By the intervention of a series of robots, introduced as “chance checkers” and developed through the use of algorithms and softwares, they materialize the financial system so as to underline its dysfunctionalities.

Such is the case of the “ADM” software, evolving from exhibitions to festivals into machines such as ADM.9, a trader-robot presented at the art center ZKM in Karlsruhe in August 2011, then at the Gaîté lyrique, building dedicated to digital cultures, in February 2012. This speculating-robot is programmed to deal and optimize an initial fund of 8.279 euros on capital markets, until it inevitably goes bankrupt, in a more and more entropic environment; it especially aims at reporting public transactions through an online follow-up of financial performances, twitted in real-time in open source.

These digital artists do it again with their “Algorithmic trading Freak Show,” presented during the *Disnovation* exhibition.⁵¹ The artistic proposition is presented as part of the “Accès)s(” festival in October 2014 at the Belle Ordinaire in Pau,⁵² dedicated to the jeopardizing of the “propaganda for innovation” on which is based the techno-capitalist fetishism and its innovation/consumption complex. Following the model of reverse engineering advocated by the *The Critical Engineering Manifesto*, it is about widening the “machine concept” by “describing the interrelationships of the bodies, agents and network forces devices”; it is mostly about, by questioning our “techno-political heritage,” creating a frustration feeling by jamming the automatic adjustment between supply and demand:

The Critical Engineer observes the space between the production and consumption of technology. Acting rapidly to changes in this space, the Critical Engineer serves to expose moments of imbalance and deception.⁵³

According to the RYBN collective, the most efficient way to foil the financial mechanisms thus is to make visible their concealment strategies, by considering

51 Portmanteau word created from the contraction of “disruptive innovation,” which gave its name to the exhibition. [Online] <http://disnovation.net> [accessed 22 July 2015].

52 [Online] <http://acces-s.org/festival-2014/> [accessed 22 July 2015].

53 Julien Olivier, Gordan Savičić and Danja Vasiliev, *The Critical Engineering Manifesto*, 2014, Precept 6 and 7. [Online] <http://criticalengineering.org/en> [accessed 22 July 2015].

“the exploit to be the most desirable form of exposure.”⁵⁴ The objective then becomes to open the “black box” of the big data by gathering random, obsolete, deficient or ineffective algorithms with suggestive names (Sniper, Sumo, Guerilla...), on the basis of the “cabinets of curiosities” and other odd collections by “butterfly chasers.” Algorithms are classified in six categories, from the most logical to the most occult, since the infamous stock exchange prediction model “Hexagram me”: the latter was created within a zodiacal circle by the trader William Delbert Gann in the early 20th century, and based on an unlikely synthesis of astrology and numerology. It is claimed that it capitalized record earnings in 1909 (a 1.000% progression of its portfolio), before anticipating and predicting the Wall Street Krach of 1929. At the whim of operations lead in a random fashion by cybernetic tools, mathematical models and IT softwares, the device dips the spectator in the enchanted universe of statistic models, since Bachelier’s researches in 1900 to the Mandelbrot’s fractal approach of markets, leading an “algorithmic trading at high frequency” capable of revealing “a new kind of mysticism.”⁵⁵ A few parodic specimens deserve to be mentioned, such as the “Zero intelligence,” the “Twitter Oracle,” indexed on the fluctuation of feelings and opinions in social medias, or the “MonkeyDex” which seriously took the quip by market efficiency partisan, Burton Malkiel, who, in 1973, would have suggested “that a blindfolded monkey throwing darts at a newspaper’s financial pages could select a portfolio that would do just as well as one carefully selected by experts.” It thus is through darts thrown onto an edition of the *Wall Street Journal* that random speculative previsions are made.

Consequently it is for RYBN, just like for a certain number of digital creation artists,⁵⁶ about making the existing operational processes of mathematical modelization visible in an “algorithm policy” in which “code is law,” as per the expression of US lawman Lawrence Lessig in 2001. The objective is to question a certain “algorithmic governmentality,”⁵⁷ while “these predictive models based on important data volumes are becoming widespread in the economic, social and political domains.”⁵⁸ In 2003, the estimated amount of data collected, stocked, managed and exploited since the origins of humanity was five exabytes. Since then, five exabytes of data are created every two days, if we are to believe Google CEO, Éric Schmidt’s declaration, in 2010. The World’s accelerated

54 Julien Olivier, Gordan Savičić, Danja Vasiliev, *The Critical Engineering Manifesto*, 2014, Precept 6 and 7. [Online] <http://criticalengineering.org/en> [accessed 22 July 2015].

55 Translated from: Interview by Marie Lechner, “Le *Freak Show* des algorithmes financiers,” *Libération*, 21 November 2014. Source of all following citations.

56 See the example of Werner Moron’s approach with the project “The Wall Street of Our Desires and Disillusions. Accounting Poetry”, who—through performing-conferences during which he presents himself as “the next-door banker,” a collaborative website and a “doubt University,”—aims at establishing a poetic “bank,” as a guarantee of an “intimate economy,” considered as “a cordon-sanitaire between our desires and our disillusions.” See *Multitudes*, no. 57, “Art cent valeurs,” Fall 2014, p. 138-144. See “We will bomb the reality made for us with all the realities that live within us, The Wall Street of our Desires and Disillusions will provide a stock exchange where our symbolic values, climbing and falling in turns, will raise your desires and arm a revolution.” (p. 144).

57 Antoinette Rouvroy, *Law, Human Agency and Autonomic Computing: The Philosophy of Law Meets the Philosophy of Technology*, London, Routledge, 2011. See also, from the same author, “Gouvernementalité algorithmique et perspectives d’émancipation,” *Réseaux*, no. 177, “Politique des algorithmes,” 2013.1, p. 163-196.

58 Translated from: Interview by Marie Lechner, “Le *Freak Show* des algorithmes financiers,” *Libération*, 21 November 2014.

“datafication” thus creates a “datafiction,” which storytelling gorges on the “Big Bang Data” myth, to use the title of the exhibition presented at the Modern culture centre of Barcelona in 2014.⁵⁹ Such configuration can only create in turn a new internet activism form in the era of the 2.0, whether it is algorithm reprogramming, data scrambling systems, or new forms of digital camouflage, sources of resistance to media hypervisibility.⁶⁰

Beyond such parodic deviation strategies, concerned about delving into the economic “matter” and source of inspiration and contestation, a number of artists are looking, by placing themselves as service providers, to blur artistic value criterions, like Bernard Brunon with his company That’s Painting Productions, created in Houston in 1989, then registered at the chamber of commerce of Harris county (Texas) in 1991. Going back to the traditions of the artist workshop and the order, in other words the artisanal dimension of the art, and not without an echo to the *Funky Business* wave, he presents himself as a building contractor, answering to individual, business or cultural institution adjudications, originating from both sides of the Atlantic ocean. This “working support-surface” implacably offers the same type of services, namely “a rigorous work, at an affordable price and in respected deadlines,” as stated in his contract. The questioning of representation contexts consequently is at heart of an approach of which the objective is to be invisible, or even to create the conditions of its own invisibility as an artistic gesture, as in an exemplary fashion when he paints great monochromes on the walls or cymas of museographic spaces. Gestures, tools and material are exactly the same, whether it is about neutralizing the support of a very real space through “painting” or to create a “table” in a space reserved to creation. It is the (“Wet Painting”) process, literally at work in dedicated space, which constitutes an interpretative community⁶¹ capable or not to identify and recognize the artistic value of the technical gesture.

The motto of his “general painting company” claims an art of discretion, of self-effacement of furtive incursion, aiming at the spectator’s capacity of projection onto the neutral space of the work created on a pure reflective surface: “With less to look at, there’s more to think about.”⁶² Heir to minimalism, conceptual art or *in situ*, Bernard Brunon is less about the “chameleon strategy”⁶³ than the invisibilization strategy, capable of questioning the qualification, categorization or identification of the work of art (anonymous, not dependent on royalties or copyright). He dilutes it in a creative gesture, questioning the notions of artistic added value or economic externality, all the while inventing a viable business model, in the way that his company is anything but fictitious: it functions according to a proven *business model*, following a production and diffusion organization perfectly fitted into the capitalist system.

59 *Big Bang Data*, exhibition created by Olga Subirós and José Luis de Vicente at Centro de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona, 9 March-16 November 2014. [Online] http://cccb.org/en/exposicio-big_bang_data-45167 [accessed 22 July 2015].

60 See the catalog published for the exhibition under the title *Anonymise Yourself – Electronic Self-Defence Handbook*.

61 Stanley Fish, *Quand lire c’est faire. L’autorité des communautés interprétatives*, presentation Yves Citton, translation Étienne Dobenesque, Paris, Les Prairies Ordinaires, 2007.

62 In English in the source.

63 Translated from: According to Pascal Beausse, “Bernard Brunon : Peintre et Manager,” in Yann Toma, Stéphanie Jamet-Savigny and Laurent Devèze (eds.), *Artistes et Entreprises*, Paris, D’ailleurs, 2011, p. 177.

Place of formal experiment, the industrial painting company is jeopardizing, through the means of pictorial performances inscribed at the heart of reality, far from any traditional illusion technic, the assessment and validation devices of modern art, while doubting of its representation regimes.

Backwards of this invisibility strategy, occur contrary hypervisibility strategies, that can be also considered as ostentatious or even exhibitionist, sometimes pushed to the extreme, within true performances aiming at capturing resources both human and attentional. Such is the case, under a totally dematerialized service, of an artist-business like the Agence internationale de remplacement [International agency for replacement] (AIR) created by the comedians and artists Alain Gintzburger and Johanna Korthals, based on a very simple assessment: “You cannot be in different places at the same time.” It inspires an aporetic or contradictory injunction: “You cannot be replaced, find a replacement.” Facing the multiple and simultaneous requirements of the modern world, the agency offers (or rather sells) the gift of ubiquity, by the means of a team of replacements implanted around the world that present themselves in your name at any type of personal or professional events. Preliminary interview and creation of a replacement figure can establish the client’s “monography”: it aims at anticipating “all kinds of defined actions” so as to “transform you into an AIRTIST.”

It is thus about sanctifying, in an only apparent contradiction, the singularity and interchangeability of the modern individual, as perfectly substitutable as he is irreplaceable. By resorting to such a priced service (paid in “air-money,” money artificially created for this kind of services), the client becomes the businessman of their own life, by the means of a “unique creation to represent you,” “made to measure,” like a remedy to procrastination, indecision and “frustration,” just as stated in the ad:

With AIR, you no longer have to give up on all the choices that are given to you. With AIR, become ubiquitous. With AIR, become legend. AIR will make you a myth. AIR offers you a series of unique services that will make your absence an unforgettable event.⁶⁴

It is in reality, at the heart of life that emerges an artistic posture that has nothing in common with role playing but aims at authenticity through its own agentivity regime:

We end up in places that are nothing like the theatre, where we act. We really are in real-life, this is about coming closer to someone else. It is about going towards an elsewhere that it is not a fiction either, because we are talking about a living person.⁶⁵

The company thus offers an identity usurpation, unless it is a play on the function of the representation system at the basis of our political (representative diplomacy), economic (business shareholding) or social (trade union representative, joint committees) orders. The finality of such an artistic process of voluntary identity usurpation, “in an era which assigns to everyone concrete and inalienable spots,” is twofold: “on the one hand, you will be given credit as a replacement, and on the other, we table the idea of reversement, by traveling

64 Translated from: [online] <http://art-flux.univ-paris1.fr/spip.php?article519> [accessed 22 July 2015].

65 [Online] <http://www.terrafemina.com/emploi-a-carrieres/actu/articles/13359-agence-air-etes-vous-irremplacable-.html> [accessed 22 July 2015].

during a few moments behind the representation that we have given.”⁶⁶ The stake of such attentional attractors is thus, by deviating the functioning methods of the attention economy,⁶⁷ to create powerful capture systems of artistic value, all the while perverting, by ostensibly exhibiting them, representation mechanisms.

Towards (an upcoming) protocols policy

Protocols to be activated, status sharing, questioning of cultural institution rules and of artistic auctoriality principles, exhibition situation or creative processes reversal: numerous are the attempts to symbolically compensate the dominating tendency of culture merchandization within a recreative entertainment economy that has didactic, playful and controversial, and lucrative objectives. If some artists are content with going back to an artisanal vision of their art that is conforming to the preclassical tradition of workshops, others make the experience of two processes apparently contradictory: at times they mean to exhibit the mercantile vocation of artistic creations through the focus of the fictioning of economy; at times the stake is, on the contrary, to exalt the mercantile dimension of the artistic relationship within fictions engaged in an alternative or, more rarely, subversive critical posture, towards its economic grasp.

Nourishing “protocolar and relational collections” of modern arts foundations, such as the Centre national des arts plastiques, inspiring hybrid installations, at the cross-roads of installation and live performance, in the image of the exhibition *Des choses en moins, des choses en plus* [Something Less, Something More] at the Palais de Tokyo between February and March 2014,⁶⁸ these businessmen-artists’ approaches are part of an ambivalent policy of the gesture that can jam the production mechanisms, disturb exchange rules and thwart the consumption models of symbolic goods, all the while inscribing themselves in the business order. If the business infiltration or market contamination strategies inspired by the *care* economy is not devoided of any recuperation risks or even of mercantile dissolution of the artistic process, it is however capable of claiming a form of minor deviance, in other words, of sly subversion of the cultural and artistic entrepreneurship codes, of the (lucid) admission of the (building) painter Bernard Brunon:

I was sometimes reproached to play into capitalist hands and of reinforcing the system, by being a boss employing workers. But I think that all out resistance to capitalism can only be met by failure, because the system is, among other things, capable to own this resistance, to turn it into merchandize and sell it to whomever would try to resist it. It is thus imperative to find new strategies. By acting within the system, but without co-opting its values, it might be possible to eradicate it. It probably is not very spectacular, or with any great meaning, but this can be efficient on some levels.⁶⁹

Backwards of all this essentialist perspective on works, but also of all these deconstructivist conceptions of artistic practices and their validation processes,

66 [Online] <http://www.terrafemina.com/emploi-a-carrieres/actu/articles/13359-agence-air-etes-vous-irremplacable-.html> [accessed 22 July 2015].

67 Yves Citton, *Pour une écologie de l'attention*, Paris, Seuil, 2014.

68 [Online] <http://www.palaisdetokyo.com/fr/exposition/des-choses-en-moins-des-choses-en-plus> [accessed 22 July 2015].

69 Translated from: Press release, “Art et services,” 4th international symposium Art & Flux, 14-15 March 2013, Saline royale d’Arc and Senans-Cité des utopies.

the analysis in terms of policy of protocols allows as a consequence to put into a new light the difficult articulation of art and money, by mobilizing functionalization devices liable to put on the forefront articulating methods between reality and illusion. In the midst of invisibilization, ostentation and infiltration, it appears that the immersive cooperative or participative critical devices, conceived to put “the economic fiction” in place, evolve towards immersive or performative protocols that can mobilize an economy of affects that, if not opposing art merchandizing, can place its representation in the era of suspicion.