Michael HUTTER, *The Rise of the Joyful Economy. Artistic Invention and Economic Growth from Brunelleschi to Murakami* (London/New York, Routledge 2015)

The Rise of the Joyful Economy by the German cultural economist-partially-turned-sociologist Michael Hutter is about as far as you can get from a standard monograph in cultural or economic sociology. Drawing on insights from art history, cultural economics and economic sociology among others, the book is hard to categorize. The claims which the book makes are as sweeping as the evidence provided for them is a-typical: the analysis of works of art, selected from a 600-year timespan. But for readers who are not daunted by these deviations, *The Rise of the Joyful Economy* is a highly original analysis of artistic and economic transformations since the Middle Ages. Moreover, the book sheds news lights on contemporary debates in economic and cultural sociology.

Hutter presents three interrelated arguments. First of all, in the beginning of the book he claims that we are witnessing "a new era in the development of our global economy," which he calls "the joyful economy". That name is a reference to *The Joyless Economy* (1976), a book by the Hungarian-American economist Tibor Scitovsky, who warned that post-war consumer society would fail to satisfy human needs for joy and novelty. Hutter, by contrast, is not so pessimistic: he argues that the satisfaction of such needs is central to contemporary economic systems. Like many authors before him (think of almost any sociologist writing on consumer society, or of marketing gurus Pine and Gilmore and their theory of the "experience economy"), he claims that our economy does not revolve around the production of material goods, but around symbolic production.

More controversial may be Hutter's claim that the arts are the core of this symbolic economy. The innovations, novelties and surprises which are produced in this core, are adopted by the cultural industries, and later ripple through the remainder of the economy. The author also deviates from standard accounts when he states that the joyful economy is no new, late-modern phenomenon, but has gradually come into being over the course of six centuries. The reader should not expect precise empirical evidence to prove this claim. For instance, the book does not

Olav VELTHUIS, University of Amsterdam [ovelthuis@fmg.uva.nl]
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present longitudinal data on the monetary value of so-called joyful goods. Instead, he argues somewhat ambiguously that the rise of the joyful economy "might refer to a kind of growth—not the trivially linear growth of numerical indicators, but the more complex growth of life forms in their environments."

The second argument which the book presents, is that there is a pattern to this long, slow rise of the joyful economy. It can be divided into three periods. First, the "period of exploiting cognitive illusion," which starts in Renaissance Florence with the invention of linear perspective. Linear perspective was applied for the first time in the arts by the 15th century Italian painter Masaccio, and it took the viewers of his work by surprise. Linear perspective was further developed and applied by other artists, architects, craftsmen and mapmakers, over the course of the next two centuries. It was also used for political purposes in Louis XIV's imposing, domineering gardens of Versailles in the late 17th century, which is where this period ends for the author. Next comes what Hutter calls "the period of exploiting social relations," which starts in 1730 and ends in 1890. During these years, a consumer society is born, the notion of fashion is created, and a new, wealthy upper-middle class comes into being whose members are in need of "politeness goods." Hutter singles out the British 18th century artist William Hogarth as an exemplary painter of such politeness goods, which enabled members of the leisure class to engage in thoughtful, moralizing conversations with each other. Finally comes "the period of exploiting serial variations," which starts after World War II and is still ongoing. This can be characterized, somewhat paradoxically, by a "joy in repetition." Think of the work of Andy Warhol, which stands out, among others, because of the large editions in which he created it.

Hutter's third argument is that the joyful economy is set in motion by a variety of "plays of value" which are each relatively autonomous and constituted by their own rules and conventions. Out of these various plays, the book predictably focuses on two—art and the economy. Innovation, surprises and novelty in the joyful economy, he argues, come about because of one play "irritating" the other. As Hutter is ready to admit, the term "play" is similar to notions such as fields (Bourdieu, Fligstein), logics (Friedland and Alford, Thornton), worlds (Becker) or "worlds of worth" (Boltanski and Thevenot). Unlike Friedland and Alford or Thornton's notion of conflicting logics, but like David Stark's understanding of the notion of dissonance, Hutter uses the term "irritation" to allude to the productive side of the confrontation between different plays. (Together with Stark, Hutter and his colleague at WZB, Ariane Berthoin Antal, recently edited a volume on the value-generating potential of dissonance.) On the one hand, he argues, artistic inventions may set in motion new economic "games" and may even be seen as a source of economic growth, as the subtitle of the book—*Artistic Invention and Economic Growth from Brunelleschi to Murakami*—suggests. The best example is probably the first part of the book, where a detailed account is given of the way linear perspective, which according to Hutter was invented in the arts, found its way into numerous commercial products, including maps (which in turn assisted navigators in discovering new territories) and technical illustrations. On the other hand, economic life may be a source of fascination for artists and may therefore set in motion new artistic games. Hutter is agnostic when it comes to the primacy of one type of "irritation" over the other: productive impulses may flow in both directions, from the economy to art and vice versa.

The author supports these three claims by means of a highly unusual type of empirical evidence: works of visual art, and, in an isolated case, architecture. The works which he discusses are as diverse as a 15th century Florentine fresco of the holy trinity (Masaccio), a 16th century painting of a meat stall (by the Dutch artist Pieter Aertsen), a lush 18th century family portrait (by aforementioned William Hogarth), a 19th century portrait of a sad-looking Parisienne in a bar (by the impressionist painter Édouard Manet), a colorful large-scale photograph of a 99 cents shop in Los Angeles (by the contemporary German artist Andreas Gursky) or an artist-designed museum installation of a Louis Vuitton shop (by the Japanese pop-artist Takashi Murakami). Hutter constructs a thorough, highly interesting reading of each of these works, and provides rich, contextual information regarding their production and consumption. Indeed, while the first and last sections of the book are theoretical and draw on social scientific literature, the book's body leans on art historical scholarship, which Hutter demonstrates he is highly familiar with.

Surely it is not difficult to criticize a book which develops such daring and sweeping claims. Let me mention three such criticisms. First of all, little is said about the ways in which Hutter selected the works of art in support of his argument. As a reader, one cannot escape the impression that, had other works been selected, the patterns in the rise of the joyful economy would have looked quite different. Themes other than the exploitation of cognitive illusions, social relationships, and seriality, which are now singled out, might have emerged. What, for instance, if Hutter had discussed the oeuvre of avant-garde artists like Marcel Duchamp, who were fascinated by the rising economy of mass consumer goods, and translated that fascination into "ready-made" works of art. Surely those works triggered strong surprises among their viewers. Also, the historical demarcation that Hutter presents, could have looked quite different had other works been selected. For instance, the exploitation of social relations, which are now specific to 18th and 19th century art, can be found in other eras as well. Think of the famous frescoes of family life that Renaissance painter Mantegna created for the Duke of Mantova, or, in a very different manner, of the intricate moral stories told by Jan Steen's 17th century genre paintings. The repetitiveness that Hutter sees as typical of the third, most recent era, can be encountered in the 16th century as well, as Hutter doubtlessly knows. For instance, the Flemish Brueghel family would make dozens of copies of a single original work of art. Hutter moreover fails to make clear how the three periods are interrelated; they are presented in the book as entirely discontinuous. This is not very convincing for an account of the rise of an economy which presupposes some form of continuity.

A second set of criticisms concerns the book's conceptual framework, in which a relatively autonomous economic play propels a play of art, and vice versa. But to what extent was it really possible to distinguish distinct "plays of value" in early Renaissance? Isn't the relative autonomy of fields like science, economics, religion, and art in particular, a rather recent, 19th century phenomenon? Moreover, in eras such as 15th century Italy or 19th century France, the whole of society was in flux: science, arts, the economy, the organization of the public sphere, political life, and so on. Privileging the arts (in 15th century Italy) or the economy (in 19th century France) as the source of these changes is problematic.

Thirdly, Hutter says little about the timing and depth of the surprises provoked by the works he discusses. Think of Manet's paintings: at the time, Manet's work was hardly valued and virtually impossible to sell. It was too innovative, too full of surprises, so to speak, to be appreciated by the general audience. Instead, the art that was valued, both artistically and economically, concerned works that, far from being innovative, followed the traditional, academic rules for the production of art. Manet's consecration as an innovative artist only came in the 20th century, when the period of "social exploitation", as Hutter calls it, had already come to an end.

Or think of the works of art that currently fetch multi-million dollar prices at auction. Warhol is an excellent example: in November 2013, a painting of a car crash by the artist was sold for $105 million at Sotheby's in New York. How likely is it that the buyer was interested in the surprise value of the work? Not so much. It is much more likely that the buyer was interested in its status and investment value: not a search for novelty, but for financial security and, as art market slang would have it, "wall power." More generally, for a sociologist, it is remarkable how little attention Hutter pays to the socially situated character of art appreciation: to the extent to which, in other words, the ability to recognize and appreciate novelty and surprise is a matter of education, income, class etc. And for a book with this title, it is remarkable how little time Hutter spends countering the arguments of Scitovsky. Scitovsky (and a wide range of pessimistic intellectuals before and after him) feared that our consumer and amusement society, where old templates are endlessly being repeated, would not be characterized by novelty but by predictability and boredom. Just think of Hollywood movies or hit-parade songs.

These criticisms notwithstanding, *The Rise of the Joyful Economy* is an important contribution to cultural economics, to the sociology of art, and, because of the ways in which it rethinks the relationship between different "worlds of worth," to economic sociology as well. Although Hutter may go a step too far, what is particularly refreshing about the book is that it does not reduce cultural artifacts to a Bourdieusian reflection of social stratification; that for the author, the value of a work of art is not the outcome of social constructions or a matter of symbolic capital. Hutter does not waste time explaining how Manet came to be part of the canon or which gatekeepers were involved in the making of Andy Warhol's multi-million dollar auction market. Instead, this book shamelessly, and without much ado, privileges works of art, and sees them as a source of innovation and novelty—as objects which provide inspiration within designated societal circles. Moreover, while he may not convince all readers that the works of art he discusses are either inspired by economic games or have propelled such games, his elaborate discussions of these works convincingly suggest that meaning is not just created in Becker-ian "art worlds," but that the works are meaningful in themselves. In that sense, *The Rise of the Joyful Economy* should be located in what authors such as Ron Eyerman and Edoardo de La Fuente refer to as the "new sociology of art." This sociology can be loosely identified with the conviction that the content of works of art is relevant to sociologists. The book could thus be seen as an appeal for a visual analysis of cultural artifacts as a source of (historical) sociological knowledge.

Another strength of the book is that it enriches our thinking of the ways in which societal spheres have an impact on each other. The main contribution, however, and it is on the verge of cliché to write this, is that the book supports one of its own key hypotheses: the irritation hypothesis. Written by a scholar who was trained in mathematics and economics, and who later shifted his career in the direction of sociology, turning himself into an art historian in the meantime, *The Rise of the Joyful Economy* proves that novel, surprising insights are to be gained at the interface of different disciplinary perspectives.

OLAV VELTHUIS