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Chapter 12 of Why are Artists Poor

Conclusion: A CRUEL ECONOMY

Why is the Exceptional Economy of the Arts so Persistent?

Illustration 26. Apologizing for not Going into the Arts

Alex meets Marco at a classical music concert. When Alex tells Marco he's a visual artist, Marco confides in Alex that a few years earlier he had contemplated about going to a music conservatory to study composition. He explains that he is a good pianist and that he has won some prizes at concourses for young people. During their conversation, he reveals his regrets about going into information technology instead. But his regrets appear to be of the romantic kind; the sort of regrets people can indulge in. Alex is more struck by the fact that Marco is apologetic about his choice not to go into the arts, as if he has done something wrong and now must apologize. Maybe he feels the need to apologize because Alex did manage to go into the arts. In Marco's opinion, Alex has done the right thing.

This has happened to Alex before: people being apologetic for not choosing the arts. Marco is, however, the first who explains why he is apologetic. He notes that by letting the arts go, he feels that he missed out on something special. By not becoming an artist, he has harmed himself, like he has mutilated himself. He could have put himself, his personality, into his compositions, which would have allowed his personality to grow. He would have become a more complete human being. Moreover, he would have belonged, belonged to the world of art. But it's not just he who has lost out — Alex mustn't think him arrogant — but society also lost out because of this regrettable decision. If he had become the composer he wanted to be, he is sure he could have offered something significant to society. He would have joined the group of artists who help shape the history of art, of civilization itself. Yes, he is ashamed of his choice and deep down he feels guilty.

Alex tells him that despite his talents, his chances of actually making it as a professional composer would have been extremely slim. Marco says that this just makes things worse. It demonstrates that he is a coward, somebody who wants to play it safe.

Alex has to admit that Marco doesn't appear to be a very adventurous person. Moreover, Alex notices that he thinks Marco is 'bourgeois', even though Alex knows he should be congratulating Marco in his decision to choose a lucrative career.

Alex has discovered people like Marco everywhere, even in a poor country like Brazil. Alex (the alter ego of the author) wrote this chapter in Recife, Brazil. One day, while he was in an alternative bar in the new part of Recife, Alex met a woman, Maria, who told him that she had always wanted to become a dancer but ultimately decided not to. It struck Alex that she talked about it in exactly the same apologetic tone of voice as Marco. On another night, Maria introduced Alex to a group of dancers. None of them were employed at that time. Nevertheless, some had been working for fringe dance companies in different cities in Brazil, and were hoping to continue to do so. The amazing thing was that their descriptions of the Brazilian fringe dance scene sounded a lot like the fringe dance scene in the Netherlands: the same kind of dedication, the same hardships, the same large groups of dancers working only once in a while. The fundamental beliefs that underlie the arts and the economy of the arts are more international than Alex had thought.

Marco's apologetic behavior lies at the heart of the exceptional economy of the arts. While Marco may have regrettably decided to not pursue art, many others decide precisely the opposite. They enter the art world because the arts are extremely attractive, despite the prospects of low incomes. The arts offer something 'extra' that makes Marco apologetic.

I set out to write this book to explain why incomes are so low in the arts and why the arts remain so attractive as well as the phenomenon of the large amounts of donations and subsidies the arts receive. During the process, it turned out that in many respects the economy of the arts is an exceptional economy. In this concluding chapter, I will list the aspects which makes the economy of the arts exceptional. I will also summarize the book's findings with respect to low incomes and the large gift sphere. On top of that, I will try to analyze the results by attempting to answer, first, whether the economy of the arts can be qualified as a cruel or merciless economy, and secondly, whether artists sacrifice themselves or are sacrificed within this merciless economy.

As an artist, I am aware that the arts did not bestow the romantic alternative upon me I had hoped for. Being an artist is just a lot of hard work and also badly paid work. Nevertheless, I continue to believe that all my struggles will ultimately be worth the effort. I am convinced that in the years to come I will contribute something significant to the history of art. Because the work is hard and badly

paid I really need this kind of belief to keep me going. *As a social scientist*, I am now aware that the arts are a tough place for many of those who take the plunge. The economy is merciless. It is also an exceptional economy. Because of all the myths that swaddle art, the economy of the arts is persistently exceptional.

1. The Economy of the Arts is an Exceptional Economy

In the course of this book, I have drawn a picture of the economy of the arts that shows its exceptional nature. The following table lists several exceptional aspects as they appeared in the pages of this book. Taken together they portray an exceptional economy.

Table 4. Aspects Contributing to the Exceptional Nature of the Economy of the Arts

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. <i>The valuation of art products tends to be asymmetric; one group looks up to the high art of the other group, while the latter looks down on the low art of the former. (Chapter 1)</i>2. <i>In the arts: (1) the economy is denied; (2) it is profitable to be non-commercial; (3) commercial activities are veiled. (Chapter 2)</i>3. <i>Art and artists have an exceptionally high status. (Chapter 1)</i>4. <i>Artists overlook or deny their orientation towards rewards. (Chapter 4)</i>5. <i>Top incomes in the arts are extremely high; higher than in other professions. (Chapter 5)</i>6. <i>The large majority of artists earn less than other professionals do. Hourly income is low or even negative. In the modern welfare state, this is truly exceptional. (Chapter 5)</i>7. <i>Despite these low incomes, an unusually high number of youngsters still want to become artists. The arts are extremely attractive. (Chapter 5)</i>8. <i>Beginning artists face far more uncertainty than the average beginning professionals. (Chapter 5)</i>9. <i>Money represents a constraint rather than a goal for many artists. (Chapter 4)</i>10. <i>Artists are (more than others) intrinsically motivated. (Chapter 4)</i> |
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11. *Artists are (more than others) oriented towards non-monetary rewards. (Chapter 5)*
12. *Artists are (more than others) inclined to taking risks. (Chapter 5)*
13. *Artists are unusually ill-informed. (Chapter 5)*
14. *A combination of myths reproduces misinformation about the arts. (Chapter 5)*
15. *Artists more often come from well-to-do families than other professionals. (This is even more exceptional because usually the parents of 'poor' people are also poor.) (Chapter 6)*
16. *Poverty is built into the arts. Measures to relieve poverty do not work or are counterproductive. (Chapter 6)*
17. *The arts are characterized by an exceptional high degree of internal subsidization. By using non-artistic income artists make up the losses they incur in the arts. (Chapter 6)*
18. *The gift sphere in the arts is large; subsidies and donations comprise an unusually large portion of income. (Chapter 2 and 8)*
19. *Unlike other professions, the arts do not have a protected body of certified knowledge. Anybody can access it. (Chapter 11)*
20. *Unlike other professions, there is no formal control of numbers in the arts. Anybody can pursue an arts career regardless of their qualifications. (Chapter 11)*
21. *Many informal barriers exist in the arts. (Chapter 11)*

The exceptional nature of the economy of the arts, as it emerged in the chapters of this book, is a relative exceptional phenomenon. The difference between it and other sectors is a matter of degree. Nevertheless, given the combination and intensity of exceptions, the phrase 'exceptional economy of the arts' is justified.

2. Despite the Many Donations and Subsidies Incomes are Low in the Arts

This book has attempted to answer the questions of why income is low in the arts, why the arts are so attractive and why they receive so many donations and

subsidies. The main answer to the first two questions was sought in the high status of the arts. It leads to overcrowding and therefore to low incomes. A number of reasons were given for art's high status. The denial of the economy both stems from the high status of the arts and contributes to this very status. Because the average artist cares less about money and more about non-monetary rewards than other professionals do, the high status of the arts causes overcrowding and low incomes. Incomes are also low because artists believe they miss the capabilities needed in 'normal' professions, and because artists tend to be less risk-averse than others. Moreover, prospective artists are structurally ill-informed, and therefore even more youngsters enter the profession and incomes end up being even lower. The willingness to work for low incomes is so great that, when an artist's art income is too low to earn a basic living, artists often utilize income from second jobs or money donated by partners to continue making art. Finally, this book argued that donations and subsidies designed to relieve poverty in the arts have the opposite effect; they tend to increase the numbers of artists with low incomes. Moreover, well-known subsidy programs for artists give the signal that the government is willing to take care of artists and thus add to the overall attractiveness of the arts and therefore exacerbates the conditions that produce low incomes.

At first glance, the answer to the third question 'why do the arts receive so many donations and gifts' seems to originate with the answer to the first question. Because incomes are low and because people want to relieve poverty in the arts, private people, corporations, and the government support the arts. To a degree, this book went along with this explanation. The argument that private and public gifts are necessary to counteract poverty in the arts has contributed to the large size of donations and subsidies for the arts, even though the effect has probably been the opposite, namely more poverty. In the long run however, it can't be ignored that donations and subsidies have little or a negative effect. Therefore, it is unlikely that the poverty argument can explain the total dimensions of the large gift sphere in the arts.

Instead, this book has put most emphasis on the explanation of the large gift sphere in terms of the interests that donors and governments have in giving to the arts. In other words, donors and governments receive returns. Both donors and governments use art for display purposes. Therefore they buy art and even more give art. Chapters 8 and 10 analyzed the many purposes this kind of display serves. Donors and governments profit from the high status of the arts, while at the same time they add to this high status. This takes us back to the beginning: the fact that the high status of the arts contributes to the large numbers of artists and low incomes. Therefore, many gifts are more likely to contribute to poverty than to relieve poverty.

3. A Grim Picture has been Drawn

Can the exceptional economy of the arts be characterized as a 'merciless' economy? If it is merciless, this can be revealed in two ways. Firstly, in a subjective sense — the portrait of the arts in this book pretty much debases art. Secondly, in an objective sense — many participants in the arts economy are worse off than they would have been had they chosen other occupations.

People tend to attribute high and admirable qualities to art. In a subjective sense therefore, the economy does not live up to the rosy picture people have of the arts. It is unpleasant to acknowledge that art has two faces and that it is profitable for artists to deny the economy. It is annoying to learn that monetary and aesthetic values often coincide. It is hurtful to learn that donors and artists are not selfless. And it is disappointing to discover that the arts are not open and independent and that there is no such thing as an equal chance. Barriers exist everywhere and winners pass their advantage on to their protégés. Therefore, surviving in the arts is not just a matter of 'natural' talent. The picture remains disappointing, because it contradicts the myths that surround the arts. The insights of this book tend to demystify the mythology of the arts and this can be a painful experience.

When I think in terms of a merciless economy, however, I first think of objective characteristics. The clearest sign of a merciless economy in an objective sense is low average income and the fact that poverty is structural. Some people earn extremely high incomes and yet average income is much lower than in comparable professions. Income is often so low that it doesn't even cover the costs of the profession, like instruments, materials and studio rent. Average incomes are not only low; they are virtually fixed. Higher demand or greater donations and subsidies do not raise income levels, instead they encourage more people to enter the arts. With more money funneled into the arts comes ever-increasing numbers of poor artists per capita and thus rates of poverty increase as well. Built-in poverty is a clear manifestation of a merciless economy.

Because of the mythology that surrounds the arts, youngsters run to the Promised Land, thinking they're going to find a pot of gold once they get there. Many of them leave the profession many years later, disillusioned and too old to start a new career. Because of art's sacredness, beliefs are persistent and are not subject to correction. Losers blame themselves for not having been dedicated enough. They never blame the structure of the arts. Unlike after the gold rush when people start to go home artists do not realize that there are far too many of them seeking their fortunes. Moreover, nobody ever asked to see their diplomas or membership cards. In other sectors, membership is regulated both to the profession and to the inner circles within the profession. This kind of regulation also serves as a deterrent. The numerous informal barriers in the arts, however, remain ambiguous and invisible from a distance. They do not, needless to say, deter newcomers.

Given the fact of low average incomes, artists only manage to survive thanks to internal subsidization. Because the sacredness of the arts is taken for granted, giving to the arts has a ritual aspect and some gifts are more or less obligatory. Huge amounts of money from second jobs, partners, family, and friends, continue to flow into the arts. With its army of superfluous artists, the arts are insatiable; they scrounge off anyone in their path. This ability to extract gifts could be a characteristic of a privileged situation. But because few people appear to profit from the gifts and most of the money disappears into a bottomless pit of ever more poorly paid artists, the continuous support of the arts exemplifies a grim rather than a privileged state of affairs.

Thus far, the analysis confirms the cruel nature of the economy of the arts. And yet, artists are not necessarily as bad off as other low-paid professionals. As indicated in Section 6.11, they probably receive more than the average amount of private satisfaction and other forms of non-monetary income such as status. These forms of remuneration are probably more available in the arts than elsewhere and artists are more oriented towards these rewards than others. Artists are inclined to exchange money for other types of income. When artists appear to sacrifice themselves and are poor in monetary terms, their poverty is partly compensated. It is however difficult to tell to what degree.

This book has also emphasized that the aura and the mystique of the arts misinform artists. Because of the mystique, many well-trained youngsters enter the arts with high expectations. As noted, some stay, while others leave the arts at a later stage, when it is generally impossible to start a new attractive career. In either case, the subsequent disappointment is an existential disappointment because it concerns all aspects of life. The poverty due to misinformation is not compensated. I therefore personally think that the word suffering can be applied to poor artists, even though they receive some compensation.

In certain respects, the economy of the arts resembles a pre-capitalist economy. The many gift transactions remind of this. The same applies to the idiosyncrasies inherent in both market and gift exchanges in the arts. As was the case in feudal times, the personalities of the two participants entering into the transaction are essential, as is the notion of dependence. Personal contact and dependence play a decisive role in the many transactions that take place in the art world; between artists and dealers, artists and curators, artists and impresarios, between dealers and customers, between customers and artists, between artists and patrons, and between artists and government officials.

Other aspects of the economy of the arts, however, remind one of the heyday of capitalism. Many toil while few profit. The extreme uncertainty that beginning artists face does not jive with the reality of a modern economy with its general regulation of numbers and regulated markets with built-in securities.

These similarities only exist in a relative sense. Unlike 19th-century workers, modern artists don't starve. There are at least four reasons for this. (1) Artists don't starve because of the support offered by families and partners. (2) Artists manage by benefit of modern social security. — While families and partners have played a significant role in the arts for several centuries, the assistance offered by social security is relatively new. Although artists still take relatively high risks, these risks are lower than they would have been in earlier times.— (3) However ill informed potential artists may be, they have a choice; they could choose another profession. The old proletariat of the past had no choice. The main reason however, why artists don't starve, is that (4) many artists have second jobs. Nonetheless, because these second jobs are usually unskilled, most of them remain underpaid considering their levels of education. (If in the distant future the majority of artists were to have attractive, well-paid second jobs, the economy could no longer be termed merciless.) These four points demonstrate that poverty in the arts and the mercilessness of the economy of the arts are relative concepts that exist in comparison to other modern sectors.

4. Winners Reproduce the Mystique of the Arts

After the gold rush, the vast majority of miners end up leaving to try their luck elsewhere; the gold rush is over. Why has the 'art rush' lasted so long? Why do poor artists stay or leave at a much later point in their careers than one would expect, and why do so many newcomers arrive to take their places? Why is poverty structural? First of all, it should be noted that nothing is permanent. Overcrowding and large-scale poverty in the arts are relatively 2002 phenomena, becoming widespread only after the Second World War and these conditions could very well disappear over the next fifty years. Nevertheless, this book has tried to show that, for the time being, current conditions help maintain an exceptional economy of the arts and poverty that remains structural.

In this respect, it should be noted that the fact that the economy of the arts produces a host of losers and a few winners, is not exceptional. The same occurs in every other economy as well. For example, the introduction of the mobile phone spawned many telecom outlets. Three years later most of these shops had gone out of business. Those who survived were the apparent winners in the market reward system. Thus, the notion that contestants compete for a market share and that some will lose is not exclusively an arts related phenomenon. What is exceptional however, is that, unlike the cases of the telecom shops or the gold diggers, art economy losers don't necessarily leave and others continue to choose to enter the art world. The sector continues to be just 'too' attractive. This book has tried to describe the mechanisms that keep the sector attractive and the economy exceptional.

The economy of the arts as depicted in this book represents a relatively closed system. The key is the high status or aura of the arts. Because of the mystique of the arts, most players in the game believe they have an interest in its high status and act in ways that will assure that its high status is maintained. This applies to governments and other donors, successful artists, critics and people working in art institutions, but it also applies to the majority of unsuccessful artists who earn little or nothing from their art. Within the confines of the system, everybody is right because if the arts were to suddenly lose their high status everybody would be worse off — at least in the short run.

Nevertheless, observing this all from the tenth floor, one notices that in the long run not everybody is well off in the present setting. In the previous section, I opined that many artists appear to suffer the consequences of the reality of the economy of the arts. I believe that artists are primarily sacrificed, even though they also sacrifice themselves. Or in other words, artists are exploited. Exploitation implies that there are people who receive unearned income from unequal forms of exchange. Who are the exploiters? It is natural to seek out the 'exploiters' among the winners. Nevertheless, given the importance of myths in the arts, it is difficult to discern who is precisely exploiting whom in the arts. Therefore, I do not concentrate on tracking down those who profit the most from exploitation. Instead, I look for 'social needs' or 'powerful social relations' that induce behavior that reproduces the status quo in the arts. The following needs are particularly important in the process of reproducing the status quo.

1. Because the art world believes it has an interest in sacred art, it needs government assistance to help maintain or raise the status of the arts.
2. Donors, governments, and consumers need art to be sacred for their own status and legitimization.
3. Art consumers believe they need a large stock of potential losers to increase the chances of a few extraordinary talented artists emerging to sustain the myth that artistic talent is indeed scarce.
4. The art world, donors, and governments need countless losers to enhance the high status of the winners.
5. Society needs a sacred domain. The first three items were treated in earlier chapters; the last two I will briefly discuss now.

A notion that has gone unspoken in this book is that the high status of the arts, of its successful artists, of its art institutions, and of its important donors, is even higher because of the presence of so many failed artists. 'If so many take the plunge and fail, those who succeed must be special indeed.' The more losers, the higher the status of the successful artists will be. But the real winners at the expense of the failed artists are the art institutions and the donors. Art institutions and donors need many people to become artists and many who fail, are disillusioned, but continue to work as artists or abandon the art world. They thrive on the romantic notion of the starving artist. (They legitimize their preference for the large pond by explaining how among all of these struggling artists there will emerge a few unexpected geniuses.)

The winners — both successful artists and donors — profit, but it is unlikely that they can be portrayed as active profiteers. Because the benefits are based on existing beliefs, there is no insidious plan to lure people into the arts. In fact, the contrary seems more likely. Many modern governments go to great pains to improve the deplorable economic conditions of artists. And although government programs sometimes exacerbate the very conditions they are trying to alleviate, there is no indication that governments deliberately do so or have a secret agenda. Moreover, successful artists are more often embarrassed about the general deplorable state of their profession than proud. And so, if the arts go on producing hordes of losers, it is not because there has been some deliberate strategy instituted to abet their failure. Nevertheless, when one observes all this from the tenth floor, it certainly looks like the artist losers enhance the status of the winners. Whether it's deliberate or not, winners reproduce the mystique of art by allowing many losers.

5. Society Needs a Sacred Domain

Marco in our illustration is jealous of artists who dared to pursue their muse. His decision not to go into the arts goes hand in hand with his feelings of guilt. He says it's like he has thrown away his only chance of becoming an authentic human being, a true individual. This means that artists must have 'something special' that other people lack.

Artwork and artists have been accorded a special status for a long time. Even prior to the Renaissance, artists were already becoming less and less the anonymous craftsmen; their names and signatures became more and more significant. Since then art has become 'animated': the artist is 'in' the work of art. In other words, people believe that the spirit or soul of the artist has 'entered' the art work. The personal creativity that goes into the work makes it and the artist authentic. Although being an authentic individual is a general ideal in our civilization, only artists offer definitive proof of their authenticity. Therefore artists are envied and admired. They offer a romantic alternative to a society of more or less anonymous and replaceable employees — from managers to street sweepers.

This alternative is romantic, (1) because it is unrealistic: not everybody can become an artist, (2) because a false notion of creativity is involved, as we demonstrated in Chapter 2, and (3) because it offers an escape. The bohemian artist presented a model for those who had a desire to escape the bourgeois lifestyle. Currently, it is seen as an escape from the world of commerce, technology, and science, in which calculation, efficiency, and rationality rule. By belonging to the gift sphere, art stands in opposition to these worlds.

On the one hand, art offers an *alternative*. In a technology and consumption-dominated society, it is not so amazing that many people put the arts on a pedestal as a reminder of another, better world. And it is natural that countless youngsters would want to become artists to escape the dominance of the other professions and to creatively display their individuality. They do so because they hope to share in the mystique of the high status of art, but also because they expect that making art will offer them a personal satisfaction that cannot be found in ordinary occupations.

On the other hand, art also serves as a *counterforce* in a society that is considered by many as too rational, too commercial and too technological. Therefore, art is not some noncommittal alternative to the rational activities in modern society, but a necessary compensation for these activities. It has the potential to counterbalance the unhealthy developments of calculation, rationality, and efficiency in society. Although these opposing spheres of art and rationality are threatening to one another, they also need each other to survive.

Both art and science ultimately contribute to cognition, but it's 'magical' art that relies primarily on dense symbol systems as opposed to 'rational' science, which employs discrete symbol systems. (As noted in the first chapter in dense systems all variables count: like the color, the width, the impression and the shade of line in the drawing of an artist. In a scientific graph only a limited number of variables matter in a discreet way.)

To gain true knowledge, both approaches are necessary. Art and science are two sides of the same coin. It seems that our society can go a long way in using one side of the coin, while essentially ignoring the other, but there are limits. In everyday practice, the discreet approach typical of science is omnipresent, while the density typical of art is often suppressed. Therefore, artistic expressions are extraordinary. This implies that, as long as society primarily operates on the rational knowledge of science, the arts will remain special. This societal imbalance contributes to art's sacredness.

The two interests, art as alternative and art as counterforce, merge at a higher level in a more general interest — the need for a sacred domain. Durkheim has suggested that all societies need a sacred domain. Today, religion no longer supplies a satisfactory sacred domain for society. Art has, in this respect, partially replaced religion. If society needs a sacred domain and art offers this domain, society has an interest in maintaining the arts in their present state. For the time being art must remain sacred.

All societies have probably had a sacred domain, which usually involves vital interests. Yet these interests, as they presently exist, do not need to be universal. Every period probably endows the sacred with slightly different values. Durkheim associated the sacred domain with collective and rational values that belong to the soul and that oppose the individual and egoistic desires of the body. Art as

bearer of civilization's values in other words. Although the conflict between spirit and body has not disappeared, it is less significant than in Durkheim's time. Contemporary values that are linked with the seemingly irrational or inexplicable are certainly at the core of what we consider the sacred domain; they oppose the rationality of our 'scientific' society. Whether this is true or not, our society maintains a sacred domain, which it endows with significant values. For the time being the arts represent this domain. For this reason, society seems to reproduce the mystique of the arts even though the precise mechanisms employed are not altogether clear.

6. Future Scenarios with More or Less Subsidization

The market is essential to the arts. Approximately half of the arts' income derives from the market. But compared to other sectors, the market remains secondary while the gift sphere continues to be enormous. This gift sphere is both a cause and a result of the exceptional economy of the arts. *The smaller the gift sphere in the arts the less exceptional and cruel the economy of the arts is* (thesis 107). Lower levels of subsidies and donations will turn the arts in a sector that is more like other sectors, which produce fewer victims.

But this doesn't necessarily mean that the amount of donations and subsidies can be changed at will. On the contrary, the findings in this book suggest that the sizes of the gift sphere and market sphere are pretty much fixed. Participants are locked into the exceptional economy of the arts. The epilogue below discusses possible developments that, in due time, could make the economy less exceptional, but these are not so easily manipulated either.

Nevertheless right or wrong, people tend to see the government as the one player in this complicated game whose behavior can most easily be altered. Therefore, I will briefly try to imagine what the consequences of more and of less subsidization might be.

Let us first envision a situation in which subsidies have been increased. In this situation, the economy of the arts is likely to become even more exceptional and cruel. The emphasis is on a selection of established traditional and modern art that is impressive and has already had its high status for a long time. This selection is continuously celebrated in all sorts of official settings. A portion of this art has clear roots in the past and so it tends to unify the population and to strengthen its cultural identity. Moreover, due to subsidization, part of the fine arts remains affordable for people with lower incomes and is available in towns far from the cultural center of a country. The fine arts retain much prestige, both at home and abroad.

At the same time, there will be more artists and more poor artists and as a consequence a huge oversupply of artists. New art forms will inaugurate relatively little innovation. These art forms and their patrons will receive little respect, while innovators will largely go unheralded. Any significant innovations in these new art forms will most likely come from other countries. Because the barrier between subsidized and unsubsidized art will remain high, younger generations will probably increasingly lose interest in subsidized art.

On the other hand, in a scenario where subsidies have been lowered, art will lose some of its magic and retain less prestige. Because established art will now be considered less sacred, it will be criticized and challenged more strenuously. This causes a lively and innovative cultural climate. Moreover, art, which develops outside of the established art forms, gains more status. There is more praise for innovators. New art forms are less defensive and insular. In the new art forms, many innovations are produced that keep art interesting for new and younger audiences. There is less dependence on foreign countries; the export of new art forms keeps pace with imports or may even exceed import. But art might become less helpful in building a nationwide cultural identity. Moreover, a larger proportion of artistic production will only be affordable for rich people while fewer art products will reach the far-flung peripheries in a country. The oversupply of artists is less dramatic and therefore fewer artists will be impoverished.

Although in the latter scenario there might be fewer artists, average income does not necessarily need to be higher than in the former situation. But if in the long run art becomes less sacred, fewer people will enlist. In this respect even a moderate formal control on numbers might be introduced. In this case, average incomes would probably rise.

Other characteristics could be included in either scenario. A characteristic judged as advantageous in one scenario may be considered a drawback in the other. Whether it is judged advantageous or not is necessarily subjective. It will probably not surprise the reader that I believe less subsidization has more advantages than more subsidization. Personally, I think that in our current situation, artists and society pay too high a price for art's sacredness. I want to stress that my opinion applies to the arts and not necessarily to other areas of government involvement, like education, health-care and social security. (I do not belong to the group of economists who generally support the free market-ideology.)

Just because someone prefers a situation of less subsidization in mainland Western Europe, this does not necessarily mean that one wants the European art world to mirror the American art world. In Europe with its own long history of support of the arts, the art world that evolved here has its strong and weak points, but none of it can be changed very easily. Nevertheless, I personally think that the mainland Western European art world while maintaining its strong points, stands to gain by governments, who simultaneously and gradually begin to

reduce their art subsidies and involvement in the arts a little, or at least do not further increase art subsidies.

Presently the opposite is happening in Europe however, where after a stagnation period in the 1980s and early 1990s, governments have again begun increasing their involvement. They have also sought to broaden the types of art they now subsidize, including, for instance, pop music and other new art forms. The budgets are currently still small and appear to serve a primarily symbolic function, but once they commence these kinds of subsidies have a tendency to swell fast. If this trend continues, the symbolic competition between established art forms and new art forms will become less unfair. At the same time however, I expect that subsidization will be disastrous for pop music innovations and innovations in other new art forms that compete in an international arena. Moreover, I can envision a nightmare scenario if in the end, all artistic endeavors were dependent on government support and would therefore orient themselves toward bureaucratic committees that necessarily have to draw a line between those who receive subsidies and those who do not. It is doubtful, however, that this scenario will fully develop. After all, the *raison d'être* of government involvement in the arts lies in the consecration of a selection of art and not in making all artistic endeavors equally valuable by forcing them under one bureaucratic jurisdiction.

Irrespective of one's wishes, it is unlikely that governments will contribute to a less merciless economy of the arts by reducing its level of involvement. Therefore, although the exceptional economy of the arts is certainly not eternal, for the time being many will continue to pay a dear price for the high status of the arts. And artists will continue to bear the brunt of it as they continue to sacrifice themselves and be sacrificed on the altar of the arts.

Discussion

1. What is your opinion on the use of the word suffering in connection with artists? Are artists sacrificed or do they sacrifice themselves?
2. Do you agree that with less government involvement the economy of the arts will be less cruel?
3. Can you offer arguments that can prove that the version of the exceptional and merciless economy of the arts presented in this chapter is outdated?

[\[Home\]](#)

[\[Up\]](#)

[\[Top\]](#)

Chapter 9 argues that the same applies to merit and market-failure arguments.

Menger (1999). To be precise, according to Linden and Rengers (1999) more artists leave the arts within a year and a half after graduating from college than other professionals do, but after the first two years they tend to remain longer, even if they continue to earn low incomes. When they leave at a later point in their careers, they are particularly prone to income penalties; financially they are worse off than if they had not become artists. (Those students who leave almost immediately after college could be among those for whom education is a form of consumption rather than a preparation for professional activities.) According to Filer (1987) however, the penalty is not that large.

As noted in Section 6.10, in that case a larger part of artistic activity would be transformed into leisure activities. Serious amateurs would become the main producers of art. They would have satisfying non-artistic jobs commensurate to their education levels. There would still be a few full time professional artists. The latter would have little extra status or maybe even less status than the amateurs. Art would turn into a truly privileged occupation again.

Irrespective of whether this kind of scenario is attractive or not, a number of reasons make it unlikely that this situation will occur any time soon. One reason is that most art forms currently demand considerable amounts of training. Therefore, potential artists need all their time for artistic training and thus have no time left over to be trained for attractive second jobs. Therefore, with the exception of teaching art, second jobs will remain largely unskilled labor. They continue to represent a necessary evil. Nevertheless, letting one's fantasies run wild, there could be a day in late-capitalism when Marx's ideal becomes true; people are free to go fishing or hunting, or, in the present context, to make music, poems, plays, and paintings. The economy of the arts would no longer be merciless.

Gouldner (1960).

See Chapters 8, 9 and 10.

See Chapters 8 and 10.

See Section 9.8.

Goodman (1954) 225-65.

Durkheim (1964, ed princ 1914) 325-340 and Giddens (1978) 80-100

See note 20* of chapter 1.

More will be said about the magic in art and science in the epilogue.

This point was discussed in Section 9.9.

[\[Home\]](#)

[\[Up\]](#)

[\[Top\]](#)