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## Epilogue of Why are Artists Pure

# THE FUTURE ECONOMY OF THE ARTS

Is this Book's Representation of the Economy of the Arts Outdated?

*In this epilogue, I address the question of whether my representation of the exceptional economy of the arts is an outdated one, or nearly so. Given the notions of postmodernism and commercialization, the answer to this question could well be 'yes'. Therefore, Section 2 and the sections thereafter will examine the forces that promote change in the arts and the economy of the arts. Because a thorough treatment of possible developments is beyond the scope of this book, the remarks in this epilogue are sketchy and necessarily speculative.<sup>i</sup>*

### 1. Signs of a Less Exceptional Economy of the Arts

*On the basis of the analysis in this book, one could expect a normalization of the economy of the arts to be accompanied by the following signs.*

#### **Table 5. Signs of a Less Exceptional Economy of the Arts**

##### **Monetary signs:**

- 1. There is a downward trend in the incomes of successful artists. (The contrary is currently the case.)*
- 2. There is a downward trend in the prices of old and contemporary art by famous artists. (The contrary is currently the case.)*
- 3. There is an upward trend in the average hourly income of artists. (The contrary is currently the case.)*
- 4. There is an upward trend in the percentage of artists with salaried employment. (The contrary is currently the case.)*
- 5. There is a downward trend in overall donations and subsidies to the arts. (This is currently not the case.<sup>ii</sup>)*

**Other 'hard' signs:**

6. *There is a downward trend in enrollment figures of youngsters going to art colleges. (This is currently not the case.<sup>iii</sup>)*
7. *There is an increase in formal regulation of numbers of artists. (This is not currently the case.)*
8. *Governments favor a different, more varied selection of art. (This is true in a formal sense, but not in a material sense. Although other art, like pop-music has come into focus, the money it receives is almost negligibly — see below in this section.)*
9. *Governments and other donors have become less interested in the distribution of the fine arts. (This is true.)*

**'Soft' signs, changing attitudes in society and in the art world:**

10. *Art has become less important in symbolizing people's position on the social ladder (This is not true.)*
11. *High and low in the arts have lost some of their normative connotation of superior and inferior. Instead, they denote different genres and domains. (This could be true — see Section 5 below.)*
12. *The line between art and non-art is becoming less clear. (This could be true — see Section 5 below.)*
13. *Asymmetric valuation loses its significance. The phenomenon that elites look down on the artistic preferences of the lower classes, while these classes in turn admire the choice of the elites, becomes less important. (This could be true — see Section 5 below.)*
14. *Market orientation increases in the arts. Blatantly commercial strategies become less exceptional and more acceptable. (This is partially true — see further down in this section.)*
15. *The public and the art world lose interest in original and authentic art. (This is not true.)*
16. *The cult of the genius in the arts becomes less important. (This is not true.)*

17. *The (relative) autonomy of art and artists is becoming less important for both the public and the art world. (In general, this is not true.)*
18. *The esteem accorded 'artists' in the applied arts (design, advertisement and fashion) increases. (This is true.)*
19. *The status of doing commissioned work is rising. (This is true for the upper echelon artists.)*
20. *Artists have increasingly mixed feelings about art being sacred or 'special'. (This is probably true.)*
21. *New artists emerge who favor a more down-to-earth approach to art. (This is partly true — see Sections 2 and 3 below.)*
22. *Non-arts jobs become more personal and authentic, making a romantic alternative less necessary. (This is true in some areas, but not in others.)*

*If these signs are relevant and if my assessment of them is correct, the 'hard' signs indicate that the picture of the economy of the arts in this book is not outdated. It appears that postmodernist forces have not effected the distribution of funds. Nor have important institutions, such as foundations and governments, lost interest in the arts. The hard signs do not suggest an imminent change in the exceptional economy of the arts. The 'softer' signs, however, are more ambiguous. They seem to suggest that 'change is in the air'. The 'soft' sign I believe is the most important however, that 'art has become less important as a signifier of social position', is almost certainly not true. In order to determine whether change is still likely, I shall discuss some of these signs in more detail below.*

*The more openly commercial attitudes, as mentioned in sign 14 above, are not limited just to the arts. There are few social circles left where discussing money and financial gain is still 'not done'. In this respect, society's values appear to have changed over the past thirty years. But are they only superficial (temporary) values? Or did a more fundamental attitude towards money and commerce change as well? The current increasing, sometimes even pathetic, interest in*

*non-money values among some business people, not only in new-age circles, suggests that higher order values have not changed much.*

*It seems that arts attitudes with respect to money and commerce have changed and it appears that the art world has become more commercial over the past two decades.<sup>iv</sup> Particularly performing art companies have been flirting with more commercial attitudes. It is however difficult to tell whether the new attitudes are being internalized or are a temporary answer to the present consumer and donor demands. In Germany, for instance, the first decades of the twentieth century saw an increased interest in theatre marketing, but it did not endure.<sup>v</sup> Moreover, the more commercial attitudes that emerged in the visual arts in the 1980s have by and large disappeared again.*

*Sign 8, which refers to the fact that European governments have begun subsidizing broader areas in the arts, could signal a more fundamental change, however. As I noted in Section 10.6, these governments have started subsidizing areas like pop music and related art forms. For instance, France subsidizes hip-hop and art by immigrants. In monetary terms, these subsidies are fairly negligible compared to those for the more traditional recipients of art subsidization, but they are significant symbolically. The question is whether this could be interpreted as a sign of an inaugural shift in government tastes, for instance away from classical music and towards pop music, or whether governments are simply broadening their base of art forms.*

*Although a government's selections and tastes are always evolving, I would be inclined to interpret the present development as a broadening of taste rather than as a shift in taste. Given its goals with respect to education and social coherence, this kind of broadening strategy was to be expected. Moreover, governments are increasingly aware that a taste that has become too partial and unilateral is bad for general artistic developments and narrows the public support for their policies. Therefore, this sign could indicate a significant change. If the new subsidies continue and become substantial, the gap in status between art forms could be reduced and the economy of the arts could ultimately become less exceptional. As has been noted however, it is also a natural tendency of governments to offer*

*distinction and this implies a selection between art forms, at least in the long run. Therefore, it remains to be seen how far this development will go.*

## *2. Artists with New Attitudes Enter the Scene (1)*

*Sign 21 predicts a possible normalization of the economy of the arts via the emergence of new types of artists with new attitudes. Currently, I notice that artists' attitudes are moving in basically four directions. Each of the four directions has its own type of artist who might be said to exemplify that direction. I discuss the artist-researcher and the postmodern artist in this section and the artist-craftsman and the artist-entertainer in the next. Most modern creative artists embody traits of all four, but with a different emphasis.<sup>vi</sup> (I invite readers to view my 'ideal-types' critically and to construct their own.)*

*Many modern artists have developed an attitude that resembles the scientist's attitude. Most of these artist-researchers are not particularly interested in audiences or buyers. Studios are laboratories, while concert halls, museums, books, and internet sites are lecture rooms for a select and well-informed audience. Their attitude is in line with a contemporary art that has become increasingly self-referential. To follow the discourse one almost needs to be an expert. Like the world of science the audience of these artists consists of insider — colleagues, critics, and trained laymen. John Cage is an example in the world of music. Visual artists like Donald Judd, Dan Flavin and the Dutchman Peter Struycken also fit into this group.*

*The economy of the arts could eventually become less exceptional if artist-researchers gradually became more important. They are like scientists because they value originality, but not in a romantically hyperbolic sense. They don't mind a little demystification if it contributes to the establishment of a strong professional status comparable to that of a scientist. In Europe, some of them may even be willing to become university employees with a small teaching obligation, an already common scenario in the US. On top of that, they might even go so far as to support some formal regulation of their numbers.*

*It is doubtful however, whether society is actually prepared to pay these artists in the long run. Because their research art is not that entertaining and contributes very little to the aura of art, their art usually doesn't sell well in the market. And without the indispensable aura, it loses part of its utility for donors as well, which includes the government. This means that if the artist-researcher were gradually to become the most common artists, the arts would probably shrink; art could even develop into some kind of marginal phenomenon. Therefore, it seems highly likely that it'll be another type of artist who will be most common in the future.*

*While the artist-researcher naturally probes and challenges existing rules, conventions and boundaries, postmodern artists do not so much trespass these boundaries of art as ignore them altogether.<sup>vii</sup> They do not try to shift the boundaries but prefer to leap over them from one field to another instead. They move freely between art, design, and applied arts, including advertising. For instance, world music composers, samplers, and modern DJs are examples who fit this description, as do VJs and visual artists like Mathew Barney, Pipilotti Rist as well as the Dutch artists Inez van Lamsweerde and Joep van Lieshout.*

*Postmodern artists could eventually help make the economy of the arts less exceptional, if they were to become more significant in the arts. They challenge the prevailing attitudes in the arts, especially the inclination to deny the economy. Successful postmodern artists jump effortlessly from art to advertising graphic design, for instance, and from relatively autonomous to commissioned work. They often establish a business and might hire a number of employees to assist them. In this sense, they are more like businessmen and they are not ashamed of it. It is this kind of natural commercial attitude that could easily herald a less exceptional economy of the arts for the future.*

*But exciting as the postmodern artist experiment may seem, in the long run, the arts cannot exist without borders, as I demonstrate in Section 5 below. Therefore, if postmodern 'artists' were to become more significant, art would either cease to exist in the conventional sense or these artists would just leave the art world and concentrate on other professions or, more likely, they would gradually consent to*

*the re-establishment of borders. Anyway, postmodern artists would eventually lose their edge and thus cannot be seriously regarded as a significant force in the normalization of the economy of the arts.*

### 3. Artists with new Attitudes Enter the Scene (2)

*The third direction art may take is the one of the artist-craftsman. Because of the increased importance of self-referential and conceptual art, craftsmanship has lost much of its high value among artists during the second half of the twentieth century. The last few decades however, artists with a keen interest in craftsmanship began to move in front. They began to reinstitute old techniques and developed new, more positive attitudes towards craftsmanship. Artists who actually do their own work with their own hands and who derive their identity and success partly from their craftsmanship are typical of this new or rather reinvented type of artist. It is because of them that paintings, ballets and musical compositions are again allowed to be admired for their technical virtuosity and can be considered 'beautiful' again according to some critics. Examples of this type of artist in the visual arts are Alex Katz and Dutch painters like Constant, Van Koningsbrugge, and Hans van Hoek. (This type of artist can also be found in the performing arts, but to be honest, their sort of craftsmanship has hardly ever really fallen into total disfavor. Nevertheless movements like punk music were a temporary deviation from craftsmanship as was most of 'educational theatre'.)*

*The renewed passion for craftsmanship could have a sobering influence on the arts and it could eventually make the economy of the arts less exceptional. Even though craftsmen need some modest kind of magic to showoff their tricks, their primary ambition is to be good at what they do. In general, they have no real desire to be stars. They know the value of their time and materials and so they ask fair prices for their work. They have no great need to put art on a pedestal, make it over into something sacred, or deny the economy.*

*But the real craftsman is a character from a past when art and artists as we now know them, did not really exist. Art has changed so much since then and there is*

*no turning back. Perhaps craftsmanship is more significant again, but it is unlikely that the artist-craftsman will be representative for the future artist.*

*The artist-entertainer is our fourth type of artist. Creative artists, who set out to entertain the public, are universal and timeless, as the likes of Shakespeare, Mozart, and Dickens clearly demonstrate. In the course of the twentieth century, however, entertainers gradually began to be taken less and less seriously and often found themselves outside the realm of (high) art. The notion that artists shouldn't deliberately set out to please audiences is something that the artist-researcher adheres to.<sup>viii</sup> Nevertheless, over three decades already in part of contemporary art, be it music, theatre, dance, literature, or visual art, (high) artists can be found who are not afraid of entertaining people. The Italians Clementi and Chia are examples of this trend in the visual arts. Another example is how contemporary classical music, after the hegemony of serial music, saw the return of the triad with composers like Philip Glass and more 2002ly, a renewed interest in melody.*

*The growing (financial) importance of the mass media-oriented arts has contributed to this development toward more openly entertaining formats. In this respect, it's interesting that the disdain for entertainment has never been very strong in the world of literature, which is dependent on technical reproduction and large readerships. It is also revealing that classical musicians and dancers currently can often be seen performing on television in various concourses that are above all entertaining. Most conductors of major symphony orchestras can serve examples of the artist-entertainer. (The Dutchman, André Rieu, is probably the foremost example.)*

*Artist-entertainers seem to undermine the exceptional nature of the economy of the arts because they consciously set out to please their audiences. They orient themselves toward their audiences and thus, towards the market. This applies as much to the circus clown performing for a small audience as to the pop musician, whose hit record can be heard on radio and television almost any time of the day.*

*Nevertheless, these artists do not really challenge the exceptional economy of the arts. Even though they are oriented toward consumers, at the same time they*

*tend to deny the economy. They resist the secularization of art because they evidently profit from the notion of art being sacred. At the same time, they probably stand a better chance of being the model for the artist of the future than the other three types.*

*If this analysis is roughly correct the future artist will probably be some kind of artist-entertainer. These artists will probably not be out there promoting change because, in the end, they have an interest in maintaining the notion of sacred art. And so it won't be the artist-entertainer who will help dismantle the exceptional economy of the arts. But perhaps I've discarded the other three too readily or maybe I've overlooked other important developments in the artistic attitudes. I therefore invite readers to revise these sections, based on their own experiences, knowledge, and evaluations.*

#### 4. 'Art Becomes Demystified as Society Becomes More Rational'

*Changes in artists' attitudes may or may not influence the course of the economy of the arts. But societal developments affecting the sacredness of art are bound to affect the economy. This is based on the book's fundamental thesis that the exceptional nature of the economy of the arts depends on the high status of the arts. In this context, I see three interrelated developments that may contribute to a demystification of the arts and therefore to a less exceptional economy. (Readers are invited to contribute other developments.)*

*A. Rationalization: As society becomes more and more rational, the arts will gradually go through a process of demystification.*

*B. Fading borders: Because the high status of art depends on borders and because borders in our postmodern society have lost much of their significance, the status of art is bound to experience some shrinkage.*

*C. Technical developments: The growing importance of technically reproduced artwork, of mass-produced artwork, and of media culture will further contribute to the demystification of art.*

*Rationalization, fading borders, and technological developments are not autonomous influences that can be examined divorced from their context. The*

three are interdependent. Moreover, demystification through rationalization does not have to be a contradiction of chapter 12's notion that art is a counterforce to an overly rational society. After quite some delay and from quite a distance back, art could follow the general trend towards rationalization and still end up representing a counterforce.

In this context, Norbert Elias's description of the civilizing process applies here.<sup>ix</sup> According to Elias, people become more 'controlled' in the course of a long term civilizing process. Their behavior becomes less and less colored by impulses and affective fantasies.<sup>x</sup> This process is ongoing because art is part of society, and thus cannot divorce itself from this development.<sup>xi</sup> And so in the long run art will probably also become more regulated and rational. The artist-researcher fits well into such a development.

Both art and science have a cognitive and an emotional dimension.<sup>xii</sup> The same applies to the civilizing process.<sup>xiii</sup> Emotions remain important in a regulated and sublimated way. Art contributes to sublimation and thus to rationalization as well. Art, regulated and secularized, plays a vital role in the civilizing process.

But how restrained can art get? On the one hand, it's difficult to imagine art serving sublimation without maintaining some seductive charm or magic spell. Magic, on the other hand, does not necessarily have to involve mystification and consecration. In the long run, given the civilizing process, there might very well be a place for a magical art form that is not sacred.

In order to clarify the relation between the magical, the sacred, and the rational, I would like to add a few, rather speculative remarks about the magical aspect of art. (They are based on the analysis found in Section 1.7.) Magic in art is not really magic but a kind of pseudo-magic. Artists as pseudo-magicians pretend they can perform magic and appear to be using supernatural powers, but they aren't. They merely use their imaginations to create illusions.

Artists use illusions to uncover truths about themselves and the world around them. Through illusions, art exposes reality and discovers 'truth'. This is the kind of cognition Nelson Goodman talks about. Both art and science contribute to cognition; they, in fact, compliment one another. Science also employs illusions

— a graph is not what it represents but it uses illusions in a formal and hardly a 'magical' way.<sup>xiv</sup> The symbolic systems that science utilizes tend to be discrete rather than dense, while with art it's the other way around. Because art tends to use dense symbol systems, its interpretations are richer and more undetermined. As a result, art is more likely to be experienced as magical than science.

This does not mean that all art looks magical. There are huge variations depending on the art form. Some modern sculptures have totem-like qualities, while in others any such reference seems to be banned. Some modern music and poetry can actually resemble magical prayers in their use of repetition and rhythm, while others totally lack this kind of 'charm'. Nevertheless, in the end artists inevitably disturb and charm their audiences. (According to Deirdre McCloskey, scientists also charm their audiences.<sup>xv</sup> Given their largely discrete analyses, however, their offerings are seldom as magical.)

The pseudo-magic that characterizes art exists regardless of whether art is considered sacred or not. An art form that has become fully secularized can still be magical. But at this time, art's magic still contributes to it being perceived as sacred.

The pseudo-magic and density of artistic expressions are not irrational. Therefore, any ongoing process of rationalization does not necessarily mean that art will lose its 'charm'. In an increasingly rational society, there is plenty of room for charming artist-entertainers. They are, however, likely to keep the arts at least somewhat sacred and hence maintain some of the exceptionality of the economy of the arts.

## 5. 'Borders in and Around the Arts Disappear'

If there were no such thing as high and low in the arts, art would certainly lose its sacredness and, as a consequence, its economy would become less exceptional. Ever since the emergence of the avant-garde, borders in and around the arts have been challenged. At this time, many borders seem to be vanishing.<sup>xvi</sup> For instance, many people are of the opinion that there are no recognizable styles in contemporary visual art anymore: anything is permitted

*and everything can be done. The cosmopolitan omnivorous nature of many modern art consumers, who consume both high and low art, suggests that borders have lost much of their significance.<sup>xvii</sup>*

*Without borders, anything can be art and anybody can be an artist. If there are no more borders that surround art and make art distinguishable, art as we know it will stop to exist. — It could be the much-predicted ‘end of art’. — If not, art will certainly lose much of its aura. Therefore, the postmodern development represents a force that, in the long run, clearly ends up demystifying art.<sup>xviii</sup> After reaching the right momentum, this development is bound to end up changing the economy of the arts dramatically. If, in daily practice, artworks and loafs of bread come to be perceived as equal, the economy of the arts will certainly cease to be exceptional.*

*These conclusions would apply if people were to eventually lose interest in creative and authentic works of art. But as we have noted earlier, this is not the case. And as long as people appreciate creativity and originality in art, borders will remain.<sup>xix</sup> The appreciation of creativity necessarily rests on comparisons, differences, and consequently on borders. Without borders, one would no longer be able to distinguish between artworks or discuss issues of their qualities (or aesthetic values) with friends or experts.*

*Moreover, in Goodman’s approach to art discussed in Section 1.6 artists need borders as well. Borders give artists the framework to transgress and trespass and ultimately change the rules. To be original, the existing borders must be breached, and others must be able to notice it. Because people expect art to be creative and original, and because artists want their products to be noticed between other products, borders are bound to remain important in the arts. (This is why it’s difficult to imagine that the postmodern artist can truly represent the artist of the future.)*

*Because people always assume that their own times are dramatically different from earlier times, they believe that rules and borders have vanished from the arts. In my own life as a visual artist however, I am aware of numerous rules all around me. It’s true that certain rules have become more elusive and complex;*

*one needs to be pretty much an insider to understand them. Other rules have shifted to another level and have become a kind of set of meta-rules. Sometimes these rules apply more to artists' attitudes than to actual artworks.<sup>xx</sup> Other rules describe which rule violations are acceptable and which are not. (For example, at this point in time, certain violations can be allowed, but only if they are no heartfelt cries but deliberately planned trespasses. —Serrano for instance carefully designs the extreme sexual content in his art works. — ) Rules remain important, in any case.*

*The belief that there are no rules in one's own time might be a universal truism. For instance, I'm convinced that twenty-five years from now, the art rules and borders of the 1990s will be obvious to almost everybody. (It's only now that we can actually distinguish 1970s visual art because it's only now that we have learned to discern the rules and borders those artists respected or played with.)*

*It's true that better-educated consumers nowadays are more diversified and omnivorous in their consumption behavior. One day they might go to the opera while the next they might applaud a local star singing his or her schmaltzy pop songs. This behavior does not, however, contradict the existence of borders because this scenario is basically asymmetrical because it applies more to elite art consumers than to the average consumer of low art. Moreover, as was noted earlier, even when the same products are being consumed, the ways in which they are consumed and the symbolic values they represent, continue to vary. Omnivorous consumption patterns often tend toward camp, which involves an ambiguous standard, whereby elite consumers simultaneously enjoy and mock the lower class' culture.*

*If borders eventually fail to actually wither, their appreciation may nevertheless change. More importantly however, the character of how we appreciate high and low art could change. Sign 11 in Table 5 pointed out the phenomenon that high and low in the arts increasingly refer to different domains in the arts rather than to an artwork's superiority or inferiority. And without some form of superiority, social groups would no longer have a reason to look up to the high and sacred art of other groups, whereas the elite would no longer have a reason to look down on*

*the low art of the lower classes. The fine arts would no longer be distinctive. Because we have observed that cultural inferiority and asymmetric valuations are the cornerstones of the exceptional economy of the arts, this economy would be a lot less exceptional, if the importance of a symbolic high and low in the arts were gradually to diminish.*

*Terms like 'high' and 'low' would still be employed but without their former symbolic connotations. They would simply indicate areas or genres. With respect to distinction, symbolic practices or ways of consuming art would emerge as being more important than specific artworks.<sup>xxi</sup> These kinds of practices can still be considered superior or inferior, however, even if they are now called something else. But one would need to be an insider to be able to properly classify these practices. Superior art and art practices have become extremely flexible categories; their sphere of reference is constantly mutating. This process was described in Chapter 11. Insiders continuously redefine the aesthetic borders of high and low, good and bad, modern and obsolete. Outsiders can only assume some kind of approximate shifting average.*

*So far, there is no reason to think that people climbing the social ladder in the future will suddenly stop signifying their status with art. As was noted in Section 1.2 this means that valuations will remain basically asymmetrical. As long as there is social stratification and as long as art serves to symbolize people's positions in social space, art will maintain its special status and its economy will remain exceptional.*

*I think art borders basically don't fade; some may vanish, but others will replace them. Moreover, borders will continue to serve distinction.<sup>xxii</sup> Therefore, it is unlikely that the postmodern project will make the economy of the arts less exceptional.*

## 6. 'New Techniques, Mass Consumption and Mass Media Help Demystify the Arts'

*Firstly, new techniques, especially those produced by the digital revolution, could very well portend a process of demystification in the arts.<sup>xxiii</sup> Many exciting new*

*art products come into being. Moreover, digitally produced and digitally distributed music, images and moving images will be cheaper to produce and to distribute than their predecessors were. At this time, some of this phenomenon's products are de facto free, but that situation may not last much longer. On the one hand mass-produced new products are reaching larger audiences all over the world. On the other the smallest scale at which products can be profitably produced is becoming ever smaller. This means that there is more room for larger varieties of specialized products. Moreover, fragments of older artworks, be it legally or illegally, are increasingly being incorporated in newer works, thus rendering authenticity an ever more relative concept.*

*The same problem we saw with the withering of borders comes up when we consider technological change because it's difficult to get a perspective on one's own generation. Is the impact of technological change more profound today than it was in earlier times, for instance, during the introduction of the printing press or the introduction of electricity?<sup>xxiv</sup>*

*Because new techniques are usually first applied in art forms with relatively little status, it seems that new techniques could very well undermine the mystique of the arts. But after a while the status of these art forms often rises or the more established art forms learn to adopt the new techniques.*

*It is true that some current new techniques in new media might lead to unknown interdisciplinary approaches that undermine existing borders. Modern, sometimes anonymous, artists sometimes create hybrid artworks that may temporarily fall outside the experts' realm of awareness. But these attempts to circumvent the cult of personality are not the first. And it usually doesn't take very long before the new artistic endeavors get absorbed by the established art forms and become visible. Artists emerge and some become heroes. This has happened before and is currently happening with DJs and VJs. It appears that the digital revolution has manufactured its own new heroes and thus its demystifying capacities are temporary.*

*Secondly, the current technological evolution continues to aggrandize the growing body of mass-produced artwork. Apart from the phenomenon of printing,*

*the large-scale reproduction of high quality art works only began to take off in the twentieth century. Although the two are related, the mass production of art is probably more likely to herald a less exceptional economy of the arts than the digital revolution. As early as 1935, Walter Benjamin predicted that the technical reproduction of art would lead to a breaking of art's spell ('Entzauberung').<sup>xxv</sup> Art became less obscure, more accessible and thus less magical because of technical reproduction. Moreover, as was already evident in filmmaking, art could stand to lose its autonomy, which might ultimately contribute to the demystification of art.<sup>xxvi</sup>*

*Benjamin's prediction is not difficult to grasp. Technical (re)production enables a massive production of artworks at low prices. It would be very strange indeed if this didn't reduce the exclusive and glamorous allure of art products. People in the Netherlands today can buy a 10-CD set of Bach recordings performed by one of the world's top orchestras in a chain drugstore for little more than the cost of a bottle of massage oil — little more than a Euro per CD.) And so one would predict that Bach's music would become totally ordinary, vulgar even. But thus far, this hasn't happened; Bach and his oeuvre maintain their aura. In general, when one observes the high, if not augmented status and worship of art since Benjamin's essay first appeared, his prediction was either wrong or it is going to take longer before his predictions are borne out.*

*In this context, a common misunderstanding tends to lead to faulty expectations. Many people still think that originality, uniqueness, and authenticity means a single unique artwork made by an artist's own hands, be it a manuscript, score, or art object. They forget that in the allographic arts — arts based on a notational system, like writing and most theatre, music, and even dance — there is seldom one original art work.<sup>xxvii</sup> A hand-written manuscript, score, or choreography is just a collection of directions based on a symbol system. The relevant details do not change, just because they are printed or performed. Therefore, the work of art resides in all written or printed specimens of a manuscript or score and in all performances of them irrespective of their total number. Each book and each performance is an instance of the particular*

*artwork. The millionth live performance of the Saint Matthew's Passion by Bach or the millionth copy of James Joyce's Ulysses is as much an authentic and original work of art as the first. (First editions and original manuscripts are sometimes valuable, but primarily as collectors items and not as works of art.) The same applies to the numerous technical reproductions of the Saint Matthew's Passion on CD. As long as the notes have been played correctly, all of them can be considered authentic originals.*<sup>xxviii</sup>

*To reiterate, most technical (re)productions are instances of an artwork and are therefore originals. People continue to experience them as animated and authentic, not unlike a painting. At home, listening to Verdi or Rod Stewart, listeners can be transported by the 'genius' of the composer or performer regardless of the number of copies in circulation. Thus far, these reproductions actually seem to enhance rather than diminish the high status of art.*

*For centuries, original works of art have been copied. It's only the astronomical numbers of reproductions and the speed at which they can be reproduced that has changed. In a literal sense, many artworks have become 'common'. Unprecedented numbers of people reading books, listening to CDs, watching television and surfing the Internet end up sharing original artworks. One could argue that when the numbers become this large, it becomes more and more difficult to associate the consumption of art with exclusivity. Therefore, it just seems to lose its former status.*

*It is true that some of the modern mass-produced artworks are no longer obscure and mysterious. They are consumed as part of a daily routine, not unlike food or transportation. Many artworks probably live shorter lives than they did in the past; they are trendy and ultimately disposable. Thus to some degree, mass production and consumption can actually exacerbate the secularization of the arts and hasten in a less exceptional economy.*

*It is not true however, that the general public and the experts treat all mass-produced art in the same manner. Some works are selected and placed on a pedestal while others are not, irrespective of their total numbers. Some have longer, sometimes much longer lives. They too are subject to trends, but these*

are recurrent trends. Whether today's distinguished artworks will survive as long as the works of, say, Bach, is impossible to predict, but modern artworks and artists — from Prince to Spielberg — are just as subject to selection, canonization, consecration, and mystification as earlier artworks and artists were.<sup>xxix</sup>

Third, the modern media augment the mass consumption of artworks, as is the case with films broadcast on television. Modern media also add their own dimension. The increased media attention accorded art and artists may at first sight seem to contribute to the consecration of art and artists, but in fact it makes success more ordinary and thus demystifies art. The media can be said to have a leveling effect. Modern newspapers and television broadcasting are considered transparent media.<sup>xxx</sup> They give most topics equal significance. For instance, most daily newspapers have, for a considerable time now, been publishing their articles on high and low art on the same page. Meanwhile, modern television tends to treat sports heroes, high and low artists, and entertainment stars with equality. (They often even appear on the same talk shows.)

The media have this leveling effect more than earlier forms of technical reproduction because they actually show the heroes and so make them more human. In the long run, this leveling effect could contribute to the eventual elimination of the distinct status of the arts. Why should artists be more sacred than sports stars or television's talking heads, for instance? In the end, all these 'entertainers' can be designated as heroes, they can have plenty of status and money, but they are not necessarily sacred. As in the case of mass-produced art products, certain careers in the modern visual arts and pop music scenes, for instance, can be very short-lived and temporary. The spectrum of these careers and the way they develop begins to resemble those of sports or entertainment stars. And the media contribute to this egalitarian treatment.

Nevertheless, not all artists are public figures and even when they are, important differences remain between artists and other celebrities. Artworks generally maintain an existence independent of television appearances and other public performances. In consuming artworks at home, in a concert hall or a

*cinema, people construct their own artists. This way they maintain an intimate and mysterious contact with authentic but relatively obscure artists. Therefore, I believe the aura and special status of art and artists will continue to exist for a long time to come.*

*The findings in this epilogue are highly inconclusive. Although there are signs that there is a change in the air, actual change seems to be circumscribed. This can be expected as long as social stratification remains a reality and art continues to serve as a symbol of an individual's or a social group's position in social space. Thus, I believe that this book's analysis of the economy of the arts is not outdated. Nevertheless, It's possible that other signifiers may replace art as a marker of social status in the future. If that becomes the case, the forces that demystify the arts may become stronger than the forces that keep art sacred. As a result, the economy of the arts would become less exceptional. Personally however, I would not be amazed if the exceptional economy of the arts will continue to color the arts for a long time to come.*

#### **Discussion**

1. Table 5 lists some signs that might indicate a less exceptional economy of the arts. Are there signs among them you would have treated differently? Are there other signs that were ignored that you would add?
2. Do you think attitudes in the arts are becoming more commercial?
3. Do you agree with the notion that art and science supplement each other in their contribution to cognition?
4. Do you agree with the four directions in which artists' attitudes move, or do you see others?
5. Are the three causes that would make the economy of the arts less exceptional, relevant? Should other or additional causes have been discussed?
6. Do you expect the economy of the arts to become less exceptional in the decades to come? And how do you view this development?
7. Can you imagine that the merciless economy of the arts may come to an end in the near future because most artists will be classified as amateurs with well-paid jobs outside the arts?

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<sup>i</sup> Laermans (1996) would probably argue that not only my view of the economy of the arts is outdated, but also my analysis, which relies heavily on the habitus-field theory of Bourdieu. I address this notion in note 33\* of Chapter 4.

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- <sup>ii</sup> This applies to *overall* donations and subsidies. In the US however, private individuals have been decreasing the amounts they donate to the arts over the past few decades. Humanities (1997) 19.
- <sup>iii</sup> This is not true in most European countries. In the Netherlands however, where a new and more restrictive government finance system for art schools was implemented in 2000, according to information from the ministry of OCW, the first signs indicate that at present fewer students are being admitted to the fine arts departments of Dutch art schools.
- <sup>iv</sup> Laermans (1993).
- <sup>v</sup> This was reflected in an increase in literature on theatre management in Germany. Noordman (1989) 180.
- <sup>vi</sup> These four types simultaneously differ from and are related to the integrated professionals of Becker (1982) Chapter 8.
- <sup>vii</sup> For lack of a better alternative, I use 'postmodern artist' as a provisional expression. Given the everyday connotation of 'postmodern' this adjective is the best I could come up with. However, these postmodern artists do not need to be connected with the postmodernist movement. Other adjectives like hybrid, boundless, limitless, pluralist or unruly would be too specific in their connotations.
- <sup>viii</sup> Personally, I think that this kind of ban is contrary to the very nature of art. I strongly believe that all great art both shocks *and* pleases.
- <sup>ix</sup> Elias (1994, ed.princ. in German 1939).
- <sup>x</sup> Elias (1994, ed.princ. in German 1939) 488.
- <sup>xi</sup> After the Second World War, a decline in control or a process of informalization may have set in, however. Whether this (1) applies to a sub-sector, (2) is temporary, (3) plays a (sublimating) role within the overall process or (4) contradicts the civilizing process, is difficult to surmise. Cf. Wouters (1977). Art itself can be said to have become more informal. This is particularly evident in music with its shift from composition-based music to performer-based music — cf. Cowen (1998).
- <sup>xii</sup> Goodman (1954) 225-65.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Elias (1994, ed.princ. in German 1939) 475-492.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Goodman (1954).
- <sup>xv</sup> Deirdre McCloskey suggested the use of the term 'charm' to me. It fits well into her and Klamer's approach to the rhetoric of economics. Cf. Klamer and McCloskey (1988).
- <sup>xvi</sup> Doorman analyzes seven types of borders, which are affected by erosion. Doorman (1997) 8-18. See also Braembussche (1994) 278-308 and Jameson (1991).
- <sup>xvii</sup> Cf. Peterson and Kern (1996) and Peterson (1997). They present more references.
- <sup>xviii</sup> Cf. Braembussche (1994) and Jameson (1991).
- <sup>xix</sup> Doorman (1997) 28.
- <sup>xx</sup> Cf. Heilbron (1993).
- <sup>xxi</sup> Bourdieu (1979).
- <sup>xxii</sup> Peterson and Kern (1996) also state that 'omnivorousness does not imply an indifference to distinctions'.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Given my limited intentions in this chapter, I treat technological change as a given. Technological 'progress' is, however, not a force of nature, but a cultural product. Cf. Schwarz (1999).
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Cf. Standage (1999).
- <sup>xxv</sup> Benjamin (1974).
- <sup>xxvi</sup> Cf. Braembussche (1994) 239-240. Whereas Benjamin applauded these developments, Adorno (Adorno and Bernstein (1991, 1949-1968)) feared above all the consequential loss of autonomy.
- <sup>xxvii</sup> Goodman (1954) 113-123.
- <sup>xxviii</sup> Painting as an autographic art form is a different matter. In the case of painting, in general there is only one original; reproductions are not originals but copies. Cf. Goodman (1954) 113-123. Copies often do not have certain aspects that the originals have, which may be essential to the work of art — in this they are of a different order than copies of a book or a CD. Nevertheless, given the high quality of modern reproduction techniques, this fundamental difference has become a difference of degree. High quality reproductions of photographs, for instance, are not originals, but it can be argued that

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as copies they are almost perfect and that therefore the creativity and authenticity of the original is still largely present in these copies. Moreover, in the autographic arts there has been a tremendous increase in artists making multiples or editions. All of these works of art are considered originals. In graphics and photography, the numbers of editions remain relatively small. In film and video, they can be quite large. And with digitally created sounds and images, editions can be almost limitless; often their number is beyond the control of the artists and their publishers.

<sup>xxx</sup> Adorno, contrary to Benjamin, emphasizes that reproduced works of art can become mystified as well; they are 'more' than the things themselves. Adorno (1970) 73 cited by Braembussche (1994) 244.

<sup>xxx</sup> Cf. Hilhorst (1999).