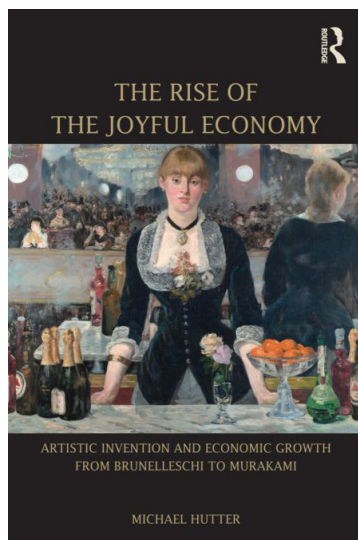


Book Review

Michael Hutter, *The Rise of The Joyful Economy: Artistic Invention and Economic Growth from Brunelleschi to Murakami* (London/New York: Routledge, 2015), 238 pages, ISBN 978113879529-7

by Léa Saint-Raymond



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At first sight, considering two research fields that have nothing to do with each other is a real challenge, especially when it comes to economics and art history. One can choose the most obvious ways to connect them – Art Market Studies or the History of Collections – but Michael Hutter decided to take a steeper path, addressing and investigating their relationship. *The Rise of the Joyful Economy: Artistic Invention and Economic Growth from Brunelleschi to Murakami* constitutes a real tour de force, as Michael Hutter, renowned Professor of Economics and Sociology at the TU, Berlin, demonstrated his great ability to deal with art history issues over a very long time-span. Instead of going into all the details of this fascinating research, which was already reviewed by Jason Potts¹ and Olav Velthuis², our paper will rather focus on its hypoth-

1 Jason Potts, Michael Hutter: The Rise of the Joyful Economy: Artistic Invention and Economic Growth from Brunelleschi to Murakami, in *Journal of Cultural Economics*, 2016, vol. 40, issue 4, 553-555.

2 Olav Velthuis, It's the arts, stupid. Hutter Michael, The Rise of the Joyful Economy: Artistic Invention and Economic Growth from Brunelleschi to Murakami (London / New York, Routledge 2015), in *European*

eses and theoretical background, and examine closely some examples chosen by the author.

The Rise of the Joyful Economy refers explicitly to Tibor Scitovsky's book, *The Joyless Economy*, published in 1976.³ As an economist, Scitovsky criticized his own research field, showing that the economic analysis of human welfare, with its concepts of "satisfaction of needs" and "utility", does not fit with the empirical evidences that were described in psychology. Indeed, people respond to stimulation and they experience "joy" by being surprised and overwhelmed, and not by feeling steadily comfortable. As a consequence, the era of mass production and its standardized products cannot help but lead to a "joyless economy". Hutter agrees with Scitovsky's diagnostic but not with his pessimistic conclusions: joyful experiences are still generated by what he calls "experience goods" or "joy products", such as artistic activities, sports events, gambling, and "conventional material products [that] are made more precious through the dimension of joyful experience", like jewellery or automobiles (p. 3). According to Hutter, our globalized society witnesses the growth of markets for goods with these experience attributes, namely the rise of a joyful economy. Creators and visual artists take an important part in the making of these joy products, through design or advertising, for instance. This aspect was actually examined by Gilles Lipovetsky and Jean Serroy.⁴ However, Michael Hutter goes even further and provides a deeper analysis of the entanglement between economics and art.

To do so, Hutter uses the concept of "irritation" by the sociologist Niklas Luhmann⁵, who studied social systems and communication. The market and the art world are seen as commercial or artistic games, and their participants as players. In such plays, controversies and manias may be considered a disturbance or an irritation, which generate an ephemeral buzz of communication and trigger new forms of practices. The irritation hypothesis is at the core of Hutter's reasoning. Thanks to these disturbances, the art sphere interplays with the economic one and, conversely and more interestingly, markets are sensitive to innovative artistic practices. "Over the centuries, commercial games have reacted to artistic inventions in changing ways, leading to commercial games that are able to produce a constant flow of novel experiences – joy products. Vice versa, commercial surroundings have disturbed and fascinated artistic creators, thus contributing to change (if not progress) in one of the art games" (p. 14).

The Rise of the Joyful Economy gives evidence of the criss-crossed interactions between art and economics over a 700 year time span. The second part of the book shows artistic responses to economic changes, presenting the invention – i.e. the innovative artwork

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3 Tibor Scitovsky, *The Joyless Economy. An Inquiry into Human Satisfaction and Consumer Dissatisfaction*, (New York / London / Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1976)

4 Gilles Lipovetsky and Jean Serroy, *L'esthétisation du monde. Vivre à l'âge du capitalisme artiste* (Paris: Gallimard, 2013).

5 Niklas Luhmann, *Theory of Society*, vol. 1 (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012).



Fig. 1. Edouard Manet (1832-1883), *Un Bar aux Folies Bergère*, 1882, oil on canvas, 96x130 cm, London, The Courtauld Gallery. Édouard Manet [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons.

– and its disruptive effect. For instance, Antoine Watteau, with *L'Enseigne de Ger-saint* (1720) and Edouard Manet, with *Un Bar aux Folies Bergère* (1882), responded to the economic changes of their time with a new kind of visual composition (fig. 1).

Relying on a series of first and second-hand documents, Hutter explores the commodities represented in the painting – the red triangle on the bottle situated on the left was likely to be the Bass Brewery triangle, first trademark to be registered in England, in 1876 – and the crowd in the background: “the

highest number of similar goods is produced and consumed by the highest number of similar individuals” (p. 163), depicted by a series of spots with no distinction of colour – their top hats. Beyond the break of perspective in the mirror, what particularly draws Hutter’s attention is Manet’s signature on a bottle label, that “puts the painting in the same commercial category as alcoholic beverages and trapeze artists – they are all experience goods, be it through aesthetic pleasure, inebriation, or suspense” (p. 166). In a similar way, the book analyses the responses to economic changes, given by Andreas Gurky’s *99 Cent* and *99 Cent II*, and Takashi Murakami’s *Vuitton Shop* (2007-2008). This stimulating iconographic analysis is very innovative in art history, and will be followed in the near future by the publication of Sophie Cras’s dissertation, focusing on the economic issues at the core of artworks from 1955 through 1975.⁶

Even more challenging is Hutter’s reflection on economic responses to artistic changes (part one). Three examples were chosen, corresponding to three periods of artistic innovation and irritation: the rise of linear perspective (1425-1680), the increase in painted conversations in mid-eighteenth century England, and the elements of series and repetition in Andy Warhol’s *Flowers* and in Ludwig Mies van der Rohe’s Seagram building. The study of the English “conversation pieces” provides most convincing evidence of the effects of art on the economic and social spheres. The first half of the eighteenth century saw the success of paintings and mass-distributed prints depicting family groups engaged in conversation. For instance, William Hogarth’s series of successful and satirical prints and oil paintings, known as *Marriage A-la-Mode*, depicts the rude behavior of a young couple, an Earl and a merchant’s daughter. The *Toilette* (fig. 2) imitates a ritual of the French nobility, the *levée*, and makes fun of this so-called virtuous and polite group. These conversation pieces had a huge economic and social impact, since they shaped a new pattern of social conduct, called “polite behaviour”. As a matter of fact, these pictures were exhibited in the new spaces of public interaction – townhouses, assembly

6 Sophie Cras, *L'économie à l'épreuve de l'art (1955-1975)* (Paris: Les Presses du Réel, to be published).



Fig. 2 William Hogarth (1697-1764), 4. *The Toilette from Marriage A-la-Mode*, c. 1743, oil on canvas, 69.9x90.8 cm, London, National Gallery. William Hogarth [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons

halls, pleasure gardens and coffee houses – and triggered the debate about appropriate conduct among members of their audiences. The *Toilette* could thus have triggered discussions about the cuckolded husband and the uncivil postures of the protagonists. As the transgressions they depicted pleased the spectators and triggered debates and irritation, these “conversation pieces” spread polite behaviour and accompanied the change of consumption patterns during a period of “consumer revolution”.

Michael Hutter wrote a joyful book, full of exciting research hypotheses that open a door to further multidisciplinary researches on the entanglement of economics and art. Its impressive time span might leave the reader yearning for more insights about the present situation. Hutter identified a turn from a “knowledge economy” to the “rise of a joyful economy”. The first one began in the eighteenth century, as scientific knowledge led to an increase in productivity and thus, to economic growth. Even if the artistic information has always been an ingredient of economic growth, the “joyful economy” may be defined by the new importance of goods with experience attributes: “I see the Arts today in a role comparable to that of the sciences”, Hutter says (p. 3). But when, and how, did the “joyful economy” begin to rise? *The Rise of the Joyful Economy* takes part in an emerging debate regarding the transformation of capitalism: Michael Hutter’s “joyful economy” could thus be related to Gilles Lipovetsky and Jean Serroy’s “artistic capitalism”⁷ or, more recently, to Luc Boltanski’s and Arnaud Esquerre’s “economy of enrichment”.⁸

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7 Gilles Lipovetsky and Jean Serroy, *L'esthétisation du monde. Vivre à l'âge du capitalisme*. (Paris: Gallimard, 2016).

8 Luc Boltanski and Arnaud Esquerre, *Enrichissement. Une critique de la marchandise* (Paris: Gallimard, 2017).