

Investment and the Divested *Métier* of Arts Education

John Baldacchino
University College Falmouth

Like many academics involved in administration, I am constantly reminded that there are investment targets to be met for educational institutions to remain *in business*. As these targets tend to be commercially volatile, when speaking of “investment” education chooses to speak the language of *standards* and *quality*, *enhancement* and *equity*, *opportunity* and *employability*. Thus while lip service is duly paid to the concept of education as a universal right, I am also reminded that educational institutions have to operate as “profit centers” — just like Kmart or the Holiday Inn.

ART’S CAPITAL

In terms of the arts, education is mostly aligned to the so-called “culture and creative industry.” Culture and the arts are no longer limited to vocational schools. It is now common to find endowed chairs in the cultural and creative industries, established by universities that a few decades ago would not have recognized such a field as having any academic value.

As governments of all persuasions poured money into the creative industry in the late 1990s and early 2000s, a significant process of rebranding swept over many arts institutions across Britain and Europe, North America, China, Japan, and Australasia. The expectation was that the arts would gain wider academic legitimacy in higher education if they were to be closely linked to technology, innovation, and the so-called digital economies. This also reinforces an arts pedagogy that is sustained by a productivist aesthetic, articulated by a predominantly results-driven social scientific model where students become customers and disciplines turn into stakeholders.¹

Joseph Beuys’s adage *Art=Capital* has been normalized and *defrocked* from its priestly criticality. More crucially, art now finds itself divested of its ironic disinterest. What Jacques Rancière identifies as art’s ability to speak “twice-over” about history² is at best eclipsed and at worse neutralized.

Here I would echo Fernando Pessoa, but this time without the melancholic spirit by which his words should be contextualized: “Yes, Art, residing on the very same street as Life, but in a different place. Art, which gives me relief from life without relieving me of living, being as monotonous as life itself, only in a different place.”³

“UNLIKE” ALIENATED LABOR

Tal Gilead’s essay gives this state of affairs a very precise context. The merit of Gilead’s essay is found in how its critique speaks the language of those whose jargon of investment stands outside the nuanced dialect that arts educators speak as arts practitioners and researchers. Gilead’s essay speaks to those who, unlike artists, regard arts education as a marketplace for the apprentices of aesthetic labor.

Yet to market artistic labor does not necessarily imply the artist's alienation from his human essence, as one finds in Karl Marx's *Paris Manuscripts*.⁴ It would be legitimate to argue that as *métiers* of aesthetic capital the arts operate differently. One might even suggest that in the creative industry artists *wilfully* and *consciously* sell their labor, although this *only* sounds plausible until one begins to question what one means by an artist's *wilful* and *conscious* trading of his or her art. Whether one subscribes to Marx's theory of alienated labor or not, I would argue that the relationship between investment and arts education does recall a certain Aristotelian grounding on which Marx, in his *Grundrisse*, traces political economy on an entelecheic process that runs from production and exchange to distribution and consumption.⁵

Latching this lineage onto the notion of investment as a form of aesthetic capital that is generated by the arts, one is likely to map arts educational investment along the route of:

- (i) *Production* as a pedagogical process by which the arts are schooled;
- (ii) *Exchange* as a marketed environment, where division of labor is extended to forms of distribution and consumption;
- (iii) A *distributive* structure that shares out the sensible via a politics of aesthetics;⁶
- (iv) A polity of *consumption* that inhabits the spaces created by its distributive structures.

As we predicate the creative industries on (and by) a curious oscillation between planned and arbitrary forms of socialization, the creative industry's polity of the sensible is not merely *manufactured* and then *invested*. Rather, it is already invested as the *terminus a quo*, as the point of departure from where this productivist economy is launched.

This state of affairs reveals a creative industry that follows Joseph Schumpeter's innovation model, where dynamic markets are created through technological innovation; typical examples being Apple and Microsoft, where a market of unheard-of proportions emerges from a product for which there was no identifiable demand.⁷ It is not difficult to see how it is often argued that rather than exploit creativity or alienate the arts, the creative industry motivates and sustains the arts (and the arts education sector) by investing the artist's creative energies into the economy.

Prima facie this appears to refute neatly the classic political-economic critique of alienated labor. Within the creative industry human capital appears to put on the image of a freed and emancipated human activity. The tables appear to turn where the arts constitute special kinds of investment that entail risk-taking, critical thinking, innovation, and creativity, suggesting that in the creative industries the relationship between labor and capital operates on presumed degrees of artistic autonomy and operational freedom.

PHILOSOPHY, ART, AND EDUCATION

Notwithstanding the rhetoric of a creative industry that motivates the arts, like Gilead, I would argue that “the compatibility of these assumptions [of investment] to the realm of education is questionable.” However in my refutation, I would take a slightly different position from Gilead’s.

To rebut the argument, I hope to firstly, mount a philosophical refutation that is clearly non-identitarian; secondly, make sure that such a philosophical argument is articulated from within the specificity of the arts; and, thirdly, emphasize that to assume the arts within a schooled context, one must question the parameters within which the arts themselves are *invested* into “learning.”

Within the limits of this short response, I would articulate this critique as follows:

- (i) Artistic creativity is specifically non-identitarian. Neither progressive nor developmental, creativity in the arts is aporetic, and thereby marked by paradox. To invest in the arts on the premise of their paradoxical character is to eliminate the same paradox that resists investment — thus reifying the arts into identitarian instruments of investment.
- (ii) Art’s philosophy must not be confused with a Philosophy of Art. It follows that any philosophical or educational argument pitted against the investment fallacy must be borne out of art’s aporetic praxes, not philosophy or education.
- (iii) The arts are never meant to teach us anything, nor are we expected to be art’s students. Such an expectation would imply that doing art would need to adopt a didactic structure, which would neutralize the pedagogical immanence by which human beings invest the arts, and invalidate the educational argument for the arts.

To unpack these assertions would entail a much longer essay. By way of concluding I would argue that to attempt to unravel and “normalize” the aporetic nature of art by means of schooling or investment is to essentialize learning and art into a series of teleological constructs.

Although Gilead’s essay singles out economic investment, the narrative of the creative industries captures a wider horizon of investments: social as well economic, political and pedagogical, ethical and aesthetic. In widening its sphere the economic narrative of creativity and innovation also claims to broaden the scope of functional *viability* for the arts.

The presumption of viability and investment in the arts is sustained, as I have shown, by the myth that artists are empowered with the recognition of their creativity. Insofar as this creativity is made to appear autonomous enough, the educational argument for the arts quickly conforms to a developmental theory that defines the arts as manifestations of multiple intelligences that would open learning to new avenues of economic and social viability. This cycle is very appealing to those who seem to think that the arts would gain greater presence by their being

mortgaged into models of development that are entertained by expectations of development, inclusion, and equity.

Yet, like the argument for investment, an argument for art's functional and economic viability must ultimately live up to its essentialist credentials, where the arts are reduced to a "creative process" that ultimately results in the reification of both the arts and education, and where creativity remains trapped in developmental formulae.

1. For my discussion of productivist aesthetics and my critique of social scientific model in arts research see, John Baldacchino, "What Lies Beyond the Bauhaus? The Political 'Logics' of College Art Pedagogy," *Australia Art Education* 1, no. 32 (2009); and John Baldacchino, "Opening the Picture: On the Political Responsibility of Arts-based Research," *International Journal for Education and the Arts*, no. 10 (2009).

2. See Jacques Rancière, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2009), 46; and my discussion of Rancière's concept vis-à-vis arts pedagogy in John Baldacchino, *Art's Way Out: Exit Pedagogy and the Cultural Condition* (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2012), 91.

3. Fernando Pessoa, *The Book of Disquiet* (London: Penguin Classics, 2002), 19.

4. Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977).

5. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1973).

6. Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible* (New York: Continuum, 2006).

7. See Nicholas Garnham, "From Cultural to Creative Industries," *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 1, no. 11 (2005): 21.