

The Art Exchange

An Investigation of the Economy of Art

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ABSTRACT

This essay explores the tensions outlined in the ‘market’ versus ‘gift’ debate to examine the economy of the Bourdieuan ‘field of art’ and the emergent dualist structure that has supposedly created two polarised ‘art-worlds’. Aspects of the Maussian gift and the dyadic thinking of Structuralist thought are used to examine structure and practice through economic theories, ‘art-world’ theories and artistic practice in ‘the real art-world’ in order to articulate the possibilities for ‘alternatives’. It is by focusing on developments in the ‘field of art’ since the 1960s to include the ‘dematerialisation of the art object’, ‘institutional critique’ and more recently the ‘do-it-yourself’ practices of so-called ‘artist-led culture’ that possibilities for ‘alternative enterprises’ can be located. These ‘alternatives’ lie within the Bourdieuan ‘field’ between the poles of cultural production on a continuum that reveals that the economy of art works with a mixed economy of heterodoxy between the ‘market’ and the ‘gift’, but also in the possibilities beyond it.

CONTENTS

FOREWORD	3
LIST OF FIGURES (redacted).....	4
INTRODUCTION: ‘Market’ versus ‘Gift’	7
CHAPTER 1: Economic Structure and the ‘Field of Art’	14
Stone Age Economics	16
Art-world Economics	33
Alternative Economics	46
CHAPTER 2: Economic Practice and the ‘Field of Art’	51
Alternative Practice	53
Anti-commodity	56
Anti-institution	61
Artist-led culture	66
A ‘Space of Possibles’	70
CONCLUSION: The Mixed Economy of Art	80
BIBLIOGRAPHY	85
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	97

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1:	<i>Untitled (I Shop Therefore I am)</i> , 1987 by Barbara Kruger Screen print billboard poster, New York City, Mary Boone Gallery	pg. 6
Figure 2:	<i>The Chapman Family Collection</i> (2002) by Jake and Dinos Chapman , Collection of Tate Gallery, London	pg. 20
Figure 3:	<i>Brillo Boxes</i> (1964), Andy Warhol Collection of Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh, USA	pg. 34
Figure 4:	Adapted diagram of The Bourdieuan ‘Field of Cultural Production’, (Bourdieu, 1996:124)	pg. 42
Figure 5:	<i>Installation (still)</i> (1992), Rikrit Tirivanja Represented by Gavin Brown Enterprise Gallery	pg. 52
Figure 6:	<i>Blizzard Ball Sale</i> (1983) by David Hammons Performance installation in Cooper Square, New York City	pg. 60
Figure 7:	<i>Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk</i> (1989) by Andrea Fraser Performed by Fraser as fictional docent Jane Castleton	pg. 63
Figure 8:	<i>Do Women Have to Be Naked to Get into The Met. Museum?</i> ~ (1989) by the Guerilla Girls, artist-activist collective, USA	pg. 64
Figure 9:	<i>Food</i> (1971-1973) by Gordon Matta-Clark, New York City Matta-Clark estate represented by David Zwirner, New York	pg. 70
Figure 10:	<i>Untitled</i> (1992/3) by Felix Gonzalez-Torres, poster stack Represented by Felix Gonzalez Torres Foundation, New York	pg. 73
Figure 11:	<i>Midwest manifesto</i> , 2004, copyright Midwest & Heavy Object	pg. 79

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FOREWORD

This thesis has been written from the perspective of my professional capacity as an independent curator and project organiser who has worked within the contemporary ‘field of art’ for a twenty year period. My interest in the economy of art, as linked to the possibilities for ‘alternative space’, artistic practice and production beyond the auspices of the institution, has been informed by my former visual arts roles at Centre for Contemporary Arts, Glasgow (1992-98), Public Art Commissions Agency, Birmingham (1998-99) and as Co-Curator of the Scotland pavilion (in the non-art venue of Scuola di San Rocco) at the 51st Venice Biennale exhibition in 2005.

More recently, my interest in ‘artist-led culture’ specifically, has been informed and influenced at a grass-roots level via my role as Co-Director of Midwest: An Artists’ Support Agency for the West Midlands region, Birmingham (2003-2008). This agency, which was co-authored with the artist, Jason E Bowman and the independent curator, Julie Crawshaw was devised as ‘a catalyst for creative thought for artist-led culture’, and the reach of its network was local, national and international. It is through this ‘self-organised’ and ‘self-instituted’ project that I became increasingly interested in articulations of the ‘alternative art-world’ and the possibilities for art that employs counter-economic strategies in the creation of ‘alternative space’. Midwest made visible a snap-shot of artist-led activity in a particular place at a particular time.

In accordance with its manifesto, Midwest acknowledged its own redundancy and closed after a five year period of operation. (*See Fig. 11 p.79*)

Rachel M Bradley, 22 September 2011

IMAGE REDACTED

Fig 1: *Untitled (I Shop Therefore I am)*, 1987 by Barbara Kruger
Screen print billboard poster, New York City

INTRODUCTION

‘MARKET’ VERSUS ‘GIFT’

In his introduction to Theodor Adorno’s ‘The Culture Industry’ (1991), a series of essays offering a negative critique of mass culture, the philosopher and theorist J. M. Bernstein asserts that the economic organisation of advanced capitalist societies provides us with the final realisation of instrumental reason in that ‘under capitalism all production is for the market’. (Bernstein, 1991: 5) By this he means that goods are produced not in order to satisfy human needs and desires, but rather for the sake of making a profit, in other words the accumulation of even more capital, typically converted into monetary form. In the capitalist paradigm primacy is given to the exchange and valuation of tangible and material objects in that the intrinsic value of things is dominated by their extrinsic value as a means to an end, in other words by their exchange-value in the marketplace. (Woolf, 1993: 73)

In the neo-classical economic field this view is supported by the *formalist* economic approach whose advocates, such as Adam Smith (2008), believe that economic science aims to study human behaviour as a relationship between ends and scarce means, thus reducing all notions of economic success to those of human actions that lead to the accumulation of material wealth and political power. However, it is generally agreed by Western economists that an opposing thesis can be brought into play as the *substantivist* approach, whose subscribers

such as Karl Polanyi believed that a ‘great transformation’¹ had occurred through capitalism’s displacement or arguably complete replacement of the ‘naïve’ or ‘primitive’ economic systems of a bygone era. (Polanyi, 2008) The *substantivists* adopting a structuralist-type methodology, understood the economy as linked not to the sale and purchase of things, but as being the social forms and structures of ‘production, distribution and circulation of material goods that characterise a certain society at a particular moment of its existence.’ (Godelier, 1977:17) As with all structuralist-based thought which asserts that language encodes certain dualistic elements common to human experience, the *substantivists* analysed the social structure of societies as systems to reveal that human action is not necessarily driven towards the mercantile ideology of material and financial gain implicit within advanced capitalism. (Levi-Strauss, 1995)

It is this structural binary of *formalism* versus *substantivism*, created through the neo-classical economic field, which also divides it. Similarly, it is the dyadic relations and dualist structures of structural anthropology with its imperative for choosing between an ‘either’ and an ‘or’, that pitches the ‘market economy’ as economic, against the ‘gift economy’ as a non-economic sphere. (Osteen, 2002: 33) Starting with the French anthropologist Marcel Mauss, who wrote his seminal text, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies* in 1925 (Mauss, 1990) many economists, cultural and ‘gift’ theorists have attempted to locate ‘alternative’ economic systems to that of the market, with its

¹ This thesis is outlined in Karl Polanyi’s best known work written in 1944, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Polanyi, 2008).

prioritisation of the rationalist calculation in the profit-motive. (Sahlins, 1972:137) By observing the 'gift' rituals of tribes in pre-capitalist societies it has been asserted, that Mauss's findings provide us with a convincing argument that the vestiges of a 'gift economy' and hence, non-economic human behaviour are discernible in the exchange relations of certain societies and economic systems in modern society. For Claude Levi-Strauss, who re-examined the Maussian 'gift' and aspects of the gift-function twenty-five years after it emerged, declared that the original text in its examination of economy in socially formed systems was the very first attempt of structural anthropology. (Schrift, 1997: 22) The particular focus of Levi-Strauss' analysis was Mauss's expression of the institution of gift-giving as one of 'total social phenomena' or 'total social facts' that demonstrate a variety of social, moral and economic functions providing the basis of a shared culture within any given system. (Mauss, 1990: 102) Most significantly for Levi-Strauss, gifts as 'goods or services' are not merely exchanged for economic profit, but are also 'vehicles and instruments for realities of another order, those of influence, power, sympathy, status and emotion'. (Levi-Strauss, 1996: 19) It is here we find the norm of reciprocity in the gift-function which involves the precipitation of a social relationship that is built not of pure altruism, but of obligation. (Mauss, 1990: 50)

It is the prevailing view, at least from a Western perspective, that the mercantile ideology of advanced capitalism is mirrored in the orthodox economic operation of the 'field of art', commonly referenced as 'the art-world' (Danto, 1964); a sphere which is not only dominated by the profit-making mores of what has come to be known as the 'Dealer-Critic' system (Alexander, 2003:87), but is indeed

analogous to it. The ‘Dealer-Critic’ system or what I shall refer to hereon as an interchangeable term with that of the ‘mediated art-world’², complies with the rules of the free market whereby the value of art is determined primarily by its price as a commodity. (Woolf, 1993: 67; Abbing, 2002:42; Hyde, 1983:61) In this way an assumption prevails that ‘the art-world’ is deemed to be both subject to and to follow the rules of the neo-classical economic laws of scarcity, supply and demand in its exchange relations.

It is by using a sociological approach that relates to the dyadic thinking and theories of structural anthropology such as the Maussian ‘gift’, along with Bourdieuan ‘field theory’, that I intend to put forward an argument that the assumption of *economism* thus set out, gives us only a very narrow view of the way that ‘the field of art’ operates, which is to focus on the market-oriented ‘mediated art-world’ alone. In determining possible ‘alternatives’ to the dominating ‘market model’, I will look to ‘field theory’ as a structural theoretical approach that suggests the existence of more than one ‘art-world’ offering the possibilities of an ‘alternative’ structure, but also to the actuality of artistic practice which since the 1960s reveals evidence of the artist’s use of counter-economic strategies, which illuminate the operations of the ‘field of art’ in its complexity as ‘the economic universe reversed’. (Bourdieu, 1993:29)

Pierre Bourdieu tells us that the ‘field of art’ functions as a dynamic economic system which shifts with respect to agents or ‘art-world players’ position-takings

² The use of the term ‘mediated art-world’ is meant in a very literal way to indicate that an intervention has taken place by curators, dealers, critics, the media that has determined cultural legitimacy by the ‘institutions of art’; in the space between art production and its reception by an audience.

in a hierarchy of exchange and power relations. (Bourdieu, 1993:42) Rather than confirming the hegemonic view that the economy of art is a site of mere commodity-exchange, Bourdieu outlines the reality, which is that in large part, the ‘field of art’ pertains to ‘a trade in things that have no price’ or to put it another way, the ‘non-economic’. (Bourdieu, 1993:74) As host to an ‘alternative’ economic system the ‘field of art’ can be revealed as being reliant not only on the accumulation of *economic capital*, but also of what Bourdieu termed *symbolic capital*. In his book *The Rules of Art* (1996), Bourdieu argues that it is the non-monetary currency of *symbolic capital* that determines the value system of the ‘field of art’ and sets out the basis for legitimacy in the ‘art-world’ and its divisions. (Bourdieu 1996:115)

By using ‘field theory’ Bourdieu is able to build up a picture of the Maussian ‘total social facts’ by offering us an account of the logic and structure of the ‘hierarchization’ of the cultural field that is based on both artistic practice and production. (Bourdieu, 1993: 46) By looking to the actuality of practice and production in the ‘alternative’ art-world system, the nature of ‘alternative art’ and ‘alternative space’ can be located. Through the examination of the structure and function of the ‘field of art’ we find that the Maussian ‘total social facts’ are formed not only via the dominant market-oriented rules of exchange based on supply and demand, but also through the social relations of the non-economic sphere and the ‘unconscious rules of exchange’ that are idiosyncratic to any given field as ‘social world’. (Shrift,1997: 8; Bourdieu 1998c: 129)

In the course of this investigation I have sought to reveal evidence that the ‘field of art’ as a commodity-exchange, offers only a semblance of the *real* economy of

art. I will argue that it is the invisible system of the ‘alternative art-world’ formed as a default position, but also through the resistant and oppositional practices of ‘artist-led culture’³, that seeks to challenge the dominant culture that values commodity-exchange above all else, and adheres to the official distribution and reception systems dictated by the institutions of art. In looking to artistic production, we find that the ‘mediated art-world’, in an attempt to preserve the *status quo*, has often disregarded the actuality of artistic practice which since the 1960s has involved the ‘dematerialisation of the art object’. (Lippard, 1973) It is through this phenomena that we find that a large part of ‘alternative’ production has been focused on placing a value on the intangible and immaterial, defying the process of commodification. (Lippard, 1973: 112) The ‘dematerialisation’ process has not only moved many artists away from producing easily commodified objects, thus engendering a focus within contemporary art discourse on the processes of art-making as ‘the work’ in itself, but it has also facilitated the continued emergence of the ‘do-it-yourself’ ‘artist-led’ initiative that seeks to forge real and conceptual ‘alternative’ spaces for art. (Rand, 2010: 10) In this way it is artists, rather than the official cultural authorities, who are defining the possibilities for the ‘alternative’ directly through their practice and production as counter-economic strategies of resistance, opposition and even circumvention. (Bradley & Hannula, 2006: 5)

³ The term ‘artist-led culture’ has been coined to describe a sphere of artistic practice as artworks, projects, events, spaces, real and virtual networks that are devised in the spirit of a ‘do-it-yourself’ approach by artists who resist, oppose and circumvent the established ‘institutions of art’ who have the power to confer cultural legitimacy.

In summary, by returning to the dyadic relations of structural anthropology to express dual art-worlds as ‘mediated’ versus ‘alternative’ is not to suggest that these spheres are polarised or mutually exclusive. (Abbing, 2002: 46) The ‘field of art’ as an economic system is host to a complex set of exchange relations that concerns, in varying degrees both the profit-making motives of the ‘market economy’ and the ‘alternative’ and non-economic functions of a ‘gift economy’. Rather than a linear route from ‘the gift’ to ‘the market’, the *substantivist* American economist Marshall Sahlins offers the idea of a ‘spectrum of reciprocities’ by which the activity of an economic system can be analysed as operating with more or lesser degrees of the ‘gift-function’ across its length. (Sahlins, 1972: 193) In the economy of art, it is the ability of artists and ‘art-world’ agents to work across this spectrum between ‘the pure to the commercial’ that suggests a co-existence and interdependency between ‘mediated’ and ‘alternative’ art-worlds, rather than a polarisation. (Bourdieu, 1996: 166) As Levi-Strauss elucidates rather than revealing the simple dyadic relations of ‘market’ versus ‘gift’, Mauss can be used to show that all economies involve a skilful game of exchange which consists not only of the received wisdom of value accrual based on the give-and-take mechanism of capitalism, but a complexity of manoeuvres which betray relations of social-debt, hidden realities and ‘double truths’. (Levi-Strauss, 1987:46; Bourdieu 1998c: 95) The hidden reality of the ‘field of art’ is that it does not operate as an orthodox economy, but rather as one of heterodoxy – a mixed economy - that both accommodates ‘alternatives’ and seeks to create them, albeit within the dominant and unavoidable structure of the market in late capitalism.

CHAPTER 1

ECONOMIC STRUCTURE AND THE 'FIELD OF ART'

In a sociological approach this chapter will consider the economic structure of the 'field of art' as formed by the constitutive practices of artists and 'art-world' agents proposed in Bourdieuan 'field theory', to reflect upon the economic tensions that lie within the 'market' versus 'gift' debate. (Osteen, 2002: 229) This debate sets out the 'market-sphere' and 'gift-sphere' as two polarised economic paradigms, the relations of which are assumed to be logically contradictory. (Vaughan, 1991: 1) This text attempts to reveal that within the 'field of art', rather than being mutually exclusive these paradigms not only co-exist, but demonstrate significant levels of interdependency.

By using a methodology akin to that of 'institutional analysis' which aims to examine the structure and mechanisms of the institutional and social order in any given system, it is possible to reveal how individual and collective behaviours function in the creation of economy. (Durkheim, 1978) In the field of economics this method is often used to explain economic behaviour which does not conform to the 'rational choice theory' of supply and demand in the market, in other words behaviour which pertains to the 'gift-sphere' or the seemingly non-economic. (Abbing, 2002: 90) It is in looking to the organisation of the wider economic field

and aspects of the gift-function as evidenced in the archaic gift ceremonies, highlighted in Marcel Mauss' research, such as *kula* and *potlatch*, that economic behaviour can be seen to operate not by the laws of scarcity and give-and-take, but by abundance and circularity. (Mauss, 1990: 29, 49) Furthermore, 'institutional analysis' is an appropriate methodology here as it considers social systems as structured according to theoretical rules, such as Danto's 'institutional theory' in the formation of the 'art-world' (Danto, 1964), whilst also looking for explanations of behaviour in what are known as 'rules-in-use' within any given field. These 'rules-in-use' are often invisible, but can be revealed in looking to the actuality of practice. (Durkheim, 1978: 192)

The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu developed 'field theory' in relation to the wider 'field of cultural production' (Bourdieu, 1993: 29), but also more significantly here as *The Rules of Art* in which he traces the structural genesis of the literary 'field of art' as in nineteenth century France. (Bourdieu, 1996) Bourdieu had articulated the concept of 'the field' as a theoretical mechanism that considered institutional and social relations in order to account for the logic, structure and economy of a range of spheres of cultural production. (Bourdieu, 1993: 35) He believed that every 'field of cultural production' was relatively autonomous and functioned according to its own laws and relations of power that operated in a particular structured space. (Bourdieu, 1996: 52) As with all 'fields', the social topography of the 'field of art' as an economic system, can be mapped out as a function of the distribution of the occupied positions and position-takings of the participants or agents within it. It is the distribution of these 'occupied positions' which are accorded through a hierarchy that is

dependent on the contingent relations of power, indicating a discrete exchange mechanism which is formed both 'in' and 'of' the 'field'. (Bourdieu, 1993: 131)

The 'field' can therefore be defined as a dynamic social space in which agents and structures move around to form the reality of the social world which Mauss articulated as the 'totality of social facts', supporting Levi-Strauss' claim that a whole epistemology is involved in the way social reality is constructed in the actuality of practice. (Bourdieu, 1993: 45) In this way it is through the exchange of both goods and services as social relations, that the 'art-world' can be revealed as both 'structured and structuring', possessing 'the means of imposition and inculcation of the durable principles of vision and division that conform to its own structure.' (Lash, 1990:262) This is not to suggest however, that individuals are not able to build and adapt social phenomena in the given field through their motives, their thinking and their actions in practice. It does suggest however that such construction, including the creation of 'alternatives', always happens inside 'an unavoidable structure' which in the case of the 'field of art' can be advanced as the dominant market-oriented economic paradigm of late capitalism. (Bourdieu: 1977: 124)

Stone Age Economics⁴

The term 'economic' is generally used in relation to the market economy in a monetary sense, accounting for judicious expenditure, implying an exchange of equivalence or an exchange generating profit and pertaining to an 'economic sphere', with its relations of value, capital, ownership and power. In defining

⁴ *Stone Age Economics* (1972) is the title of Marshall Sahlins' text which studies the economic life of pre-capitalist societies comparatively.

what is meant by ‘economy’ the American anthropologist Marshall Sahlins, contests this dominant view held in Western capitalist societies that understands the economic to be the process of materially provisioning a socio-cultural system or society on the basis that not all economies need money to operate, as the study of archaic societies reveals. (Sahlins, 1972:195; Simmel, 1978: 347) His structural approach asserts that in pre-capitalist or ‘naïve’ economic systems, rather than constituting an aspect of culture and the way people choose and organise means in order to reach certain self-interested ends, ‘economy’ is regarded as a kind of human action or ‘social relation’ that constitutes the material-life process of society rather than the material-need satisfying process of individual behaviour. (Sahlins, 1972: 186) Therefore one may conclude that although received wisdom assesses this process as pertaining to a ‘non-economic’ sphere, it is arguably the very organisation of economy itself. (Sahlins, 1972:187; Godelier, 2001:2)

In *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies* (1990) Marcel Mauss provides us with the idea that the gift-behaviour displayed in certain rituals and exchanges in pre-capitalist economies is confirmation of non-economic human behaviour that can also be located in the exchange relations of certain sectors of modern society. (Mauss, 1990: 107) The text, informed by Bronislaw Malinowski’s contemporaneous work ‘Argonauts of the Western Pacific’ (1922)⁵, considers latent and manifest evidence of gift-institution drawn from Mauss’ empirical participant-observation research, whereby he analysed the

⁵ In Malinowski we find one of the oldest examples of anthropological fieldwork which challenged the neo-classical economic assumption of self-interested and rational motives by analysing the social and symbolic nature of forms of competition and exchange operational amongst the Trobriand islanders of the Pacific region.

economic relations and forms of competition and exchange that operated amongst the tribes of 'primitive' societies in the American North West and the South Pacific islands. The thrust of Mauss' argument lies with his challenge to the over-riding assumption made by advocates of free market economics, that human beings are fundamentally driven by an aspiration to maximise profit in the form of material possessions and that all human interaction and motive can consequently be analysed in the economic terms of self-interested calculation and utility. (Mauss, 1990: 93) Rather, he identifies an 'alternative' or counter-economic strategy in gift-behaviour or gift-function that can be aligned not only with the non-economic, but explicitly regarded as a theoretical 'plank against utilitarianism' in order to conceive of an optimum economy better adjusted to the motivations of human beings. (Douglas, 1990: x) Indeed, fundamental to the function of the Maussian 'gift' transaction in its creation of economy is its creation of social ties 'which structure the foundation of all social life.' (Cheal, 1988: 182)

It should be borne in mind at this point, that many anthropologists in the early twentieth century were much more confident in mapping the progress of human societies by developing evolutionary schemas, concluding that the prevalent 'gift economy' had by and large been displaced, if not completely replaced by the market economy. (Godelier, 1977: 21; Polanyi, 2008) Furthermore, the 'market' had subsequently come to be regarded as the only model of economic organisation, a view that arguably persists in contemporary society. In this way the 'market' and 'gift' are traditionally presented as polar opposites, operating as a dualist structure. However, it was Marcel Mauss's work in *The Gift* that began

questioning the notion of a complete ‘wipe-out’ by capitalism of the gift economy in what Hobbes had termed the ‘war of all against all’⁶, to assert that gift-function could still be located in modern society operating in an environment of co-existence and interdependency with market-function, rather than pitched in an outright conflict with it. (Kavka, 1999: 2) As mentioned one of the key purposes of Mauss’ text can be assessed as trying to locate an ideal or optimum economy. For many gift theorists this ideal can be found as a ‘mixed economy’ that lies between the parallel systems of ‘market’ and ‘gift’, which will be discussed later in this essay. However, it is the anthropologist David Cheal who looks to another dualist structure to find the optimum economy within the interdependent operations of the political economy and moral economy. He argues that such interdependency is evidenced in that political economy generates resources for use in the moral economy and the moral economy ‘generates the motives for acquisitive effort in the political economy.’ (Cheal, 1988:183) In this way, further arguments concerning the representation of gift economy as moral economy have been taken up by a number of theorists with an interest in questioning power relations within mainstream economics. (Hesmondhalgh, 2007:33) Such approaches are explicitly aimed at challenging the lack of ethical perspective in the neo-classical economic paradigm that is dominated by market forces that ensures that economic activity and any surpluses it might create are used as a means to an end. (Sayer, 2000: 81)

⁶ In *Leviathan* written in 1651 Thomas Hobbes analyses political communities as being based on ‘social contract’ and accounts for actions in human nature as self-interested co-operation in forming ‘a commonwealth.’ (Hobbes, 2008: 229)

IMAGE REDACTED

Fig. 2: *The Chapman Family Collection* (2002)⁷ by Jake and Dinos Chapman
Collection of Tate Gallery, London

Many moral economists maintain that it is only through modernity that we see ‘a market society’ deemed to be a rational, economic system that subordinates human needs in the pursuit of economic gain. (Thompson, 1971: 76-136) The Marxist view is that such subordination needs to be resisted and opposed lest capitalism attempts to commodify whole areas of social life, according value only to that which is marketable. (Osteen, 2002: 28) Most importantly, the

⁷ *The Chapman Family Collection* (2002) is a collection of faux-ethnographic sculptures playing on the illusion of an actual collection of artefacts assembled in the early twentieth century, which incorporates the logos and symbols of the McDonalds food chain to critique the pernicious excesses of capitalism.

notion of the moral economy rests with the central principle of ‘embeddedness’ as pre-capitalist economies are considered moral because they are an integral part of social relations and non-economic institutions. (Booth, 1994: 653) The argument goes that when the market broke away from normative influences embedded in the non-economic, it became ‘disembedded’, autonomous, self-regulating and entirely economic in nature, purpose and outcome. Furthermore, the capitalist process of co-option eats into and, in some cases, consumes and overrides the values and norms of the non-economic realm. In the ‘field of art’ and indeed other areas of cultural production this process is evident in the ‘mainstreaming’ of cultural activity which starts out as an ‘alternative’ behaviour or product, but is neutralised in any subversive or radical intention by the process of commodification. Such processes have been described as resulting from ‘embeddedness in reverse’, with modern society becoming embedded in the market, rather than the pre-modern market as ‘gift economy’, being embedded in society. (Booth, 1994: 656)

Mauss considered the moral economy in postulating a ‘moral universe’ that governs economic life that is founded on respect and responsibility towards others, rather than calculated self-interest. In *The Gift* Mauss laments the loss of ‘the morality of generosity’ extant in the transactions of pre-capitalist societies, as one precipitated by the development of class-based society. (Mauss, 1990: 88) Nevertheless, he continued to maintain a sense that by creating an understanding of ‘the gift’ he may be able to prove that Western societies retained in their economies, ‘small islands’ as ‘social worlds’, that had the potential to transcend the instrumental and utilitarian. (Mauss, 1990:63, Cheal, 1988:167)

In affirming this hypothesis, Marshall Sahlins' focused his later study of archaic communities, *Stone Age Economics* (1972) on the economy of 'domestic production for livelihood', assessing that the submission of that domestic production to the material and political demands of society at large draws our attention to a sphere with 'modes of production and relations of exchange that are unknown to capitalist enterprise.' (Sahlins, 1972: 302) Furthermore in citing Durkheim's typology of suicide (Durkheim, 1979: 22), specifically the anomic type⁸, gift theorist and anthropologist David Cheal explains that economic gains cannot provide lasting satisfaction for human beings, because there are no ultimate values by which success and failure can be determined in market exchange. (Cheal, 1988:183; Abbing, 2002: 148) In this way he draws the conclusion 'that economic achievement is only an effective principle in social life insofar as it contributes to some goal of the individual whose object lay outside the market.' (Cheal, 1988:167)

Perhaps then, it can be suggested that we need look no further than the 'field of art', artists, their practice and production in 'the creative act' itself, to locate individuals and groups with such an object. Although the prevailing view of the artist in contemporary society persists as one of a Bohemian genius⁹ awaiting news of patronage, sales or commissioning opportunity in keeping with the Romantic notion of 'discovery', in reality the motives of the artist to make

⁸ According to Durkheim 'anomic suicide' is related to moral confusion and a lack of social direction towards solidarity that is linked to economic upheaval or failure, where people do not see where they fit in with their societies. (Durkheim, 1979:22)

⁹ Janet Woolf writes of the affect of this persistent view of the isolated artist in *The Social Production of Art* (1993: 11)

work rarely relates to demand in the market as Hans Abbing makes clear in his recent analysis of the economy of art. (Abbing, 2002: 27) Rather, a variety of wide-ranging motives can be identified, from the desire to make a contribution to contemporary art discourse, to making work for peers or for discrete cultural spheres, to accessing a certain audience through display in specific distribution and reception spaces. (Komter, 1996: 5) The extent to which these practices constitute an ‘alternative’ as anti-economic or non-economic behaviour generated through the gift-function will be discussed in Chapter 2, but in exposing this reality in the field of practice it can be revealed, that the artist accumulates non-material profit or reward as *symbolic capital*¹⁰ from his or her work, in the acquisition of cultural legitimacy as prestige, status and rank. As will be explained in the next section this legitimacy is afforded by the dynamic, relational and hierarchical structure of the ‘field of art’. (Grenfell and Hardy, 2007: 117)

In anthropological terms there are several ways of understanding economic conditions in the process of social life, which can be explored through another dualist structure configured as the distinct and contradictory lines of thought between proponents of *formalist* and *substantivist* position-takings. At the time that *The Gift* (Mauss, 1990) was written the field of economic anthropology could roughly be divided into two camps: the *formalists* who used neoclassical economic theory to put forward the notion of *homo economicus* - man as a unit who seeks to maximise individual profit – and the *substantivists*

¹⁰ *Symbolic capital* is a term used by Pierre Bourdieu to describe that which has a symbolic value, rather than a material or *economic* use-value but, if acquired by agents, can be equally used in determining power relations within any given field. (Bourdieu, 1993: 39)

who by differentiating the economic operations of pre-capitalist societies from modern societies argued that the former could not be analysed in purely material terms as separate from social context. For *formalists* then, the aim of economic science is ‘to study human behaviour as a relationship between ends and scarce means which have alternate uses’, a point of view which is held by the majority of non-Marxist, Western economists. (Robbins, 1998: 155) The *formalist* definition of economics expresses a mercantile ideology and the belief in the ‘mythology of *homo economicus* that legitimises a bourgeois view of society as reduced to a mere market’ focused on an economic rationality of financial profit through competition. (Godelier, 1977, 19) As it is assumed that individuals will compete with each other within the economic field it is confirmed how these individuals will exchange their labour and their products in order to maximise their satisfaction. Therefore the *formalist* stance assumes that every product including labour power is an exchangeable commodity and the relations among the individuals to commodity exchange holds that these relations are the relations of competition. (Granovetter, 1985: 482) In contrast, the *substantivist* line of thought, developed most famously during the 1950s by Karl Polanyi in his work *The Great Transformation* first published in 1944, makes the argument that the market economy, in its replacement of archaic economies that worked morally to create social ties and without money, had come to be viewed as the *only* kind of economy for the organisation of society. As Mauss concurred, for many ‘market society’ had become a law-like economic realm that is no longer questioned. (Mauss, 1990: 100) It was indeed Polanyi’s view that the tentacles of market society extended to such a degree

that the economic realm as a profit-making sphere had become the sole vehicle of analysis in which all aspects of social life were objectified, quantified and couched in terms of maximising behaviour and efficiency. (Polanyi, 1998: 120) In other words, the human being becomes understood only as the *homo economicus* of *formalist* thought. For some the dualist structure that pitched ‘market economy’ against ‘gift economy’ was a distinctive characteristic of social life in all capitalist societies, in contrast to primitive societies where an ‘institutionalised market economy does not exist.’ (Marchak, 1991: 37) In order to explain this further Polanyi (1998: 68) specifically devised an account for the diversity of pre-capitalist economic structures in his typology of economic systems¹¹, though this has been criticised in its analysis of production and not the circulation of goods in understanding economy and because it implies the mutual exclusivity of economic spheres. (Kolm, 1996: 118) After all, it was the overarching aim of the *substantivist* challenge to *formalists* to suggest that the development of commodity exchange in capitalist societies should not be seen as the culmination of an evolutionary scale, but rather as one of a number of ways of organising economy. (Cook, 1974) As aligned with the theories of structural anthropology *substantivists* saw economy as interrelated with political, social and cultural life, rather than as a separate domain. Furthermore, it was important to *substantivists* in building up a picture of how economy operated in actuality to look beyond theoretical laws of economy and

¹¹ This typology involves four economic systems as: 1) economies regulated by mechanisms of ‘reciprocity’ dependent on kinship relations in classless society; 2) economies regulated by mechanisms of ‘redistribution’ by means of a central authority; 3) economies characterised by rank or status in a hierarchy of chieftainship; 4) economies integrated by the function of the established institutions and ‘disembedded’, in other words ‘the market’. (Polanyi, 1957)

the visible functioning of economic spheres and social systems to the ‘rules in use’. Although acts of distinguishing may begin with innate perceptions of dyads or binary opposites, according to Levi-Strauss, structure also constitutes a level of invisible realities which are only visible behind social relations. (Levi-Strauss, 1971: 93)

The tensions between the ‘market’ and the ‘gift’ again become apparent in looking to the way in which market exchange is usually presented as one of alienable and anonymous items devoid of moral considerations or obligations, whereas gift exchange is regarded as inalienable because through a relationship of reciprocity, it involves the creation of social bonds and mutual obligations between parties which constitute a given social order. (Mauss: 1990: 67) The common view was that in contrast to the exchange relations of clan-based or tribal societies, the commodity-relations of capitalist societies is marked for its separation of things and persons by way of the market transaction, which emphasises the autonomy of the individual who does not necessarily engage with the social relations that constitute a shared culture. (Hyde, 1983: 110) This argument highlights the anti-utilitarian aspect of the gift-function explored extensively by many gift theorists in relation to art including those who consider the ‘creative act’ of the artist to be the premise of the ‘gift’ in that it involves an undertaking given for free and cannot easily be attributed with an exchange-value, unless manifest as the material object of commodity. (Weiner, 1992: 28) Indeed, it was Mauss who observed in the field that gift exchange was often non-utilitarian, serving no obviously useful function. (Mauss, 1990: 93) Those tribe

members in pre-capitalist societies such as the Kabyle¹², who were involved in gift rituals were often able to fulfil their own material needs, so did not need to engage in exchange to satisfy a material economic need. In this way many gift exchanges are often purely ceremonial and involve swapping objects of great symbolic value, but little utility. It is the imperative of utility through *homo economicus* that informed the *formalist* belief that the principles of ‘rational choice’ were universal and were therefore useful in analysing all economies including pre-capitalist ones, whereas in contrast *substantivists* believed that the economies of different societies and systems were based on different logical and discrete relational processes and therefore, should be understood in their own terms. (Elardo: 2006) Just as the Kabyle gift economy functioned with a logic that was not directly reducible to a monetary economy, so Bourdieu argued that the economy of the ‘field of art’ functioned with its own specific ‘practical logic.’ (Lane, 2000:140)

It is in treating the ‘gift’ as a non-material profit-type, imbued with symbolic value as a hidden reward and generated through a function of reciprocity, which leads to discussion of the economic complexity of the ‘gift’. Although it appears to be anti-utilitarian, it does in fact operate with self-interest. Here lies the paradox of at least the Maussian gift, which is apparently voluntary and yet involves obligation. (Parry, 1986: 458) The gift-exchange is more than it seems since it has an economic component in the form of a social contract in that it asserts a necessity for future relations. As outlined in *The Gift*, Mauss believed

¹² During the Algerian War 1958-62 Pierre Bourdieu undertook extensive research using participant-observation to analyse the social and economic life of the pre-capitalist society of the Kabyle or Kabylia, of which he wrote in his texts concerning ‘the gift’. (Bourdieu 1997a: 202)

that the essential feature of all gift transactions were three obligations: to give, to receive, and to make a return for gifts received. For Levi-Strauss this norm of reciprocity was ‘a cultural universal’ in all systems where social interaction could be found which was to argue for the fundamental role of the ‘gift’ in structuring economy as social relations in forming alliances, solidarity and communities. (Berking, 1999, 135) The ‘gift’ transaction is therefore, not necessarily non-economic, in that rather than constituting an act of pure altruism polarised against the profit-motivated ‘market’ transaction, it is ‘first and foremost the means of controlling others’ as it generates a different kind of profit manifest as reciprocated reward, in a competitive struggle for power and status. (Mauss, 1990, 73) The underlying logic of the reciprocal gift is that it cannot be given unless receipt of a counter-gift of equivalent value is guaranteed. This is known as ‘constrained reciprocity’ demonstrating a binary of give-and-take found in the market, but as anthropologist Edward Tylor argues it is not a simple exchange of equivalence, as behind every gift lies an ulterior motive of self-interest. (Tylor, 2010:341) This can be explained more clearly not through reciprocal giving but through circular giving as demonstrated in the *kula* ritual of the Trobriand islanders, whereby *kula* articles – arm-shells and necklaces – are circulated and displayed in the current ‘owner’s’ domestic setting in order to draw attention and renown amongst the tribal community. (Munn, 1992: 127) The significance of this gift-type is that the *kula* articles are purely ceremonial with no practical use and that their circulation is symbolic of competitiveness in order to gain status and rank in the given society. (Hyde, 1983: 13) Although it is not made explicit the purpose of

this ceremony is to access a viewing public or social circle and engage in conjecture as to who is deemed deserved of the gift when it is next passed on. The bestowing of this ‘gift’ requires a repayment of an equivalent counter-gift though this can be after a considerable amount of time, may be years. (Gosden, 1999: 159) This time-lapse is important as it breaks the rules of equivalence dictated by the give-and-take of capitalism. Here the gift demonstrates that ‘there is trade, but the objects traded are not commodities.’ (Hyde, 1983: 15) Furthermore the circular motion of the gift imposes on the givers a situation whereby they lose sight of the gift and are required engage in an act of blind faith in their expectation of return at an indeterminable future date. (Bourdieu, 1993: 75) Pierre Bourdieu wrote about this paradox within the ‘gift’ in very specific terms as a process of ‘misrecognition’ implying disinterestedness which takes place within the field and indicates expectation of an invisible reward. (Bourdieu, 1993: 81) As will be discussed later in the context of ‘art-world’ economics, this stance, regarded as a non-economic position-taking in its rejection of the immediate profits of economic reward masks the fact that such a denial, implicit in ‘the gift’ may in fact increase the accumulation of cultural status and therefore an artist’s currency in the market at a later point in time. So a seemingly non-economic act is in fact one that is economic. (Abbing: 2002, 83) In this way, ownership in the *kula* is a special economic relation in that the sense of ‘possession’ is wholly different from that witnessed in capitalist society. The symbolic social code is that to possess is to give, in that the person who ‘owns’ the gift is expected to share and distribute it. Most significantly, as will become clear in the context of my discussion of ‘art-

world' formation, is that the exchange path in the *kula* system is both reflective and constitutive of a struggle for pre-eminence and profit as 'reputation, name or fame'. (Appadurai, 1994: 19) Although no money changes hands in this ceremony, it is hardly devoid of connections with the spirit of commerce. (Hyde, 1983: 143) The *kula* demonstrates a non-monetary mode of valuation where a price is set by a negotiation process as 'indebtedness engineering' and in this way it does not submit to the alienating valuation forces of scarcity, supply and demand. (Firth, 1967: 135)

In texts such as Mauss' *The Gift* (1990), Veblen's *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1994), Derrida's *Given Time I: Counterfeit Money* (1992) and Bataille's *The Accursed Share* (1998) we find powerful explanations of how economies are not always characterised by a calculative logic of production as commodity, but also by incalculable consumption and excessive wastage. This is to argue that some economic systems are actually organised around excess, another aspect of the gift-function, as opposed to the classical notion of scarcity. (Fowle & Larsen: 17) For Georges Bataille, reflection on the nature of the gift-function in the *potlatch* ceremony of the Haida tribe of the American North West, was a point of departure to overturn the economic principles of utilitarian calculation that defines the rationality of the 'restrictive economy' to come up with a new logic based on the unproductive expenditure of excess that defines the optimum economy as the 'general economy'.¹³ (Kosalka, 1999: 5) In the *potlatch* ceremony gifts are exchanged between communities and each gift is

¹³ In *The Accursed Share* (1998) written in 1946, Georges Bataille proposes a 'general economy' based on all that exceeds the economy but is integral to it, as distinctive from the 'restrictive economy' which is the domain of neo-classical economics which only addresses a fraction of economic life.

expected to be more lavish than the previous one until one side gives away everything, leaving the other in sole possession of the field. (Hyde, 1983: 90)

In analysing Mauss' observations of *potlatch* Bataille proposes a law of surplus based on a metaphor of solar energy, whereby surplus as an excess energy which must be positively expended, and can be so through modes of cultural expression such as art, allowing the artist and art object to be freed from utility. The theory goes that as sunlight falls on plants, through photosynthesis, they capture it and make energy from it to use in their own survival. This idea is closely tied with a conception of sacrifice that is associated with the gift, and certainly with the artist who works for free, who can use it to escape the cycle of necessity. (Hyde: 1983: 62) Bataille's theory is almost akin to a right to waste, liberating the artist and leaving others to the enslaving activity of production for financial profit.

Many gift theorists believe that although useful in outlining divisions in economic thought in order to put forward 'alternative' arguments, efforts in structural anthropology should be concentrated not on the dualist structure of the 'market versus gift', but on the location of the ideal or 'optimum' economy which, as already mentioned, concerns equilibrium between the two spheres (Cheal, 1988: Douglas: 1990) It could be argued that this was the main concern of *substantivism* in that its imperative was to locate the balance between capitalist enterprise and the gift-economy as an optimum economy of 'common-wealth' which goes beyond questions of economic efficiency to engage with basic moral questions of justice, equity and public good. (Morgan, 2003: 15) It is in looking to Marshall Sahlins' 'typology of reciprocity' which informs us of how a 'mixed

economy' might work. Types of reciprocity can be located along a continuum of closeness and remoteness with others, ranging from the 'pure gift' of 'generalised reciprocity' which lies at one end, where social proximity is intense, and 'negative reciprocity' which lies at the other end, where agents within a system are perhaps more calculating in their self-interested gain. (Sahlins, 1972:193) The key argument here is that Sahlins offers not a polarised field, but one involving gradations whereby agents can operate with more or lesser degrees of both 'market' and 'gift' functions. This spectrum is important in pursuing arguments in the complexity of a 'mixed economy' as it has the capacity to accommodate the gift-function of reciprocity and utility or instrumentalism as 'economically rational' in that it frames exchange as swinging from 'disinterested concern for the other party through mutuality to self-interest'. (Sahlins, 1972:192)

As I have described much is made of pitching the 'market' against 'gift' in discussions of economy in the field and it is commonly perceived that the relations of the market-sphere and the relations of the gift-sphere represent two different, if not mutually exclusive, polarised realities. The reality of the gift exchange for Mauss was that as one of many 'total social facts', it had to be explained not only in its relations with 'the market', but in terms of its role in social organisation as a whole, operating with systems of morality and hidden social forces, dispelling the idea that gift-giving is a clandestine form of exchange. Claude Levi-Strauss thought too that analysis of any economic system should not be confused with the examination of its visible aspects alone. (Henaff, 1998: 40; Godelier, 1977: 23) Though structuralist in approach he felt that the overall achievement of Mauss' 'gift' essay was to look beyond the overtly visible

exchanges of the economic field and make known the unconscious rules exchange as 'total social facts'. By this he meant that 'economy' involved a multitude of institutions that made up the conditions of social life or indeed, a social system 'which should be analysed in the totality of their connections'. (Mauss, 1990:78)

It is in returning to the concept of 'embeddedness' that we see that formal principles that may be appropriate for analysing economies embedded in the market were inappropriate for non-market societies where the economy was embedded in other social institutions. In non-market societies then, it can be argued that a discrete economic sphere or field is denied, as economic activity articulates within itself as an institutional matrix that functions according to its own laws and relations of power in any given social system. (Bourdieu 1996: 52)

'Art-world' economics

In introducing 'field theory' devised by Pierre Bourdieu we find an analytical methodology that can be used to examine the institutional matrix and therefore, the economy of any given social system; in this case the 'field of art' as 'art-world'. To structurally analyse the 'field of art' with the purpose of revealing it as a complex economic site of exchange relations requires a definition of what is meant by the term the 'art-world' from the outset. The 'art-world' which has come to dominate Western perception and is akin to Bourdieu's idea of the 'field of art' as relationally formed system, was put forward by Arthur C Danto as 'the institutional theory of art' in his seminal text *The Artworld* in the early 1960s. (Danto, 1964: 571-584) In this essay, Danto discusses Andy Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* (1964) to question the first principle of philosophical aesthetics, in proposing how a work of art can be distinguished from non-art. His solution to the

paradox that determines that Warhol's plywood replica boxes are art and that a pile of Brillo-branded boxes found in a supermarket is not, focuses on the assertion that an object gains its 'art status' by being offered up for interpretation within 'an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art: an art-world.' (Danto, 1964: 572)

IMAGE REDACTED

Fig 3: *Brillo Boxes* (1964), Andy Warhol
Collection of Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh, USA

As an illustration of how the institutional theory works, one can revisit the iconic Duchamp-authored ready-made *Fountain* signed as '*R. Mutt, 1917*'. (Yanal, 1998: 508) If it is accepted that there is no material difference between this ready-made artwork and a real-life urinal, then its 'art status' must therefore emerge from its institutional status as a relational property rather than as a material one. (Yanal, 1998: 512) In this way Danto's institutional theory dismisses the concept

of any intrinsic aesthetic or formal qualities pertaining to a work of art, thus allowing anything whatever to count as art, provided only that it has been put forward as such, by a suitable member of the hierarchically organised social system that constitutes the 'art-world'. The formation of this hierarchy is contingent on the relationships of power between artists, dealers and critics and the so-called 'official' institutions of art in the dominant and visible 'art-world' structure, now known as the 'Dealer-Critic' system. (Lacy, 1995: 178) By proposing the 'art-world' as a theoretical paradigm, Danto argues that 'there is no art without those who speak the language of the art-world.' (Danto, 1964: 574) Therefore, the 'art-world' is an entity that involves not only a structuring population in its contingent social relations, but manifestly, the mass of verbal and other expressions, designations and interpretations that different individuals and groups use to articulate an interest in art. (Becker, 2008: 36) This 'atmosphere' or exchange system is defined 'by the parameters set by the tangible institutions of art' such as galleries and museums, which provide relational contexts with other artworks, but more significantly here, by the decisions of 'art-world publics' who participate in that system, specifically those social agents who have power to confer art status. (Dickie, 1974: 31; Danto, 1964)

Importantly, it is this definition that continues to inform the widespread perception of the 'art-world' as a sphere that operates primarily as a market-oriented exchange, focused on the sale and purchase of art objects as commodities. It is this prevailing view that has meant the term 'art-world' has now become synonymous with the operation of the so-called 'Dealer-Critic' system as the only form of economic organisation in the field, and to which I shall

refer hereon as an interchangeable term with that of the 'mediated art-world'. (Cook, 2000: 168) In line with Karl Polanyi's assertion that the market has completely overridden other systems of economic organisation the art critic Boris Groys locates the post-war period as the time when the notion of the 'art-world' became synonymous with the notion of art market. In analysing work specifically of a political, counter-cultural and subversive nature he says that all artistic production made under what he describes as 'non-market' conditions became 'excluded from the field of institutionally recognised art.' (Groys, 2008: 5) However, as will be discussed such a conclusion can only be drawn by focusing solely on the artist's aspiration - which of course is also linked to economic need - to enter this particular version of 'art-world' as 'mediated art-world'. However, as will be argued later, this 'art-world' does not account for the totality of economic structures that occur within the field, and it is particularly by looking to artistic practice, that other invisible systems of operation can be revealed.

In tracing the genesis and structure of the field of art in his major work *The Rules of Art* (1996), Bourdieu describes the 'art-world' as a 'field of struggles', where participating agents compete for cultural legitimacy. It is in looking at the structural make-up of the 'Dealer-Critic' system that it can be seen how patrons, collectors, critics, artists, museums and galleries, as institutions, have contributed to the modernisation of the field, in working up the value of art in struggling for cultural authority. (Prior 2000:144; Alexander, 2003:87) Bourdieu's overall thesis is informed by his identification of a 'heroic rupture' that took place when the 'art-world' as an independent social field won its autonomy through its emancipation from the institution of the French Academy system, and its

subsequent evolution as the 'Dealer-Critic' system. (Bourdieu 1996:148) In this way it could be argued that the 'Dealer-Critic' system evolved to relinquish any notion of independence in the sense of supporting artists outside of an institutional framework, as it became colonised by dealers, critics and curators who dictated cultural legitimacy and determined the value of art primarily in terms of its worth in the marketplace, replacing the Academy.

As with all fields, participants in the 'art-world' take up various positions in relation to one another based on their position of power, and whenever a new position is taken, the whole structure of the field is displaced, leading to a 'knock-on effect' as those in other positions take up new positions in reaction to change. In this way 'the field' offers both a fluid and competitive, although 'detrimental' model of exchange which structurally has been compared with a pyramid. (Duncan, 1983: 172) By 'detrimental' I mean that in such a hierarchical system there is only limited room at the top, so an artist reaching the higher echelons of the pyramid will only be able to do so to the detriment of another participant who is effectively demoted. (Giuffre, 1999:815) In its connection with the market-driven calculation of art as commodity, it can be argued that this system also makes a principal contribution to the mechanism of speculation. Such market speculation means that the purchased 'artist' as associated with the purchased 'artwork' will gain notoriety in the future and will therefore gain in value, acknowledging the potential for investment with profitable return. (Alexander, 2003: 74) In summary the overriding assumption is that the sole economic operation of the 'art-world' is embedded in the 'Dealer-Critic' system as pertaining to the market-sphere which treats artwork and artist as commodity,

and attributes value to art through its conversion into commercial economic worth. Therefore, the 'Dealer-Critic' system represents not only a battlefield of commerce (as *economic* gain), but also one of cultural legitimacy (as *symbolic* gain) in that the institutions of art and their contingent 'gatekeepers' filter and validate what enters and leaves by way of both people and products, and in doing so exert their power to confer art status. (Alexander, 2003: 120) So, in keeping with the 'institutional theory' it is the structural relations of the system that constitutes what is art, rather than any individual artist's declaration. (Becker, 2008: 22) Furthermore, in the 'Dealer-Critic' system the 'institutions of art' not only define what art is, but through power relations attempt to maintain the *status quo* by controlling art's distribution and reception mechanisms in their allocation of exhibiting spaces and the contingent access they provide to audiences. (Becker, 2008: 135)

At this juncture it is interesting to return to an aspect of the gift-function which concerns the nature of competition and profit, usually considered to be the premise of the market operation. Returning to the ritual of the *potlatch* ceremony we find a system of exchange which is characterised by antagonism and competition. Although the *potlatch* involves a process of giving everything away it rather betrays a struggle of 'usurious and sumptuary character' between tribal chiefs as they seek to establish a hierarchy. (Douglas, 1990:8) The gifting of *potlatch* means to create a social-debt from which the individual or clan will benefit at a later date. So, although the gift-function is thought of as pertaining to a non-economic sphere this particular exchange can be considered economic in that it consists of a complex totality of 'manoeuvres to fortify oneself against risks

incurred through alliances and rivalry'. (Levi-Strauss, 1996: 19). The gift functions in pre-capitalist societies not only as 'goods and services' that are exchanged for economic profit, but also as an instrument in gaining power, influence, prestige and status. Similarly, the 'field of art' is shaped *economically* and competitively - implying profit - not merely through the sale and purchase of the art object as commodity, but as a socially constituted space of art-world agents through the 'buying' of positioning in a hierarchy of power relations that determines status and rank. (Grenfell & Hardy, 2007:60) This does not mean that 'art-world' agents belonging to the higher echelons of the hierarchy are necessarily involved in any kind of conscious conspiracy of control in the 'field of art'. (Bourdieu, 1988: 246) The fact is that success, in terms of financial profit and status within the field can be gained as a 'by-product' and is more often than not unknowingly sought through artistic position-takings which are always the 'semi-conscious strategies in a game in which the conquest of cultural legitimacy is at stake'. (Bourdieu, 1993: 137) This can be explained further by putting forward the Bourdieuan idea of the polarised field that in simplified terms pitches 'art-for-art's-sake' against 'the market' or 'the pure' against 'commercial'. (Bourdieu, 1998: 84) The artist who gains cultural success through engaging in so-called *avant-garde* practice as 'art-for-art's-sake' can convert that into economic success in the market where its currency as symbolic value is attributed with a monetary worth. This phenomenon has been assessed by Hans Abbing as evidence of a dual economy at work in the 'field of art' that exists between the 'gift-sphere' and the 'market sphere'. (Abbing, 2002: 48) Rather than polarised the 'field of art' represents 'a two-faced' value system which 'emphasises selfless

devotion to art and condemns the pursuit of monetary gain’, whilst operating using ‘the gift’ to veil its orientation to sale in the free market. (Abbing, 2002, 49) In this way it is even sometimes commercial to be a-commercial, in that artists expressing anti-market values in their ‘alternative’ art practice can in fact add to their market success reinforcing the component of reciprocity in ‘the gift’.

In illuminating the generation of value in the the ‘field of art’ and the creation of economic worth it is useful to introduce Bourdieu’s notion of *capital*. (Anderson, 1993: 132; Bourdieu 1993: 77) As discussed, the central concept of ‘field theory’ is that it can be defined as a setting in which agents and their social positions are located. The positions and position-takings that an agent occupies within the ‘field of art’ are relational, informed and defined as a direct result of the interaction of exchanges that are determined by the ‘rules of the art’ in the field and the accumulation of the agent’s *capital*. (Swartz, 1997: 118) So, Bourdieu uses the term to evaluate positioning and exchange in the ‘field of art’, and therefore its economy. Bourdieuan *capital* can be expressed in four forms: economic, social, cultural and symbolic, but for clarity I will only discuss *economic capital* as referring to financial worth and *symbolic capital* to refer to the symbolically powerful attributes derived from the dispositions that agents choose to take up or are permitted to take up within the ‘field’. In this way I wish to firstly concentrate analysis on the tensions between the *economic* and the *symbolic* to reflect in particular upon how the accumulation of the symbolic form of *capital* can in fact be economic and secondly, on another emergent dualist structure emergent in the ‘field of art’ articulated by Bourdieu as that of the

‘large-scale field of production’ versus the ‘restricted-field of production’.
(Bourdieu, 1996: 114)

Of course capital is a term resonant with Marxism referring as it does to the basic features of the capitalist economy as the possession of materials and human resources, but Bourdieu does not explicitly connect with this notion. (Grenfell & Hardy, 2007: 30) Rather, he adopts capital as the medium through which the processes of exchange and ownership occur which means that the relative importance of the form of *capital* depends upon the ‘rules’ governing the autonomous field from which it is generated. Crucially, the value of the different forms of *capital* is derived from the given field as the recognised, acknowledged and attributed site of exchange. (Bourdieu, 1996: 250) The currency of this exchange is not necessarily that of monetary or economic value, but it can be of symbolic value in that it is gained as status and reputation through position-taking by ‘art-world’ agents. In this way capital is accumulated through the ‘art-world’ agents varying power relations with institutions and official lines of authority and it is used to exercise power over other agents, controlling the rates of conversion between them and structuring the hierarchy of the social space. (Wacquant, 2000: 115) In the ‘mediated art-world’ thus described, *capital* is gained through processes of acknowledgement and recognition and it can only have value if it is recognised within the field itself, in its symbolic form. (Bourdieu, 1990: 121) Within any given field symbolic capital is accumulated through agents’ activity in social formations and institutions and it is unevenly distributed, in this way behaving just like economic capital. (Guillory, 1994: 28) The acquisition of *symbolic capital* is deeply significant in relation to the formation of the ‘art-

world' as a 'field' as the economic order of subordinate versus super-ordinate takes shape. In the 'mediated art-world', agents including artists and the 'institutional gatekeepers of power' are accorded status and rank in a hierarchy dictated by social relations as those 'art-world' players, endowed with the categories of perception acquired from the 'field', who recognise *symbolic capital* and give it value. This means that 'economy' in the 'field of art' is predicated not just on *economic* or monetary profit, but also *symbolic* profit in an 'economic universe reversed.' (Bourdieu 1993:29) In this way what we know as economic success does not necessarily predetermine cultural success. (Abbing, 2002: 55)

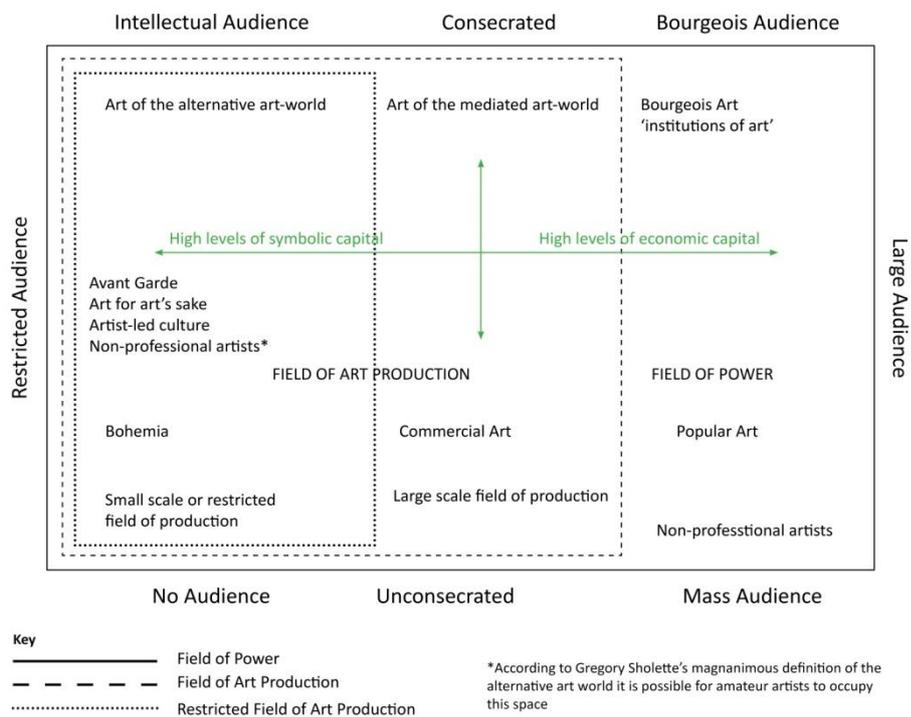


Fig. 4: The Bourdieuan 'field of cultural production' as polarised between the 'restricted-field' and the 'large-scale field' within the field of power. Adapted from the diagram in *The Rules of Art* (Bourdieu, 1996: 124)

The notion of *economic* and *symbolic capital* can be further explained through the dualist structure of ‘the field of art which pitches ‘the large-scale field’ as polarised with ‘the restricted-field’. (Bourdieu, 1993: 125) This approach is adopted by Bourdieu in order to take into account all forces and forms of agency within ‘the field’ which can ‘embrace all practices directed towards the maximising of not only material profit, but also symbolic profit.’ (Bourdieu 1977: 183) Within all mature fields of cultural production including the ‘field of art’, Bourdieu argues that there is a fundamental opposition between a ‘restricted or ‘pure pole’ of production, whose protagonists possess high levels of *symbolic capital* and low levels of *economic capital* and a restricted audience, and the ‘large-scale pole’, which is regarded as having the satisfaction of a large audience, and is championed by agents with high levels of *economic capital* and lower levels of *symbolic capital*. (Bourdieu, 1996: 121) The *economic capital* of agents at the ‘large-scale pole’ is derived from their position and influence in relation to the marketplace, where the ultimate aim is to reach the largest audience possible and to focus on commercial gain. (Bourdieu 1993: 29). The *symbolic capital* of agents at the ‘restricted-pole’ is derived from their position as occupying a space that can be historically termed as the domain of the *avant-garde* and in contemporary terms that of ‘alternative’ practice, where artists are deemed to make work for each other with little regard for economic profit. In its polarised structure then, the ‘the field of art’ is wholly defined relationally through artists’ dynamic struggle with the power relations of agents within the field who classify and legitimize the economic and symbolic production, distribution and reception of art. (Prior, 2000: 143) These two poles are mutually sustained by the entire

social structure of position-taking that takes place within the ‘field of art’. It is important however, not to draw the conclusion that the existence of these poles means that their contingent artistic practices are antagonistic and therefore mutually exclusive. It is possible for artists to operate at both poles of production, and indeed, between them in their ‘art-world’ relations. (Van Maanen, 2009: 253)

It is the accumulation of *symbolic capital* that is deeply significant here because its formation is predicated on positioning accorded by status and rank dictated by the social relations of participants. The operations of the economy of art lies within the relationships of power which are effectively exchange relationships, based on the indebtedness of sub-ordinate agent to his super-ordinate. For Bourdieu this social relation of debt explicit in ‘the gift’ determines cultural valuation and status within the art-world. It is these participants endowed with categories of perception including the way *symbolic capital* is attributed which enables them to know it, recognise it and give it value. The key point here is that artists operating in the ‘restricted-field of production’ can possess as high levels of *economic capital* as converted from *symbolic capital* as those artists operating in the ‘large-scale field of production ‘who may have more explicit relations with the market.’ (Grenfell & Hardy, 2007: 79)

The complexity of economic relations between the poles can be further explored by returning to Bourdieu’s theory of ‘misrecognition’ and ‘distinterestedness’, which is a feature of the gift-function. (Bourdieu, 1993: 40) In writing about the gift Jacques Derrida draws a distinction between genuine gifts which are altruistic and the Maussian reciprocal gift which imposes a debt upon the receiver drawing

the conclusion that gifts are in fact impossible. He suggests the imperative of reciprocity and indebtedness ‘speaks of everything but the gift’ in its dealings with economy, exchange and contract. (Derrida, 1992: 138) It has been remarked that Derrida’s gift theory is akin to Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of ‘misrecognition’ which in summary asserts that we lie to ourselves about gift-giving by choosing to ignore the implied calculation of self-interest, but at the same time he refutes the reductive argument of *economism* that purports that ‘all transactions between human beings can be explained as a desire for lucrative interest and economic ends’. (Bourdieu: 1998c, 81) He considers the question of the gift to be a moral and political one and develops the notion of *symbolic capital* as capital in which value is recognised by virtue of its material value having been ‘misrecognised’. So, to express ‘disinterest’ is in fact to be economic as *cultural* or *symbolic capital* is acquired by the agent according a higher and valuable symbolic positioning within the art-world hierarchy. In writing about disinterestedness as manifest in spontaneous acts and as ‘a feel for the game’, Bourdieu explores the machinations of conscious calculation and notions of profit accepting that there is a place in society and a logic of practice in the non-economic function of the ‘gift’. (Bourdieu, 1990: 66)

Finally, it is Bourdieu’s ‘gift’ literature in which he makes the archaic Kabyle economy his explicit focus that examines the classic gift exchange experience, as Mauss and Levi-Strauss had done previously, to reveal an economy where a monetary system or price as an exchange value is not dominant. (Bourdieu, 1997a:200) In this economy ‘gift’ exchanges secured services and goods together with social relations. So, Bourdieu was able to conclude that a distinction can be

drawn between an ‘economy in itself’ like the pre-capitalist Kabyle, and an ‘economy in and for itself’ witnessed in Western capitalist societies. (Bourdieu 1990: 113) It can be argued that it is the economic logic of *symbolic capital*, as generated by the dynamic position-takings of the field and underlying the ‘gift’ exchange, that persists in operating alongside *economic capital* in a relationship of interdependency and co-existence that forms the very structure of the ‘field of art’.

Alternative economics

Thus far the economy of art has been discussed only within the auspices of the Bourdieuan ‘field of art’ in confirming that it is through the relations of agents, their engagement with the ‘rules of art’ and their choices in position-takings, that the ‘art-world’ and its contingent poles of production are structured. A criticism often levelled at Bourdieu is that ‘field theory’ is reductive and *accommodationist* in terms of its categorisation of practice, but it should be remembered that Bourdieu himself thought that although formed through the positions of power within it, field structure could be altered by agents in their actions, so that power was redistributed. (Bourdieu 1996: 54)

As I have sought to explain the ‘Dealer-Critic’ system or ‘mediated art-world’, although precipitated by a rupture that marked the emergence of the autonomous cultural field, is still determined on the whole between two dominating polarised and antagonistic position-takings which in simple terms involves ‘art for art’s sake’ or the activity of the *avant-garde* at the ‘restricted-pole of production’ versus commercially viable, market-oriented work pertaining to the mainstream,

at the 'large-scale pole'. Significantly, artists and art-world players are able to take up positions only if they abide by the 'rules of art' set by the official lines of authority of this system and 'play the game.' (Bourdieu, 1990: 66) Although the 'Dealer-Critic' system can be identified as the dominant and most visible form of economic organisation in the field, that is not deny the potential existence of 'other' or 'alternative' systems that may lie both within and beyond its borders. (Ray, 2007b) The idea that the 'alternative' can be found beyond the parameters of the field in artistic practice will be discussed later, but it can be asserted here that 'alternative' practices, as well as formed by the struggles of opposition and resistance through engagement with the official 'rules of art' of the field, are also formed through 'rules-in-use' including strategies of active circumvention.

In returning to Danto's 'institutional theory' and extensions of this discourse that the existence of 'plural art-worlds', if not explicitly 'alternative art-world' systems, can be asserted. (Becker, 2008: 228) Howard Becker draws on Mauss' theory of an economic 'other' in his assertion of the co-existence of a distinct series of 'art-worlds', which can over-lap in their operation, but are formed separately through a 'network of people whose co-operative activity, organised via their joined knowledge of conventional means of doing things, produce the kind of art works that the art-world is noted for.' (Becker, 2008: x) This means that some 'art-worlds' can be small, esoteric and narrowly defined, such as a book-reading group or an artists' collective, and others are quite large and broad, such as the international exchange of contemporary art dealership. (Becker, 2008: 36) All participating agents operating within these different art-worlds recognise, understand and respect the distinctions that make them separate, which is not to

deny the possibilities for their intimate and extensive relations with each other in their co-existence and indeed, interdependency. In this way it is possible for artists to occupy and operate within multiple art-worlds at any one time. (Becker, 2008: 32) In establishing the existence of plural, often smaller discrete art-worlds – amateur photography, knitting circles, fine art photography, contemporary, folk art, hobbyists and ‘Sunday painters’, craft-making – an ‘other’ to the ‘mediated art-world’ system can be put forward which enables a look beyond the mainstream and the relatively small minority of artists who predominantly operate within the market-sphere, to turn attention to the majority of artists who work, albeit by default, within a non-economic sphere.

The New York-based artist-activist Gregory Sholette conceptualises this non-economic sphere as an invisible shadow realm, but in fact ‘the *real* art-world’, in that it is occupied by the majority of working artists. (Sholette, 2004a: 2) The independence of this ‘world’ is marked not only by its countering of the legitimising powers of the ‘institutions of art’, but the delineation of a shadow realm as a magnanimous site in which *any* artist, as well *any* art-world agent can become a member in that the rules of acceptance and exclusion are left to the self-determining artist as individual or collective. (Sholette & Stimson, 2007: 194) It was George Dickie who set a precedent for such magnanimity in his assertion that ‘every person who sees himself as a member of the art-world is thereby a member.’ (Dickie, 1974: 36) The ‘alternative art-world’ is further articulated by Sholette in his adoption of a metaphor from cosmological theory; that of *dark matter*. (Sholette, 2004a: 3) The theory goes that although there are enormous quantities of it, *dark matter* is largely invisible and can be equated

with the activity of the majority of artists, who may have extremely limited engagement with the 'Dealer-Critic' system. The fundamental point here is that although invisible, this 'art-world' makes up most of Bourdieu's 'economic universe' and offers an 'alternative' sphere for the occupation of artists and 'art-world publics', albeit as a default position. In addition, Sholette gives us a strong structural argument of an economy which rather than polarised, operates with interdependency across art-worlds in the assertion that without the *dark matter* of the majority propping up the visible objects of the universe such as planets and 'art' stars, then the market-oriented 'mediated art-world' could not exist at all. A criticism of Sholette's thesis might centre on the way that in its dualist structure it appears to offer us an 'alternative art-world' by default, subscribing to the very clear dyadic relations of structuralism in that the artist's membership of these two art-worlds involves an 'either/or' choice, which can be articulated as either, being a player in the market-sphere of the 'mainstream' or in the gift-sphere of the 'alternative'. However, in the actuality of artistic practice we find that rather than an inactive default position, the choice to occupy the alternative-sphere is made purposefully and one of multiple choice to practice across a number of different art-worlds at the same time. Furthermore, in describing Sholette's 'alternative art world' as a default position is not to undermine it, but rather to highlight how articulations of the 'alternative' concern matters of visibility or the 'hidden realities' that so concerned Claude Levi-Strauss. It is the invisible reality of the 'field of art' that there is an abundance of artists, who by their non-engagement with the official 'rules of art' of the 'mediated art-world' system,

show that not all ‘alternatives’ are necessarily formulated through activist position-takings. (Ault: 2002, 11)

To look at the economy of art through the lens of dyadic relations in structuralist thought has proved useful in providing the basis for a discussion concerning not only binaries, but plurality in the economic structure of the ‘field of art’. It can be demonstrated that the simplistic polarisation of the ‘market’ and the ‘gift’, the ‘economic-sphere’ against the ‘non-economic’, the ‘restricted- pole’ of the *avant-garde* or ‘alternative’ against the ‘large-scale pole’ of the commercial or ‘mainstream’, is not reflective of the complex and multiple practices which take place within the field that make up the ‘muddier reality’ of economic operations. (Carrier, 1995: ix)

CHAPTER 2

ECONOMIC PRACTICE AND THE 'FIELD OF ART'

By revealing the dyadic relations of the wider economic field and discussing the structure and formation of 'art-worlds' using 'field theory', I have attempted to expose the complexity and multiplicity of the economic systems that operates within the 'field of art'. Between and across the Bourdieuan poles of cultural production it can be seen that the 'field of art' works with the imperatives of both market-function and gift-function in the creation of economy. (Abbing, 2002: 50)

In this chapter, I continue to consider relations between the 'market' and the 'gift', but through observations in the field that concern not only structure, but the actuality of artistic practice, since according to Bourdieuan theory, the two are intrinsically linked in structuring economy. (Bourdieu, 1977: 97) It is in turning to practice and so-called 'rules-in-use' rather than theoretical rules that the hidden economic realities of the 'field of art' can be revealed through the articulation of 'alternative' artistic practices within the field, but also those which may lie outside of its parameters.

Since its introduction through anthropology in the early twentieth century by Mauss (1990), the notion of ‘the gift’ and gift theory has been applied across a series of disciplines including sociology, economics, politics, critical theory and more recently contemporary art discourse; a field that has seen the emergence of many ‘gift-related’ exhibitions and critical writing. (Purves, 2005; Morgan, 2003) Discussion concerning ‘the gift’ in art has been manifold ranging from the nature of reciprocity as interactivity with audiences (Jacob, 2005: 4), through non-monetary exchange, to the efficacy of public subsidy for the arts (Abbing, 2002: 100), and latterly to the ‘open source’ imperatives of advancing new technologies such as Web 2.0 where information is shared for ‘free’. (Holmes, 2003) The overwhelming focus of much of the ‘gift’ writing in contemporary art discourse in the first decade of the twenty-first century has tended to centre on the significance of ‘the gift’ in terms of exchange primarily through social relations, in its specific creation of economy through social ties as engagement with the art audience.

IMAGE REDACTED

Fig. 5: *Installation (still)* (1992), Rikrit Tirivanja

A rather literal application of the gift-function of reciprocity has been widely represented by focusing on ‘give-away’ art projects, the interstices proposed by art theorist Nicholas Bourriaud as ‘relational aesthetics’ (Bourriaud, 1998: 25) and in social exchange, through art ‘happenings’ that involve interaction such as the sharing of food, as exemplified in the work of the artist Rikrit Tirivanja. (Jacob, 2005: 3)

The aim of this chapter is to look beyond these literal notions of reciprocity evident in artistic production to examine the premise of the ‘gift-sphere’ and its seemingly non-economic function in offering an ‘alternative’ economy of art through a variety of strategies, some of which are formulated by relations with institutions in the field, but others perhaps external to it, by way of tactics using circumvention. Furthermore, I have sought to consider articulations of the ‘alternative’ as evidenced in practice and production, specifically as a ‘space’ in which ‘artist-led culture’ with its counter-economic, self-organised, self-instituted and ‘do-it-yourself’ approaches has been forged and continues to flourish in the ‘field of art’ today. (Bradley & Hannula, 2006; McKay, 1998)

Alternative practice

The gift theorist Alan Schrift asserts that to consider any economic system that operates at least in some part with the notion of ‘the gift’ will fail unless it relates to the logic of practice. (Schrift, 1997:15) In his opposition to ‘rational choice theory’ in what he believed was a misunderstanding of how social agents operate, Pierre Bourdieu developed an *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977) in his sociological work that emphasised the importance of practices that occur

within the 'social world'. (Bourdieu, 1977:3) According to Bourdieu social agents do not continuously calculate according to rational and economic criteria, but with an implicit practical sense described as 'a feel for the game'; where the 'game' is the field and the 'feel' is the way the field is negotiated in terms of artists positioning and their relations with it. (Bourdieu, 1990: 67) As discussed in Chapter 1, Bourdieu regarded the field as both 'structured' by its contingent agent position-takings, but contrary to the criticisms levelled at the apparent *accommodationist* tendency of 'field theory' he also saw it as 'structuring', by which he meant that the hidden realities of economic operation are constitutive of the reflexive action of agents in the actuality of practice. (Bourdieu, 1996: 43) Artists therefore, through their practice are not powerless and are capable of influencing the shape of the field. (Douglas, 1990: xviii)

Thus far, the logic of economic relations within the 'field of art' has largely been construed by looking through the narrow conceptual prism of the 'mediated art-world' alone, as organised and structured within set parameters dictated by the idiosyncratic relations created within the field itself. It can also be argued that the polarisation of the 'restricted field' and the 'large-scale field' of production identified by Bourdieu assists in building up a picture of the Maussian 'total social facts' of economic operation as conditioned by audience relations, but also by the artistic practices of a particular time and place. (Bourdieu 1996: 298) Bourdieu's 'theory of practice' does not seek to place primary significance on the subjective knowledge of the social world or on objective structural conditions in the creation of economy. Rather, the theory seeks to account for mediation between them. (Bourdieu, 1977: 78) In this way, in addition to analysing its

structure, it is only in looking to the actuality of practice and production within the field and beyond it, that it is possible to suggest not only the existence of an ‘alternative art-world’ (Sholette, 2004: 2), but also to locate ‘alternative practice’ as cultural form. These forms include ‘products’, processes and the creation of ‘spaces’, that do not adhere to the rules set by the free market and the established ‘institutions of art’. As ‘alternatives’ they are not formed necessarily by the default position thus described in relation to ‘art-worlds’, but rather forged as what I have termed ‘deliberative spaces’. Indeed, it is within artistic practice since the early 1960s that we can observe how artists have altered, and continue to alter the structure and operation of the field in their attempts to articulate and produce ‘alternatives’ in a variety of ways, in establishing an economic space that is ‘other’ to that of the market-oriented model of the ‘mediated art-world’.

For Bourdieu, as borne out in his polarising economic theory of the ‘field of art’, it is the movements and practices of the vanguard that may offer an ‘alternative’ for art through their ‘conscious and unconscious’ occupation of ‘the restricted-pole of production’, a space in which artistic practice aims to disrupt the super-ordinate powers of the ‘institutions of art’ in the ‘mediated art-world’. (Bourdieu, 1996: 179) As already explained, Bourdieu described the genesis of art from academic absolutism in France to the emergence of the ‘autonomous field of art’ as a ‘heroic rupture’ marking a moment that defined independence from rules and regulations of the dominant institutions of art. (Bourdieu, 1996:113) It is by identifying the vanguards in the history of art and artistic production from the mid-nineteenth century to the present day that a number of ‘ruptures’ can be located, in their content and cultural form as strategies of opposition and

resistance to the *status quo*. By adhering to Bourdieu's articulation of a 'field of struggles' one can locate possibilities for the 'alternative' through a variety of artistic practices which adopt strategies of opposition and resistance ranging from so-called 'institutional critique' to anti-commodity projects. In addition, and perhaps more interestingly, there are those practices that attempt a strategy of circumvention to achieve independence from the established cultural authority in the field, through the activity of 'artist-led culture'. It is after all, independence as a pivotal concept in *avant-gardism* that 'has not entirely lost its appeal to contemporary artists'. (Beech, 2008: 1)

Anti-commodity

As identified by Danto (1964) in his 'art-world theory' the significance of '*Fountain*' (1917) by Marcel Duchamp should not be underestimated in its instigation of the 'what is art?' debate at the heart of which was the question of whether art can be created or perceived when it is no longer bound by the aesthetic object. This debate had already been expanded by Duchamp himself in his lecture 'The Creative Act' (Duchamp, 1957) in which he considered how art is 'made' or comes into being only through its relations with an audience, and the conferral of art status to a given object by an expert. (Woolf, 1993: 19) In looking to modern art history we see the emergence of early 'alternatives' in the first two decades of the twentieth century in the experimental art of the historical *avant-garde* – Futurism through Dada and Vorticism – which moved away from the duty of representation in the wake of form rather than content, thereby exploiting the manifesto-driven approach amongst other approaches to explore meaning in art with utopian strategies. (Terraroli, 2006) In examining post-war

artistic practices it can be assessed that the American abstract expressionists such as Jackson Pollock, continued to provide object-based work, albeit as an experiment in emotional and spiritual content. But it is during the 1960s, that we see a move away from object-based production as art making proceeded with resistant and oppositional approaches that provided varied critical reactions to the preceding era (Mulholland 2003: 98), in what has become known as the Conceptual Art movement involving the art of ideas, systems and processes. (Marzona, 2006: 13) This work began to emerge in a socio-political climate of counter-cultural activity that seemingly, no longer accepted the social realities of advanced capitalism and its obsession with the value of commodity. (Wood, 1996:385) In this way there appeared to be an increased neo-Marxist interest by artists in the nature of the 'inalienability' of art which could be 'created' in order to defy attempts by the market at commodification. It is since this time, that many attempts have been made by artists, individually and collectively, to break the link between art and commodity. (Goldbard, 2002: 185) Of course, in Marxist theory the commodity has always been treated as a fall from grace; as a demonic phenomenon emerging from capitalism's drive toward total commodification, always linked to alienation and fetishism. (Osteen, 2002, 5) Building upon the Marxist view that capitalism had made a false god of commodity in what he termed commodity fetishism evidence of contemporary gift-behaviour as an 'alternative' pathway seems to hark back to a time when society was constituted by relations between human beings, whereas now everything has a price and has been commodified, even labour power. In the context of contemporary art many gift theorists have looked to the practice of

artists in identifying a persistent area of behaviour that demonstrates anti-utilitarianism as resisting commodification, often as the ‘creative act’ itself which is in effect given free-of-charge. In Lewis Hyde’s *The Gift: How the Creative Spirit Transforms the World* (1983) a very clear distinction is drawn between the commodity and the ‘gift’ in that artistic practice is couched as operating with the logic of an alternative, non-economic sphere in that it is given and is therefore inalienable. The exchanges of art, as the relationships between artist and audience is differentiated from the impersonal transaction of commodity exchange in that it establishes a connection between two or more people, while the sale of a commodity leaves no connections. (Hyde, 1983: 62) In other words, as Chris Gregory argues ‘commodity exchange establishes objective quantitative relationships between the objects transacted, while gift exchange establishes personal qualitative relationships between the subjects transacting.’ (Gregory, 1982: 46) For Hyde, to convert a work of art into a commodity when it is ‘the emanation of the maker’s gift’ is to destroy it. (Hyde, 1983, 56)

In continuing an appraisal of art practice emergent during the 1960s, in Allan Kaprow’s ‘happenings’ along with the influential cultural production of the Fluxus movement (Friedman, 1998) we find practice that harked back to the manifesto pledges of earlier *avant-garde* art movements which were adopted in order to break apart the formal-aesthetic view of art, and the advent of Guy Debord’s ‘Situationist’ event as a format in forging an ‘alternative’. (Sadler, 1999) More a phenomenon than a movement, Lucy Lippard attempted to provide a taxonomy of this kind of work as ‘dematerialised’ in her annotated

anthology *Six Years: The Dematerialisation of the Art Object* (1973). When written this text aimed to historicise the art of the 'just-past' and 'so-called conceptual art' as a movement of the contemporary vanguard, linking it with simultaneous counter-cultural activity including the Civil Rights Movement and the Women's Liberation Movement to encapsulate 'a real free-for-all sensibility' that fitted in with the notion of an inalienable art freed from the utilitarianism of an 'art-world' that imposed the commodity imperative. This new art considered the idea as paramount and the form as 'secondary, lightweight, ephemeral, cheap and/or dematerialised'. (Lippard, 1997: vii) In this way many artists produced 'alternative' work that was 'anti-commodity' with a view to resisting the legitimising status conferral processes of the 'mediated art-world' structure. (Ault, 2002: 6) Artist's projects which focused on 'dematerialisation' employed alternative media, time-based strategies, interventionist, collaborative and dialogic approaches (Kester, 2004) indicating the artists' desire to create alternative art and spaces outside of the prevailing 'Dealer-Critic system' which continued to favour the conventions of the 'frame-and-pedestal syndrome' of the institution. (Lippard, 1997: xiv)

It is these strategies of anti-commodification or counter-economy that became intrinsic to work produced during the time by artists such as Hans Haacke, Joseph Beuys, and Yoko Ono, who made 'dematerialised art' as installations, instructions and performances, that resisted being bought and sold in the art market. Simultaneously these artists, often through activist direct action, oppositional processes and methods, attempted to diminish the power of the 'institutions of art'

which in their view had created the problematic issue of artists themselves being bought and sold. (Kwon, 2003: 85)

IMAGE REDACTED

Fig. 6: *Blizzard Ball Sale* (1983) by David Hammons
Performance installation in Cooper Square, New York City

A challenge to such ‘purchase’ is mounted very directly by the artist David Hammons in his satirical performance work *Blizzard Ball Sale* (1983) in which he set up a stall after a winter storm in Cooper Square, New York City and sold snowballs to the public in a range of sizes which were accordingly priced from five cents up to two dollars. This work along with much of Hammons other practice and production seeks to disrupt the art audience’s sense of identity which is founded on the unspoken hierarchical values of the ‘mediated art-world’ system

that involve gender, race and class exclusions as well as the veiling of blatant commerce. (Stern, 2009) The argument goes that Hammons' work is not necessarily about finding harmonious reconciliation between the values of 'commerce' and 'pure art' spheres, but rather seeks to sustain the tensions between them as an 'alternative' practice, which I discuss in more detail later in this chapter.

In the art of this 'expanded field' (Perry and Wood, 2004) in which I include much later 'movements' largely ignored by the canon of art history, such as 'New Genre Public Art' (Lacy, 1995) artists sought to realise 'alternatives' and utopias through a range of strategies involving anti-commodity and the articulation of the intangible in temporal event-based artistic practice. Since the mid-1960s until the present day the 'alternative' economic strategies for art have focused on 'dematerialisation', but also on the burgeoning 'artist-led' initiative whereby 'alternative' sites and spaces for art have been founded by artists themselves. This has enabled artists to circumvent many of the economic and institutional factors that conditioned the making and marketing of artwork as commodity. (Ault, 2002: 11)

Anti-institution

If it can be accepted that much of contemporary 'alternative' practice located at the 'restricted-pole of production' is akin to that of the historical *avant-garde*, then it can be asserted that the *raison d'être* of many of the artists occupying this 'alternative sphere' is to challenge established hierarchies and the bourgeois values of the *status quo*. (Cook, 2000: 167) In their 'art-world' theories Howard

Becker and Pierre Bourdieu acknowledge the centrality of an audience that possesses high levels of cultural expertise as one whose decisions form the ‘art-world’ attributing significance to the reception or ‘consumption’ spaces of the institution as gallery and museum. (Becker, 2008: 165) According to Becker, it is the conventions of practice imposed by the institution that constrains what an artist can produce and exhibit, and if an artist chooses to engage with the ‘mediated art-world’, then they limit the opportunities for ‘non-standard’ artistic practices to take place, by which he means those that occur at the ‘restricted-pole’ of production. (Becker, 2008: 367) In his response to this situation, many artists interested in creating ‘alternatives’ to the market have done so through a practice that explicitly challenges the dominant institutions of art and actively set out to revise the criteria that underpin the distribution of artistic *capital*. (Prior, 2000: 144) Not surprisingly, it is the issues relating to the distribution and reception of art that provide common cause to artists working in the ‘alternative-sphere’, who have turned to the methods of ‘institutional critique’ in their practice and production.

In its challenge to the dominating powers that legitimise practice the art of ‘institutional critique’ can be read as that which makes visible the historical and socially constructed boundaries of inclusion and exclusion formed within the ‘mediated art-world’. (Alberro & Stimson: 2009) The projects of ‘institutional critique’ can then be articulated as the art of the ‘alternative’ in their adoption of oppositional and resistant formats of artistic practice in challenging Danto’s ‘institutional theory’ of an ‘art-world’ that imposes a definition of legitimate practice. (Bourdieu, 1993: 184) Such methods can be observed in the work of

Andrea Fraser who, after Bourdieu, claimed that as ‘we are trapped in our field’ as ‘art-world’, then the social existence of the artist is conditioned only on his or her permitted entrance to an established field. (Fraser, 2005: 85)

IMAGE REDACTED

Fig. 7: *Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk* (1989) by Andrea Fraser
Performed by Fraser as fictional docent Jane Castleton

Fraser critiques the ‘rules of art’ operating within the field in works such as the video *Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk* (1989) in which she dramatises and performs, in a museum context the fictional docent Jane Castleton who leads unsuspecting museum visitors on a subversively scripted tour of galleries, toilets and water-fountains. In considering the relationship between art and audiences and adopting a variety of art-world positions such as curator and critic, Fraser exposes and critiques the ways in which the artistic subject, as well as the artistic object, are legitimised and reified in and by the art institution. This work has been criticised because it contains a central paradox which is that the validation of an established exhibiting institution is required to perform the work thereby

establishing a hierarchical relationship from the start. (Ray, 2007b) In this way, the work is seen to suggest that ‘there is no alternative’ for an art conceived of beyond the auspices of the institutional framework of the delineated Bourdieuan field, a criticism which will be discussed later in this chapter by way of considering the possibilities for the ‘alternative’ as ‘deliberative space’ rather than as a default space.

Other artists working with ‘institutional critique’ have sought to challenge existing consensus through politically motivated artist-activist configurations set up in the 1980s, that aimed at targeting institutions that fostered neo-liberalism, by assuming their identities in order to offer correctives. (Ault, 2002: 72)

IMAGE REDACTED

Fig. 8: *Do Women Have to Be Naked to Get into The Met. Museum?* (1989) by the Guerilla Girls, artist-activist collective, based USA

The feminist activism of the Guerilla Girls for example, can be assessed as supplying counter-hegemonic interventions as a self-prescribed ‘conscience of

the art-world' through their billboard poster campaigns and 'pop-up' protest events of the 1980s to the present day. Their seminal work, *Do Women Have to Be Naked to Get into The Met. Museum?* (1989) challenged the under-representation of women artists in the art institution. The Guerilla Girls along with other artist-led initiatives were part of a phenomenon which saw the emergence of many artist-instituted collectives. These collectives were often specifically formed to expose artists' work that was under-represented or excluded from the 'mediated art-world' due to its political, ethnic, sexual, colloquial' and perhaps significantly, its 'unmarketable nature'. (Ault, 2002: 5) This activism shifted sites for art from the physical institution to the 'discursive' space of representation. (Carson, 2002: 121)

A further oft-cited example of 'institutional critique' that challenged the distribution systems of the 'mediated art-world' by questioning property ownership in New York City is Hans Haacke's 1971 exhibition 'that never was' at the Guggenheim Museum. Haacke's work dealt very directly with the economy of art by challenging the ownership of expensive property in New York City and the socio-political structures of the city's 'art-world' with *Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, A Real Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971* which exposed the transactions of Harry Shapolsky's New York-based pervasive real-estate business, between 1951 to 1971 in a series of photographs. Furthermore, it is the proliferation of 'alternative' art spaces set up by artists in unused properties in New York during the 1970s and 1980s in which an early 'artist-led' movement can be identified. (Deutsche, 1998) The emergence of these 'spaces', founded so that artists could exhibit and perform their own work

without interfacing with the institutions of art ‘was time- and context-based’, conditioned by the socio-economic climate of a city at a particular moment. (Ault, 2002: 6) The movement was instigated by artists in response to a specific set of issues relating to scarcity in property in New York during the 1970s, before speculators moved in to put such occupation out of artists reach. This period constituted a moment in time where socio-economic conditions and ‘artist-led’ initiative combined to shape an influential ‘alternative’ economic sphere. The ‘artist spaces movement’ in New York, was however relatively short-lived as the subsequent creation of official cultural quarters by the local authorities and a property boom during the 1990s that meant space became a lucrative commodity. (Sant, 2011: 64) The legacy of this movement however, should not be underestimated in that it offered a model for the development of a global ‘artist-led culture’ in its suggested blue-print for the creation of an independent and ‘deliberative space’, rather than one formed through strategies of opposition and resistance to institution alone. The ability of artists to retain independence from institutional power and maintain freedom from commodification was for many, attempting to articulate the potential of ‘alternative’ art spaces, one of the most significant achievement of initiatives such as the ‘artist spaces movement’. (Wallis, 2002: 170)

‘Artist-led’ culture

It is through ‘dematerialised’ art production and initiatives such as the ‘artist spaces movement’ that artists have sought independence from the official cultural authorities in the ‘field of art’ in exploring various means to articulate a self-determined approach to art-making, its distribution and its reception. The

pursuit of this ‘independent’ culture can be evidenced as the phenomena of what has more recently become known as ‘artist-led culture’. (Rand, 2010) This term along with ‘artist-run’ and ‘artist-initiated’ is now widely used in relation to the ‘alternative’ formats of practice that artists have developed by their own volition, ‘by which they can interrogate the political, cultural, social and economic frameworks within which they operate.’ (Bowman, 2005: 1) The artists working with ‘artist-led’ strategies today continue to adopt stances of opposition and resistance in disrupting the rules and regulations of the ‘mediated art-world’ structure as an expression of disillusionment with the established distributions systems of art. (Goldbard, 2002: 194) However, there are also persistent attempts by artists at circumvention tactics in the setting up of ‘deliberative spaces’ for art as ‘do-it-yourself’ galleries and exhibitions in derelict, unused and found spaces; as process-based art events, ‘happenings’ and performance; self-publishing artists’ books and self-instituted artist collectives. (Stimson and Sholette, 2007) These practices are evident historically in the setting up of physical spaces by artists as a response to a lack of exhibition spaces within their geography.¹⁴ This type of space has been replicated as the artist-led gallery in many major cities throughout the world, though their ‘alternative’ nature is questioned in that it does not necessarily provide a counter-aesthetic or counter-institutional model to the ‘white cube’, but rather replicates it. This view is supported by evidence of established institutions instigating the foundation of ‘artist-led or artist-run’ spaces, almost treating the ‘artist-led’ as genre and often providing little more than a the first rung on the ladder of the ‘mediated art-

¹⁴ Many such ‘independent’ gallery spaces have been set up over the past twenty-five years such as Transmission Gallery, founded in 1983 by graduates from Glasgow School of Art.

world' system. (French, 1998) In a manifesto-type address the artist Arlene Goldbard insists that it is the role of the artist in society today to safe-guard a vestige of independence through the self-delineation of artistic practice other than the gallery to prevent themselves from becoming the 'gatekeepers of an advance screening system for established art museums and commercial galleries.' (Goldbard, 2002: 199)

The premise of much of 'artist-led culture' is that its activity is self-defining, self-instituted and self-organised, so its parameters of operation are set by artists themselves. (Rand, 2010) The true nature of 'artist-led' activity should be to focus on the mechanism of self-institution and 'do-it-yourself' activism that not only resists the co-opting tentacles of commodification imposed by institution, but is also looking for a new cultural form located through strategies of circumvention. For example, the *Copenhagen Free University* (2001) founded by the artists Henrietta Heise and Jakob Jakobsen was set up as an anti-institution of education in the spirit of collectivity that constituted the Situationist movement of 1968. The 'university' published works and hosted artist-led events, discussions and screenings as well as setting up an operational television station *TV-TV*, that focused on methods of self-institution, self-organisation and non-economical behaviour in a variety of formats including the manifesto¹⁵. (Montman, 2006: 176)

To highlight this kind of artist-led project is not to deny that the artists involved are still working within and interfacing with the 'mediated art-world' and the

¹⁵ See 'There is No Alternative: The Future is Self-Organised' by Anthony Davies, Stephan Dillemath and Jakob Jakobsen in *Art and Its Institutions: Current Conflicts, Critique and Collaborations*, Montman, Nina ed. (2006) London: Blackdog Publishing

overarching and ‘unavoidable structure’ of the market, but to invite debate as to the possibilities and nature of ‘alternatives’ as ‘deliberative spaces’ or pockets of independent activity. Such projects offer new models of structure and artistic practice which are positively formed in response to the changing dynamics of the ‘field of art’, rather than being trapped by it. (Ray: 2007b) Overall the projects of ‘artist-led culture’ can be described as those which have resulted from artists’ engagement with processes and materials, in place of an end-product or tangible outcome. From the 1970s to the 1990s ‘artist-led’ production has been developed in response to socio-economic, cultural and political changes in the field that artists began to engage with the environment that ‘impinged on the perceptual and psychological comprehension of the object being viewed’ which in turn, according to Brian Wallis meant an accelerated search, in art terms, for more flexible and ideologically neutral sites for art, than those provided by the conventional museum or gallery. (Wallis, 2002: 170) In this way, further examples of ‘deliberative spaces’ or Wallis’ ‘art-neutral’ sites, set up in acts of confrontational Situationist ‘detournement’¹⁶ can be seen as providing not just outlets for reception of ‘artist-led’ production in formats of display, but as art projects in their own right. (Purves, 2005: 102; Sadler, 1999: 44) Gordon Matta-Clark’s utopian enterprise *Food* (1971-1973), for example, was a fully operational restaurant run by artists where the New York underground art community could meet, discuss, interact and share food in a social network and economic hub that delineated its cultural role in the city through practice and production. (Jacob, 2005: 4)

¹⁶ The Situationist methodology of ‘detournement’ is an act whereby an expression of the capitalist system is turned against itself. These acts ‘permit anyone to take part in raids on official culture.’ (Sadler, 1999: 44)

IMAGE REDACTED

Fig. 9: *Food* (1971-1973) by Gordon Matta-Clark, New York City

A ‘Space of Possibles’¹⁷

In discussing the social production of art it has been argued that the dominant ideology of a society is founded on that society’s material and economic basis by those groups who hold a position of power. (Woolf, 1993: 52) However it can be observed that the dominant ideology is never monolithic or totally pervasive. (Woolf, 1993: 53) Indeed, as Bridget Fowler suggests there have always been opportunities for artistic autonomy and the creation of ‘alternatives’ in the ‘field of art’, even when the academy system prevailed. (Fowler, 2000:7) Furthermore, a distinction can be drawn between the dominant ideology and its

¹⁷ The ‘space of possibles’ is a Bourdieuan term coined in *The Rules of Art* (1996: 234)

co-existing alternatives. (Woolf, 1993: 53) In discussing base and superstructure in Marxist cultural theory, Raymond Williams argues that alternative ideologies can be either 'residual', in that they were formed in the past, but are still active in present practice or 'emergent' as generating newly formed groups which can turn against an existing cultural or political order. (Williams, 1977: 121) Alternative ideologies may also be oppositional in challenging the dominant ideology, but at the same time retain their 'alternative' properties by co-existing with that ideology or by operating in pockets within it. Therefore, the space for 'alternatives' is never entirely blocked in that as Williams emphatically states in *Marxism and Literature* (1977), 'no mode of production and therefore no dominant social order and therefore no dominant culture ever in reality includes or exhausts all human practice, human energy and human intention.' (Williams 1977: 125) In this way there is always a space for the 'alternative': for thinking and action directed toward the elaboration of another social order other than capitalism, even if that social order occurs within it. In the 'field of art' as a Bourdieuan 'field of struggles', the practice and production of artists as the projects and spaces of anti-commodity, anti-institution and 'artist-led culture' are all direct assertions of new cultural forms and possibilities.

The notion of a 'field of struggles' as a system that forges 'alternative space' has led critical theorists to describe the 'field' as one which is both antagonistic and agonistic. (Mouffe, 2007; Bishop, 2004) The antagonism lies in the idea of a hierarchical system which reveals a struggle between 'the consecrated and the new avant-garde'. (Fowler, 1997: 48) It is easy to identify the 'agonistic' struggle of art in the configuration of power relations by which plural art-worlds are

constructed. As competing and/or co-existing, the totality of plural ‘art-worlds’ can be couched as a battleground where different hegemonic projects are confronted, often without a possibility of reconciliation. In writing about democratic public space, Chantal Mouffe contests the claim that art has lost its critical power, ‘because all the critique it generates is recuperated and neutralised by the dominant ideology of capitalism’ and the mainstreaming processes of co-optation. (Mouffe, 2007: 1) She argues that every hegemonic order, in this case the mainstream or ‘mediated art-world’, is susceptible to being challenged by counter-hegemonic practices which disarticulate the existing order. In this way, to engage in ‘alternative practice’ is to focus on the anti-hierarchical, raising questions of authenticity and perpetuating an ideal of self-institution as a state in which the artist is able ‘to control power relations, retain and maintain independence.’ (Mouffe, 2007: 2)

In moving beyond challenges to the *status quo* as dictated by the ‘mediated art-world’ Clement Greenberg expressed the view that the most important function of the *avant-garde*, with which I am equating artistic practice of the ‘alternative’ sphere, ‘is not to experiment, but to keep culture moving in the midst of ideological confusion and violence.’ (Greenberg, 1939, 8) The work of the artist Felix Gonzalez Torres (1957-1996) has been much written about in the context of art and gift theory as engaging with ‘give-away’ art practice (Purves, 2005) as part of the tenet of ‘relational aesthetics’ (Bourriaud, 1998), and as a straightforward project of ‘institutional critique’. The ‘gifting’ character of Gonzalez-Torres’ work is located in his installations of piles of liquid-centred

sweets as ‘portraits’¹⁸ and in his poster stacks such as *Endless* as they are given as members of the viewing public are permitted to take them away. (McIlveen, 2005: 177)

IMAGE REDACTED

Fig. 10: *Untitled* (1992/3) by Felix Gonzalez-Torres, poster stack

These works are admittedly usually shown in institutional settings, but arguably their creation of ‘alternative’ economy comes into being through the enacting of a form of cultural ‘dihiscence’¹⁹ as gift-function in order to question issues of ownership and economy as these works can be replenished and replicated at sites

¹⁸ The piles of sweets are ‘portraits’ in that they consist of the equivalent weight of the person portrayed.

¹⁹ James Mooney cites ‘dihiscence’ as a Derridan term which means ‘to scatter and disseminate’. (Fagan, 2007)

around the world simultaneously. (Mooney, 2006: 28) The only material work retained by the institution in relation to these projects is a ‘Certificate of Authenticity’, whereas it is the public who could be perceived as ‘owning’ the actual work in that interaction has to take place in order for it exist. In raising questions concerning ownership, authorship and authenticity in art, it could be argued that Gonzalez Torres’ work through the gift-function not only offers, according to James Mooney ‘the nullification of conventional concepts’ operational in the ‘mediated art-world’, but also creates an ‘alternative’ economic space as an artwork that continues to challenge in perpetuity. The artist himself, in interview with curator Hans Ulrich Obrist²⁰, described the aesthetic and political strategy of his work as akin to gift-function as virus:

‘At this point I do not want to be outside of the structures of power, I do not want to be the opposition, the alternative. Alternative to what? To power? No. I want to have power. It’s effective in terms of change. I want to be like a virus that belongs to the institution. All the ideological apparatus are, in other words, replicating themselves, because that’s the way culture works. So if I function as a virus, an imposter, an infiltrator, I will always replicate myself together with those institutions.’

In turns, this approach could be interpreted as a strategy to create the ‘optimum economy’ of art as a space in which new projects can be forged beyond the field.

Concurring with the view of Gonzalez-Torres in considering ‘alternative’ structures for art, Julie Ault highlights a quandary in the usage of the terms alternative, marginal and oppositional, as problematic for participants in the ‘artist-led’ arena in that they promote a hierarchical understanding of the field as a

²⁰ From *Hans Ulrich Obrist Interviews: Volume 1* Arsene-Henry, Charles ed. (2003)

system in which ‘alternative’ is merely as a differentiation category to draw a distinction between it, and the practice and production of the institutions of art in the mainstream. (Ault, 2002: 4) In an implicit critique of ‘field theory’, for her, artists should be discussing how ‘alternative enterprises’ can be shaped beyond articulations that are relationally defined with that to which they are providing an ‘alternative’.

In *The Rules of Art* (1996) Bourdieu asserts that radical transformations of the field as a ‘space of position-takings’ through artistic revolutions can only be the result of transformations of the relations of power that are constitutive of that space as the ‘field of art’. (Bourdieu 1996: 234) According to a number of art theorists who have written on the subject it is in establishing a form of independence from the regulations of the mainstream that is key to the maintenance of artist-led culture as ‘alternative’ culture, but that independent culture needs to be defended with a collective and altruistic approach for the common-wealth of art-world agents. (Moore, 2004; Bourdieu, 1996: 347) This call for collectivity is a common factor in supporting the possibilities for ‘alternative’ practice as artist collective groups, but should not only concern acts of resistance to the co-opting nature of market forces, but become a movement in itself. (Stimson & Sholette, 2007) This strategy is suggested acknowledging the difficulties faced by the new artistic or ‘alternative’ group that tries to impose itself on the field and finds itself fending off attempts at modification by established institutions that attempt to neutralise its radical potential for change. The delineation of spaces for ‘alternatives’ is not to assert that capitalism ceases to be victorious, in that these spaces often used for cultural and political

opposition are continually attacked, co-opted and instrumentalised. In this way it is important that artists suggest strategies, processes and ‘spaces’ which operate as cultural form in order to mobilise the ‘alternative art-world’ in ‘defining the possibility of an inclusive and liberating artistic practice’. (Sholette, 2004a) Such strategies, I argue are those devised beyond the field, through the ‘do-it-yourself’ ethos of ‘artist-led culture’ which involves artistic behaviours of circumvention, rather than resistance.

Surprisingly perhaps, it is Bourdieu who suggests the notion of ‘a space of possibles’ for alternative action, albeit as part of the field formed through a negative relationship. (Bourdieu: 1996, 233) Bourdieu strongly believed that alternatives could only exist as part of the field working within its ‘ensemble of constraints’ and thought that those who believed in simple ‘alternatives’ advocated by defenders of creative spontaneity were proposing such a space from a position of naivety. (Bourdieu 1996, 234) For innovative or revolutionary research as ‘alternative’ to have a chance of conception, it is ‘necessary for them to exist in a potential state at the heart of the system of already realised possibles’ and therefore in a state of co-existence. (Bourdieu 1996, 235)

Perhaps then, a more difficult to achieve approach to ‘alternative enterprise’ is that which Raymond Williams described as ‘the long revolution’ which can only triumph in the dispossession of ‘the central political organs of capitalist society’. (Williams, 1977:62) Of course the creation of autonomous space through the dispossession of power from established art institutions in pursuit of this ‘missing revolutionary horizon’ is not seen as a realistic strategy for most artists working today. (Ray, 2007b) However, the artists involved with ‘artist-led culture’

demonstrate a range of intentions and aspirations ranging from those who just want ‘a piece of the action’ which might involve engagement, with institutions of art, ‘to others who want nothing less than a revolution.’ (Ault, 2002: 14) Furthermore, it has been observed that what is common to configurations of ‘alternative’ practice and production is that since the 1980s there has been no single institutional model established, meaning that many hybrid forms of cultural organisation have come to emerge. The formats of these ‘spaces’ are varied and flexible, responding to socio-economic, cultural and political conditions, in suiting the needs of artists and their artistic production and importantly in the context of this essay, in forging new imaginings of space. Some of these spaces are ‘pre-institutional (e.g. artists’ collectives), some anti-institutional and some deliberately replicating established institutional structures admittedly with different content.’ (Wallis, 2002: 170)

Returning to Mouffe’s discussion of democratic public space we see that the maintenance of the characteristics of agonism and antagonism are important in enabling the emergence of what she describes as ‘new political frontiers’ in the formation of alternative structure and practices. (Mouffe 2007: 4) The problem with the rationalist and individualist economic approach of the ‘uncontested hegemony’ is that it cannot grasp the pluralistic nature of the social world which renders it ‘incapable of thinking politically as it attempts to squeeze varying perspectives into a harmonious ensemble’. (Mouffe, 2007: 2) The most important consequence then, of the agonistic model of ‘struggles’, is that it has the capability to challenge the widespread conception that the ‘field of art’ or ‘mediated-art world’, as a terrain from which consensus can emerge.

As discussed in Chapter 1, the relations between art-worlds and the relations of artists to art-worlds are complex and multi-faceted, in that it is possible for artists to simultaneously occupy the ‘mediated art-world’ and the ‘alternative art-world’. Similarly, within the ‘field of art’ there will always co-exist, diverse forms of practice and production in a ‘mixed economy’ that works between the mainstream as ‘large-scale field’ and ‘alternative’ as ‘restricted-field’, and between the market-sphere and the gift-sphere. Furthermore, ‘alternative’ formats of practice and production are often derived from the relations of conflict in strategies of opposition and resistance to the dominating institutions of the field, but also by the practices of circumvention in forging new cultural forms, that seek to look beyond it.

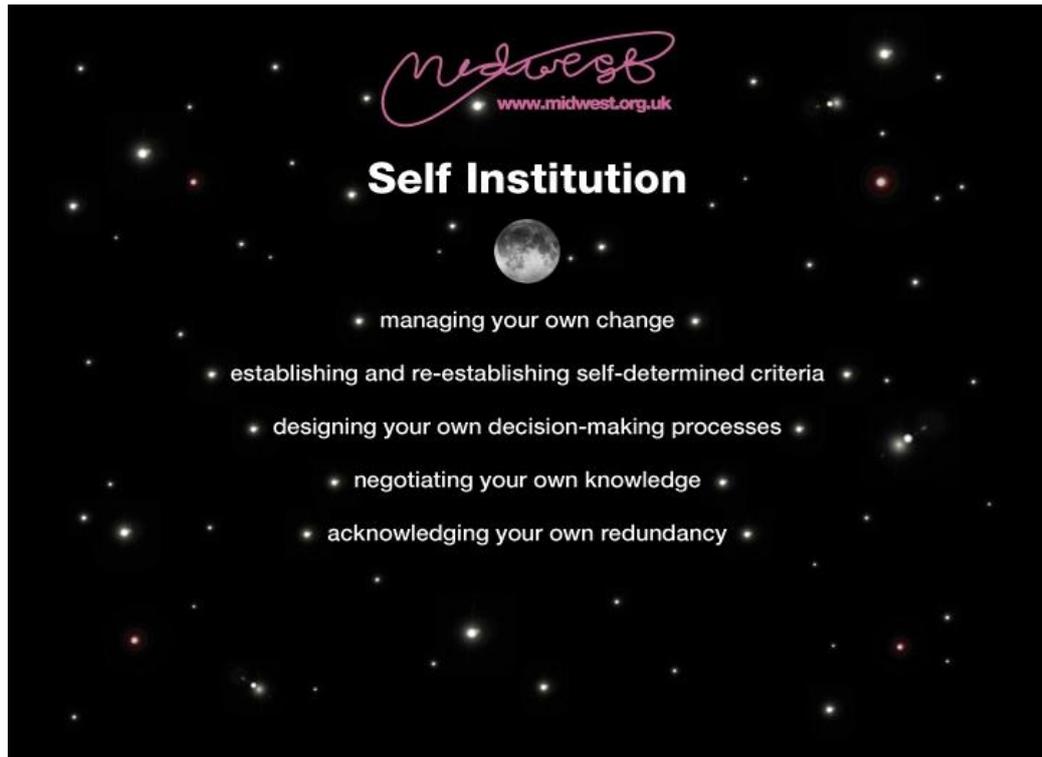


Fig.11: Midwest manifesto of self-institution (2006), developed with artists through a programme of events that aimed to reinforce the value of 'artist-led' culture, based Birmingham, West Midlands, UK (2003-2008) . Designed by Ian Richards, Heavy Object

CONCLUSION

THE 'MIXED ECONOMY' OF ART

When economists talk about 'a mixed economy' they mean an economy which contains both the private ownership of the means of production, infrastructure and institutions alongside the state ownership of some of these elements. (Moore, 2004: 471) The notion of a 'mixed economy' allows for the profit motive of capitalism, but denies absolute autonomy as some decisions pertaining to ownership and action are within the state's sphere of influence. Some have argued that there is no such thing as a 'mixed economy' by way of mixing the capitalist system with that of the state, because 'even state-owned enterprises are subject to market forces.' (Groys, 2008: 5) However, in looking at the etymology of the term, it can be revealed that rather than an attempt to pitch the operations of capitalism against the operations of the state, it was actually coined to identify any economic system which strays from the ideology of capitalism. It is through examination of both the structure and practices of the 'field of art' as a site of economic exchange that I have sought in this essay to assert a formulation of a 'mixed economy', which does not attempt to present a mixture of the capitalist-run with the state-owned, but a mixture of a 'market economy' and a 'gift economy' that works concurrently and interactively in the economy of art.

Using Mauss' structuralist conception that the economy of any given system consists of the 'total social facts' of its social world and Bourdieu's proposition of the dynamic and relationally formed 'field of art', I have attempted to explain the complex relationships of both the market-forces and gift-forces in action within the economy of art in terms of both 'art-world' structures and artistic practice. Furthermore, in examining the dualist structures and binary relations of the economic and social world as a Bourdieuan 'field' that pitches 'the market' against 'the gift', *formalists* against *substantivists*, the political economy against the moral economy, the mainstream against the 'alternative', I have sought to reveal that economic and non-economic approaches are not polarised, but in accordance with Sahlins' typology of reciprocity operate along a continuum demonstrating degrees of interdependency, and a state of co-existence.

It is in the analysis of the 'art-world' as a social structure and the actuality of artistic practice in order to articulate 'alternatives' as forms and spaces that it can be observed that 'the field' of art' operates not just as an orthodox economy in neo-classical mode, but as a heterodox economy. (Moore, 2004) This heterodox economy, consisting of not only dual, but plural 'art-worlds', does not operate as an exchange that is solely concerned with one form of economic organisation, namely the transaction of mere commodities in the marketplace to gain monetary rewards. Rather, it functions with a multiplicity of exchanges that accrue a range of different profit-types that include material wealth, but also the acquisition of symbolic value, where the value of art is not necessarily related to its price as material object, but to the positioning of status and rank of the artist that can be

‘purchased’ with a currency of legitimisation and validation awarded by the institutions of art. In the light of Greg Sholette’s proposition of a dualist structure in which the ‘real art world’ as ‘alternative art-world’ exists in parallel, though not entirely separately with the ‘mediated art-world’, it can be concluded that the majority of artists through their practice are concerned, both consciously and unconsciously, with the generation of symbolic profits, which pertain to a gift-economy rather than to the material profits of the market-economy. (Sholette, 2004b) This is not to suggest that artists cannot occupy more than one ‘art-world’ at any one time, and most indeed operate within both spheres, revealing an interdependency of practice. The ‘field of art’ as with all heterodox economies, is multi-faceted in its structure and practices, but it shares a commonality with other heterodox economies in its interrogation of neo-classical economic orthodoxy and the assumption of the rationality of the economic agent’s motive to maximise profits, as the only way of understanding the workings of economic and social life. It is Mary Douglas in her introduction to Mauss’s *The Gift* (1990) who alerts us to the dangers of reduction in structuralist dyads by suggesting that Mauss rather uses a more considered approach arguing that ‘structural analysis does not work by reducing all symbols to one or two of their number, rather, it requires an abstract statement of the patterned relations of all the symbols to one another.’ (Douglas, 1990: xviii)

In looking to the ‘alternative art-world’ and its contingent practices, its co-operation and transfers with the ‘mediated art-world’, and the attempts by ‘artist-led culture’ to articulate ‘alternative’ forms, institutions and space, that evidence is provided that economic relations which do not involve monetary exchange or

go beyond monetary exchange though invisible, misrecognised or ignored, form just as much a part of the creation of economy. In this way, it should not be assumed that 'the market' is the default form of economic organisation, but rather just one of several modes including 'the gift'. As Andrew Sayer asserts, 'capitalism is absolutely dependent on non-market forms of co-ordination of divisions of labour as well as market ones'. (Sayer, 2000: 3) The autonomy of market forces can only ever be partially realised because the market can never completely escape its dependence on the non-economic processes or aspects of social life. (Abbing, 2002: 56)

In his criticism of theories of gift economy James Carrier outlines a tendency in anthropological description to 'characterise entire societies in terms of distinctive forms of circulation: societies of gift and societies of commodity' (Schrift, 1997: viii), whereas according to him these forms operate with varying degrees along a spectrum that stretches between the economic and the non-economic. In this way it can be argued that there are aspects of capitalist societies that operate in a way that cannot be wholly reduced to the profit motive of capitalist calculation. The compromise offered by Carrier as to how to theorise gift exchange is to assert that 'society contains a capitalist-sphere, a sphere of Maussian commodity exchange, existing together with a non-capitalist sphere, a sphere of Maussian gift exchange' (Carrier 1997: ix) As he explains further these dichotomies still offer only a simplification of what is rather a more nebulous picture in the actuality of practice. The radical contrast between the two types of economies as 'market' and 'gift' is an imagined chasm as these realms are 'discursive rather than the geography of the real world'. (Jolly 1991:46) It could be asserted that the

geography and economy of the 'real art world', by which I mean the totality of plural art-worlds, is analogous with that of the gift economy in that it involves 'a complex of motives, rituals, distribution rules, institutionalised ties and modes of discourse by which small social worlds' can be produced within mass societies. (Cheal, 1988: 167) It is in 'alternative practice' as product, space and strategy that these 'small worlds' can be located as pockets of 'alternative' economic activity. This activity, created through acts of resistance, opposition and circumvention means we can question Polanyi's assertion that the 'great transformation' from archaic or 'gift economy' to capitalist economy is complete. Furthermore, it can be argued that these pockets as 'small social worlds' offer a dimension of social interaction as a post-modern 'alternative' which is much neglected by many political economists. (Cheal, 1988: 87) In exploring the structures and practices of 'the real art-world' in the light of Mauss' original text, we begin to understand his observation that the gift-function can persist in certain sectors of modern society and that the neo-Marxist conception of a corrosive mercantile spirit has not yet fully invaded the 'field of art' in that 'all is not yet couched in terms of purchase and sale...Our morality is not solely commercial' (Mauss, 1990:63) It is in looking to the 'alternatives' articulated by artists as self-determined and self-instituted forms of economic organisation, the 'deliberative spaces' borne out of artist-led culture, along with the continued projects of 'dematerialisation' and institutional critique that suggests that the negative impact of commodity relations is an incomplete process and 'islands of symbolic and meaningful behaviour persist' in the economy of the art exchange in contemporary society, as part of a 'mixed economy'. (Smith, 2001: 75)

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