WORK IN PROGRESS – Holm Friebe

"There is no path that leads away from the new, because such a path would be also new."
Boris Groys, On the New

"Further ahead is where no one knows their way around" is a well-known dictum in commerce. As a universal truism, this phrase also applies to other fields — art, for example. The inquisitive search for the new seems to be something that humans are born with—even if there are many counterexamples of cultures and centuries that managed perfectly well without innovation. In any case, the modern West is based on the notion of progress: the idea that things do not have to remain the way they are; that they can only get better. The path that led us from the hand-axe to the computer mouse and continues on, right into the future, sometimes trails off or is badly marked. At any rate, it is clear what is important for the economy up ahead—further on, where no one knows their way around. Or at least what it requires when it dares to move into this territory. "Turning ideas into financial returns" is the straightforward definition of innovation used by the Boston Consulting Group, for instance.

The search for new profit opportunities brings a certain dynamic into the economic growth process, pushing the old market equilibrium to a newer and higher level. Joseph Schumpeter is credited with reinforcing this view of capitalism over classic equilibrium models, which now seem quaintly old-fashioned. Schumpeter's oft-quoted "creative destruction" is a "process of mutation that incessantly overthrows economic structures from within." Economic progress appears to be a careless battleground here, the cut and thrust of competitive entrepreneurs who continue to expand the borders of what is conceivable and viable with visionary and audacious projects. When Guglielmo Marconi became the first to transmit radio messages across the Atlantic, the share prices of transatlantic cable companies plummeted. As the saying goes, you can't make an omelette without breaking eggs.

Blue flower, blue ocean

Compared to the radio, the bicycle or file sharing, most innovations hailed by the economy today seem to be purely me-too products, i.e. imitations, or at best incremental innovations, cosmetic improvements without real added value. Precisely for this reason, however, hardly any other topic interests the manager caste. Now, after outsourcing has entwined value chains all the way around the world; after Six Sigma has squeezed out the last drops of process efficiency, and funds have been squandered on the magic realism of financial speculation, people are starting to notice that growth is impossible without innovation. The transcendent blue flower sought by everyone is really transformational innovation—able to open up completely new markets. The consultants W. Chan Kim and Renee Mauborgne have delivered a popular metaphor for this in the "Blue Ocean Strategy". While the red ocean of existing markets is characterised by bloodthirsty and merciless competition, a daring Odysseus, courageously advancing through the blue ocean of absent markets, can expect magic growth rates and Biblical profits through a lack of competition. The prophet and poster child for this mythical land over the rainbow is Steve Jobs, who brought Apple back from the brink of bankruptcy by launching groundbreaking innovations such as the iPod, iPhone and

iPad—turning his company into the world's most valuable technology enterprise. One hears reports that in the midst of a difficult restructuring phase, he had a ship laden with marble slabs for the first Apple flagship store in New York halted in its Italian port, so that he could personally control the grain patterns. The management wunderkind as artistic genius? We will come back to this point. But what about the field of art—what effect does the concept of innovation have on art?

Innovative art

A major one—yet upon first sight, rather minor. Naturally, every work of art claims to represent an innovation. Otherwise it would merely be decoration. On the other hand, art and commerce—leaving the hypertrophic art market out of consideration for the moment—function under different coordinate systems. Art creates problems, and the economy is interested in efficient solutions; the artist creates ambiguity and disparity, while successful brands have a clear unique selling point. Indeed, this list could be expanded almost ad infinitum. So the words "innovative art" could either be considered a superfluous phrase or a slightly distorted description of what art achieves at its core. More suitably, one could reference Niklas Luhmann or even Rainald Goetz and the criterion of "timeliness". This is why some art already appears "dated" to us after just a short time, while other artworks seem perpetually relevant. On the other hand, art keeps up with the times and orients itself on progress. Important findings inspired by science, such as central perspective, revolutionized our viewing habits. Futurism hoped to fill the frame with the beauty of a speeding racecar. Every new technical medium, from copperplate engraving to the Internet, has generated its own art forms and genres. If one looks at the history of art as a whole, with its succession of styles and fashions, then it appears from a distance to be an omnidirectional and evolutionary search—a sequence of Schumpeterian mutations and revolutions from within—and thus as a long chain of artistic innovations. But in the actual light of day, the most profound innovation drivers were not based on industrial or technical innovations—on changes of a material basis. The actual artistic leaps were based on a theoretical superstructure, on the paradigms of what art was and is, and what it will be in the future. In 1964, commenting on Warhol's Brillo boxes and the ensuing need for explanation, the art theoretician Arthur C. Danto brought this idea to a point in his seminal "Artworld" essay: "It could not have been art fifty years ago. But then there could not have been, everything being equal, flight insurances in the Middle Ages, or Etruscan typewriter erasers. The world has to be ready for certain things, the artworld no less than the real one."

The subsequent testing of thousands of plateaus as to whether they are suitable as new paradigms for artistic positions actually constitutes this game of newness within the art world. And the re-association, or re-evaluation, of the old supplies the distinction that opens up a new differentiation. One only needs to look at Joseph Beuys' work "The Silence of Marcel Duchamp is Overrated." Creative destruction is as much a part of the repertoire— witness Arnulf Rainer's overpaintings or Michael Landy's "Art Bin" for a current example.

Furthur!

The artistic avant-garde takes on a special dialectic position in this game. They didn't seek new frontiers in the fine arts alone, but rather in a new and holistic interlacing of art and life. "Furthur!" (sic) was the destination spray-painted on the hood of the Day-Glo bus which Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters used to travel around the USA in the early sixties.

They were messengers of the psychedelic revolution, always on the lookout for the next daydream—"the current fantasy"—always challenging the limits of what was considered socially presentable and practicable. Those who read Tom Wolfe's Merry Prankster chronicle "The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test" will realise that ultimately, this "Furthur!" remained stuck in the mire of narcotic drugs—probably more so because the goal was never clear from the beginning. However, one willy-nilly effect that Kesey and his followers had was that their psychedelic release pushed open the door to a completely different blue ocean: that of the pop industry, which for decades would become the largest field of growth within the cultural and creative industry. A bohemian capitalism makeover. In "Sexbeat", Diedrich Diederichsen recalls the historical transition point of the early 1970s, when "*further* no longer meant *further.* Rather *further* was nothing more than the *other.* Ken Kesey repeatedly referred to this in his speech at the Vietnam Day Committee in 1966, when he warned others of *playing their game.*" In the hipster cosmos of the time, the reverse gear appeared to be the only way out of the jumbled 20th century: *"Historicity as weapon"*.

Around this same time, a seismic quake was registered in the art world, caused by the implosion of progress. "By 1970, at the latest, art had reached a threshold, at which point anything seemed to be permitted," Christoph Menke and Juliane Rebentisch note in their introduction to the anthology "Kunst Fortschritt Geschichte": "This situation led to a crisis, particularly regarding the notion of progress in art theory." But as Posthistoire soon became boring and stagnant without the idea of "further", the "dissolution of boundaries" soon came into play along with the timeless "intensive aesthetic experience": "a kind of meta-progress, i.e. a growing reflection on the paradoxical relationship between aesthetics and technology." In other words: progress filters through to the next higher level. So is there still—or once again—progress in art, by deliberately and calculatedly "playing their game". Elke Buhr, deputy editor-in-chief of "Monopol" magazine, thinks so: "Art has become a user interface, a social tool, experimental ground for all areas of society: ecology, social work, cinema, etc." The current hot topic is climate change. Visionary architecture, such as the "Walking House" by the Danish artist group N55 unveiled at Emscherkunst.2010, or the "climate capsules" which Friedrich von Borries recently showed in Hamburg, open up new dimensions in problem-solving to politics and the natural sciences.

According to Buhr, this process is similar to space exploration, in which inventions in NASA's high-tech laboratories ultimately led to useful household appliances through non-linear impact chains. We should not overestimate this spin-off effect: a Teflon pan has nothing to do with outer space; the American company DuPont had already invented Teflon in 1938, and a Frenchman patented a Teflon-coated steel pan as early as 1954. Looking back, the entire field of manned space travel appears more like an exceptionally expensive genre of happenings and performance art. Nevertheless, there is something new: art as an interdisciplinary space lab for other social areas and problems, including the economy. Yet this is not really new at all.

Artful making

The historical reference point for the productive interlacing of disciplines is and remains the Renaissance. During this period, the natural sciences and the area of fine and applied art reciprocally affected one another, producing innovations such as the Copernican turn, calculus, movable type and the sonnet. The American media theoretician Douglas Rushkoff thinks that we as a society have once again reached the point of "renaissance—a moment of

renegotiating old ideas and values in a new context" and "innovation on the widest possible level", in which we "have the freedom to redefine the arts, systems of government, religions and industries."

A rapprochement between art and the economy has repeatedly been attempted. And not without success. The Anglo-Saxon Arts & Crafts movement, like the German Werkbund, aimed for a world "in which art and economy speak the same language". The Bauhaus also grew out of the idea of upgrading the medieval stonemasons' lodge for the age of industrial mass production. There is hardly any other point in history that seems more favourable than today for reattempting this, for lying in bed together and bearing innovations. These are fertile days, and not only because the role model of the artist (where he or she is not already marketed as a branded product or midsize company), is changing. The artist is becoming the economically-minded interface manager, who, under the constraints of uncertainty and time pressure, is able to cobble together and orchestrate a heterogeneous production network. But also because the economy is very receptive at the moment to genre-exploding ideas and external impulses. After all, it has discovered that when using bureau- and technocratic procedures of innovation management, it tends to land in the corridor of what is expected—in the red ocean of generic competition.

"Artful Making—What Managers Need to Know About How Artists Work" is a typical title from the growing body of management literature, professing to look beyond the rim of the proverbial teacup—over to the world of the arts. Already at the turn of the 21st century, Franz Liebl and Wolfgang Ullrich promoted "brand hacking" as an innovative tool: artists should irreverently take possession of brands, thus allowing companies to gain new perspectives. The current fantasy making its way up to the executive board level is a process known as "design thinking". Business leaders should proceed like designers in reinventing products, processes and business models: impartially and optimistically, in heterogeneous teams and with as many iterative loops as possible. Instead of incremental improvements, this is a matter of designing complex systems, the "holistic customer experience". "Think outside the box" is the fitting mantra of design thinking.

Open innovation

In the end, the most sustainable advances in the area of innovation are concerned with the very nature of innovation itself: away from isolated applications, which are incubated in corporate research silos before being trimmed to marketability—and towards open and collaborative multi-stakeholder processes. The 2008 OECD report "The New Nature of Innovation" lists numerous examples of how "open innovation" can be practiced on open development platforms which include customers, suppliers and competitors—thus avoiding the notorious "not invented here" syndrome. However, this message has not arrived, let alone been understood, everywhere. Only gradually is an expanded notion of innovation establishing itself over a purely technologically-oriented definition of the term. This expanded concept also focuses on innovations that cannot be directly measured in hard numbers and cold cash. Social innovations are incommensurate with the funds spent on research and development, and do not increase the number of patent applications. New practices, formats and models for action can only rarely be patented. Furthermore, they do not usually have one or a few identifiable creators, but are generated in the social arena, where they are adapted, aligned and enhanced. For instance, no one can say for sure how the phenomenon of "co-working" actually developed. Nevertheless, it has spread widely as a timely way of

life and work — particularly in large urban centres, fostering enormous creative potential. Arriving from Britain, which was always ahead of the game in the political perception and appreciation of its creative industry, the concept of "hidden innovation" has recently caught on here. This encompasses innovations which fly under the radar of statistics, and which feed on a *hinterland* of ideas. These innovations are often not even consciously recognised as such, but have enormous influence on the capacity for advancement and with it, market prosperity—as they constitute the topsoil for other innovations. They are generated in what are often considered less innovative segments, such as the educational system, the health care sector or administration. The cultural and creative industry produce such innovations—not exactly on an assembly line, but rather in workshops or studios.
In open-source procedures, new handling and socialisation forms are tested, new concepts and formats are developed. Similar to the Internet, the art world functions as an integral whole in producing such social innovations. The local creative scene and its institutions, including trade fairs and festivals, act as a sounding board and amplifier for this form of productive swarm intelligence.

An art fair which considers its role to be innovative has a double function here—on the one hand, acting as a prototypical participatory platform in creating an environment that fosters the process of circulation, mutation and selection of ideas—and on the other, permanently questioning its own existence, while also radically re-conceiving and reinventing itself. In this process, one of the most important principles of "design thinking" must be taken to heart: function before convention! When the function of an art fair can be achieved without exhibition halls, speaker systems, etc. then it must be replaced. And when the art fair format no longer makes any sense, it should be swapped for something better, which naturally no one can as yet describe. One could also call this process creative destruction. But without it, innovations simply are not possible; progress itself is and remains a *work in progress.*

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