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Enrichment: a critique of commodities, by Luc Boltanski and Arnaud Esquerre, translated by Catherine Porter, Cambridge, Polity, 2020, 600 pp., £ 35.00 (hardback), ISBN 9781509528721 (hardback)

In 2017, the same year when the prominent French sociologists Luc Boltanski and Arnaud Esquerre published their book *Enrichment: A Critique of Commodities* (in French, translated into English in 2020), Bloomberg opened their new headquarters building in the City of London. The newly erected structure encapsulated multiple layers of enrichment: the business news corporation, which made financial profits from its effective, globalised and outsourced information services, housed in what was labelled as "the world's most sustainable building," carbon neutral, aesthetically striking and built using locally sourced materials through community engagement. The spectacular building incorporated ancient Roman archaeological remains that were uncovered during the excavation and paid tribute to Walbrook river, long relegated to flow as an underground sewer, through a trio of stunning fountains designed by the Spanish artist Cristina Iglesias. It is this kind of seamless intertwining of global capitalism, high culture, sustainable design and narratives and meaning-making that interest Boltanski and Esquerre.

In *Enrichment* Boltanski and Esquerre seek to discern the process of value creation and profit accumulation in late capitalism, characterised by a drive to sell things to people who already have all the necessities they need. This form of capitalism does not replace the traditional serial industrial production, supplying high volumes of standardised goods at low prices, but is developed as an addition to it, as the industrial production of standardised goods has been delocalised to countries with a cheaper labour force. Having dislocated the workshop industries, the rich – or old industrial countries – have been developing a new mode of capitalist production, which is about creating "differences" and discourses of value, used to justify premium prices in the market. This book explores the logic of such difference-making and forms of valuation.

What gets established and recognised as a value able to command a high price depends on a number of cultural mechanisms and strategies. The market of goods or commodities is not just an interplay of utility rationalities, but a contest of ideas and narratives. Here Boltanski and Esquerre argue that the establishment of a thing's value does not precede, but follows the price. People need to be able to refer to a narrative to justify paying a lot of money for things, which serve functions other than utility. Such a commodity only becomes outdated and obsolete when the valuation narrative is no longer available; they do not wear and tear, strictly speaking. Their value depends on culture. To stabilise high prices in this way producers need to create discourses of valuation. This process appears to be strongly linked with growing inequality: Boltanski and Esquerre argue that the increasing importance of the economy of enrichment reflects the concentration of wealth in the top 1%. While Thomas Piketty identified the inheritance of capital as the vehicle of this concentration, Boltanski and Esquerre study what impact this concentration has on commodities, where the highest profit margins characterise those kinds of production that service the ultra-rich and (just) very rich people. However, the middle class is not absent from the enrichment economy, it remains relevant, shifting its consumption patterns toward objects and activities that serve purposes other than the satisfaction of everyday needs (consuming as if they were rich). However, in this process the middle classes go beyond the conspicuous consumption that seeks to display social status through distinction, as influentially argued by Pierre Bourdieu. The production of symbolic goods becomes the drive of the economy itself, not just a social process of status demarcation.

This leads to a different form of production that diverges from the industrial capitalist way of producing standard, cheap goods, at the same time exploiting and exhausting natural resources and human labour, where these goods eventually become trash and valueless. In the enrichment economy it is not necessary even to produce a new thing: existing things can be enriched, endowed with meaning and sold at premium prices. This applies to what could be considered as trash, obsolete industrial commodities or just old things. As Boltanski and Esquerre put it, anything can be enriched: industrial sites become cultural heritage destinations for tourists, old cars and old furniture become collectables, old clothes become vintage, and houses become both collectables and assets. In this process of enrichment, things acquire a new narrative identity. Capitalist production in this enrichment economy is about creating genealogies of things, narrating their identity and value and offering them to the market at a high price.

In this way, according to Boltanski and Esqurrre, heritage-making is not the opposite of capitalism, but it is at the heart of the capitalist logic of the enrichment economy: "There is nothing that cannot be enriched, whether it comes from a more or less ancient past or is a contemporary object enriched in the process of fabrication. But a thing – any "thing" at all – can be enriched in various ways. It can be enriched physically (for example, in the case of an old house or apartment, by making the beams or joists visible) and/or culturally (for example, by relating the object to other things with which it has a certain harmony). Cultural enrichment of the latter sort always presupposes using a narrative structure in order to select, from within the multiplicity of potentially relatable phenomena, the differences presented by the object in question that can be considered especially pertinent and that must therefore be singled out and highlighted in the discourses that accompany the object's circulation. In this sense, enrichment economies have as their principal resource the creation and shaping of differences and identities" (p. 44).

This is a very interesting argument. In their long book, Boltanski and Esquerre propose that there are several forms in which the process of valuation can take place in the enrichment economy. These are what they call a standard form (industrial goods), trend form (cyclical production of differences, such as in fashion), collection form (creating a framework for acquiring things that fulfil a system) and asset form (things bought with the aim to resell them in the future). One and the same thing can actually operate in different forms, depending on the context and institutional set up, for instance, a Ford Model T car. They also trace different sub-systems of the enrichment economy, such as the luxury industry, which is defined by placing great emphasis on the genealogy of the things that they sell and careful masking of the industrial process of their actual production. This is why the giant, warehouse-size shops of Chanel and Armani in Hong Kong appear as oxymorons: the large scale contradicts the very notion of luxury. The collection form is less closely coupled with the notion of exclusivity, because anything can be collected, from stamps to sports cars and even real estate. Instead, the collection form of enrichment draws on the idea of system and lack, where each collection should be fulfilled: each specimen must be acquired to render the system complete. Collectability also suggests that each object has a guaranteed price (they call it metaprice) in the future; the very fact of belonging to the logic of collection, which is stabilised by institutions, such as museums and galleries, but also other collector associations, help stabilise the future price. In this way, expensive watches can be sold to mobile phone users as collectables; wine can be sold at premium prices to help buyers to complete their wine cellars as collections.

The trend form is the most wasteful one as it is based on (re)introduction of new differences to make earlier forms redundant, as in jeans that are no longer fashionable. However, this has become more complex recently, as vintage has become part of the trend form. Difference-making is particularly important for the collection of experiences, through tourism, gastronomic consumption, and lifestyles. The heritage-making process and animation create new regional and urban economies that Boltanski and Esquerre attribute to the enrichment economy and that are just as much part of capitalism as industrial production. The significant difference is that whereas industrial production "obliterated the past" by replacing artisanal labour and transforming urban spaces and landscapes, the enrichment economy "rehabilitates" the past, both the pre-industrial past and de-industrialised localities, by assigning new narrative identities to objects, places and experiences. Capitalism, it is argued, has not made the world uniform, because the creation of differences is just as important for the capitalist economy of enrichment (p. 378).

In detailing these different forms of valuation, they present case studies drawn from a very broad and heterogenous field of cultural and creative industries research, as well as gentrification, urban regeneration, and tourism studies. These case studies are limited to France, which narrows down the scope of the book quite considerably, making it rather Eurocentric, as even French colonies are not included in the discussion. Indeed, one might ask, what the idea of the enrichment economy brings to the well-established and wide-ranging debate about the creative economy, creative industries and creative labour, particularly their status in the hierarchy of state policy priorities and the issues of social justice that shape the field? After all, scholars working in these fields have long debated the mixed blessing of attempts to monetise the contribution of culture and the arts to the economy, as it led to the bureaucratisation of arts agencies and cuts in public subsidies for arts and culture. Boltanski and Esquerre argue that there is not enough appreciation of the economic contribution of art and cultural practice, which is a fair point, and they offer a way to account for the expression of the cultural logic of enrichment in terms of economic value. It is an interesting idea, because the process of enrichment is not necessarily tied to an institutionalised form of art and cultural practice. However, it is not quite clear who exactly are going to be the beneficiaries of this new accounting.

The implications of the argument presented by Boltanski and Esquerre are highly relevant for cultural policy as they call for greater redistributive justice. For instance, the creators who develop the images, forms and narratives enriching the de-industrialised objects and locations, or strengthening the narrative identity of already considerable financial and economic power, such as in the case of Bloomberg's HQ, should be remunerated in a more substantive way. Copyright law and royalties do not always do justice to the economic significance of the enrichment activity, because the form to which these are applied do not address the continuous impact of cultural value and heritage-making. For instance, if artists contribute to the gentrification of an urban area, they should get a proportionate share of the enrichment economy that they helped generate. Similarly, the use of design and art to augment the corporate value of Bloomberg could be remunerated not merely through the one-off contract of commissioning, but continuously as these works of art and design continue to work, as they are employed to "enrich" the corporation with meaning. Perhaps a fairer remuneration for such artists, designers and architects would be not just an honorarium, but also shares in the company that acquires and uses their products to create their narrative identity? However, although this form of remuneration would certainly benefit some creators in a significant way, it would do little to support the cultural professional field as such. The company shares model is unlikely to present a viable alternative to the public subsidy model, where high taxation of profit can be redistributed to fund welfare for artists/creators. Still, what Boltanski and Esquerre's book does so well, is to bolster the repertoire of argumentation for the importance of publicly-funded cultural policy, for cultural logic, as they show, is not a "princely distraction," but, indeed, a driving force of the deindustrialising Western economy. It is important reading for those studying and shaping the future of cultural policy.