
Preface

This book first appeared in 2006. As an economist by profession, who published since 1962, with around 10,000 printed pages on my conscience, I have been through quite a number of different areas, but the economics of culture never belonged to any of my fields of expertise, which are theoretical rather than empirical, and shaped through mathematical models rather than by verbal reasoning. This, of course, is a wrong format for any serious study of the economics of culture.

Art History

However, besides my profession, like most people, I had side interests. I was always infatuated with the visual, so, already as a student I read the classics of analysis in art history—Gombrich, Wölfflin, Panofsky, and the like, without making it any formal part of my study curriculum.

Anybody who browsed my other Springer books, “*Mathematical Location and Land Use Theory*” or “*Attractors, Bifurcations, & Chaos*” will agree that they contain unusually much elaborate graphics—it is more usual among economists to draw a few curves by pen using saucers and similar household equipment as support. I never dared to tell anybody how much time was invested in these illustrations, in particular getting the right shading for curved surfaces. They could take workdays for one single illustration.

Artisanship

Also, I became an artisan. Doing science actually leaves a lot of free time if you are reasonably efficient, as there is never a point in pushing efforts beyond where inspiration fails. I wanted to play the viol (or viola da gamba), the sound of which I always loved, but found it too expensive to buy one just for testing, so I decided to make one myself. There are instructive books on the making of bowed string instruments, mainly published in the nineteenth century, so it was not so difficult.

Fig. 1 Carved pearwood head to my last viol before varnishing



This became a long lasting occupation, with an output of 15–20 instruments until now. Only the first ones became firewood, the last have been quite good as professionals testify. Unfortunately, I never learned to do them justice myself.

Making “historical” viols also involves some sculpting, unlike the case of modern bowed string instruments. A violin, for instance, has a few stylized shapes, masterpiece shapes created once and for all by Stådivari, Guarneri, or Jacobus Steiner, which the modern maker can try to imitate. Not so for viols whose shapes were never fixed. In particular, whereas celli and violins always have the usual scroll at the upper end, viols used to have sculpture heads (of lions, dragons, and women). Often the museum pieces were crudely stylized. The present author, however, chose to make portrait sculptures, so at least approaching the arts. See Fig. 1.

Project Start

This brings me to the start of the project. Some colleagues arranged a conference on the economics of culture at my little university in the North of Sweden. Among the invited speakers was *Professor William Hendon*; then Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Cultural Economics*. As head of the department I invited him to a social lunch. It was quite nice, but in conclusion we had to note that we had no research interests in common. Once back home to the USA, he, however, wrote to me, “*your colleagues said that, besides making mathematical models, you also make string instruments; could you please write an article for my journal comparing the two activities*”. At first I thought the idea was completely crazy, but then I started thinking of what could be said about the issue avoiding both the too trivial and the too construed. So,

a couple of years later I actually complied with his request and wrote something about “*the unity of arts, crafts, and sciences*”.

Philosophy of Science

Further, once I finished my Ph.D., I wondered: “*What am I actually doing when I do ‘science’?*” and realized that the philosophy of science was the proper area for finding an answer. So, I asked the department of theoretical philosophy to prepare a suitable reading list, which they kindly did.

Again, being an associate professor, teaching 75 h a year did not absorb all time, so you could cultivate side interests. The reading list included work by Braithwaite, Harré, Kuhn, and Nagel, which I read, and set out to explore the nature of current textbook microeconomics. To my regret, and other economists’ irritation, I found that it mainly resulted in irrefutable tautologies, a drawback of always striving for the general, as in the ultimate example of the Arrow-Deberau much admired theory, though it is completely void of any information.

What upset some colleagues most was an example of pure logic; that the following sentence was logically true: “*If all economists are asses, then the demand for oats either goes down or it does not go down as its price increases*”.

Only one person found these digressions interesting, and cited them in his work on “the third world”, but that was nobody lesser than *Sir Karl Popper*. As Popper was not included in my original reading list, to my shame I must admit that he discovered the little Swedish associate professor before the latter read anything written by one of the greatest philosophers of the century. I subsequently tried to remedy this as best I could, and had the privilege of being in touch with this great thinker for a decade. When my work was evaluated for promotion to a chair, a Swedish economist described my work in philosophy as a “tourist trip without competent guide”. Well, tourist trip may be, but it would have been difficult to find any guide more competent than Sir Karl.

Practical Culture Production

Finally, for a period of 15 years I directed the *Nordic Baroque Music Festival*, thereby getting in contact with some outstanding performers, and learning about their personal experiences.

I also learned the conditions under which such an enterprise as a festival has to live. I dealt with program planning, choice of artists, contract negotiations, sponsorship, budgeting, and publicity, all with dictatorship powers in exchange for no charge or compensation at all on my part.

The festival died when I eventually found the personal pleasure provided by all this free labour not sufficiently rewarding. Especially when I had to solve the problem of fitting a too big violone into a too small aeroplane hold the third time, it was enough.

Venice

This was the background for the area of the book, which lay totally outside my professional experience, though, of course, I could draw on some experience from standard general economics. I started writing a manuscript, and was at the same time engaged by *Professor Gian-Franco Mossetto* at the board of his institute for the study of the economics of “beni culturali”, nicely located in Venice. At his conferences I met some interesting people and, finally, learned a little about what the economics of culture deals with.

I knew *Professor William Baumol*’s pioneering work on dynamics, but now he was absorbed in the details of Mozart’s private economy. Another outstanding economist, whose original work on the history of mathematical economics I knew from my youth, *Professor Mark Blaug* told me that he had (mis?)used a major scholarship to spend half a year in Venice alone with his cello to learn all the six Bach suites by heart. Finally, he said, he knew every note, but according to the standard he set he could not make music of it, so, he never touched the instrument again. Quite satisfying to know that there were other people around “wasting” time on such nonsense.

Contract

A colleague, *Professor Åke E. Andersson*, at my, by that time, newest and smallest Swedish University urged me to continue whenever I felt like stopping because this was not “my cup of tea”. After a while Åke was promoted Director of the Swedish Institute for Futures Studies, and resided in a magnificent apartment once built for the previous King of Sweden when he as a Crown Prince studied in Uppsala. He invited my whole family to stay with them, but when I was in his office, he told me that, unfortunately, the apartment was being renovated. He had booked hotel rooms instead, and if I only signed a contract for writing the present book there was a handsome grant from which to pay the costs and many other! So I signed, and so had to finish the manuscript. Åke, of course, knew that usually I never signed contracts before a book was finished.

It was finished when Åke was about to leave the institute. His successor, an associate professor of history, later government minister, called me and said that she had no interest whatever in this and was willing to release the copyright. Thank you I said and put the manuscript in the drawer.

Springer

And there it was, until Springer’s Senior Editor *Katharina Wetzel-Vandai* wrote to me and said she knew I had an unpublished manuscript and wanted to see it. Of course, I sent it, but said there were so many copyright problems with the

illustrations which were pictures of museum pieces, not my own computer graphics as in the other books. However, to my surprise, she was able to solve what to me looked like a difficult problem in a most elegant way.

Unfortunately, in view of the fact that the book was planned to relay on its illustrations, the combination of absorbing paper and black print in the first edition made it look anything but attractive. So when Katharina wrote anew and suggested a new edition with illustrations in colour, I was easily tempted. Also, the text definitely needed some extension and refreshing. The organization of the book, however, is quite as it was before.

Professor *Harry Hillman Chartrand* in his elegant review of the first edition could not classify the book in any of the ways he knew for writing on cultural economics, so he concluded the book represented my “Pensées”. Despite this flattering allusion, I suspect there was some irony in it. I called it a “safari”, which might be about the same.

Umeå, Sweden
June 2014

Tõnu Puu

Arts, Sciences, and Economics

A Historical Safari

Puu, T.

2015, XXIV, 189 p. 80 illus., 53 illus. in color., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-3-662-44129-9