

cultural economy: an introduction

Paul du Gay · Michael Pryke

The sets of processes and relations we have come to know as ‘the economy’ appear no longer as taken for granted as perhaps once they were. Many of the old certainties – both practical and academic – concerning what makes firms hold together or markets work seem less clear-cut and our knowledge of them feels less secure. Yet among these proliferating uncertainties has emerged – or, better, re-emerged – a belief that something called ‘culture’ is both somehow critical to understanding what is happening to, as well as to practically intervening in, contemporary economic and organizational life.

This ‘cultural turn’ takes many different forms depending on context and preferred project. In a number of formal organizational settings – both private and public – for example, senior managers have found themselves turning to ‘culture’ as a means of attempting to improve organizational performance. A central feature of this particular ‘cultural turn’ is a renewed interest in the production of meaning at work. As Graeme Salaman (1997) has argued, the contemporary interest in ‘managing culture’ is premised, in large part, upon a belief that so-called ‘rationalist’, ‘mechanistic’ or ‘bureaucratic’ systems of organization have systematically (*sic*) destroyed meaning and creativity at work, and that in order to compete effectively in what is conceived of as an increasingly globalized, knowledge-based economy, a foremost necessity is to reverse this process and make new meaning for people at work, thus unleashing their creativity and enterprise. ‘Culture’ is accorded a privileged position in this endeavour because it is seen to play a crucial role in structuring the way people think, feel and act in organizations. The aim is to produce the sorts of meanings that can enable people to make what senior management consider to be the right and necessary contribution to the success of the organization for which they work. To this end, managers are encouraged to view the most effective or ‘excellent’ organizations as those with the ‘right’ culture – that ensemble of norms and techniques of conduct that enables the self-actualizing capacities of individuals to become aligned with the goals and objectives of the organization for which they work. As the current head of the British government’s Performance and Innovation Unit has argued, solving organizational problems – whether in

government or in commerce – is a matter of culture, because it is through culture that people change the way they do things and how they see the world (Mulgan, 1997). One does not have to assume that ‘corporate culturalism’ unproblematically achieves that which it sets out to accomplish to acknowledge that it constitutes ‘a significant part of contemporary organizational life’ for an awful lot of people (Thompson and Findley, 1999: 182; see also the contributions by Heelas and McRobbie, this volume).

As in the worlds of formal organization, so too in terms of knowledge, theory and understanding of economic and organizational life within the social sciences. Here, also, culture has assumed an enhanced significance and explanatory weight. This has involved more than academics putting ‘cultural’ questions closer to the centre of their calculations, alongside economic processes and social and political institutions. Rather, it involves a reversal in the relationship between the vocabularies used to describe things and the things themselves. Instead of viewing a market or firm as existing prior to and hence independently of descriptions of it, the turn to culture instigates a reversal of this perception, by indicating the ways in which objects are constituted through the discourses used to describe them and to act upon them. This is not the same thing as saying that markets and organizations are ‘embedded’ in a particular socio-cultural context, or that they are ‘socially constructed’ (Callon, 1999; Crang, 1997: 12). Rather, it is to suggest that economic discourses – not simply or primarily academic ‘economics’, but those ‘hybrid’ disciplines such as accounting, marketing, finance, and so forth – format and frame markets and economic and organizational relations, ‘making them up’ rather than simply observing and describing them from a God’s-eye vantage point (Callon, 1998; du Gay and Salaman, 1992; Miller and Rose, 1990).

Thinking for a moment about that object we refer to as ‘the economy’, it seems obvious that when we seek to manage this entity one of the first things we need to do is build a clear picture of what ‘an economy’ looks like. We need to ask ourselves: what are its main components, and how do these work, how are they related? In other words, before we can even seek to manage something called an ‘economy’, it is first necessary to conceptualize or represent a set of processes and relations as an ‘economy’ which are amenable to management. We need therefore a discourse of the economy, and this discourse, like any other, will depend upon a particular mode of representation: the elaboration of a language and set of techniques for conceiving of and hence constructing an object in a certain way so that object can then be deliberated about and acted upon (Miller and Rose, 1990). Economic discourse here is not simply matter of beliefs, values and symbols but rather a form of representational and technological (i.e. ‘cultural’) practice that constitutes the spaces within which economic action is formatted and framed.

And what goes for macro-economic management in this regard also applies to micro-economic management. A crucial feature of many forms of interactive service work, for example, is the more or less direct relationship they involve between one or more service provider and one or more service consumer. The inseparability of the production and consumption of such services makes it difficult for both the manager of the service organization and the service consumer to isolate service quality from the quality of the service provider. In other words, the process of ‘disentangling’ or ‘framing’ necessary to the realization of a market transaction is obviously a problem in a context where the interpersonal links, the attachments, are inscribed in the service relation itself (Callon, 1998: 34). A wide range of calculative techniques and technologies have emerged to address this ‘problem’, each of which is aimed at increasing the ability of producers to ‘frame’ the service relation and each of which relies upon, albeit in different ways and to different degrees, the subtle imbrication of economic knowledge with other forms of cultural practice (Allen and du Gay, 1994).

Take, for instance, the case of certain forms of retail service work. As the quality of interactive service delivery has been represented as the main determinant of a firm’s competitive success or failure, employees involved in such work have found themselves being recruited and trained on the basis of their propensity to exhibit particular capacities and dispositions aimed at winning over the hearts and minds of customers. Through sustained exposure to an often weird and wonderful range of interpersonal and communication management techniques – such as transaction analysis – these service workers have found themselves being trained in how to fashion their conduct – bodily comportment, aural and visual characteristics, and so forth – in order to produce certain meanings for customers and thus a sale for the company. In addition, however, as those training them make clear, they are also being equipped with a set of skills that will stand them in good stead not only inside the workplace but also in the context of other forms of social interaction (du Gay, 1996; Nickson et al., 2001).

Focusing on such forms of service work indicates how difficult it is to disentangle ‘economic’ from other cultural categories in ‘economically relevant practices’, to use John Law’s term (this volume). This observation holds for work in the marketing, financial and commercial service industries as much as it does for the more direct servicing work found in parts of the retail, hotel and tourist-related trades. The links between economic and other cultural categories in the marketing and advertising industries, where the core task concerns managing, or attempting to manage, the relationship between products and consumers, may be quite readily apparent (see the contributions by Slater, Nixon and McFall, this volume). These links are of equal, if less obvious, significance in other industries. In finance, for example, particularly merchant banking, the elements of communication,

display and presentation are not simply restricted to the culture of the 'deal'. Financial networks can be viewed as socio-cultural networks in which 'relationship management' holds the key to economic success (Abolafia, 1998; Thrift, 1994). In so far as international financial centres are effectively characterized by streams of information, each of which is open to interpretation and each with its own contacts, one of the significant skills within international finance is the ability to make and hold contacts, to construct relationships of trust, and to be part of the interpretation of what's really happening. Moreover, the workings of such networks involve more than technical knowledge of financial economists. The pricing models and financial engineering that such experts compose and put in play for example, are simply surface indications of both the culturally shaped imaginations of space-time and display a collective trust in a monetized future that allow so-called 'new financial instruments', such as derivatives, to work as forms of money (Pryke and Allen, 2000; see also Dodd, 1994: 136). As Thrift (1994) points out, far from a reduction in the need for face-to-face contact in the international financial centres, even allowing for the profusion of 'hard' electronic technologies, there is now greater emphasis on the presentation of self, face work, negotiating skills, and so forth, in large part because of the increasing requirement to be able to read people as well as the increasingly transactional nature of business relationships between firms and clients (see also Allen and Pryke, 1994; Pryke, 1991; Pryke and Lee, 1995). Similarly, the work of Abolafia (1998) shows us traders obsessed with networking, 'multiplying entanglements', as Callon (1998: 40) puts it, the better to calculate economic advantage.

Because contemporary service work involves both economic and other forms of cultural knowledge the identity of services is simply not amenable to representation in terms of a binary divide between 'economics', on the one hand, and 'culture', on the other. Rather than being solely an 'economic' or a 'cultural' phenomenon, service work is a contingent assemblage of practices built up from parts that are economic and non-economic (but always already cultural) and forged together in the pursuit of increased sales and competitive advantage.

But if economics – seen in their broadest sense to include accounting, marketing, and so on – are understood as particular material-cultural or 'discursive' practices, what are the ramifications for the traditional dualism between 'culture' and 'economics' that has structured so much debate in the social sciences? The first thing to note is that this 'discursive' conception of 'culture' effectively overturns, or, at the very least, side-steps, the critical representation of 'culture' as always already on one side of a presumed opposition – between 'culture' and 'politics', 'culture' and 'economics', and so on. As long as debate is structured around such distinctions – between a cultural logic that pertains to human inwardness (and intrinsic meaning) and

an economic logic that does not (i.e. Sayer, 1997) – then we will continue to miss the point; namely, that ‘culture’ is not a logic, sphere, value or ‘life-order’ at all (Turner, 1992: 43). As Weber (1948: 323–59), for example, argued long ago, we are cultural beings precisely because we are not natural, living, social, religious, political or economic beings. This particular understanding of economics as ‘culture’ focuses attention on the practical ways in which ‘economically relevant activity’ is performed and enacted. It serves to show, in other words, the ways in which the ‘making up’ or ‘construction’ of economic realities is undertaken and achieved; how those activities, objects and persons we categorize as ‘economic’ are built up or assembled from a number of parts, many of them supplied by the disciplines of economics but many drawn from other sources, including, of course, forms of ostensibly non-economic cultural practice (Miller, 2000; Slater, this volume).

To highlight the contingent ‘assemblage’ of the ‘economic’ in this way is not to endorse a politics, as some advocates of the ‘cultural turn’ can appear to imply. For the latter, the discovery of ‘contingency’ serves to free up ideologically frozen relations of dependence and domination in the name of human possibility and inventiveness. As Charles Turner (1992: 3) for example has argued, the declaration that particular forms of (economic) conduct and practice are not ‘natural’ is ‘no longer made in order to contrast them with a “really” natural mode waiting to be uncovered, nor is it founded on a belief that the attainment of the truly “natural mode” is the task of politics’. Rather, the politics that is presumed to follow from the discovery of ‘contingency’ is ‘that declaration, that predicative activity, the assertion that a state of affairs could have been and can be otherwise’ (Turner, 1992: 3). This turns out to be a bit of a canard, though, for it seems very difficult, if not impossible, to make contingency a matter of either celebration or suspicion, as opposed to a brute fact that has to be dealt with. This is a difficult lesson for some proponents of the ‘cultural turn’ to learn; they appear to believe that what they take to be their epistemological sophistication gives them a political advantage over those who, for example, maintain a belief in objectivity. But this, as Stanley Fish has indicated, is a ‘flat-out misreading of the lesson that anti-foundationalism preaches’ (1994: 20). If all arguments, for example, are contingent and therefore challengeable at some basic level, then no argument, including the argument that all arguments are contingent and therefore challengeable, can claim an epistemological (or political) superiority that would give its advocates any sort of advantage ‘independent of the hard work of presenting evidence, elaborating analogies, marshalling authorities, and so on’ (Fish, 1994: 20). It is because all arguments owe their force to contingency at some level that no meta-argument can claim contingency for itself alone or bestow a progressive politics upon it. ‘Contingency’, as Fish indicates, ‘is a given and can count neither for nor against an argument; any argument must still make its way by the same routes that were available before contingency was recognized’ (1994: 20).

This in turn suggests that, while one can profess a cultural or discursive view of economics and continue to make strong economic assertions, one cannot necessarily do economics in a way that follows on from one's convictions concerning its cultural constitution. This is because doing economics and doing, what we might term, 'cultural economy' are two rather different sorts of practice. As Callon (1998: 50) has suggested, the objects of economics are made up by ignoring or forgetting their cultural or social constitution. Doing economics means acting on the assumption of a determinate nature waiting to be described and calculated about by a neutral observation language; doing 'cultural economy' means acting on the assumption that economics are performed and enacted by the very discourses of which they are supposedly the cause. Any attempt by social scientists to enrich practically what Callon (1998: 34) describes as the 'cold and disincarnated' objects of economics may be on a hiding to nothing precisely because it risks confusing two distinct practices, with a subsequent loss of focus (and purpose) for them both.

increasing 'culturalization'? Exploring and assessing the explanatory reach of this 'economics as culture' or 'cultural economy' perspective provides one of the central themes of this volume, as a brief examination of the individual chapters makes clear. It does not, however, provide the sole focus. For our term 'cultural economy' is also designed to carry another register of meaning or signify another set of debates. This second strand refers to certain epochal claims – often associated with terms such as 'economies of signs', 'the network society', 'the knowledge economy', and so on and so forth – that we are living through an era in which economic and organizational life has become increasingly 'culturalized' (Castells, 2000; Lash and Urry, 1994; Leadbeater, 1999). So what does it mean to talk about 'cultural economy' in this latter sense?

Well, one of the most sustained attempts to make this argument is contained in work of Scott Lash and John Urry. In their book *Economies of Signs and Space*, they argue that

Economic and symbolic processes are more than ever interlaced and interarticulated; that is . . . the economy is increasingly culturally inflected and . . . culture is more and more economically inflected. Thus the boundaries between the two become more and more blurred and the economy and culture no longer function in regard to one another as system and environment.

(Lash and Urry, 1994: 64)

In attempting to back up their claim that the economy is now more than ever ‘culturalized’ they point to a number of developments. For example, they argue that organizations whose business involves the production and distribution of cultural hardware and software have become amongst the most innovative and creative economic actors in the world. Today, the ‘culture’ industries broadly defined and other so-called ‘soft’ knowledge intensive industries not only represent some of the most important economic growth sectors but also offer paradigmatic instances of the de-differentiation of ‘culture’ and ‘economy’ in terms of their own business practices (Lash and Urry, 1994: 108–9).

Second, Lash and Urry argue that more and more of the goods and services produced for consumers across a range of sectors can be conceived of as ‘cultural’ goods, in that they are deliberately and instrumentally inscribed with particular meanings and associations as they are produced and circulated in a conscious attempt to generate desire for them amongst end-users. They maintain that there is a growing aestheticization or ‘fashioning’ of seemingly banal products whereby these are marketed to consumers in terms of particular clusters of meaning, often linked to ‘lifestyles’, and this is taken as an indication of the increased importance of ‘culture’ to the production and circulation of a multitude of goods and services. This process, they argue, has been accompanied by the increased influence of what are often termed the ‘cultural intermediary occupations’ of advertising, design and marketing; those practitioners who play a pivotal role in articulating production with consumption by attempting to associate goods and services with particular cultural meanings and to address those values to prospective buyers (Lash and Urry, 1994: 222).

Finally, Lash and Urry suggest that the growing importance accorded to signifying practices in doing business is evident not only in the production, design and marketing of goods and services, but also in the internal life of organizations as well. Indeed, as we have seen, there has been a distinct ‘turn to culture’ within the world of business and organization in recent years that is premised, in part, on the belief that in order to compete effectively in the turbulent, increasingly internationalized markets of the present, a foremost necessity for organizations is to change the way they conduct their business and the ways that people conduct themselves in organizations (Lash and Urry, 1994: 108)

Now it is important to note that the empirical significance of these epochal claims of ‘increased culturalization’ needs careful consideration. Authors working in fields as diverse as the social anthropology of economic life and the history of advertising practice, for example, have indicated just how empirically insubstantial are the exemplary oppositions – between a more ‘use’-value-centred past and a more ‘sign’-value-centred present – that run through epochalist accounts such as these (Douglas and Isherwood,

1979; McFall, 2000 and this volume; Miller, 1995; Nixon, 1997; Sahlins, 1976). Much of the hyperbole surrounding claims of increased ‘culturalization’ can be explained, perhaps, by the fact that those taking the ‘cultural turn’ in the field of economic and organizational analysis are busy finding ‘culture’ where previously none was thought to exist. However, they also tend, perhaps, to work against the grain of ‘cultural economic’ analysis, as an emergent form of inquiry concerned with the practical material-cultural ways in which ‘economic’ objects and persons are put together from disparate parts, by setting up their co-ordinates too far in advance and thus leaving no ‘way out’ from their terms of reference. This has the effect of rendering certain potentially important, if (seen from the heights of grand ‘theory’) often seemingly banal, contextual details insignificant or even invisible. As we argued earlier, techniques of ‘economic management’ do not come ready-made. They have to be invented, stabilized, refined and reproduced; they have to be disseminated and implanted in practices of various kinds in a range of different locales. This involves much hard, tedious work whose success and effects cannot be taken for granted ‘in advance’. Thus, the emergence and development of such techniques are probably not best explicated in terms of the large-scale transformative processes – transitions from Fordism to post-Fordism or from organized to disorganized capitalism, for example – beloved of much epochal theorizing, but rather cry out for the ‘grey, meticulous and patiently documentary’ genealogical methods recommended by Foucault (1986: 76), among many others (see also the contributions of Law and McFall, this volume). This should not be taken to imply an out-and-out rejection of all claims of contemporary ‘culturalization’. Quite obviously there are many substantive developments in economic and organizational relations – such as the obsession amongst senior managers of large enterprises with changing ‘corporate culture’, which we mentioned earlier – that might conceivably be explicable in terms of some sort suitably situated ‘culturalization’ hypothesis¹ (see the contributions by Allen, Heelas, McRobbie and Warde, this volume). However, it is important that such claims be assessed with care and on more of a case-by-case basis rather than simply being assumed or asserted. As Paul di Maggio, for example, has argued in relationship to the current upsurge of interest in all things ‘cultural’ in the field of economic and organizational analysis, ‘the price of the insights and explanatory power that a cultural perspective can generate is an enduring scepticism toward “culturalist” accounts that claim too much or generalize too broadly’ (1994: 27).

As di Maggio suggests, an attitude of scepticism towards culturalist accounts that would over-reach themselves is not the same thing as outright hostility to culturalist approaches *per se*. Ray and Sayer, however, come perilously close to making such a categorical error in their discussion of ‘culture’/‘economy’ relations, in general, and epochalist representations of cultural-

economic implosion, in particular. According to them, epochalist representations are actually dependent upon a general distinction between ‘cultural’ and ‘economic’ logics which they are incapable of acknowledging (Ray and Sayer, 1999: 4). Although epochal theorists continually trade on the contemporary dissolution of ‘the culture–economy distinction’, they ‘are unable to stop referring to the cultural and the economic separately, which suggests that we actually need it’ (Ray and Sayer, 1999: 4). The problem centres on the nature of the ‘it’ that Ray and Sayer suggest we still need. They argue that “‘culture’ and ‘economy’ are not synonyms’ (1999: 4) for, if they were, cultural studies could be renamed economic studies with no loss of meaning or intellectual purpose. Yet, few, if any, proponents of the contemporary cultural turn, including those we might reasonably categorize as ‘epochally’ oriented, would suggest they were synonymous. Ray and Sayer then proceed to argue that ‘culture’ and ‘economy’ are not ‘antonyms, and neither do they refer to separable “spheres” of social life’. Furthermore, since the basic terms have several meanings, there may well be more than one culture–economy distinction’ (1999: 4). This seems all very plausible. As we have already seen, it is practically quite difficult to institute a *general, prior, analytic distinction* between ‘culture’ and ‘economy’ when, on the one hand, as Sayer himself elsewhere acknowledges, the ‘economy has always been as much a cultural site as any other part of society, such as the family, community or school’ (1997: 7), and, on the other, a range of non-reducible and non-transferrable culture–economy distinctions are continually emerging and re-emerging in specific sites and contexts – in ongoing processes of generating social distinctions between different classes of person (Bourdieu, 1984), for example. The point here is that actual cultural interests and capacities – and the distinctions they might give rise to – can only be formulated and assessed in the context of definite normative and technical regimes (such as those provided by educational, aesthetic, legal, economic, political, sexual or familial institutions). There is no reason to assume that these regimes are founded on any prior, general analytic distinction or opposition between ‘culture’ and something else – ‘economy’, for instance – rather than such a distinction emerging historically as a contingent feature, say, of particular relations between such regimes.

Yet, having indicated how difficult it is to maintain a general analytic distinction between ‘culture’ and ‘economy’, Ray and Sayer (1999: 4) proceed to argue for one on the grounds of political and theoretical necessity. The distinction they formulate, though, is a remarkably familiar one. They argue that it is possible to distinguish between an economic logic that is concerned with the calculation of means/ends relations and a cultural logic that is concerned with ends in themselves. As Sayer puts it, an analytic distinction between ‘culture’ and ‘economy’ needs to be maintained in terms of ‘a difference between intrinsically meaningful activities, artefacts and relationships

whose value is primarily internal, and instrumental activities directed towards the external goal of the reproduction of social life' (1997: 8). As Ian Hunter (1994: 149) has indicated, it was Kant who 'posited the existence of a universal moral imperative in terms of the pursuit of the good 'for its own sake' – rather than because one was inclined to pursue it as the result of social training and practice, or because it served a worldly purpose'. Even Max Weber's discussion of value-rational behaviour – the case of a person who pursues an ultimate end even in the face of great social and personal cost – is a Kantian example (and this from possibly *the* supreme cultural economist [Hennis, 1988: 135]). However, Kant's 'identification of ultimate ends with the existence of a unified moral personality governed by a universal sense of moral duty' (Hunter 1994: 149) is very different from Weber's more historical and anthropological programme. For Weber, as we saw earlier, cultural interests and capacities are not the expression of a universal moral personality; they are the plural creation of historically specific ethics or 'life orders' (du Gay, 2000; Hunter, 1988; Turner, 1992). The ends of value-rational action are 'therefore multiple and specific to particular regimes: religious, legal, economic, aesthetic, and so on'. As Hunter indicates, for Weber 'the "ultimate" character of such action merely refers to the zeal with which a particular end is adhered to in one of these domains'.

This in turn suggests that Weber's historical and anthropological programme cannot sustain a general analytic distinction between formal and substantive rational action (or between 'intrinsically' and 'instrumentally' oriented activity, as Ray and Sayer prefer it), and this for two reasons. First, because the pursuit of ends in a substantively rational manner is itself dependent upon a certain formalization or disciplining of ethical life. In other words, it is the product of socio-cultural relations of training and practice within specific spaces and contexts. Second, the 'formal' rationality of economic management, for example, itself gives rise to substantive ethical goals. In *Economy and Society* (1978: II, 956–1005), Weber points to the 'formalistic impersonality' of bureaucratic organization – its refusal to acknowledge inherited differences in status and prestige – as a source of social levelling and democratic equalization: '[C]onsistent bureaucratic domination means the levelling of "status honor" . . . [T]he dominant norms are concepts of straightforward duty. Everyone is subject to formal equality of treatment' (1978: II, 975).

Similar complexity can be discerned in Weber's discussions of substantively rational activity. In *Economy and Society* (1978: II, 812–13), he describes the workings of a theocratically oriented, substantively rationalized legal system, where decisions based upon the ultimate imperatives of religion hold sway over the formal rationality produced by adherence to positive legal procedure. In so doing, he points to the manner in which legal formalism is capable of developing and sustaining a substantive defence against

the arbitrary exercise of power precisely because of its procedural imperviousness to ultimate moral imperatives.

Formal justice is thus repugnant to all authoritarian powers, theocratic as well as patriarchic, because it diminishes the dependency of the individual upon the grace and power of the authorities. To democracy, however, it has been repugnant because it decreases the dependency of the legal practice and therewith of the individuals upon the decisions of their fellow citizens. . . . In all these cases formal justice, due to its necessarily abstract character, infringes upon the ideals of substantive justice. It is precisely this abstract character which constitutes the decisive merit of formal justice . . . to those who on ideological grounds attempt to break down authoritarian control or to restrain irrational mass emotions for the purposes of opening up individual opportunities and liberating capacities.

(Weber, 1978: II, 812–13)

As Weber's work suggests, any attempt to instigate categorical distinctions between 'intrinsically' and 'instrumentally' oriented activity in order to support a general normative analysis of economic and cultural life will quickly come up against brute empirical realities that it will not be able to account for or make much reasonable sense of. And this for two reasons. First, as Ian Hunter has argued, 'value-oriented or substantive rationality do not [*sic*] constitute a single universal Kantian moral imperative capable of functioning as a moral yardstick for all other forms of rationality' (1994: 150). Second, as Weber's examples clearly indicate, formally and substantively oriented conducts are too contextually specific and historically contingent to allow them to function as general 'means–ends' moral discriminators in the manner implied by Ray and Sayer's theoretical distinction. Albert Hirschman (1977: 133), for example, has shown how formally rational economic conduct or 'self-interest' became regarded, in the early modern period, as a vehicle for exorcizing those disastrous 'passions' (associated with the 'full human personality') that had fuelled the European wars of religion.

Ray and Sayer (1999) seem bemused to find that, despite their insistence on the contemporary implosion of 'economy' and 'culture' or the dematerialization of the economic into a plethora of signs, scapes and networks, some proponents of the 'cultural turn' continue to deploy the terms 'culture' and 'economy' in distinct and meaningful ways. This, they argue, is a contradiction. It is not necessarily so. As we have already seen, to do cultural economy is not the same thing as doing technical economics; but, equally, to profess a culturalist view of economic and organizational life does not preclude one from making strong economic assertions – concerning the

ways in which markets are formed, the ways in which the marketing of goods and services takes place, or the ways different accounting technologies transform the meaning and reality of organizational management. One can continue to use the terms ‘economy’ and ‘culture’ in doing ‘cultural economy’ without one’s practice falling apart. What one should, perhaps, avoid trying to do is to impose a general analytic distinction between ‘economy’ and ‘culture’ on one’s material prior to examining, anthropologically, its practical constitution.

the structure of the book The chapters in this book are organized around these two particular notions of ‘cultural economy’. In other words, they approach ‘cultural economy’ either as a means of exploring the ways in which economic and organizational life is built up, or assembled from, a range of disparate, but inherently cultural, parts, or as a series of claims concerning the extent to which economic and organizational relations in the present are more thoroughly ‘culturalized’ than their historical predecessors. More often than not they end up, either explicitly or implicitly, developing both strands at the same time.

The text is divided into four broad parts. Part One (Chapters 1–3), is concerned predominantly with ‘cultural economy’ in the first sense of this term, as a means of analysing the construction of disparate forms of economic knowledge and the constitution of economically relevant activity. In Chapter 1, John Law seeks to develop a set of conceptual tools that help to make sense of material practices that are both economic and cultural and to draw attention to the complexity of practices that run through the ‘economic’. He does this by drawing on developments derived from semiotics, post-structuralism and Science and Technology studies and provides a fascinating exploration of the material orderings of a case study laboratory which reflect and perform enterprise, administration and science as ‘vocation’. The account he relates makes central some of the major issues at the heart of cultural economy.

Law argues, first, that practices, subjects and cultures, including forms of economic calculation, such as accounting, should be understood as materially heterogeneous relations. Second, in line with Callon and with others in this volume, he argues that these relations are performed and the style of the performances should be attended to; that, in other words, economic subjectivities are the outcome of interference. For as Callon (1998: 23) points out, highlighting the work of Peter Miller (1998), accounting tools (to which both Law and Daniel Miller in this volume make explicit reference) do not simply aid the measurement of economic activity, they shape the reality they measure and thereby contribute to the performance of calculative agencies

and modes of calculation in much the same way that economics ‘perform the economy’ (Callon 1998: 26). Furthermore, caught in such dynamics, the management of such an organization, for example Law’s case study Daresbury, find themselves accounting for their action in a discourse shaped to a growing extent by agents – accountants and management consultants – who have recently entered the frame. Lastly, Law argues that the calculative agent required of economics is always in the making, is never complete. This leads him to conclude that, rather than economic culture, the idea of ‘economically relevant activity’ captures the ‘complexities and the heterogeneous materials that produce and are produced within those practices’.

In Chapter 2 John Allen draws attention to the sidelining of expressive forms of economic knowledge as interest focuses on the elision of culture and the economy. While the emphasis on the creative and the cultural has grown, particularly as creative skills are now associated with the profitability and future of the so-called ‘new culturalized economy’, so the need to recognize aesthetic and more affective forms of knowledge has also gained ground. Invoking the work of Ernst Cassirer and with echoes of Simmel, who long ago insisted ‘that the whole human being is involved in the acquisition of knowledge’ and drew attention to the ‘importance of humans’ “inner life” (feelings, affects, will, motivations, etc.) and the role it plays in the acquisition of knowledge’ (Kaern, 1990: 76), Allen makes a case for more affective forms of knowledge to be recognized in cultural economy. For, as his chapter argues, even in the most recent approaches to economic knowledge, such as those written by John Urry, Scott Lash and Robert Reich, and even the likes of Charles Leadbeater, the cognitive is prioritized over the expressive forms of economic know-how. Both culture and economy, for Allen, run together in all economic sectors, combining in different strengths the abstract, the expressive, the affective and the aesthetic, making each distinctive while not making any combination, such as the material and the symbolic, exclusive to any one sector.

As Callon has argued, ‘The market is not a two-step process with a competition phase followed by an exchange phase. The type of representation puts the creation process of products and demand for these products in parenthesis, a process which involves a web of close connections between designers, producers, distributors and consumers’ (Callon, 1998: 43; see also Callon, 2000). In the same spirit, in Chapter 3, Don Slater unearths the networking involved in ‘capturing the the customer’. Slater adopts an angle to the fusion of culture and economy that more or less belongs within the cultural turn. Through reporting an ethnography of cultural intermediaries, advertising agents, Slater argues forcefully that ‘cultural’ and ‘economic’ action in markets and market relations can never meaningfully be separated out; they are entangled and interdependent within the social practices of making markets (see also Crang, 1997; Slater and Tonkiss, 2001: 195). He

argues further that lessons drawn from studies of consumption and material culture might usefully be adopted in an approach to cultural economy which treats such categories as *lived processes* rather than formal categories. Moreover, in line with a cultural economy approach outlined earlier in this introduction, he repeats Callon's insistence that economic theory is brought into this analysis of the economic processes: economic theory is an active participant in the making of economic realities.

Part Two (Chapters 4–5) focuses on the issue of work ethics in the present and the question of their increasing 'culturalization'. In Chapter 4, Paul Heelas suggests that a useful way of arguing against those who conceive of the economic realm as impervious to culture is to examine the role played in economic and organizational life by work ethics. Having established the 'cultural-economic' character of work ethics, Heelas proceeds to discuss the extent to which contemporary work ethics might be considered more 'culturalized' than their historical predecessors by focusing on what he terms the contemporary 'self-work ethics' of 'soft capitalism'. For Heelas, the development of this soft self-work ethic is in large part due to the perceived failure of other forms of work ethics. He identifies, in particular, the inability of certain traditional forms of work ethics adequately to grasp or deal with what he considers to be the cultural 'turn to life' – 'life' as that 'inner' realm that is regarded as ultimately belonging to the individual alone – among those better educated, more expressivistic members of Western societies.

This 'turn to life' and its related 'self-work ethics' also forms the central focus of Chapter 5. Here, Angela McRobbie charts the growing importance of a particular ideal of self-expressive work in the so-called 'creative industries' (see also McRobbie, 1998). As she argues, these industries are continually represented – by management gurus, academics and politicians, for example – as leading-edge exemplars of an emerging 'talent-led economy' populated by youthful individuals who demonstrate a perpetual capacity for energy, creativity, resourcefulness, resilience and enterprise, and, as such, are continually mined for ethical models of economic and personal conduct for all members of the population to emulate. In considering the discursive construction of this ethic of self-expressive work in the creative industries and in charting some of the inequities it generates, McRobbie has cause to engage with, and offer critiques of, recent, influential general analyses of the changing cultures of work proffered by Richard Sennett (1998), Ulrich Beck (2000) and Charles Leadbeater (1999).

McRobbie's chapter provides a useful framing device for and bridge to the concerns of Part Three (Chapters 6–8). Here the focus is on the historical and contemporary cultural-economic constitution of aesthetic and creative economies. In Chapter 6, Keith Negus draws attention to an important shift that has occurred in the study of the production of popular music. He charts

a move away from approaches that attempt to understand the impact of specific forms of industrial production on aesthetic artefacts (by applying notions of ‘industry’ to ‘culture’) towards a perspective which approaches aesthetic production as an assemblage of cultural-economic activities (by applying theories of culture to industry). Focusing on the activities of staff working in the recording industry, Negus indicates how this shift of emphasis enables a more complex understanding of the dynamics of aesthetic production within this and other so-called ‘culture industries’. In particular, he shows how different occupational groupings within the recording industry are infused by particular norms and techniques of conduct – what he terms a ‘culture of production’ – and how the latter contribute to the construction and maintenance of highly distinct boundaries within the industry.

In Chapter 7, Sean Nixon explores one particular aspect of the service relation in advertising – the contract of agreement between client and agency – as a means of analysing the cultural economy of contemporary advertising practice. He indicates the ways in which financial arrangements – specifically forms of remuneration – established in these contracts both reflect and enact particular assumptions about the identity of advertising agents as certain sorts of service provider. He argues that the symbolic significance of these financial forms is as great as, if not greater than, their economic or commercial significance. He shows how recent attempts by advertisers to ‘re-imagine’ the nature of their business, as a response to perceived changes in their commercial environment, have at their core a reconceptualization of the forms of financial compensation which agencies receive from clients. The focus on remuneration is so important to advertising’s ‘cultural change’ agenda, he argues, precisely because of the powerful meanings it carries about the nature of the client/agency relationship.

Nixon’s empirical focus helps to provide a more nuanced account of the cultural economy of advertising than those more epochalist accounts that have dominated cultural analysis in this area (Wernick, 1991). In Chapter 8, Liz McFall ploughs a similar furrow, indicating how detailed, historical genealogical work on advertising practice issues a distinct challenge to purveyors of the ‘increased culturalization’ hypothesis. Focusing on the issue of ‘persuasiveness’ as a means of analysing claims about advertising’s ‘culturalizing’ role, she argues that historically theorized accounts have tended to be weakly historically empiricized. Evidence of ‘increased persuasiveness’, she suggests, is drawn primarily from textual work. The latter suffer from a lack of contextualization that prevents them from offering grounded analyses of the significance of advertising at any given time. She concludes that a contextualized historical study of advertising as cultural-economic practice provides a useful antidote to the overdramatic assertions inherent in epochal accounts of increasing culturalization.

The final part of the book (Chapters 9–11) is concerned with exploring the relationship between cultural economy and political economy. In

Chapter 9, Daniel Miller distinguishes between two aspects of the contemporary ‘cultural turn’ and indicates why he finds one compelling and the other far less so when it comes to understanding the political economy of modern capitalism. He argues that the ‘cultural turn’ as a particular approach to the study of economic institutions within the social sciences (cultural economy in our first sense of the term) has provided some important explanatory advances which it would be foolish for political economists to ignore. However, he is far less sanguine about claims of ‘increasing culturalization’, which imply a change in the object of analysis rather than in the style of analysis. For Miller, this sort of ‘cultural turn’ can offer no insights into the political economy of modern capitalism. Rather it imposes a remarkably abstract self-referential model on material whose constitution it never bothers to investigate empirically but simply assumes in advance. For Miller this aspect of the ‘cultural turn’ possesses an elective affinity with what he considers to be the dominant development in contemporary market and non-market institutions and processes, the rise of ‘virtualism’ – hyper-abstract, fetishistic modelling that effectively creates that which it purports to describe.

In Chapter 10, Alan Warde chooses to work with what he calls a ‘more operational definition of culture’ in addressing what for him, and for other authors in this volume, has become a central question: the degree to which ‘contemporary economic relations are more or less culturalized than their historical predecessors’. He takes as his starting point Raymond Williams’ three uses of the term ‘culture’ – a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development; a particular way of life; and the works and activities of intellectual and especially artistic life – and inserts each into the claim that the economy, to include industrial activities, consumption and advertising, has become more culturalized. While Warde’s chapter works towards an affirmation of the claim that today’s economic relations are ‘more or less’ culturalized, his approval is not without qualification. Such qualification draws upon his detailed empirical studies of economic practices, work experiences and the functioning of economic organizations. In the end, it seems to him that the ‘logic of economizing’ has not been as thoroughly culturalized as some proponents might have us believe. For while consumer culture and the outputs of the culture industry, with the associated multiplication of mediatization, advertising and sophisticated selling techniques, have certainly moved on apace, the implication simply does not hold that the outcome is the cultural saturation of everyday life and the weakening of the logic of economic practice.

The issue of the growing significance of the manipulation of organizational cultures touched upon by Warde, and earlier by Law, becomes the central focus of the last chapter. Here Nigel Thrift raises issues related to the emergence of what he refers to as ‘fast’ managerial subjects. He explores

some of the significant related pressures – such as those stemming from drives towards short-term performance and the desire for a faster pace of business life – which inform today’s business spaces which are the breeding places, as it were, of his fast managerial subjects. Management subjects, he argues, are being produced through three types of active and performative space through which, Callon (1998) would suggest, ideas and material practices are being circulated. Together, these entangled spaces constitute what Thrift calls a *new geographical machine* able to make new qualities and quantities visible and therefore available to be worked upon. This new machine draws on a number of influences to produce three spatialities, each of which is infused with the new business cultures. The increasing influence of business magazines shapes new *spaces of visualization*; the employment of performative techniques in the practices of management work on subjects to produce new *spaces of embodiment*; and the increasing mobility of management represents *new spaces of circulation*. Taken together these spatialities are the chief inspiration for his claim that the cultural economy of significant business markets heralds a new phase of ‘caring imperialism’.

note

1. Take the way that the economy today is being talked about. Technical economic know-how sometimes seems to be giving way to a set of interlinking appeals that draws upon a range of disciplines and images. What has been called the ‘therapeutization of the economic’ sees an ‘economic’ issue such as unemployment approached not in terms of the need to tinker with aggregate demand, but as a socio-cultural-economic issue revolving around the ‘attitude’ of the unemployed: ‘They need conselling and advice on how to represent themselves for employment’ (Thompson, 1999: 609). Similarly, national and international competitiveness calls for economic agents and organizations to respond to the demands of what Callon (2000), amongst many others, terms ‘highly self-reflexive markets’. And by acting out and through the images conjured up by cultural dispatches calling for economic actors to be (more) innovative, efficient and better performers, and by adapting to the recent and profound shifts that have taken place about how markets should work, the ‘economy’ is made to be more self-reflexive and hence more competitive.

references

- Abolafia, M. (1998) ‘Markets as cultures’, in M. Callon (ed.), *The Laws of the Markets*. Oxford and Keele: Blackwell and the Sociological Review.
- Allen, J. and du Gay, P. (1994) ‘Industry and the rest: the economic identity of services’, *Work, Employment & Society*, 8 (2): 255–71.
- Allen, J. and Pryke, M. (1994) ‘The production of service space’, *Environment and Planning D. Society and Space*, 12 (4): 453–76.

- Beck, U. (2000) *The Brave New World of Work*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Bourdieu, P. (1984) *Distinction*. London: Routledge.
- Callon, M. (1998) 'Introduction: the embeddedness of economic markets in economics', in M. Callon (ed.), *The Laws of the Markets*. Oxford and Keele: Blackwell and the Sociological Review.
- Callon, M. (1999) 'Actor network theory – the market test', in J. Law and J. Hassard (eds), *Actor Network Theory and After*. Oxford and Keele: Blackwell and the Sociological Review.
- Callon, M. (2000) 'The Economy of Qualities'. Paper presented to Culture & Economy Seminar, Goldsmiths College, University of London, December.
- Castells, M. (2000) *The Rise of the Network Society* (2nd edn). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Crang, P. (1997) 'Cultural turns and the (re)constitution of economic geography', in R. Lee and J. Wills (eds), *Geographies of Economies*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Dodd, N. (1994) *The Sociology of Money*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Douglas, M. and Isherwood, B. (1979) *The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- di Maggio, P. (1994) 'Culture and economy', in N. Smelster and R. Swedberg (eds), *The Handbook of Economic Sociology*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- du Gay, P. (1996) *Consumption and Identity at Work*. London: Sage.
- du Gay, P. (2000) *In Praise of Bureaucracy: Weber, Organization, Ethics*. London: Sage.
- du Gay, P. and Salaman, G. (1992) 'The cult[ure] of the customer', *Journal of Management Studies*, 29(4) 616–33.
- Fish, S. (1994) *There's No Such Thing as Free Speech . . . And It's a Good Thing Too*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Foucault, M. (1986) 'Nietzsche, genealogy, history', in P. Rabinow (ed.), *The Foucault Reader*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Hennis, W. (1988) *Max Weber: Essays in Reconstruction*. London: Allen & Unwin.
- Hirschmann, A. (1977) *The Passions and the Interests*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Hunter, I. (1988) *Culture and Government*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Hunter, I. (1994) *Re-thinking the School*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.
- Kaern, M. (1990) 'The world as human construction', in M. Kaern, B.S. Phillips and R.S. Cohen (eds), *Georg Simmel and Contemporary Sociology*. Boston: Kluwer Academic Press.
- Lash, S. and Urry, J. (1994) *Economies of Signs and Space*. London: Sage.
- Leadbeater, C. (1999) *Living on Thin Air: The New Economy*. Harmondsworth: Viking.
- McFall, E. (2000) 'A mediating institution? Using an historical study of advertising practice to rethink culture and economy', *Cultural Values*, 4 (3): 314–38.
- McRobbie, A. (1998) *British Fashion Design: Rag Trade or Image Industry?* London: Routledge.
- Miller, D. (1995) 'Consumption as the vanguard of history', in D. Miller (ed.), *Acknowledging Consumption*. London: Routledge.
- Miller, D. (2000) 'Turning Callon the right way up'. Unpublished paper.
- Miller, P. (1998) 'The margins of accounting', in M. Callon (ed.), *The Laws of the Markets*. Oxford and Keele: Blackwell and the Sociological Review.
- Miller, P. and Rose, N. (1990) 'Governing economic life', *Economy & Society*, 19 (1): 1–31.
- Mulgan, G. (ed.) (1997) *Life After Politics*. London: Fontana.

- Nickson, D. et al (2001) 'The importance of being aesthetic', in A. Sturdy, I. Grugulis and H. Wilmott (eds), *Customer Service*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Nixon, S. (1997) 'Circulating culture', in P. du Gay (ed.), *Production of Culture/Cultures of Production*. London: Sage.
- Pryke, M. (1991) 'An international city going "global"', *Society & Space*, 9: 197–222.
- Pryke, M. and Lee, R. (1995) 'Place your bets: towards an understanding of globalization, socio-financial engineering and competition within a financial centre', *Urban Studies*, 32 (2): 329–44.
- Pryke, M. and Allen, J. (2000) 'Monetized time-space: derivatives – money's "new imaginary"?'', *Economy and Society*, 29 (2): 264–84.
- Ray, L. and Sayer, A. (1999) 'Introduction', in L. Ray and A. Sayer (eds), *Culture and Economy After the Cultural Turn*. London: Sage.
- Sahlins, M. (1976) *Culture and Practical Reason*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Salaman, G. (1997) 'Culturing production', in P. du Gay (ed.), *Production of Culture/Cultures of Production*. London: Sage.
- Sayer, A. (1997) 'The dialectic of culture and economy', in R. Lee and J. Wills (eds), *Geographies of Economies*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Sennett, R. (1998) *The Corrosion of Character*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Slater, D. and Tonkiss, F. (2001) *Market Society: Markets and Modern Social Theory*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Thompson, G. (1999) 'Situating globalization', *International Social Science Journal*, June: 139–52.
- Thompson, P. and Findley, P. (1999) 'Changing the people: social engineering in the contemporary workplace', in L. Ray and A. Sayer (eds), *Economy and Culture After the Cultural Turn*. London: Sage.
- Thrift, N. (1994) 'On the social and cultural determinants of international financial centres: the case of the City of London', in S. Corbridge, R. Martin and N. Thrift (eds), *Money, Space and Power*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Turner, C. (1992) *Modernity and Politics in the Work of Max Weber*. London: Routledge.
- Weber, M. (1948) 'Religious rejections of the world and their directions', in H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (eds), *From Max Weber*. London: Routledge.
- Weber, M. (1978) *Economy and Society* (2 vols). Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Wernick, A. (1991) *Promotional Culture*. London: Sage.