

## **Between the rock of culture and the hard place of economy: toward a hybrid economic geography<sup>1</sup>**

Culture is not 'a decorative addendum to the 'hard world' of production and things, the icing on the cake of the material world' (Hall, 1988)

Many of us have learned to want to cleave to an order. This is a modernist dream. In one way or another, we are attached to the idea that if our lives, our organizations, our social theories or our societies, were 'properly ordered' then all would be well. And we take it that such ordering is possible, at least some of the time. So when we encounter complexity we tend to treat it as a distraction. We treat it as a sign of the limits to order. Or we think of it as evidence of failure (Law, 1994: 4-5).

What do Christmas, the Sex Pistols, and a plank of wood have in common? While this sounds like the beginning of a bad joke, I want to use the question as an entrance point to one of the more intractable issues in the social sciences, the relation between economy and culture, and which, with its recent 'cultural turn', spills into economic geography (Crang 1997; Thrift 2000a; Barnes 2001). In academic and popular representations, economy and culture are often sharply separated, put into quite different conceptual boxes. Karl Marx, for example, puts economy in a box called base or infrastructure, and culture in a very different box called superstructure. Or Talcott Parsons puts economy in box called adaptation, and culture in another box called latency. This same separation is also repeated in popular media: newspapers separate out their business and review sections; there are magazines focussing on the economy (e.g., The Economist Magazine) and magazines focussing on culture (e.g., People Magazine); and there are TV programmes that discuss only finance (e.g., 'Wall Street Review') and other shows are only concerned with the arts (e.g., 'BookTV'). Indeed, in North America there are whole channels devoted exclusively to one or the other topic, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

In contrast, I argue in this chapter that rather than clear and distinct the relation between economy and culture is muddy and indefinite. Following the argument of this book, I suggest that economy and culture are not a neatly divided binary but a hybrid. This is also the answer to my opening question. What Christmas, the Sex Pistols, and a plank of wood have in common is that they are hybrids of culture and economy. That is, they take on attributes of both such that it is difficult to know where one begins and the other ends.

That Christmas is a culture-economy hybrid is clear (and discussed systematically by Thrift and Olds, 1996). Marking the birth of one of the world's greatest cultural religious figures, Christmas in high-income Western countries is also fundamentally about money: of shopping until you drop, of crowded retail malls, of sales and bargains, of gifting, re-gifting, and de-gifting. It is about spending time with family and friends, but it is also about overdrawn bank accounts and usurious interest on unpaid credit card balances. It is about eating special foods – in my Anglo-cultural tradition such delicacies as mince tarts, sausage rolls, and Christmas pudding – and drinking special drinks – egg nog, sherry, and warm punch – and carrying out culturally specific rituals – trimming the tree, lighting the Christmas pud, putting up interior and exterior house decorations – but it is also about capitalist producers drawing together an immense amount of economic resources, and undertaking planning, sometimes years in advance, for the production, delivery and selling of the kind of commodities required to make these rituals

possible such as turkeys, or Christmas trees, or Xmas cards and wrapping paper. It is about glistening eyes and radiant smiles at infant school nativity plays or at elementary school Christmas concerts, or hissing at villains and cheering at heroes in pantomimes, or seeing Christmas specials on the box that you've seen ever since you were a kid – Alistair Sim as Scrooge terrorizing the Cratchett family, Mr Bean getting his head stuck in the rear-end of a turkey, Jimmy Stewart realizing 'it's a wonderful life' – but it is also about unrelenting TV adverts, fliers in newspapers, handbills in letter boxes, under car windshield wipers, and thrust into your fingers on the street, all trying to convince you to open your purse and wallet to buy that perfect commodity for your loved ones. Is Christmas a cultural celebration? Or is Christmas a once-a-year economic bonanza for capitalism? It is both. It is a hybrid.

The same goes for the Sex Pistols, the English punk-rock band that burst on to the cultural scene in 1977 with their singles 'Anarchy in the UK' and 'God Save the Queen,' and whose LP 'Never Mind the Bollocks. Here's the Sex Pistols' initially was sold under plain brown wrapping so as not to offend innocent bystanders. Apart from the fact that they produced a cultural product, music (or at least they thought so -- Sid Vicious said, 'you just pick a chord, go twang, and you have music'), the Pistols influenced, and came to define, a wider youth sub-culture, punk. It was a culture defined by: particular forms of dress and deportment -- ripped jeans and t-shirts, green-and red-dyed hair, Doc Marten boots, and the ubiquitous use of safety pins for tethering things that should never be tethered; a specialized language and vocabulary marked by 'insults and rejection ... [but] yet recognisable as everyday speech' (Savage, 1993: 206); and a broader philosophy and politics of life rooted not in 'the negative or cynical rejection of belief but the positive courage to live without it' (Savage 1993: 195). If the hallmarks of culture are innovation, new forms of language, and changed values and ways of life, then the Sex Pistols were real culture. The Pistols from their very creation, however, were always also about making money, of selling product, of being part of 'the great rock 'n' roll swindle' (Mitchell, 2000: 68). They were a manufactured band directed towards making profit for their sponsors, primarily their manager Malcolm McLaren. As a consequence, it was entirely in fiscal character that the Pistols recorded with then on-the-run great train robber Ronnie Biggs, that Johnny Rotten engaged in an eight-year legal suit with McLaren to recover unpaid royalties (Lydon, 1994, chs, 19-20), and that McLaren coined the slogan 'cash from chaos,' and also insisted that 'Sex' be in the name of the group because it advertised his shop of the same name located on Kings Road, Chelsea. Were the Sex Pistols an explosive and original cultural phenomenon, 'a distinct break in the pop milieu' (Marcus, 1989: 2-3), like Picasso's cubism, or Schoenberg's atonalism, or Joyce's stream of consciousness, or were they only about 'filthy lucre'? They were both. They were a hybrid.

Making the hybrid argument for a piece of lumber is more of a stretch. Like 'death and furniture', to use Edwards, Ashmore, and Potter's (1994) examples, there is a seemingly brute finality about a plank of wood that puts it outside of the cultural pale. A plank is a plank is a plank. But it is not. Culture infuses every stage of plank making and selling, and which I will illustrate by using examples from one of the great plank-making regions of the world, British Columbia (BC). It begins with broad cultural attitudes to nature, and in the case of BC an attitude towards the temperate rainforest that covers the province's southern coastal region. Are we stewards of this forest or masters of it? Since European settlement in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century mastering has been the order of the day. Legally formalized through the recommendations of a

series of BC Royal Commissions on forestry beginning in 1945, mastering nature in the province has produced gargantuan clear-cuts, a policy of cut and run, and the proliferation of single-industry towns one task of which is to produce two-by-fours. Culture further extends into the very process of work. While recently those work practices have been transformed following a move from Fordist to post-Fordist methods (Barnes, Hayter and Hay, 2001), they remain highly masculinised – ‘men’s work’ – turning on the use of large machines and male brawn (about ninety percent of jobs in the Canadian wood products are held by men, Randall and Ironside, 1996). Furthermore, the masculinist culture inside the sawmills infects the culture outside producing among other things patriarchal relations (Egan and Klausen 1998), a particular culture of education especially among boys who discount its benefits because of the presumed inevitability of job availability at the mill (Behrisch, Hayter and Barnes, 2002), and a community culture of fatalism, feelings of impermanence and isolation, and characterised by a lack of initiative. Finally, culture stretches into the kinds of planks that are made. In particular, from the 1980s onwards among especially coastal BC lumber producers there was a switch from selling to the US and Canadian housing construction industry to exporting particularly to Japan, SE Asia, and China. But those latter markets do not want traditional two-by-fours, but lumber of quite different dimensions to construct their own culturally distinct housing and commercial buildings (Hayter and Edgington, 1987). In part, the shift from Fordist to post-Fordist methods was to enable production of these new dimensions. So, is a plank only a plank? In my interpretation, it is not. While a plank might be physically unblemished, it is knotted by both economic and cultural markings; it is a hybrid.

The argument in this chapter is that the economy-culture hybrids illustrated above are pervasive in economic geography. That we don’t typically recognise them is because of an equally pervasive mindset of binary thinking found in the discipline that divides phenomenon into either the economic, which is a legitimate domain of study, or the cultural, which is not, and is passed on to others to investigate. With the ‘cultural turn’ in economic geography such a mindset is not viable any more, if ever it was, and we need to engage in different practices. To determine what kind of practices I divide the paper into three parts. First, I discuss the longstanding debate about the relationship between economy and culture, and economic geography’s relationship to it. What emerges is a need to theorize outside the binary of economy and culture. Second, I will argue that such a theorization is achievable by using the idea of a hybrid, and here I draw principally on the work of Bruno Latour and other proponents of actor network theory. Finally, I discuss two attempts by economic geographers – respectively J. K. Gibson-Graham and Nigel Thrift – to work through the idea of an economy-culture hybrid, and which can be used as the basis for a potentially reconfigured economic geography.

### **Economy, Culture and Economic Geography**

Economy and culture are typically interpreted as a binary. For Derrida such binaries are the very vehicle by which meaning is created in the West, forming the basis of what he calls logocentrism (Gibson-Graham, 2000). Logocentrism – meaning literally reason-centred – is the strategy of producing meaning by dividing language into opposite pairs of terms. The first term of a given binary is defined positively, and the second term is defined as its antonym. Formally, it is represented by the scheme: A/not-A. In the case of economy and culture, the first term, economy, is positive, and the second term, culture, is everything that the economy is not. As a

result, while the economy is hard, culture is soft; while the economy is about facts, culture is about values; while the economy is strong, masterful, and masculine, culture is weak, submissive, and feminine. And on it goes.

It further follows given the binary nature of this scheme that economy and culture are doomed never to be on the same page; that things economic are separated from things cultural because they are their opposites. Certainly, such a strategy characterized much of social science that in the past assiduously divided economy and culture into sealed spheres of inquiry.

In particular, the study of the economy is given over to the discipline of economics. In its orthodox form, known as neoclassicism, economics removes any trace of culture from its study by making two related methodological moves. The first is by pursuing methodological individualism, an approach that explains social events by reducing them to the beliefs and actions of the individual rational actors involved. More specifically, in the neoclassical model, the economy is constituted by a set of rational individuals. Imbued with an exogenous map of preferences, those individuals are guided in their consumption and production choices by both their innate rationality and the invisible hand of market prices that ensures eventual collective optimisation and harmony. Following methodological individualism, that collective never exists, *sui generis*, on its own, but is only ever the sum of its individual parts; that is, it is always reducible to the beliefs and actions of constitutive individual rational agents. Consequently, methodological individualism portrays culture as chimera, as something that appears real, but is not. As Margaret Thatcher might have said, 'There is no such thing as culture, only individuals.' The real are rational economic agents, the spurious are communal entities like culture.

The second methodological move evacuating culture is neoclassicism's deployment of formal modes of reasoning and analysis. Joan Robinson once said, 'you can't put culture into an equation.' If so, neoclassical economics has no hope of dealing with culture because as a discipline it defines itself by the use of mathematical models. For example, the influential American economist, Paul Krugman says, 'to be taken seriously an idea has to be something you can model' (Krugman, 1995: 5; original emphasis). And while admitting that 'people who do not write formal models may have rich insights,' he also says, 'strangely, though, I can't think of any' (Krugman, 1995: 88). The further implication is that if non-economists, such as economic geographers, are to study the economy then to have credibility they must also adopt the standards of economics and undertake formal modelling. A failure to do so results in economic geographers not studying the economy, but engaging in forms of pseudo inquiry. This is Krugman's opinion of current research by economic geographers who eschew formal modelling. He lambastes those, for example, who make reference to "'post-Fordism" ... [a term coined by] the Derrida-influenced regulationist school – deconstructionist geography!' (Krugman, 1995: 85). While it is doubtful that Derrida is much of a regulation theorist (Eagleton, 1995), the important point for Krugman is that by shunning formal models economic geographers engage in absurd forms of study like 'deconstructionist geography!' It is the economist's way or no way. And the economist's way produces a distilled world of pure economy, unblemished by culture.

Neoclassical economics is extreme in its aversion to culture, leaving its study to soft, unscientific, or non-rigorous social sciences and which include, at least in Krugman's interpretation, economic geography. It is true that during one period in the history of economic

geography, some but certainly not all economic geographers threw their lot in with the economists, and by deploying neoclassical mathematical models, and adopting methodological individualism, pursued an approach that displaced culture. The most systematic application of neoclassical economic principles to economic geography occurred roughly in the twenty-year period, 1955-75, and associated with the discipline's 'quantitative revolution' (Barnes, 2001). Best represented by the theoretical tradition of locational analysis (Haggett, 1965), culture was often difficult to discern in the consequently flattened, formalized economic geographical geometries of concentric rings of agricultural production, industrial locational triangles, and hexagonal market nets of central place services (Barnes, 2002).

Some of the work within locational analysis represented a direct translation of the methodological individualist assumption of the rational agent to the geographical case. For example, in the writings on spatial interaction, and which was often formulated mathematically in terms of the Newtonian gravity model equation, it was assumed that individuals who spatially interacted exhibited 'uniformly rational behavior' (Sheppard, 1978: 388). In particular, an individual's decision to interact spatially was determined by their utility function, and which they attempted to maximize. But the form of that function, and which represents a person's preferences for travel, and for that matter everything else, is given exogenously; that is, an individual's preferences are represented as laying outside formal analysis, neither requiring nor obtaining scrutiny and explanation. But it is those preferences that contain everything interesting about cultural norms, values, and rules. It is in this sense that economic geography in the tradition of locational analysis only begins after culture is set aside.

Locational analysis, and the influence of neoclassicism, began waning in economic geography from the mid-1970s when a new, political economy approach increasingly took hold (albeit not without resistance; Johnston, 1991). At least initially, however, the same binary impulse remained, one that cleaved economy and culture, and asserted the dominance of the former over the latter. To see how and why, it is best to return to Marx's most succinct, and most well known theoretical statement about economy and culture, and found in his Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy (1859). There Marx writes, 'the mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness' (Marx, 1904: preface). As Marx makes clear in other parts of the Preface, the social being that determines consciousness is rooted in 'relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development in the material productive forces' (Marx, 1904: preface). It is therefore economic relations, or what Marx called the 'base' or 'infrastructure,' that is the prime mover. In contrast, social being or consciousness, and which correspond to the 'infrastructure' and comprising cultural elements such as religious and legal institutions, are the consequence and of secondary importance.

Marx's position is often interpreted as economic determinism: culture as a set of 'social, political and intellectual processes in general' is irrevocably determined by the economy, 'the mode of production'. Culture is thereby reduced to an epiphenomenon, performing the functional role of an ideological smokescreen for an oppressive capitalist class bent on immiserising the proletariat. In this interpretation, while there are differences between Marx's and neoclassicism's view of economy and culture – for Marx culture performs a functional role in

keeping capitalism going, but for neoclassicism it plays no role – there are also strong commonalities: both prioritise and essentialise the economy conceiving it respectively as either the embodiment of material productive forces or of individual rational choice. Culture, in contrast, is sloughed off; it is not real, not essential, and not a priority.

Certainly, when economic geographers began systematically drawing upon Marx's work they reproduced the economic determinist interpretation of classical Marxism, where culture was an after thought if it was a thought at all. Such a position is perhaps best found in the work of David Harvey who through the 1970s and 1980s developed a systematic and often brilliant geographical interpretation of Marx through a detailed exegesis of his writings (summarised in Harvey, 1982). The details are complicated, but the gist is that propelling geographical change are economic imperatives of accumulation turning on the maximization of surplus value within the sphere of production. Culture doesn't get much of a mention by Harvey until the late 1980s when it is theorized in The Condition of Postmodernity (Harvey, 1989), and subtitled significantly, An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change. But even here, Harvey resorts to a version of Marx's original base-superstructure model. Modernist culture is predicated upon a Fordist economy, and post-modernist culture is predicated upon a post-Fordist one. Furthermore, both types of economies derive from the basal logic of all capitalist accumulation resting on an incessant need to reduce turnover time in order to realize surplus value. Marx's original binary thus remains firmly in place. Ten years later or so, still not much has changed. Harvey in his introduction to his latest book, Spaces of Hope (2000), continues to assert the dualism of culture and economy. On the one hand, there is 'cultural analysis' which is 'fun', and on the other, 'political economy' which is about 'the dour world and crushing realities of capitalist exploitation' (Harvey, 2000: 5). For Harvey (2000: 7), of course, it is those 'crushing realities' that demand our attention, and his list of the most important – 'fetishism of the market,' 'the savage history of downsizing,' 'technological change,' 'weakened organized labour,' and an 'industrial reserve army' – make it clear that it isn't going to be fun. We need to be prepared for serious work. No cultural analysis here.

I realize this is caricaturing Harvey, and that his prose and theorizing is more nimble and nuanced than I've suggested. But he is now almost alone among Marxist geographers in his resistance to 'cultural analysis.' For example, the former dye-in-the-wool, classical Marxist, Dick Peet (2000: 1215) now searches for 'the cultural source of economies,' urging the use of 'cultural terms such as symbol, imaginary, and rationality ... to understand crucial economic processes' (p. 1213). As Peet (2000: 1231) writes, 'In a phrase I never thought I would say, political economy should become cultural economy.' Or Neil Smith, a student of Harvey's, who in his earlier days trumpeted 'the universalization of value in the form of abstract labour' (Smith, 1984: 82) now says, "'Back-to-class" in any narrow sense is its own self-defeating cul-de-sac' (Smith, 2000: 1028), and it is necessary 'to find a way of integrating class into the issues of identity and cultural politics' (Smith, 2000: 1011).

Helping produce such changes of heart among former hard-line Marxist economic geographers has been an increasingly large body of work from the left that rethinks the relationship between economy and culture, and in doing so moves away from Marx's binary base-superstructure relation. Again, the details are complex. Its general impetus is to show that the cultural, for example, as gender, and/or race, and/or religion, partially constitute(s) the economic and vice

versa, and as a result there is no neat dividing line between one sphere and the other. Although there are historical precedents for this cultural turn (for example, in Gramsci's notion of 'hegemony' articulated in the 1920s), much of the impulse derives from cultural studies, and which comes in at least two versions. The older British type, and particularly associated with Raymond Williams ('structure of feeling'), Richard Hoggart ('the felt quality of life'), and later Stuart Hall ('Marxism without guarantees'), remains committed to a socialist politics intent on remedying the inequities of capitalism. Its novelty is in trying to hang on to class analysis and the economy, while at the same time recognising and merging cultural values and practices, ways of life, and emotional and political commitments that lie outside. Hence, for example, William's phrase the 'structure of feeling' that connotes the 'doubleness of culture ... [as both] material reality and lived experience' (Eagleton, 2000: 36). The North American version of cultural studies is less interested in class politics. Embracing tenets of poststructuralism, especially as expressed by Derrida and Foucault (Gibson-Graham, 2000), culture and economy can become in the North American version simply the 'free play of texts, representations and discourses' (Bradley and Fenton, 1999: 114).

In economic geography, the move towards culture has been a long time coming. Of course, one might argue that the two were together right from the beginning. Certainly, the line between the economy and culture is smudged, if it is there at all, in early economic geographical texts such as in Chisholm (1889) or in J. Russell Smith (1913). That said, it is not until Doreen Massey's (1984) *Spatial Divisions of Labour* that there is an explicit attempt to theorize the relation between culture and economy. Writing from a Marxist perspective, Massey in effect criticizes, and provides an alternative to Harvey's theory of accumulation. Using a geological metaphor, she conceives of culture and economy in particular places as involved in a recursive, two-way relationship, and in so doing, she clearly moves away from Marx's classical base-superstructure rendering. There is not space to provide a detailed account of her analysis. The important point is that *Spatial Divisions* put culture on the economic geographer's theoretical agenda in a way that it was never there before, and paving the way for the cultural turn' now found in the discipline. That 'cultural turn' has taken a variety of forms embracing both the traditions of British and North American cultural studies, but it has also drawn upon other bodies of work as well ranging from critical realism (Sayer, 1997), to Karl Polyani's idea of embeddedness (Mitchell, 1995), to Thorstein Veblen's institutionalism (Martin, 1994).

All of this is to say, is that in the last few decades there has been a sustained effort at least from some factions on the left, as well as the left in economic geography, to shift their thinking from the binary of culture and economy, to something more complex; one that tries to overlap and dissolve the boundaries of the two categories. To use the vocabulary of this book, there had been a move to conceive culture and economy as a hybrid.

### **Hybrids and Translation**

Deriving from botany and zoology, and more recently genetics, a hybrid is the result of combining two different species or different genetic strains of the same species. The consequence is a new object that while sharing characteristics of its 'parents' also possesses unique traits.

That hybridity as an idea has travelled from the life sciences to the social sciences is because of dissatisfaction with the conceptual binaries pervading the latter. Hybrids provide the possibility for thinking outside traditional dualisms. Additionally, such possibilities have political resonance, for example, as is the case with the use of hybridity in post-colonial literature. The identity of the colonial migrant living within the metropole is hybrid, lying between and between colonial and native subject positions. As such, it challenges the very binary of home and colony, the same and the Other (Bhabha, 1994), and the relations of power that inhere between them. Or again, Donna Haraway (1991) uses the notion of a cyborg – a creature that is half human, and half machine – as an exemplar for the kind of politics that she wants to prosecute, and which cuts across hitherto oppressive binaries like man/woman, straight/gay, white/black, and able-bodied/disabled. The hybrid cyborg interrupts and thwarts categories typically used to assert domination, power, and control. As I will discuss in the next section, some economic geographers also believe that opening up a hybrid space between economy and culture provides a location for political potentialities.

Another possibility afforded hybrids is making connections between types and objects of inquiry that because of binary thinking have been hitherto kept separate, for example, nature and society, science and humanities, or in our case economy and culture. In particular, the notion of a hybrid or hybrid collectif has been used extensively within actor network theory (ANT) to subvert the dualism of nature and society (Latour, 1994; Callon and Law, 1995). By reviewing that work, I will try to provide a vocabulary and set of concepts that I can use in the last section to discuss a hybridised economy and culture within a reconceived economic geography.

ANT emerges out of science studies, and is especially associated with the work of Bruno Latour (1993, 1999) and John Law (1994, 1999). One of its most insistent claims is that ‘entities take their form and acquire their attributes as a result of their relations with other entities’ (Law, 1999: 3). Those entities can literally be anything – pitri dishes, microscopic bacteria, spectrometers, papers published in Nature, people in white coats. There are no limits. The important point is that the meaning of an entity is a relational effect of its association with other entities. As Callon and Law (1995: 485) write: ‘it is the relations ... that are important. Relations which perform.’ In the language of ANT, individual entities are called actants, and the sum of the relations established among them is termed a network. A network is a tight-knit assemblage of heterogeneous actants that are persuaded at least temporarily to stay in place, and work with one another to produce order (Whatmore, 1999: 28; Murdoch, 1997).

Order is only as durable as the network itself, however, and reaches only as far as the network extends. There is nothing outside. Order is not universal and fixed from on high, given by transcendental categories like Nature or Society, or Economy and Culture. Rather, it is contingent upon the workings of particular networks, their stability, and geographical reach. As Whatmore (1999: 31-32) writes, order is ‘always in the making, not ... a priori.’ That we sometimes think it is a priori, inherent in transcendental categories, is because of a process of purification (Latour, 1993); that is, the process of fastidiously dividing the world into unblemished categories – rocks into Nature, working class into Society, money into Economy, opera into Culture – making the world neat and tidy, as if it is one giant filing cabinet. But for Latour such categories are not beginning points for inquiry, but end-points. As he writes, Society and Nature are not ‘causes of our knowledge ... but a consequence.’ So, scientists don’t

start with Nature, but produce it only at the end of their research by a process of purification; that is, by systematically excluding from their accounts parts of their work that do not fit into the Nature box. But in reality scientists continually bring together all manner of heterogeneous entities – petri dishes, microscopic bacteria, and so on – connecting them, forming networks, or what amounts to the same thing, working with, and producing hybrids. But those hybrids are not recognised. They are continually purified into sub-components, separated into various binaries. Latour (1993: 2) provides an example:

The smallest AIDS virus takes you from sex to the unconscious, then to Africa, tissue cultures, DNA and San Francisco, but the analysts, thinkers, journalists and decision makers will slice the delicate network traced by the virus for you into tidy compartments where you will find only science, only economy, only social phenomena, only local news, only sentiment, only sex.

For Latour, however, if we want to understand how science works, we must trace through the multitudinous networks of which it is composed, recognising their hybridity. The real action does not take place at the rarefied poles of Nature and Society, but in ‘the middle kingdom’ (Latour, 1993: 47); that is, within the ‘imbroglio’ or ‘Gordian knot’ of hybrids (Latour 1993: 3). Callon and Law (1995: 485) call that imbroglio a ‘hybrid collectif’, and define it as ‘an emergent effect created by the interaction of the heterogeneous parts that make it up.’ As with Latour, they are keen to stress that the hybridity of the collectif often goes unrecognised, and, important for this chapter, it is a criticism that they apply as much to social scientists as to natural scientists. Social scientists are as blinkered by binaries as natural scientists. The solution is to follow the interaction of heterogeneous actants wherever they lead, and the hybrids that are consequently produced.

Useful for understanding how hybridity is produced from these heterogeneous actants is the notion of ‘translation.’ Michel Callon (1980: 211) writes that ‘translation involves creating convergences and homologies by relating things that were previously different.’ Translation is thus the very basis of hybridity. Latour (1999: 88) elaborates:

The question of translation consists of combining two hitherto interests ... to form a single goal.... Even if the balance is equal, neither of the parties ... will be able to arrive at exactly [their] original goal. There is a drift, a slippage, a displacement, which, depending on the case, may be tiny or infinitely large

Translation, then, involves bringing together entities that are sometime radically different, and convincing them that they have an interest in connecting and relating. Through a process of ‘drift’, ‘slippage’, and ‘displacement’, that connection creates something new, a hybrid. Callon’s (1986) original example of translation involved marine scientists, fishers, scallops, and techniques of scallop propagation in St. Brieuc Bay in Normandy, France. The context is a sudden decline in scallops in the Bay for harvesting. The task of the scientist is to understand the process, and which, as Callon shows, is achieved through creating a hybrid collectif that brings together through translation the four actants. Scientists must be persuaded that St Brieuc is an interesting problem to study, fishers must be persuaded to curb their harvesting while scientists work, scallops must be persuaded to join the experiments of the scientists, and techniques of

scallop propagation must be persuaded to operate in conditions quite different from those in which they were initially designed. There are no guarantees here, and to enable the hybrid collectif to emerge and attain stability requires the expenditure of a lot of work and resources. It is always in process, always an achievement.

In sum, the science studies literature on hybrids provides a vocabulary and set of concepts to represent the relationship between culture and economy. It says that terms like Economy and Culture are the consequence of a prior process of purification in which tainted hybrid entities are either removed, or cleansed. The world we study, though, is not like that. It is full of messy distinctions and objects that smudge boundaries and cross borders. It is a hybrid world. Michael Mann (1986: 1) writing in a different context says, 'the world is messier than our theories of it.' ANT provides a means of coping with the messiness. It says that we need to attend to the networks of relations that crosscut, interleave, and fold across culture and economy, and that form hybrid collectives. More particularly, the task is to trace specific translations of objects, people, and ideas, as they come together from a variety of origins, and sometimes split apart. It is by undertaking this tracing that we enter the 'middle kingdom', and see the world before it is torn in two, in this case purified by the binary of Culture and Economy.

In addition, there is a political imperative. I have not discussed issues of power, but they are there especially in Law's (1994, 2001) work, and certainly in Haraway's (1994, 1997) who is sympathetic to ANT (her notions of a 'cat's cradle' and cyborg compliment the hybrid collectif). The political problem with applying purified categories, especially in a binary form, is that they can produce dogma and intolerance, and sometimes much worse (Bauman, 1989, brilliantly discusses the 'much worse'). It is for this reason that Haraway (1991:) says, 'I would rather be a cyborg than a Goddess.' Recognising and staying with hybrids, with complexity, if not creating a kinder, gentler world, might create a more politically tolerant, modest one, less skewered by immaculate binaries. As Whatmore (1999: 35) writes, 'hybrid geographies cannot be other than plural and partial,' and which is surely better than monolithic and absolute.

### **Toward a Hybrid Economic Geography: Two Examples**

As I suggested, since Massey's (1984) work there has been shift towards recognising the cultural within economic geography, and since the mid-1990s that move has sped up producing the 'cultural turn,' and pushing the discipline farther away from the economism of either the neoclassical or Marxist type. Thrift (2000a: 692) even says that 'it is possible to argue that economic geographers have become some of the leading exponents of cultural geography'. However, there are already critics including those who are otherwise sympathetic to the inclusion of the cultural within economic geography. For example, Martin and Sunley (2001) and Sheppard and Plummer (2001) in reacting to the cultural economic geographical manifesto put forward by Amin and Thrift (2000) see that project weighed down by the same kinds of problems found in economic accounts except here it is a culturalist dogma that is espoused: actors are cultural rather than economic dopes. Further, both sets of critics are suspicious about both the lack of theoretical and empirical rigour in cultural approaches – Martin and Sunley (2001: 152) talk about its 'vague theory and thin empirics' – and the limited, small-scale nature of the studies produced that are unrepresentative of larger scale phenomena and geographies.

Certainly, the arguments of Martin and Sunley and Sheppard and Plummer are important warnings. The task of a hybrid economic geography should not be simply to reverse the binary and make culture primary, and the economy secondary. Rather, it should be to dissolve the binary altogether (and which I would argue Thrift attempts at least in his substantive work, and discussed below). In addition, a hybrid economic geography should recognise and utilize a variety of methodological strategies, quantitative and qualitative, statistical and story-based, and not be methodologically monist. Finally, it should not confine particular kinds of phenomena to particular scales of analysis. The cultural is not inherently local, and the economic is not inherently global. Some hybrids of culture and economy, like LETS schemes, operate at a local scale, while other hybrids of culture and economy, like transnational corporations, operate at a global scale. Rather than assuming economy and culture are naturally found at particular geographical scales, the important task is to evaluate the strength and nature of the linkages of the particular hybrid in question to ascertain its ability to extend spatially its reach.

More broadly, the debate between Amin and Thrift, and Martin, Sunley, Sheppard and Plummer (and there were others, see the special issue of *Antipode*, volume 33, number 2, 2001) suggests that the task of bringing together culture and economy within economic geography is still in process, still in discussion. There are no definitive approaches or answers. There are already, however, some interesting substantive works that attempts to realise the promise of a hybrid economic geography that takes culture seriously, and to finish let me provide two examples.

The first, and exemplifying the political possibilities of a hybrid economic geography, is J. K. Gibson-Graham's (1996; 2000) work. Rejecting the classical Marxist base-superstructure position and associated economism they had earlier deployed, from the early 1990s they began making use of Althusser's concept of overdetermination, and which enabled them to explore the political possibilities of conceiving the economy as an open, porous entity, influenced as much by culture as it influences culture itself (Gibson-Graham, 1996: Preface). By overdetermination, they mean the idea that everything determines everything else. The result is that it is impossible to uphold traditional binaries like culture and economy. The two are continually in interaction and exchange, displacing, drifting, and swerving, creating new hybrid entities. Gibson-Graham (2000) give the example of the factory. As a term, it is part of a classic binary positively associated with economy, and all the other words that go with it like production, man, and reason (Gibson-Graham, 2000: 98). As a master signifier, it defines itself by what it is not – household, reproduction, woman, emotion. Gibson-Graham argue, however, it is not this simple. The two sides of that binary are always leaking into one another, disrupting them. For example, it is possible to 'reverse the flow of cultural valuation by pointing out how many hours are spent in unpaid domestic labor in the household and how this contributes to Gross Domestic Product, [and which] if measured, would outweigh the labor performed in factory-based production' (Gibson-Graham, 2000: 98). Through this reversal, the binary begins to crumble.

They apply this same anti-binary, overdetermination logic to understand capitalism itself, and it is here that they work out the political possibilities of hybridisation. Capitalism as a term gains meaning from being on the same positive side of the binary as factory, and associated with the kindred words already listed. The problem with this binary politically is that it makes capitalism seem invincible, masterful in every sense. People accept the binary, and act accordingly, believing they can't go against it. The purified category of Capitalism is too strong too resist.

But for Gibson-Graham (as for Latour), the political task is to tarnish those purities, and in doing so provide the possibilities for resistance and change. This needs elaborating. Gibson-Graham argue that once capitalism becomes Capitalism through the binary, the only means of transformation is seemingly an apocalyptic one, a revolution on the same scale and magnitude of Capitalism itself. But the effort and resolve necessary for such a revolution is so large as to preclude it. If, however, we begin to reconceive the binary through an overdetermination logic, and exemplified by the factory example, we begin to see that Capitalism is plural and partial – a hybrid – and as a result strategies for change appear far less daunting, and more likely to occur. In particular, Gibson-Graham provide two particular strategies for recognising the hybridity of capitalism, thereby opening spaces for political action.

The first is empirical. It is to investigate alternative forms of capitalism. By their very nature as alternatives, they are necessarily open to features on the other side of the binary, for example, reproduction, household, family, emotion, and culture. Here Gibson-Graham have studied the ‘alternative’ economic regions of the Mandragon region in Spain, the Latrobe valley in Australia, and the Katahdin region in Maine (for further details on their project see, [www.arts.monash.edu.au/projects/cep/knowledges](http://www.arts.monash.edu.au/projects/cep/knowledges)). The second is conceptual. It is to replace traditional metaphors stemming from the old binary and used to describe capitalism – masculinity, heterosexuality, domination, closure – and which make it so monolithic and absolute, with another set turning on femininity, homosexuality, resistance, and openness (Gibson-Graham 1996: chs. 5 & 6). Once capitalism is described by these new metaphors, political action and the promise of alternatives become imaginable in ways inconceivable before.

The second example comes from Nigel Thrift’s work and his attempt to deal with the hybridity of particular quaternary service activities within capitalism. Thrift’s work is part of a wider body of writing by both economic geographers and others that recognises a sea change in the operation of capitalism over the last two decades, transforming the nature of goods produced and sold, the behaviour and choices of consumers, and the very internal work-a-day operations of firms. Here Scott Lash and John Urry’s (1994) book on ‘economies of signs’, Ulrich Beck’s (1992) work on ‘reflexive modernization,’ and in economic geography, Nigel Thrift’s (1999) own writings on ‘soft capitalism’ are signal contributions. Such works argue that the economy operates as a discursive construction blending economy and culture. As Thrift (1999: 136) says, ‘capitalism seems to be undergoing its own cultural turn as increasingly ... business is about the creation, fostering, and distribution of knowledge.’

It is the ‘knowledge’ industries on which Thrift has focussed, and in particular those in the financial sector and high-level management consultancy firms (Leyshon and Thrift, 1996; Thrift, 2000b). In both cases, he is keen to illustrate their hybrid nature, and he does so by drawing explicitly upon the vocabulary and concepts of ANT. The contrast he makes is between an earlier form of business organization and management resting on structures, hierarchies, systems of inputs and outputs, and control devices, and a newer form couched in the vocabulary of networks, post-bureaucracy, teams, virtual management, and post-structuralist organization (Thrift, 1999). The earlier form represented an application of binary thinking, or pure categories, of seeing the firm as large flow chart with its different operations neatly organised into pre-assigned separated boxes. This was the era of the ‘rational company man’ (Thrift 1999: 154). But in the post-Bretton-Woods, post-Cold War, post-Fordist period, with flattened corporate

structures, pervasive use of IT, and ever-compressed space-time horizons, binary thinking no longer works. There is a need to be looser, quicker, more flexible, more creative, and more adaptable. And to be this, argues Thrift, requires above all openness to a heterogeneous range of institutions, techniques, technologies, ideas and people. The task of 'corporate social persona of the 1990s' (Thrift 1999: 154) is to bring these different elements together, to make them perform. That is, it is to make them work as a hybrid collectif. As a result, and for reasons already given, the distinction between culture and economy loses its force.

## **Conclusion**

As John Law (1994: 4-5) says in the epigraph to this chapter, we become nervous in the face of complexity, treating it at best as a 'distraction,' and at worst a sign of 'failure,' both ours and the wider system. One means by which we impose order is by deploying binaries of various kinds. They enable us to sleep at night, to have the modernist dream. My argument in this chapter, however, is that the binaries are the dream. The world is not cleaved so neatly. Shakespeare has Hamlet declare to Horatio, 'There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in philosophy.' Shakespeare (and Hamlet) were probably not thinking of a critique of binaries when they said that, but they might of. The contention of this chapter is that there are more things in heaven and earth, including within economic geography that are hybrids than binaries: like Christmas, like punk rock, like a plank of wood. And they demand a vocabulary sensitive to their hybridity.

Such a vocabulary has not existed in economic geography for much of its recent history, and which was dominated by the economism of either neoclassicism or classical Marxism. This is changing with the 'cultural turn'. One component of that 'turn', I suggested, might be a vocabulary drawn from ANT, and which is sensitive to hybridity. That said, it is not the only sensitive vocabulary available, and evident from other contributions to this volume. It is flexible, though, and which I tried to illustrate by casting the work of Gibson-Graham and Thrift within it as they prosecute a hybrid economic geography.

Haraway (1991: 129) argues that for political and intellectual reasons we must be vigilant in search of 'geometries, paradigms and logics [that] break out of binaries.' But even if we find them, such as ANT, there are always pressures to capitulate and return to a binary world. Jonathan Murdoch (1997: 732) writes: 'Spanning the divides, overcoming the dualisms, will not simply be a matter of adding terms such as 'hybrid' or 'cyborg' into our existing modes of thought, but will require a much more thorough re-examination of our theories and methodologies for there is an ever present danger that the dualisms will prise apart the connections and associations we might stitch together.' For this reason, we need to be watchful and alert. Whatever we do we shouldn't roll over and go back to sleep. Only the binary dreams of modernism and Western philosophy await us, and not the hybrid world of our waking lives.

## Footnotes

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