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SPACE, CULTURE AND ECONOMY – A QUESTION OF PRACTICE

by
Kirsten Simonsen

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ABSTRACT. This article addresses the current debate within geography and other circles studying urban and regional development of the relationship between culture and economy. It revolves around two arguments. First, that the relationship should be seen not only as a question of epochal change, of de-differentiation and culturalisation of the economy; it should be considered as an analytical rather than a historical question. Second, it is argued that a theoretical articulation may be gainfully employed starting from the level of social ontology—particularly an ontology of practice. These arguments are developed starting from a critical discussion of two dominant bodies of thought about the relationship, following which, a demonstration of the inseparability of practice and meaning is used to conduct a theoretical re-articulation of culture and economy. Finally, the spatiality of the culture economy relation is considered, displacing the emphasis from connectivity in bounded regions towards joint involvement in the production of space on different scales.

Introductionⁱ

During the 1990s an increasing interest developed within geography, as well as geography-related circles also dealing with questions on urban and regional development, in the degree and forms of connection between economy and culture. The debate has provoked contributions from authors coming from rather different points of departure, and various publications have tried to collect such contributions (see e.g. Lee and Wills 1997; Ray and Sayer 1999; *European Urban and Regional Studies* 6:4 1999). Much of this debate has been oppositional in its formulation, each side trying to demonstrate the privileged importance of economy and culture respectively (e.g. Crang vs. Sayer 1997; Shields vs. Le Galés 1999; see also Gregson, Simonsen and Vaiou 2001). But still I prefer to consider the emergence of the debate as a signal of a will to bridge the gap in the subject between on the one hand the development of the “cultural turn” and on the other the “purification” of the economic in economic geography.

The aim of this paper is to write myself into such an endeavour and to offer some suggestions as to its progress. One major concern revolves around the

question of the level of analysis in which it is likely to pursue the connection or articulation of economy and culture. The main argument of this paper is that the problem of articulation is mainly a theoretical/ontological one, inscribed in the very definition of culture and economy alike. The paper addresses this problem by means of a discussion in four steps. First, in order to set the scene, what are considered to be the two most dominant arguments or models of connection appearing in the literature are discussed below.ⁱⁱ Taking off from that, it is argued that the theoretical connection needs to start from the level of social ontology, and at this level an ontology of human/social practice is outlined. In the third part the consequences of such an approach for the conceptualisation of both culture and economy and their relationship are discussed. Finally, since the issue involves a spatial as well as a social dimension, the paper ends by considering possible spatialities and spatial entrances. In this sense the paper addresses the economy-culture relationship in relation to regional/local development rather than the simultaneous and related debate on politics of redistribution versus politics of recognition.

Culture and economy: two configurations

In the kind of analysis representing a “cultural turn” in economic geography and a connectivity between culture and economy, two different bodies of thought seems to be predominant.ⁱⁱⁱ One is closely related to cultural studies and discourses of post-modernity and could tentatively be called the “culturalisation thesis”.^{iv} This argues that in the contemporary world, culture by development has become more important than hitherto; the economy has been “culturalised”, increasingly involving the production, circulation and consumption of items that are cultural in character.

This thesis is employed most fully in the debate about postmodern cities and spaces in which much work revolves around showing how cities, or urban governance coalitions, participate in an inter-urban

competition by means of cultural production. Conspicuous consumption centres, shopping malls, theme parks and heritage museums, cultural festivals, even 'exotic' ethnicities and local culinary cultures, have become tools in urban economic boosterism.^v

More generally formulated and perhaps more relevant in the present connection, the culturalisation thesis is developed by Scott Lash and John Urry in *Economies of Signs and Space* (1994). In this analysis they use the term "reflexive accumulation" to capture how

"economic and symbolic processes are more than ever interlaced and interarticulated; that is, that the economy is increasingly culturally inflected and that 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" (p. 64)

This de-differentiation of economy and culture is argued by Lash and Urry to be about economic life becoming cultural and aestheticised; symbolic processes, including an important aesthetic component, has permeated consumption as well as production. They believe this argument is supported by four points: (1) by the importance of knowledge and information within contemporary economies and the allied increasingly discursive and reflexive nature of the production process; (2) by the significance within contemporary economies of information-processing capacities as well as symbol-processing activities such as design and circulation of aesthetic symbols, images, sounds and narratives; (3) by the increasing reflexivity of not only production, but also consumption, involving lifestyle consumption as a part of self-construction of identities by de-traditionalised individuals; and (4) by the increasing importance of non-material products—services, communications and information—within economies, activities rendering necessary a co-production consisting of dialogically structured communications.

These analyses are formulated in a both compelling and persuasive way, and I have no intention of contesting their insight into the development of the contemporary social world. There has undoubtedly been an increase in the role of symbolic production, information and media. Consumption has indeed been thrust to the foreground of practical concerns,

both for those who attempt to manage in the business world and for everyone in the organisation of everyday life. These genuine changes, however, and others like them, do not necessarily justify the grand-sweep historicisation involved in the general argument—one that tends to exaggerate the issue of epochal novelty (see e.g. Glennie and Thrift (1992) for a demonstration of the way in which the construction of identities in urban contexts has drawn on fashion and consumption practices since the seventeenth century). Moreover, and even more important in the present connection, in arguing for the contemporary de-differentiation of economy-culture, Lash and Urry leave room open for the inference to be made that what preceded de-differentiation was a degree of separation between economy and culture. This presents a problem for me. Even if the economy-culture articulation might appear in different configurations, that does not give a basis for an assumption of their being more or less separate. Rather than regarding the economy-culture connection as a historical question, I would consider it as a transhistorical or analytical one.

The second set of ideas involved in the "cultural turn" of economic geography and regional development stems from what may be broadly described as the institutionalist perspective on these subjects. Leaving behind orthodox economics and Marxist political economy, they seek inspiration from institutional and evolutionary economics and from economic sociology. In particular, the latter tradition stresses the influence of wider social relations in economic life (see e.g. Swedberg, 1996). These bodies of thought encourage an understanding of economic life as both an instituted process and a socially embedded activity, and therefore as context-specific and path-dependent in its evolution (Amin, 1999). In most of these studies, culture seems to be identified with the skills and attitudes of place—and/or region-specific pools of labour and with entrepreneurial inclination and receptiveness to new ideas, thus influencing the success or failure of regions in (inter)national competition. More specifically, culture seems to be incorporated into the analysis through four key/overlapping notions; as local milieu, embeddedness, networks and knowledge/learning.^{vi}

The notions of local milieu, embeddedness and networks together outline a "new regionalism" which stresses local economic interdependencies drawing on the social properties of networks in which economic agents are involved. They include tacit knowledge based on face-to-face exchange,

embedded routines, habits and norms, local conventions of communication and interaction, reciprocity and trust based on familiarity and so on (see e.g. Storper, 1997). These relational assets underline the importance of spatial proximity and territorial agglomeration for economic development, and they give birth to local milieu as specific conjunctions of firms, institutions and labour. These developments are widely summarised as introducing “culture” into the analysis of regional/local economic development. In this context, then, culture is introduced via issues such as management styles, trust and individual motivation, acceptance of failure and accumulation of local knowledge, and processes of adaptability, all of which make a difference to how regions fare in the inter-regional competition (Saxenian, 1994). Culture/s are regional attributes that act as barriers or resources for economic development.

The introduction of knowledge/learning is closely connected to the arguments referred to above. Although the importance of knowledge and innovation for economic success is hardly novel, it is argued, knowledge has reached the stage of a strategic resource, and subsequently learning is the most important process for societies/places to engage in to sustain and/or develop successful economic trajectories. Furthermore, the concept of the learning firm producing knowledge is transposed through spatial embeddedness into the notion of the learning region (Morgan, 1995). Becoming a successful learner is thus widely seen as the route to competitive success. Most interesting in the present connection however is the qualitative distinction drawn between codified or formal knowledge, increasingly ubiquitously available, and the tacit knowledge in the form of know-how, skills and competences which derive from the embeddedness of firms in local cultures (Asheim, 1997; Maskell and Malmberg, 1998). In this thinking, then, culture seems to fulfil the task of informal knowledge transfer, which is seen as the key competitive asset.

This “new regionalism” has undoubtedly enriched the scope of debate within economic geography and opened up novel opportunities for a broadened understanding of economic life. Seen as an engagement with culture-economy articulations however it is somehow defective. First, in these readings, culture is generally added to the analysis at a level of particularity where it is primarily used to account for observed economic behaviour and performance. This minimises the theoretical significance of culture and reduces its role to one of ‘add-

on’ or ‘correction’, in this way somehow completing the explanation of competitive success/failure. Second, culture in these discussions is attached to firms, places and regions. This in turn signals a conception of culture as a vaguely specified attribute possessed by economic and/or spatial units (firms, regions, cities, places). As I have already pointed out, culture in this understanding comes to be seen as a constraint or resource in relation to a more dynamic set of economic forces. Moreover, within these formulations culture also appears as bounded and relatively stable; as singular and internally undifferentiated and as a realm in which people are more or less the same. As a consequence of these views, economy and culture seems to be interwoven only in the specificities of particular places; they are not and cannot be articulated theoretically.

The two bodies of thought outlined above seem to inform most discussions of economy-culture relations, either separately or in some form of combination (see e.g. Thrift and Olds, 1996). Both introduce important insights into the field; however in both cases the conceptions of culture, economy and their connectivity are inadequate to support a theoretical/analytical approach to the economy-culture relationship.^{vii} As suggested in the introduction, I am convinced that such an approach is feasible only by means of a move to the most basic level of social analysis. Therefore, my next step will be a short detour to social ontology.

Practice and meaning

Some of the most recent interventions concerned with the broadening and renewal of economic geography is encouraging an even stronger communication with knowledges from outside economics. One issue taken into this discussion is a sociological and anthropological reading of the firm, seeing it as a set of overlapping practices (Amin and Cohendet, 1999; Amin and Thrift 2000). In the formulation of this suggestion, the authors draw on the book by Etienne Wenger titled ‘*Communities of Practice*’ (1998). Wenger defines a community of practice as a unit kept together through three dimensions of practice; mutual engagement of participants, joint enterprise understood as the participant’s negotiated accountability of what they do, and a shared repertoire of routines, symbols, stories, ways of doing things and so on. Wenger’s purpose is to develop of a social theory of learning, seeing learning—whether it is explicit or tacit—as a process of social participation. Communities of

practice should subsequently be thought of as shared histories of learning, based on dual moments of participation and reification.

I consider this focus on social practice to be a fruitful entry into a reconceptualisation of economic activity; I also see it as invitation for intellectual interchange with social and cultural geography (at least as it is conducted in the Nordic countries; see Simonsen 1999). From learning, I would however like to broaden the scope to the more general discussion of the culture-economy relationship. For this purpose, I find it necessary for a moment to shift the emphasis to the level of social ontology. This turn is based on the conviction that a reconceptualisation of the economy-culture relationship needs to start from an understanding of social practice and that such an understanding basically relies upon the ontological question of what human practice is all about. I will try to throw light on that through a short visit to the work of Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Wittgenstein.

I start from the idea that the subject's understanding of the world comes from his/her everyday practices. As with many contemporary approaches in social theory, this proposition involves a rejection of the classic Cartesian notion of the subject as a unitary being made up of disparate parts, mind and body, which is universal, neutral and gender-free. In that, consciousness is a disembodied, immaterial unity with full reflexive access to itself, and the body in turn is a material object to which consciousness is attached. The dissociation from this notion has however followed very different roads. With a "slogan" borrowed from Merleau-Ponty, the one to be followed in this instance may be formulated as "Consciousness is in the first place not a matter of 'I think that' but of 'I can'" (1962, p. 137). That is, the subject is basically derived *in practice*.

One important source of inspiration for such an approach has been Heidegger's existential phenomenology—in particular as formulated in *Being and time* (1962). In this work "Dasein" or human "being-in-the-world" is described as an existential "facticity"—as a practical, directional, everyday involvement. Our concern with the environment takes form through tools and articles for everyday use as well as produced useful things and projects—altogether designated as "equipment" (Zeug). "Being-in-the-world" then is an everyday skilful coping or engagement with an environment which includes objects as well as other human beings. That means that our "environment" does not arrange it-

self as something given in advance but as a totality of equipment dealt with in practice. It is important to state, however, that the use of the metaphor of equipment or tools does not lead to a reduction of the notion of practice to one of work as seen in much Marxist literature. It is a much broader conception, as, for instance, when houses or flats are seen as equipment for living in a place.^{viii} Heidegger describes very simple skills—hammering, walking into a room, using turn signals, etc.—and shows how these everyday coping skills contain a familiarity with the world that enables us to make sense of things and to find our way about in our public environment. He demonstrates that the only ground for the intelligibility of thought and action we have or need to have is in the everyday practices themselves, not in some hidden process of thinking or of history (Dreyfus and Hall, 1992). But the skills involved in these everyday practices are in themselves remarkable. Even in the most banal activities extensive biological and cultural resources are mobilised.

A further development of such thinking is found with Merleau-Ponty in his sensuous phenomenology of *lived experience* where it is closely connected to the question of perception (1962, 1968). For Merleau-Ponty, perception is an opening out on to and engagement with otherness, a dialectical relationship of the body and its environment, which at the same time constitutes subject as well as object. Therefore, perception is not in the first instance an "experience" of objects; it is an enjoyment and involvement with them, and the connected mode of consciousness is a practical consciousness which is pre-reflective, pre-objective and pre-egological (Crossley, 1996). We should then speak neither about reflection nor observation, but about participation, and it is in this participation or practice that meaning and subjectivity are constituted. Merleau-Ponty's favourite example is taken from football, one that at the same time serves to highlight the importance of acquired cultural skills and routines. Football players do not reflect on the field and the rules of the game when playing, they are absorbed in the game. The players read the game and see openings, passes, "offsides" and goals—that is, different meaningful dimensions of the game. The point is that the significance of these elements is constituted, not reflective but practical. The players have what Bourdieu later on called a "sense of the game".

It is this kind of thinking that is later sociologised and set in a historical/structural connection

by authors formulating social theories of practice, such as Lefebvre (1958, 1961), Giddens (1984) and in particular Bourdieu (1977, 1990). When Lefebvre writes about the importance of everyday life, Giddens about “practical consciousness” as the basis of a great part of our day-to-day activities, and Bourdieu about “habitus” as internalised dispositions for action and about people’s “sense of the game”, the point is exactly this transcendence of the distinction between subjective and objective coming from the inseparability of practice and subjectivity. These authors also add at least two aspects to the understanding of practice. One is the fact that practices should not be seen as isolated, intentional acts, but rather as continuous flows of conduct which are always future-oriented or part of a project. The other aspect is that taking a starting point in practice does not imply believing in social coherence or harmony. The construction and enactment of power can be an inherent aspect of practice, as, for instance, demonstrated by Bourdieu in his notions of multiform capital—social, cultural, economic and symbolic—and social field.

There is no doubt that this thinking is equally important to the above-mentioned ideas of learning and tacit knowledge.^{ix} Ideas of implicit relations, embodied understandings, tacit conventions, untold rules of thumb, underlying assumptions and so on, all in some sense connected to shared world views, owe much of their development to a theoretical understanding of human and social practices. In line with that, Wenger (1998) has tried to re-think learning in terms of practice and participation. For him, then, learning in communities or organisations may be summarised around the following processes: Developing forms of mutual engagement, internal relationships and identities in the organisation; understanding and tuning their enterprise by reconciling different interpretations of what it is all about; and developing their repertoire, styles and discourses and renegotiating the meaning of tools, routines and representations. All these are related to the development of practices and abilities to negotiate meaning.

These developments can lead to yet another important element when considering the relationship between practice, subjectivity and meaning—that is, the close connection between everyday practice and everyday language, most thoroughly developed by Wittgenstein (1953). In accordance with the above, Wittgenstein argues that meaning and significance cannot be ascribed to some kind of pre-given independent phenomena, but is produced

by human beings in their performance of specific activities. Significance and meaning is constituted by the means of language-use, and being a language user is always connected to a practice and to a specific situation that in some sense has to be taken for given. What Wittgenstein provides by his philosophy of language is therefore at the same time a philosophy of practice—a phenomenological hermeneutics in which being a language user is in absolute concordance with being an acting and speaking person situated in a specific context. Language becomes a medium for social practice and everyday life; namely the life that we share with each other through our language.

A further consequence is that our understanding of the world is worked out in joint action and dialogue. Rather than representing our actions, the function of language is to set up intersubjective settings of common actions. Wittgenstein introduces the notions of “language game” and “form of life” to illustrate the significance of language and the relationship between language and practice. He says: “Here the term ‘language-game’ is meant to bring into prominence the fact that *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life” (1953, vol. I, p. 11e).

Through this statement, Wittgenstein by way of language use underlines the radical intersubjective character of human/social practices and produces an orientation towards ways of life of different social groups. Meaning and signification become mutually connected to social practices conceived as patterns of collective life. Without shared human activity no structured “reality” or practical experiential basis exists that renders possible an identification of items for designation.

The general argument then relocates the meaning of our talk from consciousness (imagination) to the public sphere (language, intersubjectivity) and relates to the innumerable sets of language games that we as social beings play with each other. The notion of form of life comes in as a notion of culture—as concordant ways of living in which the language games are located and our utterances take on meaning. Constitution of meaning is referred to networks of social practice, to the capability to go on within different social, temporal and spatial contexts. From that, it is now possible to return to the ontic level and the conceptualisation of the economy-culture relationship.

Before doing so, however, I should make it clear that I have no intention of claiming an approach based on theories of practice to be new in human

geography. Different versions have certainly circulated within the subject. One of the most prominent Anglophonic proponents of such theories is Nigel Thrift (see e.g. Thrift 1996). In relation to the subject of this paper, he has demonstrated how theories of practice can qualify analyses of the role of social networks and “actor-networks” in economic systems and flows (see e.g. Thrift and Olds 1996, Thrift and Leyshon 1996). The course I wish to pursue in the rest of this paper is slightly different. It is to proceed from the outlined practice/meaning connection to an understanding of culture and economy, and in particular their articulation.

Economy-culture in terms of meaning and practice

If for a moment we reconsider the two configurations of the economy-culture connection introduced above, it is obvious that they are expanded from rather different conceptions of culture. From the “culturalisation thesis” comes a conception of culture emphasising cultural products, the sign value of social practices, relations and products, forms of consumption and lifestyles, or “the stylisation of life”. That is, culture becomes a question of cultural production and consumption. As suggested above, the embeddedness/network literature tends to rely on an understanding of culture/s as more or less homogeneous local identities. The model of thinking is one in which economy and politics are the dynamic forces mobilising relatively stable, unspecified “traditional” cultural resources/constraints in the process of regional development. Notwithstanding the qualities of these approaches, an analytical/theoretical approach to economy-culture renders necessary a more generic concept of culture, one that recognises the importance of meaning and the inseparability of practice and meaning demonstrated in the previous section.

One of the common observations used to commence discussions of the concept of culture is to remark on its hyper-complexity and to use this to legitimate the impossibility of unambiguous definitions. This complexity has a long history. Since the eighteenth century the concept has come to connote contrasting meanings due to its development in different academic traditions (French, German and English) and its incorporations into different branches of knowledge (Fink, 1988). One such contrast is between those who see culture as a ‘generic’ quality of human life, as the basic capacity of human beings to organise their world into mean-

ingful schemes, and those who stress the “differential” quality of culture; that is, the identification of distinctive identities of social groups grounded in social behaviour and meaning systems. These conceptions, however, do not need to be seen as contradictory. The capacity for culture naturally includes the capacity for specific cultures. Generic culture can then be seen as the source of variation and creativity within human populations, while differential culture represents the realisation of generic culture in its historical and spatial specificity (Friedman, 1994).

Thus the present understanding of culture starts with the recognition that social life is inherently cultural; that is, inherently shaped and even constituted in part by the ways in which people generate or recognise meaning in social action and its products. Culture is not then a specific domain of social life; it is about the production of meaning, about the processes of making the world meaningful and significant that we are all involved in. I follow Hastrup and Ovesen (1980) in their tentative definition of culture as the continuously produced and reproduced frame of meaning from which social life is conducted and carried on. This understanding emphasises the complex creation of norms, values and schemes of meaning, their foundation in communicative processes and their significance to social practice. As suggested above, however, this should not give occasion for an understanding of culture as only a pre-given framework from which practice is derived or a static collection of norms, values and belief, even if hegemonic symbolic discourses do exist in all social configurations. Culture is a dynamic dimension of social practice, and as such “a culture” is seldom sharply bounded and never completely internally homogeneous. Meaning and signification are created in and through practice; they are based in spatio-temporal transmitted constructions and continually struggled over and renegotiated through everyday life. In this way the production of meaning, or our meaningful mapping of the world, should be considered as involved in the whole gamut of human and social practices.

What would this mean for the understanding of economy? First, taking off from such a concept of culture and from the conceptual inseparability of meaning and practice, an inevitable step will be to acknowledge that when it comes to economic activities and practices, they themselves should be seen as materialising meanings. Economic practices and activities need to be seen as necessarily involving creation, negotiation and fixing of mean-

ings. That is, at the same time as these practices produce particular goods and services, they are producing ways of doing and thinking about economic activities as well as other parts of social life. In turn these ways of doing/thinking should be acknowledged as frequently having critical economic effects—whether in terms of innovation and competitiveness of firms or regions, or of work and labour market development.

This understanding of economy as also a meaningful activity—and as such inseparable from culture—is not a new invention. For instance, in German ‘*Wirtschaftssoziologie*’, as it emerged in the end of the nineteenth century, the study of economics was argued belonging to the ‘cultural sciences’, basically in order to maintain that an interpretive and historical-comparative approach should be applied. One of its most prominent participants, Max Weber in *Economy and Society*, stresses that “all ‘economic’ processes and objects are characterised as such entirely by the *meaning* they have for human action” (1978, p. 64). He argues for both a formal and a substantive rationality of economic action. While the first casts it as a calculating goal-oriented activity, the second appeals to criteria or values which are ethical, utilitarian, egalitarian, hedonistic or aesthetic and which in the end can be embodied into the “spirit” of whole economic systems. Such a dual understanding of economy, combining the material and the ideal or practice and meaning, is in accordance with the approach forwarded here. Swedberg (1998) also argues that Weber’s idea of an “economic ethic”, having to do with the values and norms that inform economic activities and with how ideal and material interests are intertwined, is one that puts him ahead of much contemporary economic sociology. These insights seem to have been lost during the twentieth century in the construction, in both academia and popular discourse, of the economy as a self-contained material sphere of production, circulation and consumption, a conception that fails to recognise the degree to which it is itself a cultural construct.

If we reconnect these ideas to the one of firms (or other economic organisations) as sets of communities of practice, these practices and communities themselves have to be seen as social fields in which meanings and identities are constantly being produced and re/negotiated. In the performance of economic practices we constantly produce social values and meanings as well as mobilise and draw on them. These processes include both explicit and tacit (or in other terms both discursive and practi-

cal) dimensions of our experience. Both are involved in the constant process of negotiation of meaning in everyday life. As a side effect, this can somehow question the sharp distinction between explicit and tacit dimensions of knowledge/learning adopted in some of the literature. Since both aspects are always present to some degree, it might be more productive to think in terms of a spectrum or a continuum.^x

As an illustration, let me give a few examples of the meaningfulness of economic activity. The first is taken from Viviana Zelizer’s brilliant book *The Social Meaning of Money* (1994), in which she starts from classic interpretations of the modern world which portray money as a key instrument in the rationalisation of social life. Money, according to this conception, is the ultimate objectifier, homogenising all qualitative distinctions into an abstract quantity and flattening personal relations and social ties. This is presumed to stem from money’s total indifference to norms and values. Even if the social observers have been right to predict that money increasingly enters our social practices and relations, Zelizer argues, they are wrong in their assessment of the consequences. For money is neither cultural neutral nor social anonymous. People differentiate and segregate their money both in regard to their source and their use. Money obtained in different ways carries different meanings and moral values. How else could we use as metaphor “dirty” money to describe money of ethically dubious origins? Concerning the spending of money, families, by means of earmarking, carefully creates distinct kinds of money, a process of struggle and negotiation invested with cultural meaning and power. In traditional households, for instance, a housewife’s funds are very different from children’s allowances or a husband’s personal money, just as the construction of the idea of a “family wage” was a highly influential ascription of cultural meaning to wage money. Some of Zelizer’s oppositional arguments might be overstated. Money can probably function in both ways—sometimes being differentiated and endowed with significance, and sometimes being divorced from context and meaning. Nevertheless Zelizer’s historically informed discussion of the meaning of money confirms that a serious concern with meaning is essential to an understanding of the culture-economy connection.

The same applies to my second example/s that are drawn from two Danish PhD dissertations (Nielsen, 1998; Haldrup, 1999; see also Bærenholdt and Haldrup, 2001). Both address the post-

communist transformation processes from a point of view of culture-economy relations—in the Czech Republic and Slovakia respectively. One starts from a conception of the firm as a unit of action, and investigates how transformative values and norms between managers influenced economic practices. The other one investigates the role of discourses and identities between workers and middle range executives in a specific region as they were performed and negotiated during the transformation. In both cases it is demonstrated how the “path-dependency” of the economic transformation is formed by the way in which meaning and identity are transmitted and renegotiated between the actors of the transformation process.

An important lesson to be drawn from these examples is also that the question of understanding economy-culture relations has to be seen not only as a theoretical, but to a high degree also a methodological one. Taking the connectedness of practice/meaning or economy/culture seriously must also involve a “hermeneutic” endeavour in analyses of the “economic”. That is, an understanding not only of people’s actions, but also of the ways in which their own interpretations and constructions of meaning shape these actions. The integration of culture into analyses of economic practices and regional development must therefore reach beyond the level of “black box” or presumptuous generalisations and adopt methods that allow in-depth understanding of the agents involved.

Economy, culture and space

Not surprisingly, the engagement with economy and culture within circles debating urban and regional development has to a considerable degree also revolved around the issue of space. More recently, this issue has been voiced in a debate conducted in *European Urban and Regional Studies* arguing that economy-culture can most profitably be explored through a spatial approach (le Galés, 1999; Shields, 1999). Spatially situated analyses, it is argued, privilege an understanding of the synthesis of practices of meaning, signification and identity and those of labour and material conditions of existence. Such an argument could be seen as closely related to the thinking of Henri Lefebvre when he raises the following rhetorical question:

“(W)hat exactly is the mode of existence of social relationships? Are they substantial? natural? or formally abstract? The study of space

offers an answer according to which the social relations of production have a social existence to the extent that they have a spatial existence: they project themselves into a space, becoming inscribed there and in the process producing that space itself.” (1991:129)

As touched on in the previous discussion of local milieu, embeddedness and learning, space is however much more often thought of in terms of units such as localities, places or regions. These are construed as more-or-less bounded zones in which social relations and cultural identities constitute particular local/regional milieu for economic activity. As suggested above, this mode of connecting culture and space is problematic. When culture is seen as integral with spatial units (regions, cities, places or even nations), these easily end up being seen as singular and internally integrated, as discrete units of discourse, and as realms in which people are more or less the same. Thinking of cultures as integral tends both to hypostatise them and to direct attention away from the way in which they are internally complex and continually reshaped through practice, negotiation and struggle.

Other spatialities do emerge from the approaches discussed above; for instance, when the culturalisation thesis produces ideas of postmodern urban/culture spaces and sets forth contradictory processes of embeddedness/disembeddedness. But rather than open up a diversity of spatialities, this strategy tends to freeze a dichotomy between bounded places and its opposite—a site-less space of flows. For me, therefore, it is important to understand how culture—seen as the production of meaning—is constituted in a variety of practices, networks and spatial scales. It can be in global flows and networks, as it is discussed in the globalisation literature, in the ‘imagined communities’ of national or regional identifications, in local networks and memories, or in spaces of everyday practices such as homes and firms. What places offer in this connection are specific articulations of these multiple layers of meaning. In this interpretation, what gives a place its specificity is not just some long internalised history and identity, but the fact that it is constructed out of a particular constellation of practices and social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus (Massey, 1994). Therefore, rather than seeking a connection of economy and culture in bounded regions, we should see them as jointly involved in the production of space on different scales.

In this way the weaving of space into the econ-

omy-culture argument could be both much more generic and much more complex—and in accordance with the richness and diversity of contemporary debate on the spatial. Many examples might be used to invoke different spatialities: Thrift and Olds (1996), besides bounded regions, suggest three other topologies as possible spatial representations of the “economic” (networks, flows and “two places at once”); many writers explore the imaginary geographies involved in the production of sign values of products and so on. Again, however, I think that the development of an explicit spatialisation of the culture-economy articulation needs to return to a more basic level—that is, to the spatiality of social practices. Such a starting point can be found in the now well-known work of Henri Lefebvre (in particular 1991). First, his approach will underline that economic practices (as all practices) are never just “in” space; they are inherently spatial (and space producing) themselves. Second, with his conceptual triad of social spatiality—including the dimensions of spatial practice, representations of space and spaces of representation—he underlines the indispensable connectedness of the material and the representational; of social practice, signification and the conflict-ridden production of meaning.

Since the translation of *The Production of Space* (1991), Lefebvre’s work has been widely used within geography. But (perhaps because of the temporal coincidence between this translation and the “cultural turn” within the subject) it seems that the above-mentioned conceptual triad has mostly been activated to analyse the production/appropriation of space in relation to representations of space, the importance of the imagery and politics of recognition (e.g. Shields, 1991; Soja, 1989, 1996). The relevance of his approach to an understanding of local (economic) development has seldom been discussed. One of the applications coming nearest to the issue is Allen and Pryke’s (1994) discussion of the production of service space in the City of London, which focuses on power relations in the production of this “finance” space. What I am looking for is rather an entry into the complex spatialities of the culture-economy articulation as it occurs in production, work and consumption. I think that Lefebvre’s conceptual triad has much to offer in such an endeavour. It is however beyond the scope of this paper to make a full development of such an analysis. Actually, I do not consider it possible to do that “in abstract”. Instead, I will outline a few analytical themes that an application of Lefebvre’s conceptual triad might suggest.

- 1) “Spatial practice” in Lefebvre’s terms embraces the social production and reproduction and the particular locations and spatial sets characteristic of a given social formation. In the present connection it calls attention to all the different spatialities and topologies of economic practices, such as labour markets and spatial organisation of production (e.g. home-working, international division of labour); networks in scales ranging from the local to the international level; flows or continual movements of capital, information, commodities and people, etc. The variety stresses how local development, even though it is performed in situated practices, needs to be seen as an articulation of a range of social spatialities in different scales.
- 2) “Representations of space” is connected with “order” and dominant spatial codes in any social configuration in question. It is about more or less institutionalised meanings and significations framing or influencing social practices; for example, about dominant discourses interfering with economic and political practices. One such representation could be the discourse of “globalisation” which is widely deployed to imply the inevitability of certain events and the necessity of certain particular policy options in the name of global competitiveness (Kelly, 1999). Another could be the “Europe of Regions” reinforcing ideas of bounded regions, inter-regional competition and uneven development; yet another the general economic discourse of accumulation and growth. The last one underlining the above-mentioned argument that the dominant conception of economy is itself a cultural construct.
- 3) “Spaces of representation” involves the complex symbolism connected with the spatiality of social life, the place and its symbolic value, the rhythms of everyday life, feminine and masculine and so on. In the present connection this would be related to the production of meaning between the agents involved in economic practices, whether they are managers, producers or consumers of products and services. These patterns of meanings, symbols and values have their source in history—of groups of people and individuals belonging to those groups—but they are also continuously produced and renegotiated in and through practices in different settings such as firms, neighbourhoods, unions, etc. Spaces of representation today must however be seen as produced on different scales, as

such producing differential sets of cultural meaning more or less in accordance with the dominant discourses discussed above. Thus, an application of Lefebvre's "spatial triad" to the question of local development not only underlines the inseparability of economy and culture argued for above, it also reintroduces questions of power and resistance into an increasingly de-politicised field.

All the issues mentioned in this short outline are to some extent familiar in one or another part of geographical analysis. What Lefebvre's conceptual triad provides, I think, is a means to spatialise the culture-economy articulation that sustains its complexity and reduces it neither to bounded regions nor dichotomous constructions of spaces of places contra spaces of flows.

Finishing remarks

What I have been attempting in this paper is to argue that the relationship between economy and culture is not just a historical phenomenon, one of de-differentiation or epochal culturalisation. Neither is it a question of "correction" or "addition" of non-economic elements to economic life, in this way the connection/articulation only being relevant in the specificity of regional development. The alternative, I would argue, is not just a matter of rhetorical advantage, but one of conceptual redefinition. Therefore, I took the way through an ontology of practice to show how meanings and subjectivity are created in and through practice, and subsequently how culture (as the production of meaning) and economy (as meaningful practices) are inseparable. Economic activities should therefore not be set in opposition to extra-economic cultural and social forces but be understood as just one category of social relations, much as families, kinship and religion. Economic phenomena are interdependent with systems of meaning and patterns of social relations. Analyses of economic practices as meaningful activities would constitute a bridge to the understanding of these interdependencies and connections.

Finally, two more points are inferred from this discussion. The first concerns space. As a consequence of the above, the spatial dimension of the economy-culture relation should not be seen as one of social/cultural embeddedness in bounded regions, but rather as a joint involvement in the production of space on different scales. The other point

is about methodology, arguing that a genuine engagement with economy as a meaningful activity presupposes taking hermeneutics seriously; that is, an adoption of methods appropriate for the understanding and interpretation of meanings.

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Notes

- i This paper owes much to the co-operation I have had recently with Dina Vaiou from the National Technical University of Athens and Nicky Gregson from University of Sheffield, and some of the arguments in the paper will overlap with joint publications (Gregson, Simonsen and Vaiou 1999, 2001) At the same time however, none of them should of course be made responsible for the general approach I outline here.
- ii This is done in the full awareness of the fact that such a categorisation is of course always a simplification.
- iii This shows up in the discussion in *European Urban and Regional Studies* 6:4, 1999.
- iv See also Gregson, Simonsen and Vaiou (2001).
- v There is a wealth of literature to illustrate this point; e.g. Sorkin (1992), Watson and Gibson (1995) or Zukin (1997).
- vi The following discussion summarises a more developed one in Gregson, Simonsen and Vaiou (2001).
- vii An exception to this general description may be found in the work of Andrew Sayer, who conducted an analytical discussion of the relationship between economy and culture (Sayer, 1997; Ray and Sayer, 1999). Unfortunately however, this endeavour used is by Sayer to emphasise the distinction rather than the connection between economy and culture (see also Gregson, Simonsen and Vaiou 2001).
- viii Even if the question of work is of course crucial in the present connection.
- ix Even if the inspiration in economic geography has more likely emerged via Polanyi (1983).
- x One might argue that Wittgenstein's demonstration of a close connection between everyday language and everyday practice already blurred the distinction.

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KIRSTEN SIMONSEN

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