

EDITORIAL

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Remembering the 1990s in *new formations* 50, Lynne Segal detects at its end a renewed interest in economics within Cultural Studies, ‘a new emphasis in production alongside consumption, in social context as well as hermeneutics, even a move “back to reality”’.¹ In retrospect this is hardly surprising. As Larry Ray and Andrew Sayer have commented, the ‘cultural turn’ and the commensurate decline in economic analysis coincided strangely with ‘a time of widening economic divisions and increasing economic problems’.² The sector that has seen the worst relative decline in funding has been higher education, wasted by decreasing funding for increasing student numbers. In the UK, annual funding per student declined by more than 50 per cent in the years between 1990 and 2001. Meanwhile their teachers were coming to believe, in Simon Wortham’s description, ‘that as academics we all exist within - and can produce ourselves only in relation to - a market’, a market in course recruitment, research funding and the relentlessly monitored production of books and articles, which then must find *their* market among increasingly risk-averse publishers. We will return to the question of intellectual work in *new formations* 53. As this one went to press the ‘marketisation’ of higher education was consolidated by the parliamentary imposition of greatly increased fees for undergraduate tuition, thus shifting the burden of rebuilding the universities from general taxation to the individual ‘consumer’.

If these factors weren’t sufficient to reacquaint the academy with the economy, there is also the question of world politics, as they have been explicitly reorganized around globalisation’s exacerbation of inequalities and - after 9/11 - an empire’s determination to pre-empt any threat to its military and commercial dominance. Nevertheless, acknowledgement of the interrelation of culture and economy (adduced variously to theory and empiricism or, in reverse, the social and the structural) has not come easy to contemporary scholarship, despite its commitment to interdisciplinarity. This may be because, as Wortham has argued, ‘the “economic”/ economics defies any singular positioning either “inside” or “outside” the interdisciplinary enterprise. Economics, as the sign of systems of exchange, almost names interdisciplinarity, and yet it exists and can be located only problematically in relation to it’. Cultural criticism requires a plural economics - ‘economics as a material base and economics as a structure of representation (or part of one)’³ - without the disciplinary divisions such a distinction implies. As for the cultural, Peter Osborne has similarly argued against its reduction to the singularity of signification or subjectivity, proposing instead the complex imbrication of ‘certain kinds of social

1. Lynne Segal, ‘Theoretical Afflictions: Poor Rich White Folks Play the Blues’, *new formations* 50, (Autumn 2003), 150.

2. Larry Ray and Andrew Sayer, ‘Introduction’, *Culture and Economy after the Cultural Turn*, London, Sage Publications, 1999, p2.

3. Simon Wortham, ‘Bringing Criticism to Account: Economy, Exchange and Cultural Theory’, *Economy and Society*, 26, 3 (August 1997), 402-3.

4. Peter Osborne, *Philosophy in Cultural Theory*, London, Routledge, 2000, p18.

5. Jacques-Alain Miller (ed), *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII, The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-1960*, New York, W.W. Norton, 1992, p229.

relations, and hence also of certain forms of human subjectivity ... the cultural is the meaningful dimension of subject production'.⁴

In this spirit, this issue examines the relations between a variety of cultures and economies in Blair's Britain, the US nation-state, the media industries and queer theory. Boris Vejdosky opens the issue with a reflection on the economies, political and libidinal, of Crèvecoeur's eighteenth-century *Letters from an American Farmer*. In the Frenchman's celebration of 'my own land, the bright idea of property, of exclusive right', he discerns the aggressive narcissism of which Freud warned in *Civilization and Its Discontents*. As Lacan's commentary on that essay observes, 'To exercise control over one's own goods is to have the right to deprive others of them'.⁵ Only when these goods are revealed as others, when Crèvecoeur's farmer encounters the 'living spectre' of a tortured slave, is the violence of this privative *jouissance* disclosed.

In extolling the pursuit of happiness through possessive individualism, the American pastoral founds both a culture and an economy. Two hundred and thirty years later, Paul Smith brings both terms to bear on the new imperialism of the United States. In his assessment, contemporary American foreign policy serves both global capital and the national impulse to dominate rival imperial powers. The concomitant of this inter-state aggression is the US state's domination of its own citizens in an increasingly distant, dysfunctional and authoritarian political culture. Belying Hardt and Negri's farewell to the age of national imperialism, the Bush imperium is increasingly global and domestic, bidding to realize the 'anti-utilitarian' character that Arendt perceived in totalitarian states.

One aspect of this authoritarianism, the proliferation of surveillance, is also identified in this issue as a consequence of what has been called 'pornographication'. As pornographic products and services are streamed to mass markets, the information technologies which make this possible also enable the extension of consumer monitoring. The internet may offer unprecedented private access to sexual representations, but it records your credit card details as it does so. And while the policing of this industry contributes to the drive for what the Pentagon calls total information awareness, its growth stimulates major innovations in website design as well as demand for broadband connection. As Stephen Maddison points out, to focus on pornography as an exclusively textual system (for sexual expression or oppression) risks ignoring its broader role in the development and regulation of mass media.

Where Maddison's political economy stresses the limits of textual analysis, Anne Barron's examination of film copyright returns to it in order to take account of film as both a commodity and a cultural form. Revisiting the Althusserian tradition that informed the influential film theory of the 1970s, she traces its failure to reconcile the regulatory and the discursive function of copyright law. As the mechanism that secures the commodification of symbolic artefacts, copyright discourse is argued to reveal what film is for

its commercial producers and distributors, an incoherent ontology that recent legal decisions have done little to resolve.

The relation between textual dynamics and political economy is also one that troubles queer theory, given its inclination to what Rita Felski has called 'political formalism'.⁶ Spurred by the denigration of poststructuralist analysis in the Culture Wars, as well as homosexuals' increasing assimilation to market citizenship, theorists of sexuality are turning their attention to global capital, and its complex relation to legal discrimination, legitimate kinship, commercial recognition and the relations of labour.

One striking example of the contradictions in play here is developed in Cora Kaplan's analysis of recent film portrayals of unemployed men from the mines and the mills of England. In the 1996 *Brassed Off*, the 1997 *The Full Monty* and especially 2000 *Billy Elliot*, showbiz offers the sole means of transcending an abject redundancy. Ascending from pit villager to *primeur danseur*, Billy takes the lead in the famously queer Matthew Bourne production of *Swan Lake*. There, watched by an enlarged kin group of father, brother, transvestite best friend and his black male companion, the high-flyer of Blair's 'meritocratic' Britain performs for its no longer 'pretended', if scarcely prosperous, new family.

6. Rita Felski, 'Modernist Studies and Cultural Studies: Reflections on Method', *Modernism/modernity*, 19, 3 (2003), 509-512. Felski defines this tendency as the representation of texts as 'all-powerful devices for the interpellation and manipulation of human subjects'.