Interdisciplinary studies as a door to access culture in the changing world of higher education
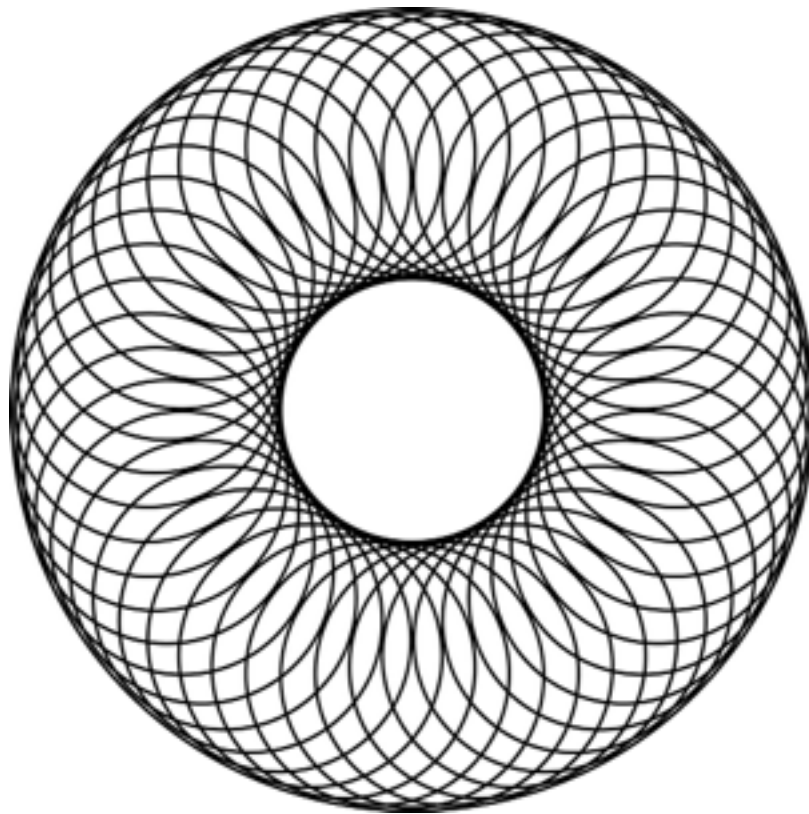
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Introduction

Oh, East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet,

Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great Judgment Seat;

But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth,

When two strong men stand face to face, though they come from the ends of the earth!

Rudyard Kipling, 1889

"A world obsessed with ones and the multiplications and divisions of ones creates problems for the conceptualization of relationships."

Marilyn Strathern, 2004, p. 53

Throughout the 20th Century and more recently, theorists have expressed in different ways the need to acknowledge the animating forces behind people's economic activity. In the field of organisation studies, a field which forms much of our understanding of changes occurring in higher education, the divergent outcomes of such changes in higher education has made understanding 'culture' an increasingly important task. Centrally, this paper is a critical exploration of the theoretical problem of how to better account for cultural factors when we are asking questions about economic change.

The above quotations reflect the interests I wish to pursue in the following work. Through Kipling's poem questioning the validity of the 'East-West' divide, I allude to the prospect that current conceptions of cultural difference within many fields remains under-developed and need to be re-assessed. Through Strathern's insight about the problems with an obsession with measurement and assessment, I refer to the fact that economic focus can hamper self-reflexivity and nuance when dealing with matters of culture. Thus, I first want to explore, at its roots, why culture has such a problematic status within certain fields of the social sciences. I interrogate the validity and utility of broad claims to a broad East/West division, and why the idea of 'culture' as 'meaning' leaves a hole in our understanding. Second, I address how an anthropological approach to culture, ethnography, can allow theorists to draw more nuanced links between ideas of personhood, learning and knowledge,

and perceptions towards higher education in order to more fully discern how and why global changes to Universities are having, and will have, such diverse outcomes on the ground. Ethnography, I argue, can illustrate how economic activity is entangled within the heart of human identity, and, therefore, how drawing an equation between 'economic-based' factors and 'cultural' factors is problematic. Finally, I investigate how an understanding of the changes taking place in higher education at the global level might be configured theoretically astride 'mainstream' methodology in organisation studies. The quantative focus of much work in economics and organisation studies is important to ask certain questions, but it cannot reach the same necessary depth and complexity enabled by a more localised study. If our aim is to enrich our understanding of the complex changes instantiated by shifting higher education practices, if only fleetingly, then we must delve in to the complex lives of the people living through them.

It is not my argument that we do an injustice to the complexity of people's lives by focussing upon economic 'progress'. Instead, my core proposition is that producing detailed and nuanced localised analyses of differing contexts will enable a sharpening of the focus of broader scale theoretical projects. It is a constructive proposition rather than one founded in gloom and critique. Similarity is the shadow of difference, and so observing a phenomenon through a different analytical lens can serve to enhance self-understanding. The two can operate in tandem, swinging between each other as a pendulum, and enjoying greater insight by having both a quantitative and a qualitative approach.

Culture and Economics

i. Culture as 'Meaning'

The most influential theoretical outlook in anthropology over the last few decades has been postmodernism or poststructuralism, characterised by its propensity to refute binary distinctions, cast skepticism over truth claims, and highlight how all perspectives and epistemologies are rooted in a particular position. Put simply, much of recent anthropology has been critical of the process of knowledge production, leading to an 'essentialist skepticism' (as Reyna, 2012, has put it).

Whilst there is much to criticise in this 'turn' to 'post-' theory, one productive aspect has been the increasing recognition of the inseparability of so-called 'distinct' social fields. Economy, for example, pervades the field of kinship, whilst religion is enmeshed in politics, and so on. The benefit of this deconstruction for the state of social theory is clear; social phenomena can no longer be studied in isolation or easily categorised but must be excavated in a way that illuminates these overlaps and in-distinctions. The challenge is to uphold such a deep and nuanced skepticism whilst making a contribution to understanding the 'real world'.

Outside of anthropology, much of the difficulty encountered by economic and organisation theorists seeking to engage the factor of culture is due to a prior conceptual separation of the 'economic' from the 'cultural'. The impulse to separate 'meaning' from 'economy' may be tied to a specific view of the world in which all action is either moral or instrumental. There has been a long argument in Western thought that takes the division between 'morality' and 'instrumentality' for granted and in which the problematic was what the proper balance between the two spheres of life should be, and that neither position can adequately comprehend forms of moral life in which effective instrumentality is considered to have intrinsic ethical value. Alisdair MacIntyre's book 'After Virtue' locates the historical roots of this distinction, attributing its emergence to the attempt of Enlightenment thinkers to justify morality, and looks at historical forms of virtue in which the good and the effective were unified. According to Macintyre, the morality which predominates today's thinking, 'Emotivism', is premised on the division of the social world into,

" …a realm of the organizational in which ends are taken to be given and are not available for rational scrutiny and a realm of the personal in which judgment and debate about values are central factors, but in which no rational social resolution of issues is available…" (p.34)

In line with MacIntyre's postulated distinction between 'morality' and 'instrumentalism', many theorists analysing comparative changes in higher education have partitioned culture away from economics, often relying upon an overly-cerebral idea of culture as 'meaning' or as a 'text'. Of course, the chief precedents for this kind of approach include Weber's 'spirit of capitalism', Keynes' 'animating spirits', and Adam Smith's 'moral sentiments'. One symptom of the over-reliance upon 'meaning' is prominence given to interviewing as a method over participant observation (2005). Emphasising the words spoken during a contrived interview removes meaning from its concrete manifestations, which, in turn, means that the dynamic, situated, material, and multivalent nature of cultural meanings becomes masked. The preference also reminds us of the temporal orientation of organisation scientists seeking to co-opt such a notion. As Bate (1997: 1155) observes, organisation studies are not inclined to be 'historically-minded'. Organisation looks to the future, not even the present, let alone the past.

This preoccupation with 'meaning' arose first in 'interpretive' anthropology, spearheaded by literary-theorist-turned-anthropologist Clifford Geertz, in which cultures are akin to texts. Underlying Geertz' model of culture is a pre-theoretical assumption that meaning is always contained within action; an amalgamation of systems of ideas and patterns of behaviour. Thus, in his analysis of the Balinese cockfight, Geertz argues that the persistence of fights in secret, despite their illegality, is a consequence of their important cognitive function (Geertz, 1973). Ladislav Holy, in his ethnography of the Berti people in Sudan, has challenged this construction of a collectively shared and acted upon lexicon of meanings as mere metaphors; too vague and elusive to be ascribed an unambiguous ontological status (Holy, 1991). According to Holy, the symbolic meaning of the cockfight as a 'dramatization of status relationships' is not the rationale behind the involvement of Balinese people. Similarly, the persistence of 'customary' rituals in contemporary Berti Sudanese culture cannot be seen as resulting solely from the fact that they fulfil an important cognitive function and communicate to the Berti importance information about the world.

They also have important pragmatic functions in that they are important signs of Berti identity (Holy, 1991). In this way, Geertz's characterisation of interpretation provokes a highly elitist view of culture according to which the privileged individuals define it and arbitrate on it, whereas the others, although passionately involved in the same cultural forms as the privileged elite, remain uncultured by implication.

Relating sequentially to the previous discussion of the varying perspectives of the extent to which knowledge is shared is the capacity for cultural meanings to sustain relations of power and privilege. Thus, a consequence of the view that cultural texts are motivated by a set of shared meanings is an oversight of the political consequences of cultures as ideologies, their situatedness as justifications and mystifications of a local historically cumulated status quo. Lila Abu-Lughod, in her analysis of local interpretations of television serials in Egypt, illuminates these concerns by showing that the television cannot be regarded as a 'text' (1997). Rather, TV entails discrete cultural texts that are produced, circulated and consumed, and a study of it requires a 'multi-sited' ethnography. Her case study shows clearly that the same cultural texts have different imports in different contexts. Serials raised relevant issues for village viewers and yet were unassailable because of fundamental differences of perspective related to social location. 'Mothers in the House of Love,' for example, about a group of wealthy women sitting in a comfortable retirement home, lacked significance and relevance for women such as Umm Ahmad, interviewed by Abu-Lughod, who seemed to have "little possibilities for careers that would provide personal fulfilment and financial independence" (Abu-Lughod, 1997). Differences of class, the boundaries between urban and rural, and the narrative of 'enlightened modernity' against backward customs all serve to further alienate so-called cultural texts from the subjects to which they are exposed. Poverty impedes full access to the consumer culture and commodification of signs that are so conspicuously a part of a postmodern cosmopolitan's life.

An alternative, or a supplement, idea of culture, and thus interpretation, must not only recognise the complexities of the relation between knowledge and practice, and the power relations maintained and contested by culture, but also the fact that culture fulfils a pragmatic or practical function, facilitating practical interaction. Talal Asad, for example, vocalises a concern with isolating 'communal symbols' from material conditions and social activities. According to Asad, because of a specific Christian history, religion has become abstracted and

universalised (Asad, 1983). By insisting on the primacy of meaning over the processes of construction of meaning, Geertz has adopted the position of a theologian. Besides social meaning and psychological effects of symbols and rituals, then, we should examine the historical conditions (movements, classes, institutions, and ideologies) necessary for the existence of particular practices and discourses.

Another consequence of partitioning the 'soft' 'meaning-as-culture' away from 'harder' 'economic' factors is that some things are deemed exempt from culture. If economics is defined by the choices people make, and all action follows from such rational choices, then the discipline evidently embraces the whole of human life and its evolution. However, rational choice approaches, as I have already discussed, leave preferences and moral values of the actors unexplained; they are tautologous. As Hann and Hart argue (2010), we could agree that the economy shapes institutions in the long run, but we should be skeptical of evolutionary models grounded in notions of efficiency and abstract individual rationality, and argue instead for a more rounded approach to economic organisational that does justice to the material, historical, and ethnographic method. This recognises the importance of the familial, social, and political contexts in which human beings are enmeshed or embedded.

The most extreme example is that of money. Money is a fascinating concept, because it is often seen as both, the epitome of abstract exchange impersonality (the opposite of the gift, one is tempted to say), and at the same time it is of value only due to interpersonal agreement about, imagination of and trust in its represented value. It is both, a materially worthless token of an independent reference value, and a medium of exchange that is essential for the relation between persons. Its exchange- value, in particular, is its defining characteristic and therefore so interesting. Money's exchange-value is both, expression of state imposition and a token of individual interaction. The latter point is particularly relevant for the theorist Georg Simmel (1977/78), whose ideas about the relation between money and world view link 'objectifying' western monetary policies to the ethnographically explored imaginations of specific communities. As Barnard and Spencer (2007: 380) put it, "the use of money gives rise to a particular world view, which in turn defines the ways in which money itself is represented".

Simmel sees in money yet another function (in a symbolic sense) in its representation as a means of interpersonal exchange, an illustration of the very basis of society and culture. For

him, a philosophical approach to money can reveal that there are certain socio-psychological 'pre-conditions' from which the meaning of money arises (1974, p. 54). His method is therefore not one of tracing the evolution of money, but of uncovering the "conditions under which values are realised" (Ibidem, p. 55). For Simmel, however, these are conditions and processes to which they give rise, which are not simply neutral. Taking over Marx's concept of money as divisible (since equal in form) and unlimitedly reusable, he sees in money a symbolised process of more fundamental nature. Money, to him, illustrates a procedure of the "objectification" of the subjective, the quantification of the qualitative, the equalisation of what is not equal" (Ibidem, p. 33). In the German original, his wording is even more dramatic and personifying. He writes, "[d]as Geldwesen drängt den Dingen einen ausser ihrer selbst liegenden Massstab auf" (Simmel 1977: 435f, my emphasis).1 Money becomes an agentive instrument of homogenisation; agentive in the limited sense that is arises from social preconditions, but nonetheless remains with a force of itself. As part two of Simmel's Philosophy investigates, this being, this nature of money (Geldwesen), reciprocally, shapes the society, which provided it with meaning (cf. Bloch and Parry 1989: 4). Here we find an enlivening personification of money as an independent agent; a construction, or reification of its omniscient powers, which needs to be considered critically.

Though one could criticise Simmel's philosophical perspective for ignoring, perhaps deliberately, certain aspects of money's function (its practically being a store of capital, etc), his general point was elaborated in anthropology by Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry's anthology Money and the Morality of Exchange (1989). In their introduction, they delineate their approach as a comparative juxtaposition of money with other forms of exchange. By doing so, it becomes evident, as Bloch and Parry claim, that in scholarly literature, money is often attributed with a power of its own, a fetishised independence that depersonalises social relations. Or, in the words of Marx (Marx 1961: 116), whose ideas are echoed in their anthology more than once, "in [money] the values of commodities have independent realities". The dangers of reifying the powers of money is that it happens at the expense of the recognition that in itself, it has no value, no meaning and no strategising power. It is overlooked that "culturally constructed notions of production, consumption, circulation and exchange" underlie the attribution of money with symbolic and moral meaning (Ibidem, p. 1);

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[1] "Money as being/ the nature of money ['Wesen' meaning both, being and the nature of sth] *imposes* onto things a measurement outside themselves" (my translation).

in other words, how an existing "world view" based on the existence of different value classes of exchange, for example, "gives rise to particular ways of representing money" (Ibidem, p. 15, 19).

They suggest that anthropologists should trace, for example, how it is through the opposition of seemingly moral ways of exchange that money is demonised, to uncover the processes of construction of value, or of (destructive) power. In quoting Marx, who wrote that money is the "radical leveller" (Marx 1961: 132), they suggest that one pays attention to the mechanisms of creating an ideal antagonism between money as impersonal and destructive of personal relations and the gift as personal, and socially constructive (cf. Mauss 1990).

"Under their money-form, all commodities look alike. Hence, money may be dirt, although dirt is not money."
Marx 1961: 109

One important aspect of the return to culture, therefore, has to be a re-humanisation of the economy, and the economisation of the human. The salience of 'meaning' and 'ideology' in the reproduction of persons is indicated in Althusser's argument that "an ideology always exists in an apparatus, and its practice, or practices. This existence is material" (1970: 166). Ideologies and cultural attitudes can be located in the apparatus and practice of its institutionalisation, that is, in its material dimension (Butler, 1997). As Mokyr writes, "cultural beliefs are a critical variable in fostering cooperation and thus exchange" (2012: 21). We either face operationalising culture in a pragmatic way, as Weber, Marx, and others have done before us, or we risk abandoning it altogether.

ii. Cultural Cleavages; Collectivism versus Individualism

Theorists seeking to add cultural factors to understanding institutional changes have tended to grasp for dichotomies and divisions which give a generalised gloss on understanding divergent cultural contexts. Recalling Kipling, one of the most popularly made divisions has been between the East and the West, often described as the difference between 'collectivist' and 'individualist' modes of thought. Richard Nisbett's book, 'The Geography of

Thought', argued for exactly this (2003). Nisbett argues that the Western style of thought is characterised by the value of "individual distinctiveness" or "independence," while the Eastern style of thought embodies the value of "harmonious social relations" or ''interdependence" (2003).

Buttressing his claims, Nisbett cites his own psychological experiments. In one such experiment, Japanese and American students were shown video clips of fish swimming in an environment, and were asked to give their impressions. The Japanese observers tended to make "more than 60% more references to background elements", confirming Nisbett's hypothesis that the Western perspective is one of 'tunnel vision' while the Asian perspective is a 'wide-angle lens', a manifestation of the larger collectivist versus individualist dichotomy supposedly characterising the difference between Eastern and Western thought.

There are doubts to be raised concerning the methodology here. From an anthropological perspective, meaningful research takes the form of 'participant observation', or ethnography, which is interacting and observing within people's own local worlds to learn about them in context. Taking individuals from their context and subjecting them to psychological experiments seems a dubious way to learn something significant about culture. There are also questions about the representativeness of Nisbett's studies. The vast majority of his experiment subjects are conducted on University students, which comprise a very specific subset of society.

Further, Nisbett is not clear about what level of difference within experiments would comprise a valid cultural difference. In some experiments where the specific nationalities are broken down, the proposed divide between Asians and Westerners becomes questionable, if not irrelevant. In one such experiment, 75% of Americans and Canadians gave 'western' answers, and only 20% of Koreans and Singaporeans agreed with them. However, while the Japanese, Koreans and Singaporeans were close at 30%, the French, Italians, and Germans scored the same 30%, dissolving the distinction entirely.

Perhaps the most substantial problem with the book's thesis, and the dichotomy in general, is that differences within the categories may be at least as large and as important as the differences between them. Though Nisbett occasionally acknowledges gender, religion,

and ethnicity, he reminds us that such things "shouldn't blind us to the fact that the East and West are in general quite different from each other" (2003)

We should be clear that studies from a range of disciplines dispute the utility of the 'ego-centric'/'sociocentric' model. In one study of online knowledge sharing (Ardichvili et al, 2006), the Russian, Chinese and Brazilian contexts are compared. Despite all three countries regarded as more 'collectivistic' than 'individualistic', the results show significant differences in the factors affecting knowledge sharing. Chinese employees, for example, are likely to be wary of sharing information for fear of 'losing face', whereas 'face' was viewed as entirely unimportant for Russians (Ardichvili et al, 2006). Though this particular study had a functionalist emphasis, aiming to optimise 'knowledge management systems,' it demonstrates that whether a person is an 'individualist' or a 'collectivist' (if such modes indeed exist) is not the most prominent facet guiding that person's behaviour, confirming what Mokyr describes as the 'large aleatory' component to institutions (2012: 2). In other words, even within the field of policy and management, the distinction between individualism and collectivism has scant explanatory power.

Additionally, representing cultures as deeply and uniformly indoctrinated with different ways of thinking fosters harmful stereotypes, not fostering cross-cultural understanding but hampering it. Akin to Durkheim's patronising proclamation that 'traditional' or 'non-capitalist' societies are bound by moral conformity and cultural convention in a way that modern society is not, Nisbett's distinction is overly dualistic and culturally deterministic. It also ethnocentrically denies individuals in 'collectivistic' cultures a developed sense of self.

To say this does not mean to say that all people conceptualize person, self, and individual in the same way, but that we should also think about culture from a perspective relevant to the people living within it; as Moore has argued, "people's perspectives are not fractured along the lines of western/non-western" (2011: 8). Whilst broad cross-cultural psychology has a valid place in academia, we should doubt the explanatory capability of the enterprise of pursuing a bi-fold categorisation of modes of thought when attempting to understand the changing world of higher education.

iii. Evolution and 'Progress'

More problematic are the foundations sought by some organisation scientists for these broad categories of culture in the field of evolutionary science. This is chiefly because applying the principles of natural selection to culture assumes a parallel in the way culture and genetic material operates, requiring a similarly quantifiable definition, and also suggests that cultural behaviours can be 'hard-wired' in our genes. It is easy to see why such models would be highly appealing to organisation studies; evolutionary approaches allow culture to adopt the garb of a quantifiable entity, with clearly definable constituents. We could think, for example, of Mokyr's (2012) appropriation of Boyd and Richerson's (2005) model of cultural evolution. The discourse of 'evolution' also has a tendency to be aligned with a forward progression of thought, thus making it a natural bedfellow for forward-thinking disciplines such as organisation studies or development studies.

However, even if the empirical data were strong enough to support such an approach, appealing to biological precedents for behaviour means that we dismiss the finer detail in people's lived experience. As James Laidlaw has pointed out, "Our self-understandings are never merely mistakes, but are part of the fact of the matter, part of what they seek to articulate" (2007: 224). Slavoj Žižek explains this point in his critique of the experimental psychologist Steven Pinker (2004). Pinker allegedly dismisses activities lacking in Darwinian survival value, such as art and philosophy, as 'biologically pointless' byproducts of an intelligence made for a different purpose. As Žižek observes, "the specifically human dimension" is precisely this biological pointlessness; we cannot be defined by "goal-oriented activity aiming at our survival" (2004). The rampant global confluence of ideas and people further complicates the assertion of a coherent, stable culture. If cultures have evolved in particular ways, this will become increasingly irrelevant as global flows disassemble and reorganise them. In sum, conceiving culture as either a side-effect of other evolutionary processes, or as a unit subject to evolution itself, is to miss the point somewhat. Our task in studying how organisations operate in their contexts is to attend to the complex content which shapes and provides potentialities for humans living within it.

We should thus be wary of becoming overly animated by the prospect of 'progress', or become blind to the past as a result of being oriented wholly to future developments. Decluttering the complexity of reality should not be so high on our agenda that we make our accounts of culture so removed from people's lives as to make them unrecognisable. A critique of this kind has been levied to the pursuit of 'development'. What complicates the relationship of anthropology to development (or any 'applied' branch of anthropology, for that matter) is the broader relationship of anthropology to the idea of progress. Pitted against 19th century evolutionism, 20th Century anthropology has endorsed the view that cultures need to be understood holistically and on their own terms. Instead of a pursuit of 'progress', therefore, a more useful question to ask is how people's self-perceptions, and the cultural status of particular kinds of knowledge, can affect the way in which higher education operates and is perceived.

In sum, abstract models are required to grasp people's lived experience. Culture, though constantly shifting, is one of them. However, when economic optimisation or organisation efficiency is placed as an analytical agenda or focus, then there is a tendency to partition 'culture' as something different from the 'harder' factors of economic concern. This partitioning, as well as a longstanding conceptual division between the 'moral' and the 'instrumental' domains, has had the consequence of inducing a 'meaning' or 'text' based idea of culture. Interpretive anthropology is premised upon long-term participant observation, but it is also fraught with problems, suggesting that culture is a uniformly shared text, ignoring unequal distribution of power, and overlooking the major issue that any interpretation will be affected by the bias of the interpreter. Moreover, the cerebral attitude towards culture lends itself easily to both broad cultural cleavages - such as that between East and West - and also naturalisation, in which cultural ideas are sealed in evolutionary processes.

Globalisation and Higher Education

i. The Global and the Local

Globalisation is a process, or a collection of projects, which has a wide array of effects. It changes the role of geography and distance, and makes the content of communication all-encompassing and available to many. Arguments about globalisation tend to move between two extremes. On the one hand, there is the strand of argument that emphasises the creation of unity, perceiving a hegemonic a global system. This can take a Marxist guise, as is the case for Hardt and Negri's empire or Robinson's global state. On the other hand, some have argued that globalisation has made any singular 'global perspective' impossible; recent developments destroy any hope of grasping world processes from any single theoretical point of view at all - all we have is chaos, fractures and flows.

In the case of higher education, the issue of 'global standards' are commonly addressed in studies of organisational change. Paradeise and Thoenig, in their study of measuring quality standards in universities, call for the creation of a theoretical status for 'local orders' (appropriating James March's 1962 concept), observing how universities appropriate the incentive system in their own way as 'proactive actors' (2013). However, though they state that "Assumptions need to be tested empirically without prejudging institutional trajectories", they go on to erect a fourfold categorisation of University types ('venerables', 'top of the pile', 'missionaries', and 'wannabes') and analyse the developmental trajectories of each these types (2013). They fix themselves to particular trajectories before testing them empirically.

A parallel may be found in anthropological studies of globalisation which view certain aspects of change, such as 'audit culture', as forms of 'neoliberal governmentality', drawing heavily upon Foucault. Foucault wrote extensively on education; much of his argument in Discipline and Punish is based on a complex idea of power/body relationships in education contexts (1991). However, Foucault's work was also historical; whilst he wrote of the transition to modern discipline, he commented very little upon the contemporary era. It is entirely reasonable to suggest, therefore, that the focus of Foucault's work, the 'disciplinary society', is now a thing of the past. Rather than the idea of status and rank in usually enclosed

spaces, the contemporary moment is characterised by a less obvious system of self-deforming contexts, described by Deleuze (1997: 309-10) as 'modulations', and the education system is not an exception. Thus, instead of applying comparative typologies (as is the case in organisation studies), or diagnosing social transformations solely through analytical terminology (as is the case of certain social anthropologists), ethnography can help to demonstrate how "people attempt to reproduce themselves as global citizens" (Moore, 2011, p.6).

ii. Ethnography of the Global

Distinctively, the ethnographic method provides the required methodological openness, allowing analysts to broaden their perspective of culture past the impressions gleaned from interviews, revealing the limits of an instrumental or structured view of organisations. As Hertzfeld (1997) has observed, ethnographic data allows for the unpicking of larger social and cultural forces through a core focus on a few individuals. Extending the spatial reach and diffusion of such forces is the reality of globalisation. The holistic perspective offered by ethnography to the phenomenon of globalisation is relevant for organisation scientists who wish to grasp the full extent of changes brought by global processes upon peoples everyday lives.

Vanessa Fong's ethnography of young people in China during the one-child policy demonstrates how globalisation entails not only the spread of economic policies, but also the spread of cultural models (2004). In her introduction, Fong invokes David Harvey's argument that global capitalism has managed to convince many people across the world that 'There is no alternative" (2005). The relevant aspects of Fong's work to this discussion are twofold: first, that highly context specific factors dramatically affect peoples engagement with the capitalist system and model of modernisation; and second, that adopting a meaning-based conception of culture reduces our appreciation of such "meanings, experiences, and circumstances" with "social, political, and economic forces" (Fong, 2004: 12).

Her research was based in the Northern Coastal city of Dalian, where she worked for 27 months as an English language teacher, developing strong personal relationships with around 30 of her students. In her biographical vignettes, Fong illustrates a culture of high

expectations, with parents and children living obsessively in the future, fixated on their next achievement and scaling the social ladder. Her exploration of the single-child family policy in light of the Wallerstein theory of capitalist world development demonstrates the context-specific nature of the shift from a 'planned' to a 'market' economy (2004). For example, the unrealistic expectations held by parents over their 'little Emperors', combined with growing costs of education, and fierce competition, caused young people considerable anxiety, and occasional outbreaks of anger. In one incident, a boy whose father struck him for being inattentive during lessons issued a menacing warning to his father; "Beat me now and… when you're old and weak, Ill beat you till you can't move" (Fong, 2004: 147). While parents worry about children who do not devote themselves to success, the same parents also express resentment for aspiring to lifestyles that do not resemble the idealised simplicity of the past. Clearly, living in an allegedly 'collectivist', 'third-world' country does not deter people from having 'first world,' 'individualist' aspirations. Moreover, models of aspiration and modernisation have to be understood within their cultural context.

Vanesssa Olszewska's work on class mobility for Afghan refugees in contemporary Iran, though similarly focussing on educational aspiration in a time of political upheaval, has a differing emphasis (2013). Olszewska explores how "people's subjectivities in the contemporary Islamic Republic have been shaped by both opportunities and instances of coercion" (2013). Afghan refugees seek to better their lives in Iran, but they occupy a paradoxical position; on the one hand, they are celebrated in populist revolutionary rhetoric as 'dispossessed' fellow Muslims, but, on the other hand, they are denied legal citizenship and suffer social discrimination. Thus, in order to seize opportunities, they seek to employ a complex strategy of "invisibility and quiet ascent" combined with acquiring "social and cultural capital through education and cultural activism" (2013). Since Afghan refugees were not permitted to attend state school, the refugee community had to create the market for its own education, building tiny schools and computer rooms down back-alleys and producing their own journals and quarterlies (2013). Olszewska unpicks a subtle distinction between 'resistance' and 'aspiration' as two coexisting but different 'orientations' to power; resistance as pushing back against a force, and aspiration as hoping to rise to fill existing spaces (2013). Education is viewed by Olszewska, in this context, as an aspirational response to power, but people's relation to the state, as well as their ambiguous identity, complicated their relationship to social mobility.

Among her descriptions is a family whose challenge in achieving social mobility crystallises the need to view economic action in its complex social milieu. The two oldest sons in the large family, who came from a tiny mountain village in Afghanistan, were skilled construction workers, providing most of the family's income. However, although one of the sons wanted to study engineering at university in Iran, this was prevented by policies on Afghan refugees in higher education. The same problems were true of others siblings in the family who sought non-official routes to upward mobility: the third son worked as a petty trader for a while as he pursued his true interests in oil painting and poetry before being resettled to Australia; a daughter moved back to Afghanistan; another daughter paying for private university in Mashhad; and another aiming to follow a career in the performing arts. Such stories are typical of the marginalised population who are at once presented with opportunities and oppressed by the majority. People such as these are difficult to place in a Marxist class analysis, but are a perfect illustration of status incongruence and the possibilities for and obstacles to upward mobility in one of the most marginal populations in Iran. Envisaging culture as a shared web of meanings would simply leave the experience of such people in the dark.

Holliday and Elfving-Hwang's study of the rising rates of cosmetic surgery in South Korea emphasises how global structures do not simply explain local phenomena (2012). They point out the meteoric rise of Korean cosmetic surgery in recent years; in 2008 among around 30% of women between ages of 20 and 50, and 15% of men in 2010, underwent some form of invasive cosmetic treatment (Faekler 2009). However, where many theorists who have studied this phenomena have discussed the rise of cosmetics in terms of the spread of a western ideal of beauty, Holliday and Elfving-Hwang illustrate a much more complicated picture in which "negotiation between globalised and national standards of beauty, official and non-official religious and traditional discourses and practices and national identity, as well as symbolic practices of coming of age, caring for the self, marking social status and seeking success", all play a part (2012). For example, influencing the rise are nationalist discourses which seek to define the Korean body opposed to the (colonising) Japanese body. Na Se-jin, in 1964, distinguished the Korean from the Japanese: "The calf is long, and like every part of the body's measurements are very even, the Korean resembles the well proportioned stature of the Europeans and Americans [rather than the Japanese]" (quotes in Pai, 2000: 260). Further

calling in to question 'westernisation' as the core cause of rising cosmetic surgery the the factor of local cosmological beliefs. Around half of Koreans believe that one can 'read' a person's character by looking at their face (Kim, 2005), and so, as the access to cosmetics increases, surgery to 'correct' 'errant' parts of one's face is gaining popularity as Korean customers seek auspicious faces in addition to beautiful ones. As Holliday and Elfving-Hwang state, "the most important aim of cosmetic surgery is to create a natural look that enhances the body without losing the 'Koreanness' of the subject who undergoes surgery" (2012). Rising rates of cosmetic surgery cannot therefore be explained simply by the idea of a globalising idea of western beauty but must be seen in light of other cultural ideas seeped through with history.

All three of these ethnographic works are historically sensitive, and highlight the ways in which "each individual's relationship to the capitalist system is shaped by the interactions of a unique set of subjectivities, experiences and cultural models" (Fong, 2004: 26). Such ethnographies allow us to analyse the complexity of global processes by focussing on specific connections and forms of relation as they are lived, imagined, maintained and transformed. In Fong, we see how the aspirations of young people for educational achievement are fuelled by an appetite for 'modernisation', and Western ideals of individualism, but also 'indigenous' Chinese factors relating to the value of knowledge and the importance of caring for ones elders (2004). In Olszewska's study of Afghan refugees the dynamic of oppression and power is brought more closely to the fore, with one's cultural and national identity dictating one's educational opportunities (2013). Clearly, people's relationships organisations cannot be reduced to a 'rationale', and, as the world becomes more interconnected by flows of information, money, and people, the need to acknowledge diversity in people's relationship to organisations increases. Moreover, as the case of Cosmetic surgery in Korea demonstrates, 'western' ideas are carried by globalisation, but they form only part of a complex causal picture.

When we turn the ethnographic gaze closer to home, we are reminded that 'globalisation' is not simply an academic concept, but one used in political and popular rhetoric. Karen Ho's ethnographic study of Wall Street investment banks highlights the rhetorical power of the concept 'globalisation'. Throughout the article it is maintained that Wall Street investment bankers "rely on an overarching construct of global capitalism as well

as a seductive rhetoric of the global" (2005; page 68). In this sense, Ho confronts the view of globalisation as a macro context that is too large for proper ethnographic research. Indeed, she argues that the concept of the global is misleading as it is grounded strongly in specific cultural practices across varying contexts. In the current economic climate Wall Street's ability to sell the global as a concept is central to its winning of deals. As a result huge amounts of money are pumped into creating a global image in order to suggest the ability of a company to summon connections and resources necessary to maintain a large transnational network of investors. However, Ho argues that we need to look critically at globalisation, not as a simple fact, "but a hope, a strategy, and a triumphalist ideology" on Wall Street (2005; page 86). She illustrates the fact that globalisation is simply a construct and not necessarily a reality through the example of a recruitment drive held by Goldman Sachs. A question posed during a seminar on the company's place in the wider global context queried the role of the company in investing in the growth of African economies. The question forced a delineation of what 'global' meant to Goldman Sachs. It was stated; "we don't need to be in every emerging market. We need to be where the markets are big and real, where our clients are big financial institutions, major companies, wealthy individuals" (Ho, 2005; page 83). Indeed, the global therefore does not reflect a totalising strategy but rather reveals a situation of choice, flexibility and focused movement. In this regard, even the largest investment banks are not everywhere as they may suggest but focus on specific places that produce capital return. By definition 'global' is thus simply having a presence and by definition this could merely be an empty office. Globalisation, in reality, thus relies on focusing on a few pivotal markets whilst simultaneously projecting that they can be in other markets with flexibility. This flexible global presence effectively blurs those presences that are substantial and those that are superficial or absent. Ethnography can indicate how the concepts we routinely use are loaded with rhetorical power.

Through these ethnographies, globalisation emerges as a highly multivalent phenomenon. Global processes are both economic and cultural, but not in a straightforward way. If it is the experiential truth of people living through processes of globalisation we are seeking, then there is a need for a more nuanced conceptualisation of culture. What explanatory power would the East/West dichotomy proposed by Nisbett offer us in light of any of these contexts, or any context, for that matter? As Henrietta Moore has written,

"Change is all around us, but its directions, pulses, propensities, and outcomes are maddeningly difficult to analyze and predict" (2011: 3).

ii. Subjectivity and Learning

Though the 'individualism'/'collectivism' polarity in organisational studies is overly generalist, it is nevertheless suggestive of the complex relation between ones' sense of self, education, aspiration, and perception of the value of knowledge. In other words, those pursuing the 'individualism'/'collectivism' dichotomy begin to ask the same kind of questions as anthropologists who deal with the notion of 'subjectivity'. Sherry Ortner has written widely on 'subjectivity', viewing the whole of the 20th century as a struggle over the role of the subject in society and history (2005). In other words, how do we begin to understand the relation between individuals and the society they live in, between psyche and culture? By 'subjectivity', Ortner (and the many anthropologists influenced by her) means;

"…the ensemble of modes of perception, affect, thought, desire, fear, and so forth that animate acting subjects. But I always mean as well the cultural and social formations that shape, organize, and provoke those modes of affect, thought, etc." (2005)

Such a definition allows room for power structures, reminding us of Foucault's 'discourses', but it also allows for a self that is relational, creative and strategic. As Henrietta Moore has argued (2009), individuals are multiply constituted subjects, and they take up multiple subject positions within a range of discourses and social practices.

Judith Butler has written extensively on identity, emphasising how within the subject is combined both social identity and political economy. In her analysis of gay and lesbian identity among University students, Butler points out how various identity groups are economically affected by "(mis)recognition." She asks "Why would a movement concerned to criticise and transform the ways in which sexuality is socially regulated not be understood as central to the functioning of political economy?" Gay struggles against homophobia, she argues, are more than a question of cultural recognition. They are also struggles for equality throughout the political economic sphere. Both gender and sexuality form part of material

life; they serve the sexual division of labour, and also serve the reproduction of the normative family. For instance, in many parts of the world, gays and lesbians are regularly excluded from state-sanctioned notions of the family (an economic unit), may be denied citizenship, and, among many other examples, are denied the right to make medical decisions about dying lovers, or to receive any of their property. A similar argument was made by Marx and Engels who insisted that the "mode of production" had to include forms of social association as well. In The German Ideology, Marx wrote, "Men, who daily remake their own life, begin to make other men, to propagate their kind: the relation between man and woman, parents and children, the family" (1846). Reminding us of the dangers of partitioning the economic from the social, Butler exclaims "How quickly - and sometimes unwittingly - the distinction between the material and the cultural is remanufactured when it assists in drawing the lines that jettison sexuality from the sphere of fundamental political structure!"

How might Butler's insight be transported in to the realm of learning and education? In observing the multiple layers of the subject in context, we can observe how social identity has implications for one's relationship to education, and thus one's position in the political economy. Jin Li's book 'Cultural Foundations of Learning' similarly argues that personhood and education are intimately linked. Li starts with the observation that Asian children achieve better in school than their Western counterparts - especially in math and sciences - and roots the explanation in culture, arguing that "culture is an important source of variation in human learning processes and outcomes" (2012). Conducting primarily a linguistic analysis, Li observes that the Chinese and American approaches to learning contrast markedly, and this is due to the perceived relationship of knowledge to personhood. The Chinese approach, Li argues, is located in Confucianism, organised around moral self-perfection, whereas the Western intellectual tradition is organised around ideals of knowing the world, the individual mind, and the certainty of knowledge. The continuous cultivation of moral values embodied in Chinese learning contrasts with the individualistic, goal-driven approach to learning in America. The words for learning are compared, with the Western lexicon comprising of 'study, teaching, thinking, education, books, and brain' compared to the Asian lexicon, made up of phrases such as 'keep on learning as long as you live, read extensively, learn assiduously, read books, diligent, extensive knowledge, study as if thirsting or hungering, there is no boundary to learning' (2012).

Li moves beyond a simple 'East-West' cultural dichotomy, however, by arguing that as globalisation continues, Asian (Chinese) society may appropriate aspects of Western (American) culture but without losing an authentically Asian version of the meanings. For example, she delves in to Chinese history, noting the existence of behavioural models set by great learners in the past, available in children's picture books and textbooks. one such model reads:

"Dig a hole in the wall to borrow the neighbour's light: "Kuang Heng, a famous essayist during the Han Dynasty, was very poor in his childhood. His family could not afford light. To study, he chiseled a hole in the wall to borrow the neighbour's light. This is how he acquired his knowledge. Later he became a prime minister of the Han Dynasty"" (Huang and Peng 1992: 95)

Li demonstrates that the Chinese concept *hao-xue-xin* - "heart and mind for wanting to learn" - is at the heart of Chinese learning motivation, and suggests that the slow collapse of public virtue in the West (1984) calls for a new American version of moral self-cultivation. Human learning has been approached from many perspectives, but Li's arguments suggest strong potential for an ethnographic approach to cultural models of learning. Diverse models of learning shape education and achievement in the world's cultures. The ethnographic approach to culture holds enormous promise to better articulate the ways in which people's lived experience affect their involvement with organisations.

It is clear that understanding how somebody learns, and thus apprehends education, will require for an investigation in to the multiple layers of subjectivity, which is formed by cultural models, but also, increasingly, interaction with globalising ideals and aspirations. Identity and personhood are intimately connected with the perception of knowledge, and, by extension to access to 'cultural capital' (a concept borrowed from Bourdieu). It is the cracks between categories that ethnography can capture. "In a splintered world", writes Geertz, "we must address the splinters" (2000: 221). What ethnography can highlight, as Marrewijk and Verweel write, is that "unexpected ambiguous processes that are situated in unexpected places, in unexpected forms, often trigger organizational change" (2005: 5).

Configuring Theory

i. The Pendulum between the Qualitative and the Quantitative

Within this morass of extreme complexity, how is it possible to render patterns visible and useful for organisational science? Theorists such as Mokyr (2009, 2012), Watson (2011), and Van Maanen (1988, 2006) have all explored the possibilities offered by ethnography, though it's relation to organisation studies remains debated. Part of the problem is a disjunct in the scale of theorising; very simply, understanding culture in anthropology has been synonymous with relativistic and localised study, whereas the economic and sociological models inherited by organisation studies means that is has been preoccupied with large-scale comparative and typological models. Anthropologist's ethnographic descriptions may seem dissonant to theorists of organisation - or 'painful', as Watson writes (2010: 204) - because the two disciplines work in separate 'semantic spheres' (writes Kagan, 2009). However, an amalgamation is unnecessary. Instead, ethnography can serve as a 'system-correcting praxis,' highlighting the ways in which typological and comparative models may become better suited to the complex reality.

This relation between localised ethnographic studies and broader comparative models of change may be better articulated by comparison with a debate within Human Rights law between universalism and relativism. In studying human rights law, many anthropologists have observed the need for a tension between the universal and the relative. The competing claims of universalism versus cultural relativism have been exhaustively debated and it is generally agreed the debate has reached an impasse. Empirical conditions have made deepened the impasse, as even in a world increasingly drawn together, highly different understandings of personhood and agency, among other aspects of cultural difference, have persisted.

Law may be seen as parallel to quantitative studies in organisation theory because both essentialise truth categories and identities. However, legal principles are flexible. They are constantly being readjusted to the demands of the present, the unpredictable and the local. This explains the contradictions that exist in case-law, the constant need for legislative reforms, and the evolution of the legal system.

Similarly, rather than seeing universalism (normative and quantitative organisation studies) and cultural relativism (qualitative ethnographic and anthropological studies) as alternatives which one must choose, we should see the tension between the positions as part of the continuous process of negotiating ever-changing and interrelated global and local realities. Both approaches are necessary, and their interdependence is inescapable as long as flux and change exist in the world.

The role of deep cultural analysis is not to replace existing broader analysis of Higher Education changes. The two are driven by different aims; one is to find overarching patterns in the complexity, and the other to delve deeper in to the complexity itself. However, deep cultural analysis can inform broader analysis as a 'system-correcting praxis', and, through constant oscillation between the micro and the macro, as a pendulum swing, quantitative studies of organisations can constantly adjust to do better justice to the reality of the way people live their lives.

Both the evidentiary force and theoretical contribution of anthropology might be intimately linked to giving creative form to people's art of living. As we speak to the translocal processes that so urgently demand attention, we are called to critically assess the significance of long-standing and new theoretical frames and to advance people-centred analytics (Biehl and Petryna 2013).

Making anthropological work accessible to interdisciplinary communication will take work on behalf of anthropologists. The late 20th Century was a time of upheaval across the social sciences; positivistic ideas about structure gave way to deconstruction and self-reflection, and ideas about meaning gave way to the politics of writing itself. The continuing popularity of the Foucaultian axis of power-truth-knowledge in anthropology attests to a suspicion towards ambitions to grand theorising. Yet, as Reyna (among others) has recently argued, in following the legitimate task of deconstruction, we must not 'throw the baby out with the bathos' (2012). 'Approximate truths' (Reyna's term) about culture are needed in order for the work of anthropologists and sociologists to overcome their 'essentialist skepticism' and to allow some of their insights about culture to be accessible. This involves

adopting an ontological perspective similar to Watson's description of 'Pragmatic Realism' (2011: 208).

We should not, therefore, sentence ourselves to eternal vacillation between erecting comparative typologies and conducting localised ethnographic studies. Instead, we should alternatively ask how both methods, relating broadly to two 'scales' of theorising, could co-exist and mutually benefit each other, even if the ethnography is not straightforwardly 'organisational'. One might view resorting to ethnography as a cop-out - after all, 'everyone knows that the situation is more complex, really!' But until we really delve in to the messy reality of the way people live and the way organisations operate in context, we cannot tell exactly how this complexity is configured on the ground. In short, we need a better image of the complexity in order to find more accurate patterns within it.

__Conclusion__

Running across this paper has been an extended meditation on the complex relation between economy and culture, and how certain kinds of methodologies demonstrate the entanglement between the economic and the cultural more lucidly than others. What theorists have begun to recognise is the hazard in viewing culture as "a meaning system that blocks or facilitates organisational success" (Smith, 1993: 420). By either ignoring, compartmentalising, or instrumentalising culture, we inevitably reduce its complex character.

Much ground has been covered and many more questions raised than answers proposed.

I.   First, the problems of accommodating 'culture' were explored. The Geertzian meaning or text-based approach to culture, the bi-fold division between East and West, and the search for evolutionary roots of ideology were all thoroughly critiqued. The split in intellectual history between economy and culture, or between instrumentality and the moral, was cited as an important cause for difficulty for economically focussed thinkers to

II.   Second, the methodology of ethnography was introduced in relation to both globalisation and subjectivity (or 'personhood'). The nuance and complexity afforded by the ethnographic approach demonstrates the weaknesses in generalised comparisons, or in reducing culture to shared texts. Accompanying global flows - the rise of borderless capitalism, the growth of technology and the mobility of people, and the emergence of new centres of wealth and power - are also the widespread creation of new ideas and self-perceptions. By taking in to account Butler's argument for the inseparability of social identity from political economy, as well as Li's argument for grasping the cultural conditions of learning, the ethnographic method is vital to better understand how learning and education operates in distinct contexts.

III. Third, the relationship between qualitative anthropological methods and more quantitative methods was compared to the relationship between universalism and relativism in human rights law. The tension and continual oscillation between both is necessary since both methodologies have strengths and weaknesses. Here it should be noted that the critiques levied towards the way in which culture is adopted in many fields of social science should not be mistaken to imply that theorists are unaware of such shortcomings, and does not ignore the fact that different analytical foci come with

different spots of blindness. Yet, through analysing the shortcomings of 'instrumentalising' culture in a typological model, as well as adopting a 'meaning-based' Weberian concept of culture, what becomes clear is that our studies would be profited by a recognition of the processual and performative nature of culture.

Context adds rigour to the handling of data. If organisation scientists are eager to move beyond a concept of culture that does not suffer from the weakness imposed upon it by separating it from other factors, then the ethnographic method may prove useful to provide an alternative and complementary viewpoint. The current empirical conditions of intense globalisation and postmodern 'self-making' (Moore, 2011) provides new theoretical opportunities for theorists working on change in organisations to integrate anthropological insights about the relation of organisations to both the local and the global. What the work of Fong, Olszewska, Li, and many others, can add to the picture is the weakness of conceiving cultures as 'local spheres' of meaning-making (as is the case for Paradeise and Thoenig, 2013).

Yet it is only the beginning of the dialogue between anthropology and more development-focussed social sciences, and as William James (1890/1955) argued, a degree of vagueness can be beneficial to science when attempting new research directions. As Strathern wrote, "certainty itself appears partial, information intermittent. An answer is another question, a connection a gap, a similarity a difference, and vice versa" (2004, p. 24). The complex relationship between ethnography and organisation studies has been shaped by increasingly divergent disciplinary histories. Considering both methods side by side, however, allows us to more clearly define their possibilities and limitations. Though the future relationship of ethnography with organisation studies is uncertain, it seems clear that complex organisations are most profitably understood through a range of theoretical approaches and varied methodologies. Ethnography can aid self-reflection, allowing theorists to understand the ways in which being driven by results can constrain us. Culture can be empirically accessible if only methodologies in the social sciences could initiate more fruitful dialogue.

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