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Undoing cultural studies: cultural economy at the Open University (1979–1997)

Toby Bennett

School of Media and Communications, University of Westminster, London, UK

ABSTRACT

This introduction article establishes the territory for the Symposium *What Was Cultural Economy?* After setting out the reasoning behind the collection and its eight contributions, the introduction describes the terms on which the ‘cultural economy’ concept was launched, within the Open University’s Faculty of Social Sciences, at the end of the 1990s. Noting the collective work involved, I highlight the role of Stuart Hall, and the brand of cultural studies he represents, as a key vector. Hall’s position as totemic public intellectual obscures his work as a teacher, curriculum designer and colleague, channelling the ‘cultural turn’ through this internal academic context. As such, I also stress the OU’s course team model of intellectual production, drawing from recent historiography on workshops as devices for the practice of collective intellectual and cultural work, coupling this to the figure of the ‘vanishing mediator’ as a driver of material and symbolic transformation. I then move to sketch out some of the key interpersonal relations, institutional contexts and intellectual trajectories through which cultural economy was first formulated. In conclusion, I ask what implications this little history might hold for a present-day journal engaged in the workshopping of ideas at increasingly international scale.

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Doing cultural economy

Do you do ‘cultural economy’? Do you know anyone who does? Even if you do not, I am sure you know what cultural economy is and what it is used for. You have probably heard someone making reference to it at a conference, or read about it in books or journals such as this one. You may not know how cultural economy actually works – to practice it requires a considerable degree of technical ‘know how’. Simply describing the organisational or market devices that make up a standard material-semiotic assemblage may give you trouble to start with, if you are not pragmatically minded. But in fact, although it was first outlined to students at the Open University as recently as 1997, and to the wider reading public only in 2002, most people in the social sciences will know something about cultural economy, in a general sort of way. It has entered into, and made a considerable impact on, our field. It has become part of our ‘intellectual universe’.

CONTACT Toby Bennett  t.bennett@westminster.ac.uk  Harrow Campus, Watford Road, Northwick Park, Middlesex, HA1 3TP

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ACTIVITY I

One way of knowing whether something has become ‘part of your intellectual universe’ is to see whether you can interpret or ‘read’ it – whether you understand what it means, what it is ‘saying’. Before reading further, try the following simple experiment.

Turn first to the photographs in your course pack, which you can also find on the accompanying website: <https://www.journalofculturaleconomy.org/twenty-years-after-the-workshop-on-cultural-economy/>

What can you tell us, in your own words, about these pictures? What do you make of the people in them? Who might they be and what might have brought them all together – what might they have in common? Who is not there? What can’t be seen? Now refocus and look not at the content of the images but the photographs themselves: the way they are framed. What do you make of the date in the corner – is it significant? Compose a story of what might have led up to this moment. What do you think might happen next?

Many of this journal’s readers will recognise the palimpsestic character of these opening paragraphs. Their tone and structure, and much of their wording, owe a large debt to a late 1990s Open University (OU) textbook – one that subsequently left the confines of that institution to be read as an instructional model, a set of research findings and a methodological framework, by countless students and academics. Since its original publication, *Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman* has achieved perhaps the widest circulation, not to mention citation, of all OU course texts. The Walkman book (as it came to be known) was the first book of Culture, Media and Identities – or D318, in the administrative dialect that identifies it as one of a number of courses run by the Faculty of Social Sciences (the ‘D’) available to third-year undergraduate students (the ‘3’). As a ‘set book’, it was required reading for those enrolled on a course that ran from 1997 to 2007; moreover, thanks to a long-running partnership with the BBC, it was not unusual for OU curricula to enjoy an audience well beyond the university’s somewhat fluid boundaries. Guaranteed a sizeable readership, therefore, the book’s reception still came as something of a surprise to its authors:

Because the team was centrally focused on its pedagogic core task of providing a means of making complex materials approachable for OU students new to them via an (empirically plausible) case study little time was spent on thinking about any wider impact (though our publishers, Sage, were, of course, concerned with this issue). It soon became clear, however, that the text was being taken up and used in a variety of disciplinary and interdisciplinary domains, some quite far removed from its presumed home contexts of sociology and cultural and media studies. Among the most notable of these were: cultural and economic geography, social anthropology and material culture studies, science and technology studies, design studies, popular music studies and management and organization studies. Interestingly, in these and other areas, the Walkman volume was not simply used as a textbook but was frequently approached as a research text as well. (du Gay et al. 2013, xvi).

This unexpected afterlife can be attributed to the ‘circuit of culture’, a five-pointed web of analytic touchpoints which visually modelled a relational, interdependent and multiply-determined style of analysis. The course sought to instil this approach through the widely-recognised diagram of interconnected bi-directional arrows connecting representation, identity, production, consumption and regulation. Regular encounters with this pedagogical device furnished undergraduates with a reassuring anchor, or navigation aid, allowing them to explore complex theoretical territory secure in the knowledge that they could always return home when they got lost. But, much like the portable consumer electronics device it was developed to describe, the circuit demonstrated an unexpected mobility: a ‘capacity to travel and to be readily appropriated’ (du Gay et al. 2013, xvi) well beyond the OU.

Something similar could be said about the term ‘cultural economy’, which saw its initial print appearance in another D318 book, *Production of Culture/Cultures of Production*, became formalised

half a decade later in a more agenda-setting edited collection, *Cultural Economy: Cultural Analysis and Commercial Life* (du Gay and Pryke 2002), and gave its name to this journal another five years hence. The construction and ‘social life’ of this term are the subject of this Symposium which asks, simply, *What Was Cultural Economy?* A simple answer is that it is what happened when academics interested in economic objects and processes became influenced by the ‘cultural turn’. A more focused explanation, the one explored here, centres on what happened specifically within the Faculty of Social Sciences at the Open University from the late 1980s to the late 1990s. As such, it takes the turn-of-the-millennium Workshop on Cultural Economy (WoCE) – as captured in the aforementioned photographic diptych and agenda-setting book – as a key catalyst. Looking backwards from that temporal vantage, the aim of this introduction is to place the emergence of cultural economy within a specific set of institutional, interpersonal and intellectual mediations. It centres on one particularly curious artefact of cultural economy, which is its ambiguous relation to cultural studies and, particularly, to Stuart Hall. I will emphasise that other OU academics – especially the geographers John Allen and Doreen Massey – were also formative for this intellectual construction project. But, as Chair of Sociology, Hall’s influence within OU social sciences in the 1980s and 1990s is substantial while his external recognition is, of course, totemic. He participated in the WoCE and, du Gay says, ‘the imprint of Stuart in cultural economy is something which those of us that knew him and worked with him are very clear about’ (du Gay et al, this volume). Yet Hall is nonetheless conspicuously absent from both the photographic and the written record. It is, I suggest, worth dwelling on both the ‘imprint’ and the omission, insofar as they are emblematic of the shaping influence of ‘British cultural studies’ in cultural economy’s founding concerns, as well as their excision from what it was to become.

Perhaps this absence should not surprise us. The D318 course was considered a parting shot for Hall, developed in the years leading up to his retirement, during which he had increasingly applied his energies elsewhere: to work with Black British artists and arts institutions; to a new journal with OU colleague Doreen Massey (*Soundings*); to public discourse and policymaking around race and multiculturalism, among other things. His departure ultimately freed him from an academy with which he is known to have become somewhat embittered, distancing him from cultural economy – a project, du Gay suggests here, that he seems never quite fully to have embraced. It is also not unreasonable that his improvised commentary at the WoCE – responding to an argument from Richard Sennett, concerning the corrosive nature of workplace restructuring, that had already been published (Sennett 1998) and widely discussed – might not be considered worthy of publication. Cultural studies did, meanwhile, enjoy a broader presence at the workshop: Angela McRobbie, a graduate of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) – incidentally closed by that institution during *Cultural Economy*’s year of publication (see Webster 2004) – was in attendance, as was Hall’s PhD supervisee Sean Nixon, who picked up the mantle. But this was never intended to be cultural studies by another name. Other participants, while united by the ‘cultural turn’ moving through the social sciences at large, brought different disciplinary perspectives on this turn, from post-Foucauldian strands of discourse analysis and particularly Science and Technology Studies (John Law’s contribution conspicuously positioned as the opening chapter of the collection). Indicatively, the *Cultural Economy* book’s subtitle emphasised symmetry: *Cultural Analysis AND Commercial Life* – by implication, we might be just as interested in the ‘commercial life of cultural analysis’ as in ‘a cultural analysis of the economy. Even so, John Allen is clear that, ‘[t]he cultural turn at the OU very much came from Stuart’s way of thinking around meaning and representation’ (Allen and Bennett, this volume). It is worth excavating what patterns this ‘way of thinking’ might have left.

Following these opening paragraphs, our introduction proceeds in five stages. First, the contents of the Symposium are recounted before, second, readers are reminded of the terms on which cultural economy was launched at the end of the 1990s. Third, I draw on recent historiography that sees workshops as devices for the practice of collective intellectual and cultural work; following formulations by Fredric Jameson and Kathi Weeks, I couple this to the figure of the ‘vanishing mediator’ as a driver of changes in symbolic forms. Drawing on the contributions to this section,

and some additional archival work, I then move to sketch some of the key interpersonal relations, institutional contexts and intellectual trajectories through which cultural economy was first formulated.¹ Hall's version of cultural studies at the OU, as an open, responsive and collaborative practice, is one such mediation which, while it has not quite 'vanished', has, I want to suggest, subsequently receded from view. If the 'Walkman book' could be viewed as 'an STS text manqué' (du Gay et al. 2013, xvii), then I surface here one lineage of cultural economy *avant la lettre*. In conclusion, I ask what the implications of this might be and how they can fruitfully be brought to bear on any future cultural economy.

Overview and contents

The origins of this Symposium lie in a twentieth anniversary symposium held at City, University of London in January 2020.² This was initially conceived along the lines of a witness seminar: 'a moderated group conversation' which 'aims to bring together key participants to obtain a mix of different perspectives on a specific historical event or episode by an exchange of memories that feed upon one another in interesting and unexpected ways' (Maas 2018, 571). Ultimately only four of the original sixteen participants could join in this way. Yet the collected contents here are able to build on this event, publishing or extending some contributions while soliciting others anew, leading to four discussions and four reflective provocations. All contributors were asked to comment, in some way, on the ideas, institutions and interlocutors that animated them in these years; most also had access to draft versions of other contributions, leading to some degree of exchange, provoking one another 'in interesting and unexpected ways'.

We open with an interview with the geographer John Allen, who supervised the doctoral studies of both Paul du Gay and Michael Pryke. Allen was recruited to the OU Faculty of Social Sciences as part of the same cohort, albeit at a different career stage, as Hall and Massey: first as a postdoctoral researcher and later a full-time member of staff. Our discussion centres on the intellectual foment of the time, the practice of working in course teams, and his view on being attributed as the originator of the term cultural economy – an account he contests. An interview with du Gay and Pryke then moves us forward, presenting their view of life at the OU some ten years on from Allen's arrival. They describe their interests in financial and consumer services, discourse analysis and ANT, as well as their recollections of PhD supervisions, course teams and some of the more informal moments through which intellectual exchange occurs. Moving on a stage further, there follows a transcript of the first roundtable discussion from the 2020 workshop, featuring three participants all occupied with the question of change in consumer culture. Sean Nixon, an OU doctoral student under Stuart Hall, and exact contemporary of Du Gay and Pryke, considers an intellectual trajectory that moved from subcultural lifestyles to the industries of menswear and style magazines, to the gendered nature of advertising. Liz McFall's PhD, supervised by Paul du Gay and Margaret Wetherell, took a historical lens to advertising in order to contest then-popular epochalist narratives of culturalisation; while Don Slater, then at Goldsmiths College, University of London, reflects on his own doctoral work and interests in the lived practice of marketing. Their contributions are followed by an open discussion, turning around the influence of Bourdieu, Foucault and Callon, the affective response to the economics discipline, and the possible contributions or failures of a cultural economy approach to public life.

There follow three contributions from those contemporaries who participated at one remove from the inner OU circles. WoCE participants Keith Negus and Angela McRobbie both acted as consultants and course team members, including for D318. In a reflective piece, Negus recalls his own journey into academia and co-authorship of the Walkman book, both of which intersected with his research on the British music industry. While excited by this moment, he emphasises a subsequent degree of disenchantment with the endlessly cyclical nature of analysis that seemed to result from it. Next, an interview with McRobbie tracks her workshop contribution against a shift in her work, from the consumption to the production of culture, in small-scale spaces of

exchange such as second-hand markets and dance clubs. The questions that occupied her then were later absorbed by the creative industries policy agenda (launched the same year as D318) and she reflects on her subsequent distance from cultural economy, as it came to be defined in the pages of this journal. Sarita Malik did not attend the WoCE. She gained her doctorate under Hall and June Givanni during the same period, in a collaboration between the OU and the British Film Institute, examining the production of Black and Asian images on television. Its publication (Malik 2002) inaugurated the Hall and du Gay edited book series, *Culture, Representation and Identities* (of which du Gay and Pryke's (2002) *Cultural Economy*, Nixon's (2003) *Advertising Cultures*, McFall's (2004) *Advertising: A Cultural Economy* and du Gay's *Organizing Identity* (2008) comprised the subsequent four volumes). She describes her own formation and supervision, and her sense of distance from the intellectual agendas being set out in Milton Keynes, as she deliberated on links between 'the representation problem' and the inequities of much cultural production, particularly through the bureaucratic mechanisms of funding and audit. Negus, McRobbie and Malik all foreground their own efforts, variously classed, gendered and racialised, to find a place within an academic system undergoing far-reaching transformation. In different ways, they cause us to dwell on the knotty problems of identity and difference that are otherwise absent from many of the analyses that followed, and force us to think about who and what is in or out – and why. The fissures they raise perhaps reflect the deliberate separation of *the cultural economy* (the 'culturalisation' thesis as object of empirical analysis) from *cultural economy*, shorn of its definite article (the 'cultural turn' as analytic approach).

The second of these, and perhaps the major trajectory, was taken forward in the 2000s, captured in a follow-up workshop organised by Michael Pryke in 2005, titled 'Towards a Cultural Economy of Finance' (cf. Pryke and du Gay 2007), and reflected in our last two contributions. Fabian Muniesa, a participant in that event and a comrade of cultural economy ever since, considers the import of 'culture' as an analytic and critical lens on the conduct – and misconduct – of financial actors and institutions. Explanatory appeals to (organisational or professional) culture can take an exculpatory form, stripping powerful actors of responsibility for their actions. Responding to the tradition represented by Hall, Muniesa suggests that, while *culture* may be a privileged and fertile terrain for *politics*, the former is not reducible to the latter: accounts of the vernacular theologies of finance continue to be needed, helping us to construct tractable interventions that might nonetheless go beyond its imaginative limits. Closing our collection in a similar vein, current Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Cultural Economy (JCE)* Philip Roscoe prompts us to consider the imaginaries of inside and outside that are conjured through the formation of this field. While others ended the millennium by attending OU workshops, discovering and describing those everyday cultures and literary practices that gave flesh and life to the economy, Roscoe was actually *doing* it: following a career as a financial journalist. In autobiographical mood, he recalls the heady affects of that era's market sentiments, their entanglements with neocolonial processes of mineral extraction, the excited narrativisation of such processes to assemble communities of potential investors, before his subsequent journey into cultural economy as a field of academic study – and, in turn, that field's performative exclusion of certain subject positions and imperial legacies. The Austinian dictum that words (might be able to) do things has been well-worn. Here it leads Roscoe to push us to delineate exactly *what* they can do. We should be actively traversing those institutional and disciplinary borders that carve up and purify professional life, in order to find out how the kinds of writing that cultural economy has nourished might also become, in a neat echo of that text which first named it, a means of actively *doing cultural economy*.

SELECTED READINGS

Before reading on, look at the notes below, which will help you to understand the main characters and contexts involved. Once you have done so, turn to the Selected Readings in the remainder of the text and study them in detail.

What was cultural economy?

Michael Pryke joined the Open University to begin his PhD on spatial aspects of finance in the City of London in 1984, leaving after completion in 1988 and returning as a staff member in the geography discipline in 1994. Paul du Gay started and completed his PhD on work identity in the service sector in the intervening period (1989–1993), joining the sociology discipline thereafter. John Allen supervised both and, in their joint account here, appears as the central influence. While Graeme Salaman, who was ‘ostensibly’ du Gay’s primary supervisor (and later co-author) ‘facilitated empirically and in terms of management thought, he describes Allen as a ‘dedicated ... creative ... challenging ... inquisitorial’ supervisor who provided ‘much more interaction and connection’. Pryke also emphasises the influence of Doreen Massey (his primary supervisor) who, together with Allen, provided ‘an incredibly intense and ... terrifying supervisory pairing’, with whom he nonetheless benefited from ‘a very intimate relationship’, including shared ‘supervisions at John’s house’ over dinner. Outside of direct supervisory relationships, Stuart Hall ‘was there with the overarching, kind of, theories and discussions’ and du Gay in particular ‘gravitated towards him for conversations and for literature advice’. Courses run by John Clarke also provided both with early exposure to the Open University’s distinctive approach to collaborative writing for course production, which ‘began to teach [Pryke] how to write, and effectively to teach, at a distance’. Clarke’s work with Janet Newman on managerialism and the welfare state was also influential on Du Gay’s burgeoning interest in public sector reforms.

On the D318 course text itself, ‘cultural economy’ is described as ‘borrowed from’ John Allen (Du Gay 1997, 10n). In interview du Gay credits Allen as ‘the person who outlined this idea [of ‘cultural economy’] most fully at that point’, i.e. the mid-1990s – over drinks with his two former students in London – providing ‘an umbrella sketch of what that was and where it might go’. For his own part, Allen describes his coinage as a simple means of differentiating this approach from political economy and chooses to retain some discursive distance – ‘it’s their term not mine’ – echoing Hall’s reticence to wholly accept the idea. Nonetheless it is clear that both provided substantial intellectual mentorship, as well as facilitating a social milieu in which ideas could be freely exchanged and evolved.

The point of naming cultural economy on D318 was to offer a key organising concept for Book 4, *Production of Culture/Cultures of Production*. Intended to ‘strike [students] as a little strange’, this term was deployed to ‘suggest both continuity and rupture with deterministic approaches to the study of ‘economic life’’: in line with the political economy tradition, it signalled an ‘opposition to the ahistoric and asocial tenets of neo-classical economics’ and instead emphasised ‘a multi-paradigm analysis of the economy’; by contrast, however, it sought to break with ‘political economy approaches [that] tend to represent economic processes and practices as ‘things in themselves’ – with certain ‘objective’ meanings’ and instead to visibilise ‘the meanings these processes come to have for those involved in them’ (Du Gay 1997, 3). The course’s accompanying study guide provides students with an extra gloss (Chaplin and Redman 1997, 8). To take a cultural economy approach was to recognise: first, that economic practices, processes and decisions are all, insofar as they are carried out by people, necessarily imbued with symbols and relations; second, that a global growth in the economic significance of cultural industries, and the marketing and lifestyling practices of cultural intermediaries, was not incidental in this regard; and, third, that there could be no meaningful understanding of, or effort to intervene in, ‘the economy’ without some representation in some form or another (a concept, a model, a graph, and so on). Learning from this, the course team were not shy of making their own representational figures. The ‘circuit of culture’ image already mentioned is a constant presence on the course, an *aide-mémoire* imprinted – branded even, logo-like – across the six textbooks and accompanying support materials, including written guidebooks, cassette tapes and television broadcasts. A similar image, less well-known, also appears in the study guide, in which a ‘cultural economy’ approach is equally stylised as a circuit (Figure 1). This encouraged those following D318 to take a lens in which ‘culture is neither solely the outcome of production nor a wholly separate

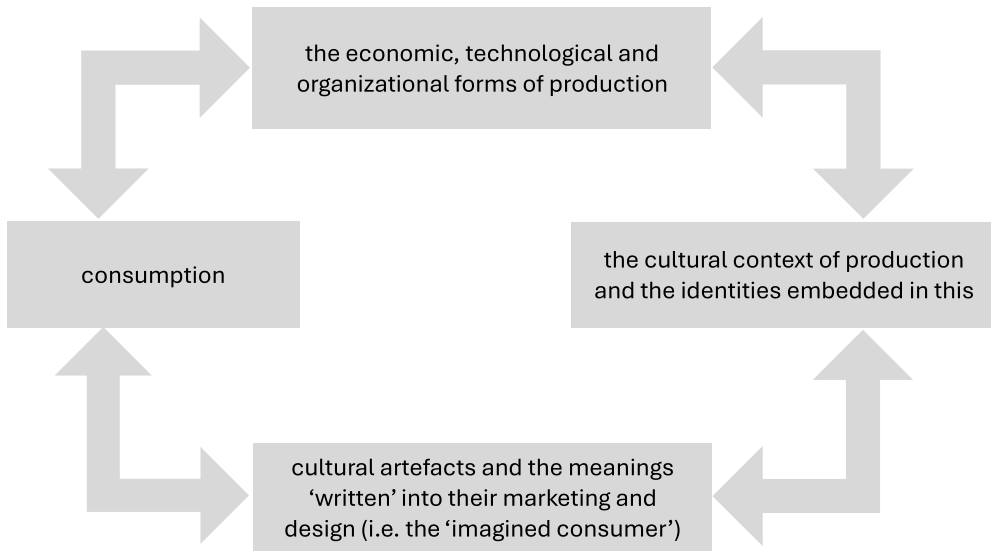


Figure 1. The ‘cultural economy’ of production, as represented in the student-facing Study Guide for D318 Book 4 (Chaplin and Redman 1997, 9).

sphere, uninvolved in production processes [...] they exist only in and through each other’ (Chaplin and Redman 1997, 8). Pitching a Frankfurt School critique of mass culture against a post-Birmingham School theory of active audiences, in a relatively caricatured form, allowed a third position – an OU school? – to emerge in the middle and play a mediating role.

Thinking in Teams

There is, of course, no ‘OU School’ – at least, no such term is ever used. An intellectual ‘school’ is associated variously with charismatic leaders, defined research programmes, the training of recruits, internal loyalty and belonging, routes to publication and financial support (cf. Medema 2024, 170). All of these are present in the OU story, to varying degrees, as I will go on to outline. Labels aside, the project to conceptualise and actualise cultural economy is founded in a relatively delimited knowledge collective with a distinctive institutional base and mode of working. We might refer to the latter as ‘workshopping’ – understood as a more-or-less formal device for nurturing the collective emergence of knowledge. Workshopped knowledge may be designated as belonging to the domain of scholarship or the domain of culture, although clearly the ‘cultural turn’ – as one among a number of attempts to refit social theory in response to deindustrialisation, the increasing significance of consumption, and an attendant demotion of economic determinism (Susen 2015, 83–93) – deliberately muddies the separation of pure waters. Lizzie Richardson (2019) refers to creative workshops as important culturalisation devices: enabling different ideas and practices to be gathered and ordered, while centring the articulation of feedback, so that what emerges is imprinted with the culture of the group. The economic historians Beatrice Cherrier and Aurélien Saïdi (2021) alert us to the careful way in which intellectual events are both *labelled* – as a workshop or a seminar, for example, with their respective artisanal or ecclesiastical overtones of apprenticeship – and used as a *means of labelling*, in an attempt to stabilise a new field of inquiry. Accordingly, economics workshops have been *construction sites*, in which new concepts and tools are crafted, or *weapons of dissemination*, mainstreaming ideas and accruing acolytes. They have commonly done so, they note, either by *bringing in* scholars from elsewhere to maximize exchange and visibility, or otherwise by *sending out* a select group to enclose retreats in order to provoke a prolonged and

focused discussion. In such ways these events prompt reflection on those moments ‘upstream (for instance, grant applications, negotiations with sponsors, selection of location and speakers) and downstream (from after dinner drinks and dinners to proceeding publication)’, alongside the broader ‘institutional, social and symbolic webs in which intellectual exchanges are entangled’ (Cherrier and Saïdi 2021, 613). These are useful cues. I focus here on cultural economy’s *construction*, ‘upstream’ of its public deployment.

This was no *fait accompli*. Prior to the WoCE, for example, the concept received a first public outing the year after D318 was first presented, at the annual conference of the International Sociological Association in Montreal, under which Paul du Gay chaired a Research Committee on Sociology of Organizations. Two sessions took place on 27th July 1998 under the title ‘Cultural Industry, Economy and Organization’, with a conceptual framing from du Gay, reports on empirical work in progress from Keith Negus and Sean Nixon, insights from doctoral projects by Liz McFall and Matt Soar (University of Massachusetts Amherst), as well as a critique from a moral economy perspective from Andrew Sayer (University of Lancaster). The OU contingent also had a presence in other workstreams of the conference; a joint paper from du Gay and Jessica Evans on interdisciplinarity and epistemology; Pryke on investment indices and the ‘symbolic projection of profitability’; and Ken Thompson on moral regulation and mass media. While all explicitly foregrounded a moment ‘after the cultural turn’, this particular gathering ‘was less significant’, according to du Gay, ‘because it didn’t have so much coherence’: it was lacking a sense of shared project. To be sure, this performative ‘misfire’ nevertheless generated ‘issues’ and ‘matters of concern’ (cf. Callon 2010), that could be taken forward elsewhere – with contributors variously rehearsing, reprising or extending arguments which appeared in print across other arenas (cf. Mcfall 2000; Negus 1997; Nixon 2003; Pryke and Du Gay 2002; Sayer 1999; Soar 2000; Thompson and Sharma 1998). But if cultural economy was to be successfully deployed as a weapon of dissemination, in Cherrier and Saïdi’s (2021) parlance, it first needed to convince others to enter its construction site.

So, while a temporally-bounded strategic intellectual event like the WoCE might be significant, a looser sense of *workshopping* opens up a wider field of intellectual practices (or perhaps better intellectual *labour*). At the OU, one-off workshop events were not uncommon; nor were traditional research seminars – such as the 1993–94 series organised by Hall and du Gay, contributions to which were published as *Questions of Cultural Identity* (Hall and Du Gay 1996). As an ongoing process, workshopping describes more simply how symbolic forms – whether a theoretical model or a staged performance – come to be produced in collaboration. In this way we might shift focus from the *event* to the *team*. Thinking in terms of collective intellectual practice raises questions of coherence, reproduction and organisational basis (González Hernando and Baert 2020); relations of collective and individual agency (as key contributors or *de facto* leaders or spokespeople) under a shared ‘brand’ (e.g. the Chicago, Frankfurt or Birmingham ‘Schools’); the handing down of particular styles and approaches, or conversely the epistemic breaks, between ‘masters’ and ‘apprentices’; and the material and institutional resourcing that enables stable formations to sustain. Workshopping can be understood in this context as a central means by which an intellectual team ‘operates to decentre notions of single authorship, propelling cultural production through the qualifications of individual creativity with collective response’ (Richardson 2019, 234).

OU seminars and workshops might best be understood, then, as staging points within a longer-term process of ongoing collective intellectual feedback – enforced by the relatively unusual course team model of pedagogical design. The course team was an OU innovation, deeply influenced by the Human Relations and systems approaches that had managerial currency at that time, to facilitate a different kind of intellectual production (Nicodemus 1992). A team would convene to produce a course over a number of years, within relatively large organisational sub-units, demanding a continual workshopping of ideas in regular meetings that included academic staff, their associated networks, media professionals and administrators. An appointed course Chair, placed in charge of the entire process, would oversee the production of new textbooks, course readers, schedules and supporting materials, as well as, working with a BBC producer, a series of

bespoke audio-visual programmes. Each member of the academic team would be required to produce multiple drafts, to a tight schedule, which would then be closely scrutinised by colleagues for explanatory rigour and clarity of expression. A course such as D318, with a shelf-life of four or five years, would be followed by enormous numbers of students, who may not have been in formal education for some time, and whose learning was largely to be self-managed (supported only by visits to their local regional office and a short residential summer school). The concepts, analyses and frameworks a course generated, across written, spoken and audio-visual media forms, were thus crafted, packaged and delivered to students to extraordinarily high professional standards, worthy of commercial publishing and broadcast industries. Course teams, curricula, styles of teaching and distance learning technologies were all subject to continual institutional monitoring.

The WoCE, I therefore want to say, was a momentary condensation of an array of *intellectual, interpersonal and institutional* mediations, which are sketched out in the following sections. Now, ‘mediation’ is not a word to use lightly in the pages of this journal, so let’s be specific. In the realm of ideas, a certain set of intellectual commitments, particularly in relation to Marxist explanations of what an economy is, how it works, and for whom, were brought into alignment with the ‘cultural turn’. This was achieved by mobilising a network of interpersonal relations, first among a cohort of new recruits to the faculty and, later, a wider group from across multiple universities and disciplines. These networks were sustained by institutional mechanisms such as course teams and media structures within a particular university’s organisational context. And this movement was deeply entwined with, if hardly fully explained by, the presence of Stuart Hall, characterised by his former CCCS and OU colleague Gregor McLellan in terms of a continuous labour of *intellectual mediation*. Mischievously, however, McLellan’s mediator is a hybrid one: part-Sartre and part-Latour. With Sartre, Hall responded to the Marxist predicament. He ‘mediated *within* Marxism – structuralism/culturalism; economism/ideologism; class/nonclass social forces – and he mediated *between* Marxism and various non- and post-Marxist discourses and movements’ (in Hall 2021, 14). But with Latour, the term trains particular attention on how meanings are transformed and translated (rather than simply transported) in an actively constituted relation between individuals, organisations, their devices and systems. OU compatriots are, to the last, unfailingly admiring about Hall as co-worker and McLellan acknowledges the truth in character studies that foreground charisma and personal generosity. ‘Mediation’, however, allows personal qualities to be sidestepped, instead positioning Hall as someone who raised problems: who would not ‘take problem fields as given’; who sought to ‘reconstitute the very concerns being addressed’, just as mediators will ‘propose and coproduce a new ‘social’ in and through their acts of problematization and the network effects they trigger’ (in Hall 2021, 342). In this way, considering Hall as an institutional mediator, shaping collective intellectual interventions – rather than simply a ‘public intellectual’ – gets us some of the way to understanding how cultural economy emerges from but moves past cultural studies.

And yet it does not explain a subsequent fading of that narrative. For if Hall’s mediations, along with those of John Allen, Doreen Massey and others, assembled the conditions for cultural economy’s emergence, those very same conditions seem also to have, if not erased, then certainly downplayed this role. In this respect Hall, the form of cultural studies associated with him, and the working environment of the OU, are *vanishing mediators* for cultural economy. The phrase is coined by Fredric Jameson (1973) to describe an idea, or a figure, that brings together two opposing terms in dialectical form, thereby sowing the seeds for its own material disappearance in the process of sublation. Jameson’s extended example comes from Max Weber, for whom the Protestant ethic mediates between the ascetic religious life of the mind (directed towards the ends of salvation) and the more instrumental everyday world of labour. The ever-more rationalised form of capitalist production that emerges from this hybridisation is one in which Protestant belief has very little place. Kathi Weeks picks up the term in relation to Shulamith Firestone’s contribution to second-wave feminism. For her, it forms a productive challenge to a heavily gendered imaginary of intellectual history that centres reproduction, inheritance and genealogy:

‘unlike other models of linear history – whether secured by narratives of progress or regress, metaphors of familial filiation or rebellion, or dialectical logics of recuperation and synthesis – the vanishing mediator can account for unexpected leaps and qualitative disjunctions’ (Weeks 2015, 740). While Hall, as we will discuss, sought to distance himself from the role of father figure, he might still be thought of, ‘with apologies to Firestone’, as ‘the surrogate mother’ – indeed, one later ‘excised from the family photos’ (Weeks 2015, 740). Likewise, if cultural studies hardly disappeared entirely from cultural economy, the internal familial links and tensions are retrospectively no longer immediately obvious.³

Cultural studies to cultural economy

Interpersonal mediations: Arrival of a new cohort

The workshop mentality is especially germane to cultural studies, given its underlying normative imperatives to dissolve the ego and elevate the collective. The subgroups and seminars around which post-graduate teaching was organised at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), for instance, were founded in Richard Hoggart’s unsettling approach to literary study on arrival at the university, not as the ‘isolated activity’ of the lone critic but as ‘the collective research of mass culture’ (Webster 2004, 854). Under Stuart Hall, his successor, this mode of intellectual production sought to break not just with genius models of artistic worthiness but student-master hierarchies. This was not just a functional work model – indeed, as Connell and Hilton (2015) caution, intellectual work at CCCS was more often deeply *dysfunctional*, prone not just to disagreement but to fractious, deeply-felt and highly personal divisions. Processes of collective thinking are prone to romanticism just as much as high-Romantic imaginaries of artisanship, whereas such experiences are, in reality, often marked by a messy and asymmetrical belligerence. As Cherrier and Saïdi (2021, 619) observe, with regard to the gendering of economics workshops, these charged moments of affiliation and disaffiliation leave subtle or unsubtle traces on the products that emerge from them: ‘formal representations of informal links, power structures and intellectual rivalries and hierarchies’, most evident in those topics and analytic frames that are discarded or silenced.

This lens of interpersonal allegiance and (dis)affiliation is especially germane to the present discussion insofar as there are clear lines of continuity, as well as rupture, between CCCS and OU Social Sciences. These links, associated primarily but far from exclusively with Stuart Hall’s appointment as incoming Chair of Sociology at the latter in 1979, are well-known but poorly understood. The U203 course on Popular Culture, running 1982–1987, has often been positioned as one effect of this trajectory (cf. Miller 1994; Turner 2003, 66), for example, but the actual circumstances of its production, the constitution of its course team, its underlying curriculum, mechanics and ethos, all belie a simple transfer of cultural studies from Birmingham to Milton Keynes (Bennett 1996). A different story can be told if we cast our lens wider. John Allen had joined the Open University in 1979, to work on a project with fellow geographer Linda McDowell, on landlords and property relations, before being appointed as full-time lecturer. His arrival coincided with the appointment of a cohort of fellow travellers that included those such as Hall and his former CCCS colleagues John Clarke and Gregor McLellan, as well as James Donald, Allan Cochrane, Laurence Harris and Susan Himmelweit, among others. Doreen Massey joined a little later, in 1984, after a spell researching urban and regional issues at the Centre for Environmental Studies and with the Greater London Council, both on the edges of the Labour Party. This was all ‘part of a concerted attempt to recruit new people’ to the Social Sciences faculty, who were ‘identified and head hunted on an informal basis’, according to Allen, driven largely not by the development of U203 but of a need to refresh the interdisciplinary foundation course D102, Introduction to Social Science (cf. Clarke 2019, 102). It was overseen by then Dean Mike Fitzgerald (cf. Clarke 2019, 120; Jefferson 2021, 7–8), a deviancy and new criminology scholar (who had offered feedback on drafts of the landmark CCCS text, *Policing the Crisis*). For Hall, and those like him, this new context appealed since it:

wasn't a sociology degree – it was a social science degree, so I felt free to assemble a grouping in the Open University that would sort of rethink the social sciences in that direction and what's important about the courses that we produced then was that it was sort of the first time that anybody tried to produce a series of teaching materials to kind of acknowledge the cultural turn within the social sciences. (Hall in Connell and Hilton 2015, 300–301)

Many among this grouping already knew one another from fora – such as CCCS, the National Deviancy Conference, the Conference of Socialist Economists or its in-house journal *Capital & Class* – that were actively engaged in challenging social-scientific orthodoxy.

Alongside shared social circles and a shared will to remake curriculum, there was a shared alignment with the institution's identity. According to Allan Cochrane, this cohort arrived at a moment when the OU was 'coming out of a period of struggle in the sense of trying to define itself, into a moment of a bit more confidence where they were able to bring people together and actively try to construct a space in which people could think collectively and differently and in all sorts of ways' (in Clarke 2019, 121). Signing up to an institutional project helped considerably here, driving a felt alliance between social science and education that positioned the university as the primary vector of social mobility. The anthropologist Ruth Finnegan, among the first OU recruits, describes herself and her husband as 'very enthused by the vision' of the institution and 'the commitment of it very much went to our hearts' (in Thompson 2010). In John Allen's words, the new arrivals 'were all on the Left, all believed in the OU as a kind of social democratic experiment in mass education'. Seeing herself as 'a child of [...] social democratic interventionism', Massey too appreciated the OU ethos, considering it 'a place where it might be possible to be an intellectual, a teacher, a researcher without being at a more formal university' (Freytag and Hoyler 1999, 84–85). For Hall's part, this 'open, interdisciplinary, unconventional' institution, at the heart of an opening higher education system, 'served some of my political aspirations' to make complex theoretical and ideological formations accessible 'to those who don't have any academic background' – in direct contrast to the 'hothouse stuff' of Birmingham's graduate students:

They [CCCS] aspired to connect, as organic intellectuals, to a wider movement, but they themselves were at the pinnacle of a very selective education system. The Open University was not. It was challenging the selectivity of higher education as a system. So, the question was 'Can cultural studies be done there?' (Hall and Chen 1996, 503)

Hall's emphasis on 'doing' perhaps contains echoes of his scepticism towards the theoretical fluency and professionalisation that appeared to accompany the adoption of this field by the university, in the United States in particular. Clearly on his mind during this period, he was moved to tell Mato (2014, 203), that he could no longer *write on* cultural studies; rather – foreshadowing the flagship D318 'Walkman book' discussed above – he was '*dedicated to doing cultural studies*'.

Institutional mediations: a university for New Times

Accompanying the notion of *doing* is that of *intervening* – a word picked up by David Scott (2005, 3), who describes Hall as 'less the author of books than the author of *interventions*'. Framed by its authorial collective as an 'intervention into the battleground of ideas' (Hall et al. 1978, x), for instance, *Policing the Crisis* famously anticipated the rise to power of the Conservative Party, offering the groundwork for a series of subsequent contributions to the labelling and defining of Thatcherism's electoral success. Hall's OU tenure was almost exactly coterminous with that administration and bookended by this and the Walkman book (the first published just prior to his arrival in 1979; the second just prior to his retirement in 1998). Both were subsequently taken up as methodological handbooks – one way, perhaps, in which the tension between *writing* and *doing* might be resolved. But his major interests in this period tracked the public and policy responses to multicultural Britain's drift, occasioning multiple efforts to intervene in public debate that deeply inflected his thinking. Hall (1999) described the period in terms of 'Scarman to Stephen Lawrence', respectively naming the 1981 government report authored by Lord Scarman into the previous decade's

urban ‘race riots’ and the 1993 murder of a Black south London teenager, the bungled handling of which by the Metropolitan Police was later diagnosed as a consequence, in the words of the subsequent government inquiry, of ‘institutional racism’.

As Karim Murji (2022) describes, with respect to Hall’s contributions to commissions and media appearances on race and racism during this period, a sociology of ‘intellectual interventions’ might be more useful than one of ‘public intellectuals’ (Eyal and Bucholz 2010). Instead of seeking to legislate who or what an ‘intellectual’ *is* or *should be* (for instance: inside or outside the academy; individual or collective; charismatic rhetoric or commercially-packaged object), or to offer judgments on their decline, a focus on interventions works to describe their production and their effects (Baert 2012). This reframing is apiece with Hall’s own perspective: his famous discomfort at being positioned as *de facto* ‘father figure’ for, and representative authority on, this emergent field. There is no ‘Stuart Hall’s Theory of Everything’ (Scott 2005, 3). An evident ‘passion for collaborative endeavors,’ comments Kobena Mercer (2014), ‘testified to the values of a socialist intellectual with no interest in patriarchal posturing or possessive individualism’: he was never ‘the Big Man with the Big Book’. Instead, Hall’s various public interventions result in a body of work that is fragmented and polyvocal, mixing teaching materials, media appearances, essays and interviews, spread across multiple outlets and edited volumes.

And yet these interventions still tend to be cast in a heroic light, illustrating the strange tension between the individual and the collective. While the reprints collected in Duke University Press’ *Stuart Hall: Selected Writings ...* series deliver a valuable curatorial service, it is one that nonetheless lends a somewhat anachronistic unity of voice and purpose, chiming with a popular ‘image of intellectuals [that] hinges on the ideals of independence of mind and freedom from social pressures, institutional obligations, and even steadfast political commitments’ (González Hernando and Baert 2020, 1145). Identifying as an intellectual rather than an academic, Hall is commonly described as, at best, ambivalent towards the professional trappings of university life which, it seems clear, had thoroughly exhausted him by the time he approached retirement. Accordingly, when Hall’s OU contributions, and especially his on-screen appearances, are mentioned, it is typically in passing (‘staying up late to watch television as a teenager in the ‘70s and coming across Hall lecturing on Althusserian Marxism’, as Mercer (2014) writes, for example: ‘an event that I am glad to say irrevocably altered my life’) and celebrated as the practice of a committed public intellectual – rather than, say, simply how distance learning operated.

This can lead to some strange diagnoses. Reviewing Hall’s *Selected Writings on Marxism* for London Review of Books, for instance, Jenny Turner (2022) detects a tonal shift: away from 1970s ‘force and precision’, towards ‘the wishy-washy Hall’ of the late 1980s, more attuned to consumerism than to the managed decline of manufacturing. Intriguingly, she associates this apparent deterioration with the move to the OU, and the notion that Hall ‘seems always to have preferred workshopping ideas with others’: ‘missing, perhaps, the CCCS and its collective way of working’, she concludes that *Marxism Today* offered some communal solace – with regrettable results.⁴ It is worth dwelling on this brief aside for a moment, on which there are several things to note. Hall’s writings for *Marxism Today* (the punchy magazine edited by the Communist Party of Great Britain’s Gramscian faction), particularly the reformist ‘New Times’ theses on new post-Fordist settlements, have been widely critiqued. The state theorist Bob Jessop and colleagues saw ‘Thatcherism’ as presenting Tory policy as too coherent a strategy, wrongly crediting the Conservative policy programme as a driver of change (see Gallas 2016), while the journal *Race & Class* saw it as a faddish disavowal of class (Sivanandan 1990). Yet Turner’s reading is surely misplaced. The claim that Hall’s New Times work resulted from intellectual isolation should be set within the course team model, which he variously described as ‘an incredible thing’, ‘a very creative activity’, and ‘an intense kind of dialogue’ which he ‘absolutely adored’ (Stuart Hall Archive Box 63). The OU was far removed from Birmingham, for sure, but the implication that it lacked opportunities for collective intellectual work is deeply at odds with the accounts of those employed in it – as described in several of the contributions in this collection.

The sheer size of student cohort and BBC involvement meant that the outcomes of intensive reflexive workshopping in course teams were indeed genuine public interventions – making a difference in wider intellectual life – going beyond simply ‘teaching materials’. It underpinned an operating model based on high upfront investment in design, low marginal costs of reproduction in delivery, aimed at a mass market of fee-paying students who could tailor a personalised education product. The cost-effectiveness of this model was calculated by an expert group, led by the economist Richard Layard (later known for his contributions to the economics of happiness), which considered it to offer the future university lessons in efficiency (Laidlaw and Layard 1974). Its ‘post-industrial’ nature, in Mike Fitzgerald’s (1999) analysis, was not lost on academic critics, meanwhile, including those within cultural studies. The OU’s early years exemplified how ‘a certain kind of liberal progressiveness can fit with a certain kind of rational organisation to produce a profound extension of centralised control in higher education’ (Harris and Holmes 1976, 80). The transactional nature of fees undermined this progressive democratic promise, reinforced by distance learning and the use of mass media, which restricted opportunities for students to ‘talk back’ to the discipline (Miller 1994; Williams 1989). If the coordination of collaborative intellectual production and the need to appeal to students’ preferences in degree structure demanded OU academics relinquish autonomy in favour of complex managerial and marketing skills, according to Graham Salaman and Kenneth Thompson (1974, 123), it also attached them to widely-disseminated high-quality texts and public media appearances that offered a potential ‘license to make a reputation’.

Meanwhile, whereas much of the British HE sector received public money via the arms-length University Grants Committee (UGC), the OU itself was directly-funded by the Department of Education and Science (DES), making it particularly vulnerable to changing political whims. This is particularly evident in the direct attacks on apparent ‘Marxist bias’ at the university. The Hayekian Education Secretary (and one of Margaret Thatcher’s most influential intellectual advisors) Keith Joseph, learning of some students’ complaints, deployed a team of unnamed professional economists to investigate the D102 Social Sciences foundation course (which Hall had helped to design and teach). The series of tightly-argued interventions that he subsequently addressed to various *internal* OU audiences – managers, regional tutors, students themselves – furnished them with arguments that would help defend the pedagogical choice of foregrounding Marxism as a key approach in a complex and evolving theoretical terrain, as well as the capacity of students to differentiate between competing perspectives (a matter on which the economists were unconvinced). Some minor alterations were made for the course’s next presentation and the political threats subsequently died down. Hall later commented on the ‘funny feeling that, you know, some senior civil servant is looking in detail’ at one’s academic writing, leading to a concern that an ‘economic squeeze might be used to, you know, to straighten out the content and the exploratory nature’; this possibility ‘had to be resisted, that had to be organised, but we succeeded’ (Stuart Hall Archive Box 63). Likely, as John Allen comments, this was tied more to the OU’s balance sheet than to any specific intellectual argument. Joseph’s demotion from the DES, a result of the failure of his enormously unpopular efforts to reduce overall student numbers (Mandler 2020, 119–126), cannot but have helped.

Whatever one’s position on Hall’s intellectual interventions in the 1980s, therefore, critical judgment also demands attention to their institutional embedding. Claims that he gave too much causal power to Thatcherism as ideological and policy formation, saw post-Fordism as the future and neglected economic explanations, for example, are qualified by his experiences in a self-consciously innovating ‘knowledge organisation’ under close ministerial scrutiny, alongside his energetic defence of students’ capacity to evaluate class conflict as one of several explanations for industrial change. His contributions to course teams in turn complicate interpretations of his relationship to the OU: that it distanced him from cultural studies’ founding commitments to collective work; or, conversely, that reduce the university to a platform for his role as a public intellectual. Such interpretations are testament to the fact that ‘Hall’s famously fomenting years at [CCCS] in the

1970s has', in Ken Thompson's (2016, 385) words, 'tended to overshadow his longer and highly productive tenure at the OU.' None of this is to deny his extraordinary capacity to articulate complex ideas or his rhetorical force – in stark contrast, indeed, to the fusty caricature of the beige-jacketed, kipper-tied, chalk-boarded academic that a bleary-eyed student might encounter upon switching on the television late at night. On the contrary, any appraisal of cultural studies amid New Times, whether in written texts or broadcast media appearances, is enriched by being placed within the crucial peculiarities of this teaching environment.

Intellectual mediations: W(h)ither ideology?

The mutual embeddedness of ideas and institution is captured in another BBC appearance, away from the OU. In a 1989 broadcast of *The Late Show* titled 'Maggie's Cultural Tendencies', host Michael Ignatieff turned to Hall to ask whether the Prime Minister had 'really changed hearts and minds?'

Well, if you mean 'has she changed all hearts and minds?', obviously not – but I don't think that that's the way to think about a cultural revolution. Has she changed the way in which people have to speak to one another, whatever is in their hearts and minds? The answer to that is 'yes'. Has she changed the way in which institutions calculate about one another? I mean, if you sat in a senior common room in a university and listened to academics talk about how they now measure what their institutions do, what their educational goals are and what is the success, their language is totally different from anything they would have said to one another ... They've just stopped talking about education, intellectual questions, doubt, scepticism, etc. They go first of all to entrepreneurial income. I mean, the whole language has become the only language which we now have to calculate whether things are worthwhile or not – which is the language of 'value for money'. (BBC 1989)

Protestations erupt from fellow panellist Jonathan Clark, a historian at All Souls' College, Oxford: 'It's not true! It's not true.' In response, Hall clarifies what was previously implicit. 'Well, it's true in my institution, it's true in the polytechnics', he retorts, before sardonically conceding, 'it may not be true in Oxbridge ...' The debate took place in the wake of the previous year's Education Reform Act, which had upended universities by ending academic tenure and the self-governance of the UGC, replacing the latter with bodies that administered public funding conditional on the imposition of reforms. This was the culmination of a dramatic period for HE funding, policy and audit, which also saw the introduction of the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), tying research-related grant income to regular evaluations of quality and 'excellence'. The polytechnics mentioned were to be elevated into full-fledged universities a few years later, furthering ambitions to deliver a true mass education, with a public debate on tuition fees inaugurated by the end of the 1990s. The OU, which had to a great extent anticipated many of these structural changes, was no longer an outlier within the sector and also kept up well within sectoral evaluations. Sociology performed well in the 1996 RAE, while its 'well crafted and outstanding' teaching received the highest mark in every category of an assessment that same year – Hall being 'absolutely delighted' that 'the rating is a proper and fitting reward' (Open University 1997). Such results, perhaps surprising for a distance-teaching institution, provide some evidence of the importance of the course team model, alongside the need to respond to an emerging model of audit-led governance.

As higher education underwent reform, so too did the theoretical resources. Returning to the theme in a 1993 article for *New Statesman and Society*, Hall elaborates on Thatcherism as a disciplining 'struggle about conduct', in which 'hearts and minds follow later'. The OU, he says,

is filled with good social democrats. Everybody there believes in the redistribution of educational opportunities and seeks to remedy the exclusiveness of British education. And yet, in the past ten years, these good social-democratic souls, without changing for a minute what is in their hearts and minds, have learned to speak a brand of metallic new entrepreneurialism, a new managerialism of a horrendously closed nature. They believe what they believed, but what they do, how they write their mission statements, how they do appraisal forms, how they talk about students, how they calculate the cost – that's what they are really interested in now (Hall 1993, 15).

Hall's irritation with the higher education system is palpable here. Less obvious, perhaps, is a tacit dialogue with OU colleagues' emerging interests in the forms of culture mobilised by the new managerialism. John Clarke and Janet Newman's studies of public sector reform, for instance, counterposed the 'discovery of culture in managerial discourses as a domain of working life which needs to be actively managed' to the relative 'disappearance of economic relations and work cultures' in cultural studies, with 'the economy appearing [in the latter] only as a backdrop to the real action' of texts and leisure practices (Clarke and Newman 1993, 426). This echoed the critiques of those, like Meaghan Morris (1988), who objected to the routine deployment of Marxist explanation as an unsatisfactory get-out clause, implying there was no need to study the realm of production. Combatting this disappearance was, of course, to become something of a founding commitment for a cultural economy manifesto (Cooper and Mcfall 2017, 2–3).

As a result, the *New Statesman* piece airs a second frustration, just as palpable. If a lazy appeal to Marxist orthodoxy obviates much need to monitor changes in 'economic' organisation, the world of ideas is also let off the hook by appeals to 'ideology'. The 'left', says Hall (1993, 14) 'has never properly understood what ideologies are': too focused on matters of manipulation and deception, they have missed those 'ideas that organise people's behaviour and conduct' (Hall 1993, 14). Among others, he may have had in mind some of the earlier CCCS debates. Richard Johnson's summary article – later cited as a template for the circuit of culture (Du Gay et al. 1997, 3) – decries the drift towards an 'expanded' (Althusserian or 'Leninist') definition of ideology, for example, in which "discourse", 'cultural form' etc. would do quite as well, preferring to 'retain the 'negative' or 'critical' connotations' of classical Marxism (Johnson 1986, 308–9n9). Instead, Hall turns to Foucault, locating ideology in the discursive practices that operate through formal institutional mechanisms, subordinating personal commitments, demanding fluency and shaping action. And yet, it is clear he is not quite ready to abandon the term just yet: ideology has always been a more complicated thing than many have understood.

This ambivalence is symptomatic of a wider fracture in the critical architecture of the period, suggesting something of the anxieties and ambiguities, as well as the new agendas, that characterised the post-Marxist turn in social theory after 1989. It is one that Paul du Gay evidently also grappled with as a graduate student. On the verge of completing his doctoral study, his first article for *New Formations* in 1991, 'Enterprise culture and the ideology of excellence', wears its commitments explicitly in its title. Variants of this article appear in the final PhD submission and the later book (Du Gay 1991; 1992; 1996) – by which point, five years hence, the title has indicatively shifted to a '*discourse* of excellence' (my emphasis). The thesis explains why. On one hand, there was a need to jettison outmoded theoretical baggage: *discourse* 'provides a means of overcoming the debilitating 'binary oppositions'', writes Du Gay (1992, 8), 'between 'action' and 'structure', 'individual' and 'productive apparatus' and 'ideology' and 'truth''. On the other hand, the Foucauldian inflection of the term suggests an attention to the technologies of knowledge that flow across institutional and disciplinary borders – that structure the practical applications of managerial or psychoanalytic frameworks, as much as scholarly analyses and explanations. One word that steps in to describe those technologies is, of course, 'culture'.

The merits and tensions involved in this terminological shift are outlined at length in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, an edited collection emerging from a 'Cultural Identities' seminar series that Hall and du Gay organised in 1993–1994, in which Hall offers an extended deliberation on the value of Foucauldian analysis to the politics of identity. Rather than treating identity as a matter of personal property, Foucault's analyses prompt us to delineate *processes of identification*. For Hall (1996, 11–16), the turn towards the material body is generative in this respect, particularly its influence on two strands of work. The first, that of Judith Butler, is especially valuable, Hall argues, insofar as she leans towards a notion of subjectivity, beyond that of intentionality and behaviour, that Foucault's critique of psychoanalysis prevented him from developing. Butler thereby opens up a route beyond the latter's tendency to veer towards *homo economicus* – although, he admits, this is an ongoing project. The second productive strand is that of governmentality,

which he associates with Nikolas Rose, and has been taken up by du Gay among others – particularly in relation to the kinds of bureaucratic governance that, under the new managerialism, would become the primary enemy of ‘enterprise’.

Although it has clearly influenced his criticisms of higher education, Hall does not dwell on this latter strand. It is intriguing, therefore, moving back to the *New Statesman* article, to encounter his own appreciation of bureaucracy. If ‘the left’ (again) have been ‘very good at pinpointing the problems of bureaucracy [...] there is something to be said about bureaucracy because at least it marks certain divisions between public and private’, he concludes: ‘People know their role in the organisation they work for; when they go home at night they can leave it behind. The new entrepreneurial ethos does not have any such boundaries’ (Hall 1993, 15). Hall’s own experiences chairing courses and as Head of Sociology never tempted him further up the managerial ladder of the OU’s ‘massive machine’, as John Allen puts it, which required more of an ‘accounting model’ of organisation: ‘to be honest he was better used elsewhere, obviously’. Nonetheless, the appeal of governance-by-bureau is evident in Hall’s comments on the Metropolitan Police, whose members, he says, ‘love reggae, eat Vindaloo curry every Saturday night, have a few black friends, and still think that ‘good policing’ requires them to act on the assumption that a young black man carrying a holdall at a bus-stop after dark almost certainly just committed a robbery and should be ‘sussed’ – stopped and searched’ (Hall 1999, 195). Again, practice undermines professed beliefs – the response to which should be to learn from the strategy of Thatcherism and turn towards the bureaucratic technologies of conduct. In this way would it be possible to think about ‘how to hold officers directly accountable in terms of preferment, and how to make the ‘cost’ of proven racist behaviour by police officers, witting or unwitting, directly impact on their careers, pay, promotion prospects and indeed job retention and retirement rewards’ (Hall 1999, 196). Work cultures, that is, are best reshaped not through training videos and public statements but through appraisals, indicators and career incentives. If the institution can generate racist subjects, it can also be used as a corrective device.

By this point, Hall has moved within ‘shouting distance’, so to speak, of the questions raised in this issue by Fabian Muniesa over the explanatory or exculpatory role of organisational culture in wider social relations. While Muniesa is interested in the light that financial misconduct sheds on political economy more broadly, for Hall misconduct among the police force presents a route into understanding the brutal racialisation of the state. And yet there remains a world of difference between discursive performance and the later economic performativity thesis – a divergence that played out in the exchange between Judith Butler (2010) and Michel Callon (2010), based on a 2008 workshop in Toulouse, and later published in this journal. Despite the two post-Foucauldian paths he had identified, Hall himself never participated in this dialogue with economic performativity – at least not in print. The anecdote recounted by Sean Nixon and Paul du Gay, of an evening spent discussing *Laws of the Markets* in Hall’s front room with Liz McFall, suggests why not. While ‘he could see it was a bravura performance’, according to du Gay, Hall ‘wasn’t positively taken with Callon’. Even so, he somewhat begrudgingly accepted that, in Nixon’s gloss, ‘when you buy a house it is about trying to get the best price, you are a calculative agent, you’re not sentimental, you are made up as a rational, profit-maximizing being’. The anecdote is telling. From the perspective of a present-day concern with how intergenerational inequalities are entrenched by asset logics (Adkins, Cooper, and Konings 2020), of course, the house-buying experience might no longer be assumed to resonate with a room of early-career academics. But housing has long been a generative topic for cultural economy’s pre-history, tracking the contested rise of a Thatcherite property-owning democracy (cf. Allen and McDowell 1989; Pryke and Du Gay 2002; Pryke and Whitehead 1994). And, moreover, the domestic setting in which the exchange itself took place illustrates something of the informal and close-knit social affiliations, well away from the ‘official’ institution, through which the workshopping of ideas so often took place.

Before being settled and locked down in written form, the various elements that would make up a distinctive ‘cultural economy’ mode of analysis moved primarily (as Allen, du Gay and Pryke, and McRobbie all emphasise in different ways) through everyday channels and intermediate spaces,

animated as much by personal passions as the demands of teaching, career progression or institutional governance regimes: supervisions bleeding into dinners; course team meetings carried over into car and train journeys; intellectual heroes encountered at parties. The rejection of Callon is symptomatic, reflects du Gay, of his own departure from cultural studies – Hall, being ‘wedded to certain theoretical resources which could not be well-aligned with ANT’ (and perhaps unwilling to embrace yet another French theorist), likely viewed the likes of Callon and Latour as ‘politically naïve’. By way of contrast, the same cannot be said for Massey, Hall’s political ally, for whom human geography was well positioned to embrace hybrid nature/culture relations (Freytag and Hoyler 1999, 57). It is perhaps this relative disciplinary openness, alongside an institutional position as supervisor and social connector, that would ultimately position not Hall but the geographer John Allen as the key interlocutor for cultural economy. An offhand comment became a helpful organising concept and, later, a more formal label – and a way of pushing beyond the limits of cultural studies, as it was then constituted.

Workshop of the world?

This brings us neatly full circle, albeit with a partial history, centring one trajectory in particular. Others are available, as signalled by the following contributions. My hope is nonetheless to have shed some light on the intellectual, institutional and interpersonal mediations shaping the formation of the key concept animating this journal, many of which have in some way ‘vanished’ from view. This introduction and the contributions that follow concentrate, in Cherrier and Saïdi’s parlance, on the ‘upstream’ context informing the turn-of-the-century Workshop. Beyond the *Cultural Economy* edited book, its ‘downstream’ consequences included, among other things, a core workstream within the multi-million pound Centre for Research on Socio-Cultural Change (CRESC), launched in 2004, and, of course, this journal in 2008. Here ‘cultural economy’ was attractive insofar as it enabled (arguably still enables) a high degree of ‘strategic ambiguity’, as Don Slater observes. Equally, I have suggested that it was also highly culturally specific: embedded firmly in the preoccupations of a certain part of the world – to some extent those of a certain set of institutional mechanisms – at a particular historical juncture: a British economy struggling to get to grips with an increasing reliance on consumer, creative, financial and knowledge services. Cast in such a light, any epistemic project runs the risk of appearing merely parochial. But, as Hall and Massey both remind us, this need not be so: Sarita Malik and Philip Roscoe both impel us to consider how the more cultural (approach to the) economy of the 1990s, whether in television productions or in mining finance, were deeply inflected by persistent colonial logics and unfolding economic relations with Global South actors. If this theme was perhaps obscured by some of the micro-analyses of economic life offered in this journal’s earlier incarnations, the absence has been partially redressed in a number of recent articles and special issues. Clearly work in this vein is ongoing and necessary (not least given the transnational but largely invisible networks and dynamics of scholarly publishing in which *JCE*, via Taylor & Francis/Informa PLC, its outsourced typesetters in Chennai and Bangalore, and the server centres that allow its metadata to flow, is enmeshed) and may well prove transformative for the field.

By way of a coda, it is apposite to mention the events leading up to and flowing out from the 2020 workshop that gave rise to the present collection. The event was initially occasioned by a house move, appropriately enough, in which co-editor Liz McFall discovered the photographs mentioned at the outset. Her decision to post these on the social media platform then known as Twitter led to a series of comments, email exchanges and Zoom calls – and the subsequent anniversary symposium. Some of its contributions form the basis of this Symposium, with others published elsewhere (Abdul Rahman, Ertürk, and Froud 2020; Entwistle and Slater 2019; Hartmann, Spicer, and Krabbe 2022; Mcrobbie 2016; Susen 2018), including two *JCE* special issues, on *Ghosts of Empire* (Bourne et al. 2024) and on ethnography as market intervention (Ossandón and Onto forthcoming). The most immediate ‘downstream’ consequence, however, was a post-conference dinner at which

participants ruminated on the pronouncements of Dominic Cummings, then advisor to the newly-elected prime minister Boris Johnson, regarding the deleterious influence of a humanities-educated professional-managerial class – and his aim to accelerate its decline. Cummings’ lamentation over those ‘Oxbridge English graduates who chat about Lacan at dinner parties’ was followed later that year by future Prime Minister Liz Truss’s contempt for the apparent influence of Foucault on the management of local Leeds schools (Riley 2020). If, as our roundtable discussion records, encounters with mainstream economic knowledge had often met with a visceral sense of distaste within certain corners of the social sciences, the ‘moment of theory’ (Du Gay 2008, 1–18) clearly had a similar effect on the rising political classes.

Yet, in the intervening months, as the taken-for-granted conviviality of workshops, dinner parties and other mundane intellectual routines were recast in a biopolitical light, certain forms of social science were thrust into the spotlight. A global health crisis, not entirely unanticipated but certainly unprepared for, suddenly revealed social and intellectual exchanges as sites of viral contagion, freighted with complex risk calculations. Some of our workshop participants, survivors of the disease, would later be driven to write with auto-ethnographic authority on the precarious care economy that media reporting had only sporadically managed to represent, if sometimes in lurid detail (Mcrobbie 2020), as well as the labelling power of those online communities who, in the case of Long Covid, gave form and collective epistemic weight to dislocated experiences of undiagnosed suffering (Callard and Perego 2021). It is not just that the backstage work of academic life was rendered ‘salient’, ‘freed’ up or displaced ‘online instead’ by the pandemic (Cherrier and Saïdi 2021, 610); rather, vectors of inquiry and assembly were being reshaped by it. Whether artisanal or ecclesiastical in ethos, the workshop of the 2020s is not that of the 2000s. Nor can its cultural-economic foundations be assumed in the contemporary university- a university sometimes now managed, and sometimes mismanaged, by those very critical academics who cut their teeth in the cultural turn, including one WoCE participant (Callard 2018). Intellectual life has continued to come under attack, subjected to inflated political rhetoric and policy decisions – or, perhaps more damagingly, the lack thereof – that increasingly threaten the very existence of humanities and social-scientific disciplines. And yet, when financial commentators espouse the merits of anthropology (see Çalıřkan and Tett 2022) and a JCE-published author trains bankers to be ethnographers, sensitised to the nuances of firm culture (Financial Services Culture Board 2017), perhaps something outside the university has also changed. Equally, while the major contemporary public intellectual, Adam Tooze, is an economic historian, so too was Kwasi Kwarteng, Truss’ Chancellor of the Exchequer, whose ill-fated attempts to radically rewire the British economy, swiftly subjected to the discipline of finance markets and central bankers, became a cautionary mythic tale for his successors ever since. ‘Culture’ – experience, ideology, aesthetic, discourse, affect, performance, technique, whatever - remains a slippery thing to get hold of, let alone to deploy. Perhaps, when we call for the ‘doing’ of cultural economy, we should be careful what we wish for. What role can or should a journal like this play in such a context? It is not enough to be critical, as McFall reminded us in the roundtable – but if cultural economy is to be truly *useful* it remains urgent to find and make spaces for collective critical thought at a global scale.

REVISION ADVICE

You should now turn to the Selected Readings that follow. As you do so, take your own notes and then compare them with ours – do you agree with the interpretation we have offered? Many others are surely possible. Consider what you could submit for your tutor-marked assignment. Remember, the submissions with the highest marks may even be featured in future journal issues!

Notes

1. From here on, quoted material refers to the contributions in this volume unless otherwise indicated.

2. The event comprised four panels. The first, ‘What was cultural economy?’, asked several participants in the original Workshop on Cultural Economy to reflect on what brought them to discuss the topic at the Open University two decades previously. An edited transcript of this scene-setting ‘roundtable’ discussion is presented here. The second panel, titled ‘Re-engineering cultural economy: The matter of mediation’, presented a number of examples of how the cultural turn makes a difference: from the attachments of political intermediaries (Jennifer Smith Maguire) and the role of policy in a cultural production system (Andy Pratt) to ethnographers entering into market design (José Ossandón and Trine Pallesen) and working with urban lighting designers (Joanne Entwistle and Don Slater). A third panel, ‘Finance, Capital, Cultural Politics’, examined the ghosts of Empire that have haunted financialisation (Clea Bourne, Paul Gilbert, Max Haiven and Johnna Montgomerie), ongoing tensions between the ‘cultural’ and the ‘political’ in finance (Fabian Muniesa), post-colonial financial citizenship in Malaysia (Syahirah Abdul Rahman) and the enrichment perspective of Luc Boltanski and Arnaud Esquerre (Simon Susen). The concluding panel, on ‘Legacies of ‘Enterprise Culture’’, prompted us to reconsider the attention paid to entrepreneurialism in the 1990s and its after-effects, whether in commercial innovation, public-funded arts or the academy itself. Thus three panellists explored the rise of a pervasive but superficial industry incentivising entrepreneurship as a form of conspicuous consumption (André Spicer), Stuart Hall’s engagement with the emergent economy of Black British Arts and its later neo-liberalisation (Angela McRobbie) and the movement of cultural-economic geographers who once analysed and critiqued enterprise into prominent managerial and leadership positions shaping UK Higher Education institutions and policy (Felicity Callard).
3. As a loose index of its displacement, this journal’s first decade saw ‘Stuart Hall’ referenced nine times and ‘Doreen Massey’ twice, mostly in short reviews or framing editorials, compared with 71 references to ‘Michel Callon’ and 47 for ‘Bruno Latour’.
4. Turner buttresses her thesis by appealing to the fact that *The Hard Road to Renewal* was ‘the only book he published in his lifetime with just his name on the spine’ – confusingly, given her argument, since this book comprises pieces written for *Marxism Today*, not the OU.

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Notes on contributor

Toby Bennett teaches media, culture and organisation at the University of Westminster.

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