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# Introduction: Dramaturgies of Value in Market Places

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## A context

The contemporary dominance of global capitalism rests strongly on the continued ideological vigor of a particular notion of ‘the market’ as much as it does on the availability of capital, the efficiency of distribution systems and the exploitation of labor. In prevailing conceptions, as many point out, ‘the market’ arises as a kind of supra-intelligence, even a kind of a deity (Frank 2000), that is said to effectively arrange social and economic life according to an unbending, and ultimately unerring, calculus of value – an idea clearly descendent from Adam Smith (Carrier 1997; Slater and Tonkiss 2001). In its present day manifestation, the neoclassical ideology of the market informs a neoliberal politics that exhorts, in ways that Smith never intended, the absolute right-of-way for commerce to shun governmental regulation or public oversight (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000).

Scholars like Ferdinand Toennies (2001) and Karl Polanyi (1957) in their own ways have grappled with explicating the extent to which economic life and action are antagonistic to notions of civic and social life or whether they can be accommodated to one another (see Bevir and Trentmann 2004; Harris 2004). The view of social–civil life as economic in origin and temperament rests upon the assumption of the existence of an extremely individualized, unencumbered, freely choosing person (usually imagined as a male) who engages in exchange based upon the impulse of self interest. If left unfettered, his actions furthermore are supposed to combine with others’ to produce benefits for all (England 1993, 2003; Carrier 1997).

The economic perspective on markets and exchange leaves no space wherein culture, meaning, sentiment and everyday practice can be

brought to bear on the study of social life (Zelizer 2005; Hochschild 1993). It is an inherited, conceptual legacy organizing much of the discussion about markets and market society. As Don Slater (2002) notes: 'The division between economic and social-cultural analysis constitutes a kind of deep structure in modern, Western thought' (p. 59). Cultural analysis, he continues, is formed around the idea that culture and economy are macro entities 'operating as externalities' to one another, rather than integrated with one another (p. 59). Indeed, it is common to encounter research that sets up clear divisions between 'culture' and 'economy' or between 'cultural studies' and 'political economy,' often affirming them in the process of arguing for their transcendence (see Miller 2006).

The works comprising *Lived Experiences of Public Consumption* reject such categorical distinctions and dichotomies from the outset in favor of engaging closely with the materiality and sociality of marketplaces – i.e. of public exchanges spatially situated. Eschewing predetermined and overdetermined conceptions of 'the market' in the abstract, the contributors take as points of departure the experiences, practices and embodiments in and of public sites of consumption. They situate themselves and their work in commercial marketplaces – on the streets and in the plazas, grocery stores, coffee shops and malls of five continents – offering the kind of rich description and analysis enabled by ethnographic and interpretive forms of inquiry. In so doing, the authors demonstrate a shared conviction that something irreducible occurs in the public, face-to-face encounters of buyers and sellers, of observers and participants, in the terrestrial market, be it a Borders bookstore, a mall, shop or a flea market. This conviction centers on the idea that whatever overarching dynamics of power, meaning and identity inform markets and consumption – be they global structures of capital or deep structures of thought about economic action – these arise and are made manifest in some discernible, observable manner as people go about their daily rounds of living.

It is widely accepted that since antiquity, the 'market' has continued to be separated from 'place' (Bahktin 1984; Agnew 1986; Zukin 1991; Slater and Tonkiss 2001). Indeed, it may be said that the ability to separate buyers, sellers and products from each other and to abstract the exchange process from any particular place, as in stock and commodity markets, has provided classical and neoclassical economics the foundation upon which to build the powerful figure of rational economic man whose disposition is thought to be above the frenzy. With the rise of internet shopping and electronic trading, it would appear that much of face-to-face market interaction would be on the wane, doomed perhaps.

Yet, it is evident that in the era of globalized business, place continues to matter, for instance, in the conditions of production (Salzinger 2003; Klein 1999), in the power and spatial significance of 'global cities' (Sassen 2001) and, as well, in social interactions among traders (Knorr-Cetina and Bruegger 2002; Zaloom 2006). Closer in form to the studies in this volume, Elizabeth Chin's (2001) ethnography of poor, African-American children in New Haven Connecticut in the 1990s demonstrates how the exigencies of place inform the meaning of goods and of social relations differently in relation to their experiences shopping at neighborhood stores and at shopping malls.

With the terrestrial market as a starting point, the chapters of *Lived Experiences* in their own ways reaffirm the significance of place in economic life. Each project focuses in some manner on the emplaced practices<sup>1</sup> which constitute the content, boundaries and meanings of various commercial activities under scrutiny. In so doing, none leads us down the fruitless avenue of inquiry of attempting to demarcate where the 'market' ends and 'society' or 'culture' begin. We are instead taken through the places and encounters of buyers and sellers and end up with insights that would otherwise remain obscured by the cloudy overcast of categorical assumptions about actors' motivations and dispositions.

By staying 'in place' – conceptually as well as physically – and attending to the contexts of the transactions, the contributors are also careful to avoid ignoring or marginalizing the 'economic,' calculative dimensions of the exchange situations. It would do no good to replace a one-sided economism with an equally myopic culturalism. Indeed, it is the tensions pertaining to the commingling of economic exchange value with other values like sentiment, love, care and belonging that animate the descriptive and analytical approaches the authors bring to bear on the treatment of their subjects. Throughout the various contributions that comprise *Lived Experiences*, the point is made with intimate detail that, in market/commercial contexts, economic value never stands alone on its own without being accompanied by and enfolded into exquisite human specificity.

## The contents

A number of recurrent themes are imperfectly threaded throughout different chapters and different aspects of chapters – a discontinuity that speaks as much to the variety of ethno-geographical contexts of the studies as it does to the emergent novelty of many of the authors' formulations. Frederick Wherry's research in a Thai handicrafts

market calls into question and confounds simple formulations of 'market action.' In relating how he 'got played' in the drama of market performances, Wherry forefronts the staging of back stages and the way consumers, sellers and the researcher sought, for their own reasons, to establish the authenticity of the crafts.

We encounter other forms of play in and about marketplaces. Joel Stillerman sees the humor among vendors and shoppers in Santiago, Chile's street markets as way of conducting 'relational work' which both furthers the strategic goals of each side pertaining to sales and deepens longstanding affective ties. In contrast, flea markets exemplify what he calls a different genre of shopping experience where the focus tends to be on the thrill of the hunt and the search for bargains and the relational work pertaining more among shoppers than between them and vendors.

The varied pleasures of shopping that Stillerman highlights take on a different hue in Jenny Huberman's study of tourists in Banaras, India. She questions what constitutes the 'object of consumption' for Western tourists who become interested in meeting, knowing and being with the young, unlicensed tour guides and peddlers on the city's waterfront. Huberman's response points to an interesting correspondence between some of Jean Baudrillard's early work and the views of the tourists themselves who are trying to stave off what they see as the alienating, dehumanizing aspects of global capitalism, even as they actively seek to partake in some of what it offers.

YuLing Chen provides us with nuanced portraits of Taiwanese mothers' personal agency as they juggle and struggle with the competing demands between employment and child/husband care. Chen poignantly illustrates that much of the 'pleasure' of shopping for these women rarely corresponds to the typical image of indulgence, except perhaps when weekend shopping at a department stores seems like a visit to a 'magical' place. It is rather a matter of ingenious necessity for them to forge something for themselves – some time or space – in the interstices of their daily rounds.

Shopping in American grocery stores, as Jan Phillips demonstrates, can be understood as a way that mothers and children together produce and reproduce family. Reminiscent of Daniel Miller's (1998) ruminations about shopping, Phillips takes the point further to argue and show that it is the notion of 'family' itself which is 'accomplished' in the relational work underlying the seemingly trivial decision of, for example, whether or not to buy certain cookies. Consumption here clearly stands for something other than purchases or pleasures as the boundaries between home, mothering and the marketplace become blurred in practice.

The play, pleasure, agency and relational work of consumers in these varied contexts stands in notable contrast to the lived experiences of Afro-Jamaican higglers studied by Winnifred Brown-Glaude. Brown-Glaude's treatment of the transient existence of these female micro-entrepreneurs exposes the social-moral organization of public space in the city of Kingston as a battle not only for physical space in which sell their wares, but a fight for discursive definitions of legitimacy. The informal, 'non-legitimate' status of their selling practices, we learn, functions as a surface condition whereby their darker, larger female bodies serve as signs both of their 'social pollution' and as instruments of their resistance to the legitimate, 'uptown' business owners and to their portrayals in the press.

Higglers' bodies and presence transgress and thereby outline the distinctions between 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate' markets in the streets of Kingston. Giovanni Semi takes us into a different kind of transgression and 'illegitimacy' occurring within and beside the officially sanctioned market of Porta Palazzo in Turin, Italy. Through the eyes and experiences of unlicensed Moroccan vendors, Semi tunes us into the varied cadences of social market life as day turns into night and how the boundaries between legitimate/legal and illegitimate/illegal are negotiated among vendors, and between vendors, patrons and the police. Through instances of aggressive, verbal sexual play with female shoppers by vendors, their joking relationship with the researcher and among themselves, we come to understand the blending of particular kinds of cultural practice in, with and sometimes in spite of the market-exchange relationships and contexts.

In privileging lived experiences, *Lived Experiences* provides vivid detail and example of how – to rephrase Geertz (1973) on culture – there are only market places, not the Marketplace. It is a point that holds beyond single-sited studies or single city marketplaces and extends into the register of global relations. Kim Humphrey examines the 'public discourse of unease' in Australia with regard to the ever-expanding presence of what he calls the 'global shop' – retail establishments that have a significant presence in many countries. He takes us through the anxieties expressed by business owners and others about the 'colonizing' and 'Americanizing' of Australian public culture by Borders and Starbucks specifically, both of which have struggled to thrive in Australia. Humphrey suggests that examining this unease as a politics of both engagement and distancing – of using and rejecting these places – will open the way to conceptualizing 'globalization' as a complex process bound up an 'embodied sense of how place should be constituted and experienced.'

Keith Brown's study of fair trade practices in and about Philadelphia handicraft stores and coffee shops provides yet another way to grapple with global issues while remaining tethered in some way to the terrestrial market context. He offers insightful description and analysis of how fair trade entrepreneurs frame the products, stores and their endeavors generally to customers largely unaware of the efforts and politics behind fair trade. Arising out of observations, interviews and his own experience working in some of these establishments, Brown outlines and gives depth to a number of tensions fair traders encounter as they seek to remain solvent in the environment of competitive capitalism.

Global tensions and interactions arise in the juxtaposition of 'the mall,' 'Bazaar' and 'the street' from Jonathan Shapiro Anjaria's fieldwork in Mumbai, India. Anjaria shows that, contrary to what many assume, the space of the mall does not overtake the less rationalized and less organized street market or Bazaar. He finds that shoppers seek different things from each place – spectacle, open space and air-conditioned comfort in the mall, personal and sometimes longstanding ties in the street, and bargains at the Bazaar. For Anjaria, we would do better to make close, embedded examinations of market places in order to ascertain how customers understand and make use of the different, non-market features each offers instead of assuming uniform effects of an overarching structure.

Anette Baldauf offers the case of Muslim women shopping in Dubai as a way to investigate multiple articulations of commercial space. She sought to understand how the She Zone, a women's-only shopping establishment, failed while a large, gender-integrated mall flourished. Juxtaposing popular media accounts which often present Orientalist interpretations of Muslim women's identities with the activities and words of the women themselves, Baldauf finds that the mall 'allows visitors to go on temporary excursions to imaginary elsewhere, where urban qualities like diversity and integration are simulated and concepts like femininity and masculinity, local and global, are negotiated.' It is this quality of consumer space, she argues which builds a particular kind of gender topography in the context of that global city.

### **A note on the dramaturgy of value**

Varied in their intensity, intimacy, tone and tenor, the contributions which together make up *Lived Experiences of Public Consumption* each trace their own trajectory through transactions and social relations to arrive at a similar point – namely, the significance of place in the encounter

with value. It is, on one level, unsurprising that place and value would be found to be closely connected given that the investigations started with this notion in mind. What we learn here, also, is how value and place inform each other with and through the embodied practices of those who inhabit and animate market spaces.

Emplaced value is embodied value. The abstract economic Value posed by the economist or theorized by Marx when discussing commodities cannot be established in, by, for or of itself. It must be located by way of identifying persons who occupy specific positions and sport specific identities *vis-à-vis* others. In market places, to encounter value is to encounter and interact with things and with others – to smell and feel the goods, to observe those others milling about buying, looking, selling, dickering, joking – that is, be in public. Seen in this way, the division between culture and economy has no force of distinction at the level of practice because value – that inescapable element of anything commercial – is *performed* in its realization. When people engage in face-to-face behavior, as Goffman (1959, 1967, 1979) demonstrated long ago, they engage in ritual performance. That is, they adopt postures and representations of typified identities. In market places and market-like situations, these postures and representations refer always in some way to exchangeable values and exchange relations.

*How* exchanges are conducted in markets are as relevant to the ‘value’ of something as what is being bought and sold. The back stages of hand-craft markets, mother-child negotiations in grocery aisles, the dance between police, drug dealers and mint traders in Turin and the soft, delicate sell of the fair trade entrepreneur – these enact various dramaturgies of value. The tie between market and theatre has a strong current in Western thought (Agnew 1986). It is made material in this volume by the ways in which many of the authors integrate, and sometimes favor, the experiences and practices of the sellers in addition to the ‘consumers.’ ‘Shopping’ is not simply an activity made by shoppers on their own (cf. Miller 1998; Miller *et al.* 1998; Zukin 2003), but a co-production involving sellers, buyers as well as the setting. The stage is inseparable from the meaning and interpretation of the performance

Directed at different audiences for different purposes, these performances nevertheless demonstrate or propose how the goods and thus the social relationships are to be regarded. Stillerman and Anjaria each describe what can be thought of as a performative differentiation of market behavior given the genre of shopping – flea market, street market, Bazaar or mall – wherein different emphases on different kinds of value are signaled by allowable and expected behavior in each place. Chen’s

mothers also perform the value of goods and place in highly public and nuanced ways, i.e. alternatively for their children, husbands and for themselves depending on the time of day, day of week and type of establishment. Controlled and contrived spaces like global shops in Australia and malls in Dubai offer different dimensions of performativity as they brand and constrain certain kinds of practices while encouraging others.

Taken individually and together, the chapters in *Lived Experiences* show, in multiple ways, that the thrust of human effort is not myopically centered on rejecting or evading monetary calculation in favor of only particularistic, personal, or social worth, as if these are exclusive of one another. Rather, the close look that these projects give us of the practices in and of public, terrestrial, commercial market places highlight how emphasizing one kind of value over another can accomplish many social ends. They can serve as a maneuver in an overall game, an attempt to make sense out of a situation or a way to make connections between and distinctions from others. We see, for instance, how tourists in Banaras seek to counter the impersonality of the commodity relation by trading with and for the personalities of their performative guides, while Kingston's higglers would welcome being seen and treated in more general, less particularistic ways rather than simply as poor, dark, female sellers.

*Lived Experiences* drives home the point that there is no one market and no one kind of market behavior or motivation. Market behavior – i.e. behavior in public market places – does not seek simply to fend off the pull of commodification with highly singularized meanings, as Kopytoff (1986) has insightfully theorized. It is rather about *engaging with* the tensions and challenges posed by the inescapable presence of pecuniary valuation in market contexts. There is always a calculative dimension when exchange is at issue; but there is never only calculation. The deeply interesting and finely detailed performances of value presented in this volume illustrate not simply an impetus toward realizing vernacular value, but toward vernacular valuation. In market places, it is the active, mutual valuation of goods wherein people perform, propose and test relationships – relationships which may be fleeting, recurring or the most permanent imaginable.

## Note

1. On the notion of emplacement of goods and consumption, see Sherry (1998).

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