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Critical and Uncritical Cultural Turns

Andrew Sayer

Introduction

A turn to culture was long overdue in social science. In the period when the new Left was at the height of its influence, culture was frequently reduced to ideology, a mere reflection of material, especially economic, circumstances, and its content ignored. Despite the opposition of thinkers like Raymond Williams, economic determinism and vulgar materialism were common. Few registered the necessary hermeneutic dimension of social science, since few saw that meaning could be constitutive and not merely reflective of social practice. The shift to a treatment of culture centering on signifying practices (Hall, 1997) and meaning as performative as well as denotative required its meanings to be interpreted. The cultural turn also helped to highlight the ways in which many forms of oppression in society had a cultural rather than an economic character, depending 'in the last instance' on ascribed characteristics of social groups and cultural meanings. This has freed us from treatments of patriarchy, racism and other forms of non-class oppression as secondary to or derivative of capital. There are more specific gains too. Consumption was viewed in one-sidedly negative terms in Marxist and much cultural materialist writing as passive and individualistic but recent research has shown how it is often active and shared. Relatedly there is also a much more open and less elitist approach to popular culture.

However, at times it seems as if there has been a shift from vulgar materialism to a 'vulgar culturalism' which is as dismissive of or reductive about economy as vulgar materialism was about culture. If cultural studies is concerned with signifying practices, then anything that society registers can be seen to have a cultural dimension since it can signify something. Yet, it does not follow from this that there are no other dimensions, so that social life is reducible to texts or text-like objects, whose signifying qualities are the only aspects that matter. Where culture is defined as 'a whole way of life' the scope for culturalist imperialism is even greater, for it allows one to pass off selective accounts focussing on signifying practices as if they were exhaustive. Similar sleights of hand allowing the economic to be marginalised were encouraged by arguments that culture and economy are no longer distinguishable (e.g. Hall, 1988; Lash, 1990, Jameson, 1990). (If culture and economy were really no longer distinguishable we could use the two terms interchangeably, for example, renaming Cultural Studies courses Economic Studies, and speaking of the economic turn instead of the cultural turn, without anyone being misled! The fact that even advocates of this position have had to continue using the terms in standard ways shows that the distinction is still viable and needed.)

There is no reason why a focus on cultural dimensions of social phenomena cannot be combined with analysis of other dimensions. It's therefore a pity that the turn was accompanied by either a wholesale marginalisation of economic issues and theory or else a 'dumbing down' of economic analysis to the level of token references to globalization or potted versions of the simplistic, and diversionary grand narrative of Fordism and post-Fordism. Ironically this has happened just at the time when neoliberal capitalism has been in the ascendancy, so that it has had to face remarkably little opposition from the more avant garde reaches of social theory. Even Stuart Hall, one of the main driving forces behind the cultural turn, and one who once argued that culture and economy had become indistinguishable, has recently acknowledged that the cultural turn has actually involved a turn away from economy (Hall, 1996):

> "What has resulted from the abandonment of this deterministic economism has been, not alternative ways of thinking questions about the economic relations and their effects, as the 'conditions of existence' of other practices, inserting them in a 'decentred' or dislocated way into our explanatory paradigms, but instead a massive, gigantic and eloquent disavowal. As if, since the economic, in its broadest sense, does not, as it was once supposed to do, 'determine' the real movement of history 'in the last instance', it does not exist at all!" (p. 258, emphasis in original)

I shall argue that this disavowal has led to a cultural turn which is in crucial respects uncritical of its object, not only because it ignores or marginalises economic matters and neoliberal hegemony, but because its treatment culture is nevertheless highly compatible with a neoliberal world view.1 I shall approach this via discussions of the role of cultural values, particularly moral-political and aesthetic values in contemporary society, and of the way in which cultural studies treats these. In doing so, I shall draw upon some modernist critiques of the cultural aspects of capitalism, some of which date back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Though old and often forgotten, in my view they still offer crucial critical insights into contemporary society. By way of illustration, I shall then turn to the recent work of Pierre Bourdieu and his influential economic analysis of culture and its 'soft forms of domination'.

However, first I want to note some other tendencies which have blunted the critical edge of recent cultural studies, namely 'ethical disidentification' (Connor, 1993) and relativism. The former term refers to a reluctance to acknowledge that behaviour can be influenced by values rather than mere convention or the will-to-power, and by a refusal to indicate any particular normative standpoint regarding social practices. This gives rise to a relativistic 'god's-eye view' which appears simultaneously to be both critical and uncritical - critical in challenging the view that behaviour can be based on values by presenting it as based on power, but uncritical in that if things cannot be otherwise there cannot be said to be a problem. Thus if truth is always a product of 'regimes of truth', implying some kind of authoritarian and instrumental imposition, then while that sounds very critical of received views, it undermines any basis for criticism, since the criticism invites itself to be dismissed as just another regime of truth. This 'crypto-normativity', as Habermas terms it in Foucault's early work, appeals to a kind of adolescent iconoclasm which assumes that the most cynical view of the world must automatically be the best (Habermas, 1987; see also Fraser, 1989; Hoy, 1988; McNay, 1994; Sayer, 1998). Relativism is the dual of dogmatic foundationalism: on discovering that there are no absolute foundations to ethical and other judgements, the relativist assumes that they therefore cannot be the subject of reasoned judgement about what is at least better or worse. As we shall see, exaggerated wariness of normative judgements makes social theory apologetic rather than critical.

Further tendencies in postmodernism which blunt its critical edge are its exaggerated suspicion of distinctions between appearance and substance, words and deeds, the apparent and the actual, and of treating the first term in each pair as less important than the second for fear of epistemological dogmatism or illegitimate 'normativity'. Now appearances need be no less real than substance, but it does not follow that they are necessarily equally important. Speaking or writing are themselves a kind of deed, but just as the fact that all sheep are animals doesn't mean all animals are sheep, this doesn't mean that there is no difference between words and deeds in the everyday sense, or that words and deeds cannot belie one another. Nor can anyone avoid a distinction between the actual and the apparent, for even to oppose it involves saying that while there may apparently be such a distinction, actually there isn't (a performative contradiction). To explain social life we have to distinguish what is only apparently the case from what is the case, and fallible though such claims must always be, in making them we are obliged to be critical. We cannot avoid making judgements of value, be they about epistemic, practical, aesthetic or moral-political matters, in everyday life or in social science. In order to do social research we have to decide whether and how far to agree with the accounts of what is going on offered by those whom we study. If forms of deceipt or illusion figure significantly in social practices, then not to point this out is to fail to explain what is going on. We therefore have to be critical in order to explain.

Culture and values

Cultures include values among their signifying practices. These may involve judgements and sentiments regarding utility, aesthetics and moral-political matters (Sayer, 1999). Contemporary cultural studies' preoccupation with aesthetic values is evident in its focus on style and taste, indeed in the definition of its object of study as 'the stylization of life' (Featherstone, 1994). There is less interest in moral-political values. These concern how society should be organised, how others should be treated, responsibilities to others, relationships with other species and the environment, and so on. I wish to argue that one of the effects of the continued development of capitalism is that in some spheres of life - though not all - moral-political values have become increasingly aestheticised and behaviour has become more self-interested and instrumental, although the effects of this are not entirely negative. The prioritization of aesthetic values over moral-political values in recent cultural studies' uncritically reflects these tendencies.

It has recently been argued that politics is not only about economic distribution but about recognition (Taylor, 1992; Fraser, 1995). People may be oppressed not only through lacking or being denied resources but through a denial of recognition; individuals or groups may be excluded from "participating on a par with others in social interaction" (Fraser, 1999). While this highlights an aspect of what might be termed cultural politics which is of growing importance, such a politics is by no means exhausted by issues of identity and recognition. Both the politics of distribution and the politics of recognition involve moral-political values and the latter are not only about recognition. Thus, as Szerszynski argues by reference to the case of anti-road protests, while these often involve minority sub-cultures and make considerable and innovative use of theatre and spectacle, they are not primarily about recognition, but about changing the cultural values of the entire society (Szerszynski, 1999). They are trying to make more environmentally-sensitive values *universal*. Indeed, this immanently universalising property is characteristic of most moral-political values (Benhabib, 1992).

The scope and nature of moral-political deliberation is strongly influenced by the changing organisation of society. As capitalism has developed, economic activity becomes dominated by systems which, despite being always ultimately dependent on the behaviour of individuals and organizations, develop a logic, autonomy and momentum of their own to a significant extent, through the interplay of unintended consequences and anonymous interdependencies. As Habermas puts it, system comes to colonise and dominate lifeworld (Habermas, 1990), and as Marx put it, economic processes increasingly work 'behind our backs'. What might otherwise be moral-political issues regarding our economic rights and responsibilities to others become matters of fitting in with the system. Thus an unemployed person might, on moral-political grounds, want a job building houses for the homeless, but she will only get one if there happen to be profitable opportunities for doing so. To get a job she has to find a niche in the prevailing economic systems and conform to their rules. The expansion of capitalist forms of organisation of economic activities depoliticises them, making them the product of so-called 'market forces', subjecting them to what Marx called 'the icy waters of egotistical calculation'. In this way, as Habermas puts it, questions of validity are turned into questions of behaviour. Instead of asking what we ought to do, we ask how the system works and how we can fit into it.

Correspondingly, political economy has changed in the last two centuries from a subject which was continuous with moral philosophy and which engaged centrally with questions of validity, to one which attempts to expel normative questions and instead focusses on 'engineering' questions, as Sen calls them, about the operation of economic systems (Sen, 1988). This de-valuation or de-moralisation of political economy and other social sciences has been accompanied by a *de-rationalisation of values*, so that they are no longer seen as a matter for rational deliberation. As science pursues value-freedom, so values come to be seen as 'science-free', to use Bhaskar's term (Bhaskar, 1986). As people lost control over their economic lives, the competitive forces of global economy tended to reduce the purchase of normative standpoints in political economy, correspondingly making philosophical discourse on ethics appear irrelevant (Bauman, 1995, p.211). Values regarding moral-political questions are supposed to be kept private. To raise them, even in avowedly 'critical' social science, is to invite incredulity that one has forgotten science and theory and descended into 'moralizing'. Hence the massive disproportion between the amount and sophistication of our explanatory efforts and our rare and usually private and embarrassed fumblings regarding normative questions about the organisation of social life (Sayer and Storper, 1997). The divorce of normative and positive thinking, and the imbalance between them, are themselves symptomatic of the emergence and separation out of systems from lifeworld, and the domination of the latter by the former.

A critical analysis of contemporary society would have, among other things, to turn some of these questions of the behaviour of systems back into questions of validity. Thus, in relation to the current instability and crises of global financial markets, many are asking 'engineering' questions about how the system can be repaired. But one can also ask questions regarding the validity of allowing the fate of economies to be determined in this way rather than through a democratically-regulated process. The pressure of markets themselves, backed by the fatalistic rhetoric of the World Bank and allied interests, compels countries to submit to the system, and effectively to disregard moral-political questions about economic organisation.

Before making further critical points, I should perhaps pause to make several caveats. Firstly, I do not want to imply that all of the problems discussed here are unique to capitalism (for example, some non-capitalist practices and forms of organisation can also encourage callousness); I don't wish to revive the bad tradition of blaming each and every social ill on capitalism alone. Secondly, it should be noted that, from a normative point of view, we may regard some existing moral norms, for example, those associated with gender, as actually 'immoral'. Correspondingly, it should not be assumed that instrumentalisation and even 'de-moralization' are always bad - it depends what is being instrumentalised. It also depends on what the consequences are; instrumentalisation may bring about goods which outweigh any negative consequences. This point is often associated with Adam Smith, though he was equally aware that this isn't always the case, indeed he was most concerned with the moral implications of the rise of commercial society (Smith, 1759). Thirdly, and following from this, I want to acknowledge that the development of capitalism has brought huge benefits for many, and not only in material terms. At the same time as capitalism de-values some practices, its continued erosion of traditional relationships frees them up to be determined by actors through deliberation and choice rather than by convention, thereby allowing the possibility of a re-moralisation in some cases.2 The clearest example of this is in the area of gender relations. Here, the cultural turn has been much more effective in contributing to a critical analysis of contemporary society. The feminist critique of the inequities of patriarchal domination is hardly ever referred to as being an ethical matter, perhaps because, strangely, morality or morality-talk is seen as inevitably conservative (Sevenhuijsen, 1998). But since this literature is about how people treat and ought to treat one another it does of course have a moral dimension. This re-valuation or re-moralization is encouraged by similar processes to those which produce a de-valuation or de-moralization of social relations.

Having made these points I now want to focus on the more problematic cultural aspects of the rise of capitalist societies.

To find a place within contemporary economic systems requires instrumental behaviour: as sellers, whether of labour power or other goods and services, we have to appeal to the self-interest of buyers. Equally, as buyers, we expect sellers to appeal to our self-interest. This of course was Adam Smith's famous point about 'commercial society', but it has major implications for cultural values, many of which Smith himself examined and indeed criticised. The motivations are of self-interest, not moral-political concerns regarding our responsibilities. Thus, once people have to get private health insurance, the dominant consideration becomes not what would be a good and fair way of providing health services based on the assumption of equal moral worth of all, but what suits our individual self-interest, or our 'lifestyle' - and of course, our pocket. If we can get a lower premium than someone who has the misfortune to have a genetic susceptibility to a certain illness, then market logic will encourage us to do so rather than cross-subsidise them on moral grounds. Only exceptionally, and if it fits with sellers' self-interest (profitability) will sellers appeal to moral-political values, as in the case of The Body Shop. Otherwise it is the buyers' self-interest and vanity which is appealed to.

Notions of responsibility for others are attenuated as responsibility for oneself in the market place takes priority. Not surprisingly, an extreme pro-market ideology such as that of neoliberalism encourages the displacement of compassion by self-interest. Markets also encourage dissembling, flattery and indeed lying - sometimes little lies, such as the carefully crafted exaggerations and omissions of the job application, or the hints of advertisers at newfound pleasure and sociability associated with the consumption of mundane products (Keat, 1999), but sometimes serious lies, such as those about the safety of products. These are to be expected in the culture of capitalism.3

Capitalism, as an amoral system, finds aesthetic values and vanity much easier to deal with than moral-political values. Even if we note that most shopping is done for others and hence allow that moral considerations come into shopping, advertisers will only appeal to them for non-moral reasons of profitability. Whereas aesthetic values can fit neatly with the appeal to self-interest, moral-political values are decidedly awkward, having a tendency to put judgements of intrinsic value before price.

As capitalism develops, the logic of exchange-value also gains ground, overriding concerns with use-value or 'existence value'. When football clubs are set up as businesses and quoted on the stock market, they become permanently up for sale and subject to the offers and wishes of those who are only interested in them as a source of money. The owners or shareholders need only take any notice of the interests of supporters - who value the team and the game itself rather than for financial reward - insofar as their actions might affect its market value. Moreover, we are continually encouraged to value things which are not currently marketed, as if they were commodified. Environmental economists who use "Contingent Valuation" ask people how much they would be willing to pay to retain some environmental 'good' or how much they would accept in compensation for its loss (Foster, 1997). Thus, even environment comes to be valued in exchange-value terms, entering the cost calculus, to be weighed against the market demand and supply for millions of other commodities, as if it were commensurable with them. As Michael Walzer has argued, one of the major malaises of contemporary society is the encroachment of market criteria into practices and situations where they are inappropriate (Walzer, 1983). In parallel, market metaphors come to pervade more and more of our language, and are applied to situations where they are inappropriate, such as when we talk of selling someone an idea rather than reasoning with them. This is particularly evident in mainstream politics, where discourse increasingly follows the model of selling, so that political practice comes to emulate public choice theory. Instrumental attitudes are further invited by calling behaviours which properly are moral in character, such as how we treat others in conversation, as 'skills', as in 'communication skills'. Of course, dissembling and lying can be encouraged by other (non-capitalist) social forms too, but a critical cultural studies should surely be alert to whatever encourages it instead of paralysing critical impulses by refusing any judgements as 'foundationalist', 'elitist' or 'paternalist'.

There is a tendency noted by theorists such as Rousseau, Smith and Marx, for identity in commercial society to become a matter of appearance which is divorced from the qualities a person actually has, a complicity shared by postmodernism (O'Neill, 1998). We are increasingly encouraged to judge people in aesthetic rather than moral terms - as 'cool' or as 'anoraks', etc., as if style were a measure of moral worth. As cultural theory notes, the most sophisticated advertising highlights the sign-value of commodities and how this may contribute to the construction of identities - as if identities were merely matters of appearance. If they are more than this and are related to what we are and do, then it has to be said that the sign-value aids pretension and vanity.4 A cultural studies which reduces action to discourse and is afraid of such 'normativity' endorses these superficial identities by default. The manipulation of sign-values may be about recognition, particularly recognition of difference, and this appears to be what many students of culture find interesting, but it remains an open but crucial question whether the prestige or recognition is deserved (see Taylor, 1992).

In a widely cited passage, Adam Smith discussed the ways in which moral sentiments - or recognition - can get distorted by inequalities:

> "This disposition to admire, and almost to worship, the rich and the powerful, and to despise, or, at least, to neglect, persons of poor and mean condition, . . . is . . . the great and most universal cause of the corruption of our moral sentiments." (Smith, 1759)5

We now know that there are other important sources of distortions of moral sentiments and judgements besides those of inequality of wealth. They concern gender, race, age, sexuality, cultural difference, style, beauty and ugliness, all of which are associated with double standards and undeserved kinds of recognition; what is acceptable in a man is unacceptable in a woman, what the beautiful can get away with the plain cannot, and so on.6

Moral evaluations of individuals and social groups and the recognition they are due discriminate between what they have through luck and what they have achieved through their own efforts, taking into account the circumstances in which they live. But market valuations of people make no such distinction. Those who, through no effort of their own, already have an advantage of good looks, get an additional advantage through a high market and social valuation. Married heterosexual couples with children enjoy 'the profit of normality', as Bourdieu puts it, though the profit may come in non-monetary form. Equally, those who, through no fault of their own, already have a disadvantage such as a disability, suffer the added disadvantage of a low market valuation, increased insurance premiums, etc. It is bad enough to get a penalty from nature, as it were, without having a further penalty slapped on top of it from society. Market evaluations reflect only scarcity and the buyers' self-interest. Thus the libertarian philosopher Robert Nozick justifies the high incomes of the talented and the beautiful purely on the grounds that that is what others freely choose to pay to enjoy them, regardless of whether they deserve such high incomes (Nozick, 1974). Presumably, by the same logic, the low incomes of the disadvantaged can be justified in that others freely choose not to enjoy or employ them. Interestingly, and in complete contrast to prevailing views today, John Stuart Mill considered that talents are a reward in themselves, not requiring supplementation from others in the form of payments or privileges.

Markets ignore these moral considerations not only because they encourage self-interested behaviour but because they are 'reason-blind' (Keat, 1997); they don't require buyers and sellers even to know each others' reasons let alone justify themselves to each other. (In many cases of course, the buyers and sellers, or rather producers and consumers, remain anonymous.) Even where firms conduct market research to discover buyers' reasons they do so only in order to learn how to increase sales, not because they are interested in the reasons themselves and want to evaluate them, as one might evaluate someone's political beliefs. Similarly, as mainstream politics becomes more like a market, it treats voters increasingly like consumers whose votes might be attracted rather than as participants in political argument.

Likewise capitalism is only interested in the difference between the appearance of worth and real worth if it affects profitability. For example, whether someone is famous merely for being famous or for having done something exceptional does not matter. A critical cultural studies would challenge this elision, but those students of culture who have learnt to reject distinctions between appearances and the real, words and deeds (despite makng such distinctions regularly in everyday life), cannot challenge it for they have undermined any critical standpoint. As O'Neill (1995) points out, a man who claimed to be a feminist would understandably be regarded with suspicion, and his deeds would be scrutinised to see if they contradicted his words. But if we misguidedly refuse distinctions between appearances and substance, the apparent and the real, words and deeds, as involving some kind of epistemological authoritarianism, then no criticism can be made of a man who treated women badly while claiming to be a feminist. Similarly, we could not distinguish between what President Reagan said the US did in relation to Nicaragua and what they actually did. The fact that in their everyday lives, sceptics are as alert as anyone else to whether words and deeds belie one another shows they don't believe their scepticism.

Such agnosticism or relativism derives from arcane - and in my view misguided - postmodernist debates about epistemology, but as already noted, they are entirely compatible with the treatment of values as mere subjective preferences in capitalism and in its economic theory, neoclassical economics. Capitalism encourages relativism. Nothing is intrinsically more important or valuable than anything else. Whatever sells/appeals to the subject is all that matters. And since markets are reason-blind, it's not in the interest of the seller to ask whether you deserve what you have the means to buy, or whether you deserve the envy and prestige it may bring you. Capitalism has nothing to fear from those who refuse to distinguish appearance from substance on epistemological grounds (see Eagleton, 1995).

In criticising the aestheticisation of moral-political issues I may have seemed to have been rather negative about the aesthetic side of culture. However, I appreciate the latter as much as anyone, and I accept that from an academic point of view, styles and tastes, especially exotic ones, (and, in an ageist society, those of youth) have their fascination. But to put it bluntly, *aesthetic values are less important than moral-political values*. What our tastes are in clothes or music, is far less important than how we treat one another. Whether we like or loathe rap or bodypiercing is less important than whether we oppress others or are oppressed by them, or whether we (inadvertently) reproduce systems which treat people unfairly. If you differ with others over style and taste, it matters little, indeed such differences may be seen as something to celebrate. If you disagree over how you should treat one another, over your rights and responsibilities with respect to one another, then that is a more serious problem, one that requires some kind of resolution, if domination, inequity, conflict or worse are not to result. The very elevation of aesthetic matters of style over moral-political behaviour is symptomatic of a society in which instrumentalisation and aestheticisation have become dominant.

Certainly, groups may attempt to make political statements through their tastes and styles, but there is nothing inherently progressive about the politics of style; after all, the management of style and spectacle can be seen in the parades of the Orange Order and Apprentice Boys in Northern Ireland, and of course it was an important ingredient of Nazi political success. Whether a particular politics of style is progressive depends on the politics, not the style - except insofar as the style itself prefigures progressive values. It is the moral-political values, not the aesthetic values which matter more.

Bourdieu's capital and the elision of exchange-value and use-value

In order to pursue this critique in more depth, I now want to focus on Pierre Bourdieu's work on taste and social distinction and his concept of capital (Bourdieu, 1986). This is particularly interesting here, because he offers an economic view of culture - a cultural turn with an economic twist. Thus he applies concepts of exchange, circulation, price, capital, profit and the like to areas of life beyond the domain of conventional economics - in particular to the circulation and valuation of symbolic phenomena.7 Bourdieu repeatedly argues that actions which appear to be disinterested are actually (subconsciously) instrumental8, and differences of taste and style can mask differences and struggles over status or distinction. It is tempting to read his work as a devastating critique of the struggles of the social field in capitalist society, the 'soft forms of domination' therein, and of the structuring of cultural values by inequalities, but I shall argue that his economic analysis of culture is too reliant on capitalist economic ways of seeing to succeed in this respect. In particular, it elides a distinction which has been central to any critical view of cultural values, that between use-value and exchange-value, between valuations of goods - and by extension, social relations - for their own qualities and the satisfaction they bring, and valuations in relation to what they will fetch when sold in the market, in terms of rewards, monetary or otherwise.

Bourdieu widens the concept of capital beyond that of conventional or commercial capital, to include other, non-monetary forms - particularly symbolic, social and cultural capital. Symbolic capital brings rewards through association with respected and revered institutions. Thus Oxbridge trades on its symbolic capital. Social capital consists in the advantages that flow from having networks of contacts and others obligated to us on which we can trade. Cultural capital consists in the advantages that flow from having or being associated with certain cultural goods, particularly those that imply or resonate with a leisured life style, removed from the pressures of economic necessity. Other kinds of capital can be identified too, such as linguistic and educational capital. People differ in their holdings of all these kinds of capital and their social influence and power varies accordingly. Largely unwittingly, people make investments in these forms of capital, which may bring them profits, pecuniary or non-pecuniary. The social field is structured by constant struggle over the valuation of these forms of capital, though the struggles are only barely recognised as such by actors. Bourdieu's work is remarkable in revealing how far apparently disinterested judgements involve hidden forms of social distinction.

However, Bourdieu's use of the concept of capital also contains a serious ambiguity, one which compromises the critical thrust of his work. It fails to distinguish between goods - such as education, culture, social relations - from the point of view of their use-value as it were, and from the point of view of their exchange-value, that is, in terms of what advantages (or disadvantages) they bring in the struggles of the social field. In relation to all Bourdieu's forms of capital - cultural, educational, linguistic, social and symbolic - this distinction is vital from both an explanatory and a critical point of view. Thus I may 'value' some people as friends, appreciating their sense of humour, intelligence, sensitivity, loyalty or whatever. Here I am valuing them individually, for what they are themselves. But if I value them instrumentally as social contacts, able to 'open doors' for me and bring me monetary and non-monetary rewards, then they become social capital for me.9 Getting an education, enjoying music, making friends may contingently give one educational, cultural and social capital, but to treat the former as the same as the latter is a disastrous mistake. Moreover, it is a mistake which capitalism depends on and invites us to make, in that its primary interest is always in exchange-value, use-value being instrumentalised as a mere means to the end of gaining exchange-value. Sellers are more interested in the buyers' money than the buyer. As we have already noted, advertising repeatedly appeals not merely to the use-value of goods but to the advantages or capital - including non-monetary kinds - they bring us vis-à-vis others. This is central to the culture of capitalism.

To develop a critical analysis of this, the use-value/exchange-value distinction as developed by Aristotle, and later Marx, is crucial (Meikle, 1995). Marx insisted on distinguishing capital from mere machines, materials or buildings. The latter have use-value, but only become capital when they are acquired in order to command the labour or tribute of others and to earn exchange-value. In equivalent fashion we might insist on a difference between 'investments' - say in education - made for their own sake (for example, learning French) and investments made in order to enhance the possessor's social standing (educational capital). Of course, the use-value of education includes an instrumental dimension - enabling one to understand French speakers, or whatever - as well as a possible intrinsic interest, but this is different from instrumentalisation in order to gain social advantage over others. This difference is equivalent to (and carries the same critical implications as) Aristotle's parallel distinction between production for own use (economy) and money-making (chrematistics) (Meikle, 1995).

Another important aspect of the distinction between capital and the goods or activities to which it relates is that capital is a positional good, that is one whose value is depleted the greater the number of people who come to have it, whereas the same is not necessarily true of the activities to which capital relates. Thus, educational qualifications - as educational capital - are devalued as more people come to get them, though the value of their education is not *necessarily* devalued too (though it is often contingently devalued as a result of reduced staff-student ratios). A particular geography lesson has a certain quality no matter how many other geography lessons of the same kind are given. Another important difference is that while the use-values of different kinds of activity - such as art history and engineering - are incommensurable, the exchange-values of the corresponding forms of capital - of art historians and engineers - are commensurated in markets or social distinction.

Although Bourdieu is primarily interested in the unintended production of effects of distinction, the relations between motives and effects, whether intended or unintended, are important from both explanatory and critical points of view. Consider the possible relations between (A) activities and their use-values, (B) their exchange-value (if any) as capital, and (C) their effects. It is contingent whether A brings B. A can be pursued without regard for B. B can be sought after and indeed be the motive for A, or it can be an unintended consequence of A, or it may even be achieved independently of A through bluff or accident. Thus, one student might gain a first class degree because they may be deeply interested in their subject, though not in any advantages it may bring them, and another might get a first through being motivated by the social advantages they hope it will bring. Of course, the first student may gain these advantages inadvertently too, and indeed may even gain extra status in certain circles for being uninterested in the exchange-value of their capital. Further, no matter how B arises, whether it is deserved or undeserved, sought after or not, it can be used for good or ill effects (C). For example, Diana Princess of Wales had three undeserved sources of recognition or capital - beauty, wealth and royal connections - but she used these as a lever to do good works, where others with similar capital have failed to do so.

That the relation between the use-value of an activity and the exchange-value of the corresponding form of capital is contingent is of vital importance. For those who do want to raise the value of their capital, there are several ways of doing so. In the case of educational capital, they might get more education, but they could also merely acquire its outward signs - a degree gown, lots of books, 'educated' ways of speaking, and so on. They might be 'entitled' to some of these, but the relation between the (use-)value of education itself and the exchange-value of educational capital and associated forms of symbolic and cultural capital is contingent. There is, for example, no necessary connection between the splendour and superfluity of the Oxbridge college and the quality of the education that goes on within it, though the inmates might like to believe that they deserve their privileges, that the high exchange-value of their educational capital is a reflection of the quality of their education and their own ability. The assumed or claimed qualities used to defend the value of the educational capital may even be a sham, as in the case of the Oxbridge MA. (Students who have an Oxbridge BA can get an MA just by waiting a certain number of years and paying a fee! - that some people make excuses for this bogus degree is a reflection of the cultural privilege enjoyed by Oxbridge.)

Thus, a *critical* analysis of educational capital cannot evade judgements of the use-value or intrinsic quality of the education with which it is associated. In other words it cannot evade distinguishing between deserved and undeserved recognition. Nevertheless, any attempt to make such a distinction is likely to invite suspicion that one is trying to establish an authoritative, indeed authoritarian, basis for judgement, an absolute set of values. I fully accept that judgements of (use-)value are contestable, but this does not mean either that all claims to recognition are of equal merit, or that there must always be some ulterior motive behind the judgements and contestations such that critical distinctions can never be rationally justified.

The contestation of use-value also differs in kind from that of exchange-value: whereas the prime consideration in the latter contest is instrumental - whatever will fetch the best 'price' - the contest regarding the quality of the goods is by reference to the internal goods of the relevant practice. If we were evaluating a course taught by Pierre Bourdieu, our judgements might be products of our position in the social field relative to Bourdieu's - we might be influenced by his gender, race, age, class, bearing and appearance, by the surroundings. All of these things might influence his educational capital and that of the students who have been taught by him. Of course, one would hope that our judgements were based instead on the quality of the education itself, his insights, the rigour of his arguments, his success in communicating his ideas, etc. These qualities might also influence the exchange-value, that is the status, prestige and other rewards of the course as educational capital, but if it's a good course, then it is so *regardless* of whether it brings him or his students any such exchange-value rewards. Conversely, no matter what the exchange-value of an Oxbridge MA as educational capital is, its recognition is undeserved for it lacks any corresponding process of education. Its market value depends on the success of the illusion that Oxbridge MA students have done something more than a BA, and on the associated exchange-value (prestige) of the symbolic and cultural capital of Oxbridge, which serve as collateral, so to speak. If we failed to note the illusory character of the recognition we would misdescribe the situation. In other words, in failing to be critical we would fail to explain.

Bourdieu retains a modernist distinction between substance and appearance inasmuch as he looks beyond the appearances of the production of social distinction, and shows that things are not as they appear, in particular that supposedly disinterested judgements of taste hide strategies of distinction or pursuit of status. Yet he fails to distinguish between use-value and exchange-value and reduces the former to the latter, emphasizing investment, calculation and profit. Since he is extremely reluctant to acknowledge the possibility of disinterested judgement, so that all disputes over taste are merely disguised struggles for advantage vis-à-vis others, then it is hard to see what there is to criticise if things cannot be otherwise. Strangely, although Bourdieu presents 'a social critique of the judgement of taste' he does not *explicitly* criticise any particular status distinctions as unjustified, for his resistance to the possibility of disinterested judgement disallows this. The critical implications of his work are therefore always uncertain (Sayer, 1999). This is more like the postmodernist dismissal of contests over intrinsic or use-value as no more than disguised power-play: like the concept of regimes of truth, it loses its critical power by self-destructing.

The subjectivist theories of value of postmodern relativism and capitalism's economic theory, neoclassical economics, could have been made for each other: the only difference is that, as Eagleton notes, postmodernism's focus on discourse produces a 'subjectivism without a subject' 10. Both treat values as subjective and a-rational. Claims about the value of the environment or particular practices are treated merely as expressions of individual preferences and measurable in exchange-value terms, or as mere discursive constructions: knowing the price of everything but the value of nothing is a distinctively capitalist cultural tendency. Similarly, the treatment of value regarding recognition or respect due to others as purely subjective or discursively constructed and as having nothing to do with the qualities of the thing valued or what those who are valued or recognised have done fits with both neoliberalism and postmodernist relativism. Postmodernist suspicion of normative claims as authoritarian mirrors neoliberal hostility to 'absolute values' and paternalism. Furthermore, a third tendency - the practice in some sociology of 'bracketing out' questions of the validity of actors' judgements - produces similar effects. Not only capitalism but Bourdieu's critique of the social judgement of taste treats values as the outcome of market processes or the struggles of the social field.

Conclusion

The cultural turn could lead to a reinvigorated critique of contemporary society, but in practice it often seems instead to be complicit with many of the most questionable aspects of it, particularly those which relate to its economic organisation and its ever more commodified form. In particular, insofar as cultural studies focusses on the 'stylization of life', it reproduces the aestheticization of aspects of life that might otherwise be considered as moral-political issues. In ignoring economic processes or 'dumbing down' their analysis, or by relying on discourses of globalisation or Fordism and post-Fordism which do not offer a critique of capitalism, it offers little to worry either capitalist economy or contemporary culture. Although, peculiarly, modernist theory is sometimes portrayed by postmodernists as being uncritical of modernism, the critique of capitalist culture developed by modernist theory remains far more penetrating and relevant. The common postmodern suspicion of 'normativity' discourages criticism of the aestheticisation of moral-political values, 'de-moralisation' and depoliticisation in contemporary society, and disqualifies distinctions between use-value and exchange-value, substance and appearance which are at least a necessary component of any kind of critical stance.

Endnotes

1. On postmodern-neoliberal affinities, see Sayer, 1995, chapter 9, and O'Neill (1998).
2. This is double-edged, for detraditionalisation can open a space for selfish individualism and barbarism as easily as it can allow relationships to be based on moral-political deliberation.
3. This is not to suggest that the situation is necessarily better in a socialist system, for unless better ways are designed of making producers accountable than existed under state socialism, it may afford even greater possibilities for the abuse of producer power.
4. Implicit in this, of course, is a criticism of the reduction of identity to appearances and discursive construction rather than something based on deeds. In this context, it is worth remembering what an identity parade is for - identifying who did it.
5. Those familiar with Smith will know that the omitted parts of this quotation are important for understanding Smith. However, delving into this would require a substantial digression which does not affect my argument.
6. Deciding what would be fair and justified judgements in the context of these forms of difference is often not a matter of disregarding difference and attempting to impose a single standard; thus the differences between the young and the elderly may not all be false ascriptions but may require judgements which take them into account. In other words, the issue of deserved and undeserved recognition takes us into the debate over equality and difference, explored particularly in feminism (e.g. Phillips. 1994).
7. Bourdieu indicates that he does not regard this formulation as merely metaphorical - for him, culture *is* economic (1993, 36).
8. pass over the problem of how strategies can be unconscious, according to Bourdieu (Alexander, 1995).
9. In this case, it is significant that the intentional instrumentalisation of the good (friendship) also undermines it.
10. This is sometimes lampooned in philosophy as the 'boo-hooray theory of value'

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