Intertwining Culture and Economy: Weber and Bataille Confronted to Recent Comparative Research

Matthieu de Nanteuil & Rocío Nogales-Muriel

Octobre 2009
Comment agir en sujets dans un monde globalisé et au sein d’institutions en changement ? Le CriDIS se construit sur la conviction que la recherche doit prendre aujourd’hui cette question à bras-le-corps. Il se donne pour projet d’articuler la tradition critique européenne et la prise en charge des questions relatives au développement des sujets et des sociétés dans un monde globalisé.

Les Working Papers du CriDIS ont pour objectif de refléter la vie et les débats du Centre de recherches interdisciplinaires « Démocratie, Institutions, Subjectivité » (CriDIS), de ses partenaires privilégiés au sein de l’UCL ainsi que des chercheurs associés et partenaires intellectuels de ce centre.

Responsables des working papers : Jean De Munck, Geoffrey Pleyers et Martin Wagener


23. La figure du client dans la relation de service : le cas des guichetiers de la poste,
Harmony Glinne


26. Le muralisme contemporain à Valparaiso : un art critique, reflet de sa société,
Caroline Steygers

27. La monoparentalité à Bruxelles. Esquisse des données statistiques disponibles,
Martin Wagener

28. Style de théorie, statut de la critique et approche des institutions, Philippe Corcuff

29. L’action sociale par contagion et par contamination en naturopathie, Anahita Grisoni

- 2009 -

1. Les bases d’une sociologie critique.
Jean De Munck

2. Toward a Capability Approach of Legal Effectiveness. The Case of European Social Rights. Jean de Munck & Jean-François Orianne

Isabelle Ferreras.

4. La “bonne gouvernance” en français correspond-t-elle à la “bonne gouvernance” en bamaman ? Philippe de Leener

5. Économie plurielle et réencastrement : Solution ou problème face la marchandisation. Matthieu de Nanteuil

6. Penser la personne à l’épreuve des cheminement de la participation.
Julien Charles

7. Intertwining culture and economy: Weber and Bataille confronted to recent comparative research Matthieu de Nanteuil & Rocio Nogales-Muriel

8. Travail sur soi et affairement. Les voies de la subjectivation du travail. Thomas Périlleux


10. Las formas de las democracias latinoamericanas. Ilán Bizberg

11. Travail et citoyenneté démocratique : Les enjeux d’une politique de la reconnaissance. Matthieu de Nanteuil

- 2010 -

12. Apport de Karl Polanyi, Fernand Braudel et Cornelius Castoriadis dans les études du développement au 21ème siècle
Thierry Amougou

13. Tensions et dévis du commerce équitable liés à l’extension des marchés. Approche en termes de jeux d’acteurs et de genre,
Sophie Charlier et Isabel Yépez

14. Face à la crise financière : Le besoin d’alternatives, François Houtart

15. Clinique du travail et critique sociale: de nouveaux lieux pour la question sociale,
Thomas Périlleux

16. Conditionnemment socioculturel et liberté,
Guy Bajoit

17. Migración y movilidad social: Argentinos y Ecuatorianos entre las “Americas” y las “Europas” Luis Garzón

18. Vers une redéfinition des relations entre ONG et réseaux d’acteurs locaux?
Geoffrey Pleyers

19. Capacité à délibérer et restructuration industrielle La restructuration de l’usine VW-Audi de Forest-Bruxelles 2006-2007,
Jean De Munck, Isabelle Ferreras et Sabine Wernerus

20. Le café équitable est-il altermondialiste? Convergences et distance entre la filière équitable et les militants altermondialistes, Geoffrey Pleyers


22. Les “démocraties” africaines, miroir des mutations démocratiques au Nord ?,
Philippe de Leener
Résumé
The proposed article provides a critical overview of the notion of "cultural economy" by (1) referring to Weber and Bataille's theoretical contributions in order to cast some analytical light on possible meanings of the intertwining between economy and culture; and confronting them to the results of recent research completed in (2) the field of the cultural grounds of the notion of "flexibility" and (3) the issue of quality assessment in the delivery of artistic goods and services. If flexible arrangements appear as practices whereby workers tend to subvert the logics of utility by the pursuit of cultural goals, either inside or outside the workplace, the notion of assessing "quality" in the artistic sector raises the question of the adequate level of rationalization – and risks associated to it – in a field that remains inalienable to other commodities. On such a basis, the conclusion focuses on possible sources of criticism of the "cultural turn" paradigm.

A propos du texte
Ce texte a été présenté lors du colloque “Re-Thinking Cultural Economy”, à l’Université de Manchester. 5 - 7 September 2007

Présentation des auteurs
Matthieu de Nanteuil, LaGIS, Université catholique de Louvain. matthieu.denanteuil@uclouvain.be
Rocío Nogales-Muriel, HEC-Management School, gefiri@gmail.com

Intertwining Culture and Economy: Weber and Bataille Confronted to Recent Comparative Research

I. Introduction ................................................................................................................. 4
II. Weber, Bataille: interpreting the progressive intertwining of culture and economy ..... 5
  2.1. Conceptualizing culture and its relationship to the economy ......................... 5
  2.2. The legitimacy argument ............................................................................. 6
  2.3. The free expense argument ........................................................................ 9
III. Flexible arrangements as expressions of cultural motivations and unproductive logics .........................................................................................................................13
  3.1. Analyzing flexibility: a framework ..............................................................13
  3.3. The structure of free expense: flexibility as an incomplete subversion of productive logics .................................................................................................15
IV. The case of culture as artistic experience and its evolution toward rationalization...18
  4.1. Intense rationalization and search for quality in the artistic sector.................18
  4.2. Assessing and operationalizing quality in arts organizations .....................21
  4.3. Rationalizing culture: The complex legitimization of formal quality assessment of free expense artistic experiences .........................................................................................................................23
V. Conclusion: a critical outlook over the "cultural turn" .......................................26
VI. Bibliography ............................................................................................................28
Intertwining culture and economy: Weber and Bataille confronted to recent comparative research

I. Introduction

The proposed article provides a critical overview of the notion of "cultural economy" by (1) referring to theoretical contributions by Weber and Bataille that provide analytical frameworks to describe the intertwining between economy and culture; and confronting them to the results of recent research completed in (2) the field of the cultural grounds of the notion of "flexibility" and (3) the issue of quality assessment in the delivery of artistic goods and services.

1. The "cultural turn" within the economic sciences can be analyzed as an attempt to explore cultural groundings of decisions based on utility. However, such a view should be completed by reflections about the precise role and meaning of the intertwining of culture and economy. Two arguments are put forward to complement existing thinking about the cultural turn paradigm: the "legitimacy argument" (stemming from Weber’s work) by which decisions based on calculations are recognized as legitimate within a certain cultural context; the “free expense argument” (from the French “dépense libre”, stemming from Bataille’s work) by which culture expresses the excess of life over death within the social world, i.e. the possibility to overcome the level of calculated means through a sovereign usage of utility. Such a usage is structured by the principle of loss and the ability to dedicate one’s activity to unproductive logics;

2. Organizational theory research has shown the insufficiency of rationality based on utilitarian calculation to explain organizational behaviors (March and Simon, 1960; Faverau, 1989; Reynaud, 1989; Friedberg, 1993). Recent research on "flexibility" (de Nanteuil et al., 2004) proposes original developments in this field: the implementation of flexible arrangements is not rooted in rational calculations but in the dissemination of a predominant and ambiguous individualistic culture, composed of autonomy and short-term vision, social insecurity and new work-life balances. Furthermore, flexible arrangements appear as practices whereby workers tend to subvert the logics of utility by the pursuit of “culturally determined” goals, either inside or outside the workplace;

3. If the overcoming of utilitarian rationality can be perceived intuitively as apparent in the field of cultural goods, the inherent dialectic in this field is not that simple. At first sight, the massive industrialization undergone by cultural industries suggests that culture is transformed as a means to make profit. The production of culture continues nevertheless to rely on free creation and emerging cultural trends in society, whereby industrialization becomes non-sense. And if the consumption of cultural goods and services is to be considered as a possibility to access "free expense", it also means
that such goods and services should not appear as simple results of rationalized production processes. Such complexity is illustrated here through the notion of "quality" assessment: it raises the question of the adequate level of rationalization - and risks associated to it - in a field that remains inalienable to other commodities.

In conclusion, three possible sources of criticism of the "cultural turn" will be posed and analyzed: the lack of direct interactions between different organizational contexts and different stakeholders’ views when analyzing culture; the concealment of the heterogeneity of cultural contents and the underestimation of their political implications; and the difficulty of measuring "culture" on a standard quantitative basis, which often causes it to be ignored and/or manipulated despite official discourse.

II. Weber, Bataille: interpreting the progressive intertwining of culture and economy

2.1. Conceptualizing culture and its relationship to the economy

Conceptual clarifications are of paramount importance when analyzing the links between culture and economy, given the overabundance of interpretations and definitions that exist. The notion of culture became a key scientific concept as mainly sociologists (but also anthropologists and economists) in the United States began to reinterpret and use the contributions of Tylor, Boas, Durkheim or Lévy-Bruhl (Cuche, 2004). Conceptualizations of culture have varied from universal versus individualistic approaches to general versus specific views, depending on the function the term "culture" sought to serve. Later, the evolution that began in the 70s and that was to be termed "the cultural (or linguistic) turn" was key for bridging academic disciplines and create symbiotic expressions, such as Bourdieu’s "cultural capital".

Since then, the label "cultural" has been deployed either in the strict sense in reference to “the symbolic creations socially endorsed stemming from the field of the arts at large” (Cuche, 2004: 80) or in the traditional ethnological sense of a set of “attitudes, beliefs, customs, values and practices which are commonly shared by a group” (Throsby, 2001: 4), which also includes artistic production. More recently, two key evolutions of particular relevance to the present article occurred within the intermediate area between these two opposite definitions of "culture": on the one hand, the explosion of activity areas qualified by the label "culture" (such as “work culture” or “enterprise culture”), and on the other hand, the diversification of the mechanisms involved in the production and consumption of cultural goods and services *strictu sensu*. The study of other progressions similar to these evolutions

---

1 “Economy” is widely defined here as a sphere of action that includes the production, distribution, exchange and consumption of goods/services (Laville, 1997), i.e. as a sphere of action dominated by utilitarian rationalization (Weber, 1971).
may contribute to a more consistent assessment of the premises on which this rapidly changing area of activity is being established and the impacts of the resulting paradigms.

A relevant approach to the core notion of culture was offered by Throsby (2001) in his influential work *Economics and Culture*. For Throsby, culture encompasses "the activities undertaken by a group of people, and the product of these activities, drawing upon enlightenment and education of the mind". The author further characterizes the particular expressions of culture as incorporating some degree of creativity; generating and communicating symbolic means; and including, to a varying extent, intellectual property. One of the virtues of this definition in the context of this article is that it bypasses the trap of selecting a specific sector of activity to qualify something as "cultural", thus allowing the inclusion of the creative and cultural industries as well as the traditional artistic sector. However, a critical reflection is to be made on the issue of rationalization itself in order to prevent Throsby’s contribution from becoming another fashionable yet ephemeral label.

Recent research insisting on cultural dimensions of the economy tends to make visible the motivations underlying choices which are officially (and widely) considered as "rational" (Sainsaulieu, 1987; Hofstede, 1995). Such research take into account the contemporary context, instead of simply theoretically pleading for enlarging the spectrum of rationality. Yet, the nature of ties between culture and the economy may not be that clear. The philosophical meanings they encapsulate, as well as the role they may play in the making of culture, remain rather blurred. In this light, is it possible to overcome such an analytical difficulty? Two possible interpretations emerge from the analysis of the legitimacy and the free expense arguments that stem from the works by Weber and Bataille.

### 2.2. The legitimacy argument

A first interpretation considers the intertwine ment between culture and the economy as an issue of legitimacy. In his famous analysis *The Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber (2003) posed that the added-value of culture is its capability to transform a decision based on calculations into a legitimate one. In Weber's view, decisions based on utility are fundamentally incomplete. Such logics have never been able to explain the reasons behind the involvement of individuals within economic behaviors dedicated to “exchange the comfort of traditional life with the violence of a world dominated by competition forces and never-ending needs” (Bouretz, 2002: 217). For Weber, such reasons come from the triple breakdown settled by the protestant Reform within Christian culture: the end of anterior techniques of salvation; the doctrine of predestination; the existential loneliness of any believer facing the unknowable desire of God concerning his/her own destiny.

Such a breakdown has had a major impact on economic life: it has given a new moral status to the term "labor". As long as labor is accomplished with a high degree of professionalism
and leads to economic success, it appears as a domain whereby believers access moral
dignity and can imagine what their salvation will be made of. What is important in Weber's
interpretation is not whether, practically speaking, capitalism has only been developed in
protestant countries. It is rather obvious that this has never been the case. What matters
here is that a large number of capitalist practices have found in the evolution of religion the
moral justifications they needed. The intellectual consequence of such statement is
substantial: it means that utility is in itself a cultural product. More precisely, it means that the
intimate desire for utility – through which people become ready to situate the whole
signification of their life into economic activities – roots in cultural implications of religious
transformations. Utility has no existence by itself. This notion has only been able to emerge
within a certain cultural context, whereby utility is recognized as a decisive matter. And the
opposite is also true: culture is not only a limited area of human activities. It is defined as a
central segment of societies in which human beings find personal reasons to act as they do.

With such a thesis, culture and economy are intertwined without losing their specificity.
Therefore, it appears as being of primary importance for our research. It explains the cultural
backgrounds behind managerial decisions, as well as successive transformations of cultural
aspects of work and organizations. As we will see, flexibility offers a powerful example of
such transformations. But such a view can also be expanded to the emergence and
dissemination of the so-called "cultural sector". Though Weber did not look at consumption
practices, it could be asserted that the "deriving" of production and consumption from
industrial goods and services to cultural ones is a way to rebuild the legitimacy of
industrialization as such. Therefore, Weber's concern for work can be considered as a wider
metaphor to indicate a specific way of linking economy with meaningful activities: culture is at
the same time a source of significations whereby decision-makers give legitimacy to their
choices, and a specific area of production whereby industrialization is practically reoriented.
Of course, such a view plays a key role in how results from our comparative research are
interpreted, as well as in the search for a right balance between culture and the economy.
However, it also includes two severe limitations.

Firstly, the legitimacy argument tends to consider that referring to the spirit of capitalism
gives sense to utilitarian decisions, which supposedly remain meaningless without it. Yet,
Weber has not been very clear about the ultimate role of capitalism's spirit. If such a spirit is
defined as a permanent feature of the economy, it appears as widely unreachable from
man's activity, hidden somewhere in a global orientation of society towards a certain "ethics".
In that sense, culture remains a key background to understand the emergence of utilitarian
behaviors, but seems in a way "too far" from concrete needs to explain or justify specific
decisions. If such a spirit is to be considered as a historical and limited root to the
emergence of capitalism, the fact is that modern capitalism has turned utility into a value by
itself. In that case, it appears very difficult for any "culture" to alleviate this sort of
anthropological movement. The role of culture would be limited to complement and moderate
such an evolution – as national cultures usually do –, without being able to change the
structure of its justification. In both cases, the attempt to enlarge calculation-based decisions with cultural contents seems very limited – "biased" in a way.

Secondly, the reference to a "spirit" is quite contradictory with its practical usage. Whereas such a spirit could stand for a field of meanings based on a radical discontinuity from the common ways of reasoning, it is used in the perspective of giving legitimacy to utilitarian decisions and, in that sense, in the perspective of increasing their effectiveness. The language of effectiveness tends to be maintained, despite Weber's will to overcome traditional dualism between utility and gratuity. Culture is not withdrawn in the intimacy of personal choices: Weber's strength is to consider that culture does play a determining role within the "public" sphere of the economy. But his conception tends to restrict culture to an explicit source of economic choices or, in a wider sense, to a collective orientation, yet rather unclear, that would ultimately explain modern economic developments. Such a view of culture does not really grasp the specificity of this notion as a distinct possibility of generating and communicating symbolic meanings, as Throsby says, within a world of constraints.

Actually, the controversial question here is about the possible autonomy of culture towards capitalist rationalization. The legitimacy argument tends to think that economic agents just have to put forward cultural meanings to transform meaningless decisions into legitimated ones. Yet, within such a perspective, culture is kept under the dependence of effectiveness. Facing such an analytical difficulty, the Marxist argument remains the most coherent: such autonomy is an ideological construction, as long as capitalism is not radically subverted. Without being so pessimistic, Habermas considers that Weber's argument has to be completed. Weber has only indicated that building an autonomous culture facing modern capitalism could be possible if contemporary societies were in a position to reject the domination of utilitarianism; but he did not expose the theoretical program for such a rejection. On his side, Habermas (1978; 1985; 1986) puts forward the idea that such autonomy could be reachable if societies defined autonomous linguistic rules, which would guarantee the moral validity of verbal exchanges. In his perspective, culture should be understood as a field of meanings in which moral validity has to be grounded, but not as a field which would be sufficient in itself. Furthermore, Habermas considers that the autonomy of linguistic rules cannot be defined in the economic sphere, where decisions seem to be alienated by capitalist rationalization. They can only be set up in the political one, through the redefinition of a contemporary "public space". Therefore Habermas is not in a position to analyze the relationships between culture and economy as such: for him, culture is only a pre-category for modern morality; and economy has to be overcome by politics if such a morality is to be practically designed.

In another direction, Boltanski and Thévenot (1991) have tried to interpret Weber's program in a more pluralistic and pragmatic approach. Their interpretation considers that any rational decision relies on a moral background, which points out a certain sense of justice. They call "cities" social representations of reality governed by ideal principles of justice. They consider that the economic sphere potentially includes different "cities": however, the main challenge
of modern ethics is to organize their coexistence and to fight against moral unilateralism. As for Habermas’ approach, such an interpretation considers that culture has to be completed by a moral perspective. But contrarily to him, Boltanski and Thévenot do not withdraw principles of morality from the economic sphere. For them, modern ethics resides in the ability to explicit moral backgrounds of rational decisions and to promote practical pluralism. But there again, moral backgrounds are designed to justify rational decisions and make them acceptable. Though they provide modern ethics with a new basis, Boltanski and Thévenot cannot avoid the abovementioned dilemma: autonomy of culture is biased by its involvement in the search for effectiveness.

Such a criticism does not assert that normative views over culture should be underestimated. As we will see in our conclusion, a normative perspective is of major importance if we want to go beyond simple descriptions of cultural dimensions of economy and question potential limits of rationalization. But it seems to us that normative reflection can only be applied if culture responds to its own logics, at least to a certain degree. Otherwise, normative production will always be affected by a form or another of utilitarian domination, and cultural meanings will always be analyzed as complements of rationalization, not as autonomous productions of the mind. To put it differently: if limits to rationalization have to be defined, it means that culture is sufficiently autonomous to provide arguments that enable such a limitation to be considered as an important matter. Despite Weber's attempt to do so, the legitimacy argument appears to be insufficient there.

2.3. The free expense argument

A substantially different approach has been proposed by Bataille's work, especially *La Part maudite* (1967). In this book, Bataille offers a complete system of interpretation of the links between culture and the economy, including a re-reading of Weber's contribution. Such a work had been prepared by other books, like *L’Erotisme* (1957) or *Les Larmes d’Eros* (1961). Although the scope of this article is not to summarize Bataille's complete view over the economy, we would like to examine his possible contribution to our reflection. At first sight, it can be asserted that Bataille follows Weber's attempt to redefine cultural background of rational choices. But his way is clearly different. What Weber was looking at behind the "economy of salvation" within a rationalized world, Bataille finds it in excess and exuberance, i.e. in a sort of "economy of desire" that would resist to the empire of utility. In his view, the above debate about the autonomy of culture facing modern capitalism is biased as long as culture is detached from its anthropological localization, which is the eternal combat between life and death. If such a starting point is to be accepted, culture has definitely no role. It “only” expresses the excess of life over death – which is, in Bataille's terms, the excess of inutility over utility. How does such an excess emerge?
It firstly has to be observed that the rational planning of life, which is governed by the principle of utility, leads to the absence of finality. In Bataille's view, such a planning represents the actualization of death within our social world: it aims at managing non-living, material things. If modern life was only dedicated to such tasks, it would be nothing but absurd. However, such a planning is necessary: it is a pre-condition of the deployment of life within modern societies. As Bataille writes: "nobody is able to imagine a world were passion would stop disturbing us... Nobody, on the other hand, would imagine the possibility of a world where calculation would not exist anymore. The entire civilization – the possibility of human life – depends on the rational planning of means dedicated to life. But such a life – such a civilized life – should not be restricted to those means, which enable it to emerge. Beyond calculated means, we look for the finality of them. (...) In fact, the pursuit of means is always a matter of rationality. The pursuit of finalities is linked to desire, which challenges reason" (Bataille, 1961: 50-51). That is why rational planning should not be mixed with life in a genuine sense: the latter resides in the ability to overcome the empire of calculated means and to access the domain of free desired finalities. To phrase it differently: rational planning is a pre-condition to life in modern societies if and only if life is simultaneously conceived through the movement of extraction from its original rational formatting. Bataille assumes here part of the phenomenological heritage, whereby Husserl criticizes modern science, in which abstraction is defined as the only adequate path to truth and sensitive life transformed into a source of scientific error. But he goes even further by theorizing the dialectic relationship between life and death, inutility and utility, culture and economy. Life gains consistency as long as it is withdrawn from the never-ending extension of calculation; its signification resides in the possibility to combat such an extension through the establishment of distinct finalities.

The above movement goes along with two major characteristics. Firstly, it should be observed that such expression of life does not depend on effectiveness any longer. What is important here is not that culture plays a functional role by giving legitimacy to rational choices, but that it looses any kind of role by being restricted to the expression of life in a wide sense. Secondly – and this is a determining argument for our forthcoming reflection –, Bataille helps us understand that the idea of a cultural world completely detached from rational calculation is nothing but an illusion. The pursuit of distinct finalities is only possible after having accepted the necessity of utilitarian decisions. That is why it would be more adequate to say that the process of life facing modern capitalism is not inutility as such but the subversion of utility – exactly as erotism could be described as the ability to subvert the process of biological reproduction. Economically speaking, what could be the principle of such subversion? The “free expense”. But what does “free expense” mean? Bataille's work could be here summarized in the three following points:

1. Life does not express itself in the simplistic denying of utility but in the possibility to submit it to a sovereign usage. Within such a usage, everyone's conscience goes from a conscience of material goods to a "conscience of the self" (Bataille, 1967: 224). Such an evolution is made visible through access to "free expense": the latter
describes the tendency to confirm the feeling of humanity through the consumption of non useful goods. What is important here is not that people purchase ephemeral goods, but that they are ready to buy goods that have practically no use: cultural goods or services, but also means of distraction, drugs or jewels, goods linked with sentimental life. Such expenses are guided by "the principle of loss". Wealth is not structured by the process of cumulative property, but by the faculty to withdraw oneself from utility, and to destroy time and money for goods that appear to have no relationship with the level of calculated means.

2. Social inequality should not be analyzed through differences in material properties but through the unequal access to the free expense.—Such inequality has a historical background: while free expense was dedicated to sacred art before the protestant Reform, the latter has redefined the place of free expense in the believer's conscience itself. Such a process has had a double impact. On the one hand, free expense has developed itself as the constant possibility to invest into luxurious goods, through the search of a never-ending wealth; on the other hand, free expense has been seen as the possibility to reject labor in the sole world of utility, and to define modern power as a possibility to be freed from the obligation of work.

3. Despite the fact that Bataille, during the pre-historical period, identified the first tracks of subversion within the world of labor — through the will to define work as a play (Bataille, 1961: 63) —, it seems that he has then situated the possibility of free expense in the world of consumption exclusively. However, his view can be completed in two directions: it can first be asserted that the workplace should not only be dedicated to the material reproduction of life but also to the search of meaningful activities and the establishment of subjective consistency, as Weber said; organizational systems may also have their own unproductive logics, through the renewal of managerial practices: in fact, many current organizational expenses do not have a direct impact on effectiveness, especially in the field of HR management or organizational change.

Bataille's view of the relationship between life and death illustrates the type of links that may exist between culture and the economy: the question is not whether or not culture maintains its autonomy within the economy, but how and for whom. Such a view assumes that consumption of cultural goods and services is mainly guided by the will to access the possibility of free expense from a consumer's point of view. But the definition of such a free expense also depends on the clear appearance of unproductive aspects of proposed goods and services, i.e. on the possibility to make the difference from what could be the result of a simple rationalized production process. As for the world of work, it can be said that access to free expense starts with the possibility given to the social subject to extract him/herself from the domination of utility and to get involved into cultural aspects of labor, whereby meanings of rational activity are elaborated. But such a possibility happens within a conflictual context, as the organization itself tries to proceed with unproductive expenses and may, therefore,
exploit cultural significations to its own purposes. Such perspectives design the theoretical frame for the analysis of our comparative research.
III. Flexible arrangements as expressions of cultural motivations and unproductive logics

3.1. Analyzing flexibility: a framework

Studies on flexibility often put forward observations concerning the recent evolution of the employment contract, as well as new imbalances inherent to the wage-earner relationship. Many researchers, especially Beffa, Touffut and Boyer (1999) or Brewster (2000), underline the fact that firms are nowadays obliged to transfer part of their financial risks on the employees themselves, within a context of market logics expansion and/or reinforcement. Within the fordist wage-earner relationship, the share of responsibilities seemed to take place in an explicit manner: on the one hand, employers were endorsing the financial risk of their economic activity, but gained the monopoly of legitimate power; on the other hand, the employees were benefiting from social guarantees linked with stable employment contracts, but had to accept the type of social order generated by strong hierarchical dependency.

Nowadays, flexible arrangements seem to gather series of strategies guided by the complete or partial withdrawal of the firms from any long-term reciprocity, in order to enlarge their financial margins on the short-term. For the employees, the apparent reduction of hierarchical constraints goes hand-in-hand with deep social insecurity and existential vulnerability (Sennett, 1999; Perilleux, 2002). On a large scale, such an evolution does not lead to the emergence of a counter-model, but to experimenting strategies, guided by a "hesitating move towards new solutions" (Boyer and Durant, 1998). If such a framework offers a stimulating interpretation of determining changes at the workplace, many questions remain without answer. For example: does such an interpretation mean that flexible arrangements are guided by strict utilitarian calculations or should they be indicators of new cultural beliefs? And if new linkages between calculation and culture were to occur, are they bound to design a new homogenous pattern? In order to suggest answers that could help us casting new light on our problematic, we suggest to interpret results coming from a European research on flexibility completed a few years ago focusing on the research contexts of chemistry and banking².

3.2. Flexibility in search of legitimacy: cultural backgrounds inside and outside the workplace

In the first case, the chemistry sector, the call for more flexibility is rooted in a voluntary and extensive vision. Without referring to a specific definition, flexible arrangements in the sector are linked with "surviving constraints", i.e. the will to adapt constantly characteristics of the workforce to market forces. However, such a vision holds various characteristics: contrarily to

² Such a research aimed to analyze flexible practices in different sectors (chemistry, banking and food retail) and different European countries (UK, The Netherlands, France). After describing different ways to flexibilize the existing wage-earner relationship, the research made explicit forms of justification that were supporting decisions and discourse over flexible arrangements, both from HR managers and trade-union representatives. Main results have been published by de Nanteuil et al. (2004). Within the limited size of our contribution, we only evoke here the chemistry and banking sectors, as their relationships to cultural appear as complementary.
common opinion, it covers a limited number of flexible practices (fixed-term contracts, flexible schedules or multi-skilling); it highly varies according to productive segments and covers heterogeneous working situations; it has been developed in a sector which has shown a long habit to internal flexibility, but a very limited recourse to external flexible practices. Such characteristics show an important gap between the official discourse – that alleges that needs for flexibility are increasing and that the ability to set up flexible arrangements is a "surviving condition" for the organization – and actual flexibility practices which are limited. Nevertheless, it is important to notice that the latter cover a large number of different situations and require a more global justification to be promoted.

Such a justification is given by a specific cultural background: the will to structurally modify the culture of labor, by “overcoming the rigid rules of the job”, “transforming working attitudes” or even “exploding mental or professional barriers” in the sector. What is important however is that such a cultural perspective is not only a general framework for implementing flexible arrangements or, to turn it even more radically, a simplistic rhetoric. It appears as a determining factor in which social actors publicly expose the reasons of their action – therefore taking the risk of entering a much more controversial sphere of discussion.

For the employers, such a cultural kick allows them to give changing practices a certain degree of signification and legitimacy – even in the perspective of a conflicting confrontation –, which goes beyond the few operational changes that may be practically needed. It also provides them with a cultural background that is wider than each specific working situation: as long as such situations are highly diversified, the allusion to a specific cultural vision allows them to overcome what may appear as a risk of fragmentation and brings back certain coherence in the management of organizational changes. Such a cultural background is also pointed out by trade-union representatives, but in a much more negative sense. The official will to introduce major breakdowns in the working culture is massively interpreted as an undisguised attempt to deconstruct the political balance born from the workers’ involvement in traditional jobs. According to them, such an imbalance is to be obtained by rendering the professional link between workers and the organization less and less solid3. Here again, culture is not a secondary aspect of organizational changes, but the domain in which social intentions and conflictual visions are settled and structured. Finally, it ought to be underlined that culture here includes values accompanying flexible practices inside the workplace.

In the second case, the banking sector, the situation is clearly different: culture covers values outside the workplace and appears as a determining factor to set up social compromises. There again, flexible practices are justified as belonging to a wide and ambitious vision. The definitions of flexibility given by managers remain generally blurred and unsteady. But this time, flexible practices are numerous, and highly differentiated, and the sector comes from a bureaucratic culture that had no habit in the implementation of any type of flexibility. The

---

3 Such a cultural offer may also create an ambiguous situation for trade-union representatives - a situation which could reduce their critical power. This is particularly clear in the case of multi-skilling: does it mean new apprenticeship opportunities for workers or is it a disguised way of reducing the workforce? Trade-union representatives have not stabilized their own view on the subject: their resistance to such initiatives is therefore rather weak, especially as some workers have deeply contested the anonymous and counter-training aspects of taylorism.
sector has had no reference in such domain and therefore discovers flexibility as a way to initiate and implement change in a wide sense. As a consequence, the need to provide strong legitimacy to flexible arrangements is even stronger than in the previous case. However, it is noticeable that such arrangements are finding their mode of justification in values situated outside the workplace, which is to say in a sphere that, traditionally speaking, used to be excluded form the classical political equilibrium inherited from taylorism.

The justification given by managers, in which they localize a so-call organizational availability to go into more flexible arrangements, refers to the individualization of working life, the demand of more tailor-made schedule, the increasing participation of women in the labor market and the global demand for a better work-life balance – nothing linked with the accomplishment of work itself. The cultural background of new local managerial practices, whereby managers intend to generate organizational changes, links operational practices with major societal changes. One could speak here about the emergence of more “domestic logics” as a possible cultural background to justify emergent managerial trends (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1991). Nonetheless, what appears as a clear breakdown from the precedent sector is that such a cultural justification now creates a trusting framework of discussion for trade-union representatives: in this case, the perspective of improving the work-life balance has been a determining perspective for the developments of social compromises within the collective bargaining system, even though such a perspective was still being considered by all parties as a far-reaching objective. On a larger scale, it has been shown that flexible arrangements are interconnected with the dissemination of a predominant and ambiguous individualistic culture, composed of autonomy and short-term vision, social insecurity and new work-life balances (de Nanteuil, 2005).

3.3. The structure of free expense: flexibility as an incomplete subversion of productive logics

It is a fact, nevertheless, that the discourse over legitimacy remains insufficient. It is something rather basic to point out that many "cultural" behaviors at the workplace do not necessarily look for legitimacy. Professional rituals, collective cooperation based on a shared history, or culture as a resource for social identity (Sainsaulieu, 1987) do not have any link with the legitimacy issue. But in our case, such an insufficiency comes out from two complementary observations.

The first one relates to the fact that legitimizing calculated choices with a certain cultural background only puts forward a certain legitimizing discourse, but does not guarantee legitimacy as such. There still is a high probability that a constant gap remains between the state of legitimacy and the intention to obtain it. In that perspective, the fact that the emergence of culture goes along with controversial interpretations does not mean that a consensus should exist as soon as a certain legitimizing discourse is being produced, but that the process of legitimizing remains partly unaccomplished, because culture does not respond perfectly to such a goal. The possibility of compromise itself, even though it could be seen as a major impact resulting from a better understanding of cultural backgrounds behind managerial decisions, is only an aspect among others of what the meanings of culture at the
workplace could be. As Habermas has widely developed, such an aspect remains affected by a rationalizing process, even though such a process is structured by linguistic rules and not by strategic interests (1986).

The second sign of insufficiency is generated by the fact that the aforementioned cultural backgrounds – either inside or outside work – are unable to justify all aspects of change through a common discourse. Within such cultural references, something like an attempt to go beyond operational borders is being said, whatever the contents themselves could be. Furthermore, it is the free possibility to submit rational activity to distinct finalities, withdrawn from the obligation of utility, which comes out as another central aspect of such transformations.

In the case of the chemistry industry, it appears clearly that the conflict between managers and trade-union representatives, about the exact meaning of flexible arrangements, does not only transform the nature of controversial arguments; it also affects the workers' free will to give a specific orientation to their ordinary work. What seems at the heart of the conflict is not only the way managers are justifying new working trends, but the fact that such a reorientation looks like an attempt to prevent workers from choosing their own cultural directions, i.e. to make a sovereign usage of the rational activities they are in charge of. In the case of the banking sector, such an interpretation is even reinforced by the fact that culture includes new living patterns, thus making explicit the intimate relationship between life and culture. The will to combine flexible arrangements with the search for new work-life balances shows a collective desire to affirm the predominance of life over utilitarian combinations, even though such combinations are of a new type and do not exactly reproduce Taylor's division of labor. To put it in other words, flexible arrangements affect certain cultural signs of life within the economic sphere and could not be restricted to operational initiatives.

However, such subversive logics should not be analyzed separately from what flexibility stands for from the firm's productive point of view. What also comes out as a key point of our analysis is that flexible arrangements do not only appear as opportunities to overcome utility for workers; they also stand for partial unproductive expenses for the organization itself. More precisely, it has to be observed that the relationship between the investment into flexible arrangements and the impacts of the latter on productive effectiveness are not very clear in the head of decision-makers. Some researchers speak about the "expansion and destruction of economic rationality" while others consider flexibility as a process that simultaneously creates and destroys performance (Roustang, Igalens, quoted by de de Nanteuil, 2005). The abovementioned research about flexibility shows an atypical evolution, which we have called a blurred rationalizing process. Apart from specific local examples, the economic argument behind the vast deployment of flexible arrangements is generally threefold: the hope of a financial return (flexibility is used to increase financial degrees of liberty within local or national organizations); the increase of general "job performance" (the recourse to flexibility should improve workers' involvement at the workplace); and a change in the productivity of work (any increase in productivity is supposed to be the result of a rationalizing process, which flexibility globally refers to). However – and this is a key observation – there seems to be no way to combine such or such flexible arrangement with a
similar increase in effectiveness ratios: no academic research is able to establish clear relationship between flexibility and increasing financial return. "Job performance" appears as a linguistic category, which describes workers' ability to constantly train and maintain a high level of competencies, far from a pure productive logic. And finally, the relationship between flexibility and productivity is somewhat obvious, but such a relationship is also paradoxical: motivations for flexibility tend to overestimate the importance of taylorist criteria, whereas flexibility is often described as a counterpart of taylorism. To sum it up, it seems that the aforementioned criteria can be compared to calculation procedures that stimulate changes, but without being in a position to get certitudes regarding their impacts.

In such a context, workers' attempts to subvert productive rationality through the introduction of distinct cultural finalities have to be situated in the wider organizational context: in the case of flexibility, it takes place within a context whereby decision-makers already tend to take distance from simple utilitarian calculations and to invest in managerial practices that may appear as partially unproductive. By doing so, organizational systems could be described through the coexistence of two aspects: the presence of unproductive logics within the productive system itself, on the one hand; critical activities undertaken by workers to re-orientate their constraining framework according to autonomous cultural goals, on the other hand. That is why it could be said that, within post-modern management (Sennett, 2000), culture at the workplace does not simplistically oppose inutility and utility, but points out two conflictual destinations of life within the economic sphere: life of systems (i.e. cultural attempts to overcome the obsession of utility, emanating from organizational systems and decision-makers) and life of social subjects (i.e. cultural initiatives generated by workers to get partially rid of what could stand for an obligation to remain under strict utilitarian constraints).

In both cases, however, the relationship between life and domination is substantially different: life is apprehended as a path towards changing modes of legitimate domination in the first case; whereas, in the second case, it is defined as a goal in itself, as long as it allows social subjects to withdraw from utilitarian logics. Such an interpretation may help us understand why a strong confusion is still being made between the two aforementioned forms of life: social subjects' aims on the one hand, and specific managerial goals on the other. But the paradox is that social subjects may have a larger chance to combat the expansion of utility if some distance has already been taken by organizational systems as such. In other words, it could be asserted that social subjects may be in a better position to reconstruct their own existential consistency in a context whereby productive systems have already taken distance from the dogma of utility. In fact, such a distance may appear as a condition to allow organizations' members to constantly re-establish themselves, by setting up new cultural finalities and practicing ordinary subversion.

It is not easy to foresee what could be the ultimate border of such a conflicting vision, but it seems quite sure that part of those interpretations could easily be used in the case of the artistic experience, especially when being confronted to an intense process of rationalization.
IV. The case of culture as artistic experience and its evolution toward rationalization

4.1. Intense rationalization and search for quality in the artistic sector

In what constitutes a milestone in the search for consistent and reliable statistics across Europe, a recent study titled “The cultural economy in Europe” stated that the cultural sector contributed 2.6% of Europe’s Gross Domestic Product (European Commission, 2006). It also showed that around 3.1% of the employed population in Europe worked in the cultural and creative sectors. The bluntness of these figures should not however mask the arduous effort of conceptualizing, gathering and producing them. Indeed, interest in direct and indirect effects of “culture” in the European economy has been gaining momentum as illustrated by the effort of academics, policy-makers and practitioners devoted to the development of measurement instruments capable of capturing the impact of the cultural production on the economy.

With regard to the academic field, in addition to the substantial contributions stemming from the fields of sociology and economics, the development of arts and cultural marketing illustrates the interest of established academic disciplines in the economization of culture (Gilhespy, 1999; Voss et al., 2000; Colbert, 2000). In the process of becoming objects of scientific study, the entities and processes that pertain to the creation and production of cultural goods and services are undergoing a new level of scrutiny. The ultimate goal is the translation of empirical observations into hypotheses which are then to be tested with a view to developing models to be confirmed or improved through subsequent research efforts.

Likewise, policy-making has not escaped the allure of rationalization. One of the most apparent results has been the implementation of what some have called “instrumental cultural policy” (Belfiore, 2002). The instrumentalization of the way in which local, national and European public bodies deliver culture has undoubtedly benefited a set of targeted organizations and even helped bridge culture to other policy areas such as social and labor policies (Pascual i Ruiz, 1998). Indeed, culture is being treated as a “fourth pillar” of sustainable development, closely interlinked with environmental responsibility, economic development and social equity (Hawkes, 2006). Nevertheless, several authors have warned of the danger of putting the emphasis on the “economic justifiers” for the arts community is general, especially for artists and artistic organizations, “since serving the state as an economic generator is very different from taking risks artistically, or being innovative and creative generally” (Caust, 2003: 54).

Lastly, practitioners in the cultural sector are progressively complying with this move toward rationalization by adopting business-like practices such as financial auditing, professionalization of human resources basis or marketing strategies. The implementation of these strategies, however, is happening with a certain level of organizational questioning and, at times, conflict.

Both external and internal factors have contributed to this organizational shift in the cultural sector (García Dosouto, 2006), and important challenges arise for cultural organizations in
this new context. Some of the socioeconomic external factors associated with the emergence of a more rational logic at the level of the three main functions associated with the cultural sector include:

a) Production function:
   - The decline in public funding (Sargeant, 2005) has made financial sustainability one of the top organizational priorities. This decline in economic resources has contributed to the perceived need for arts and cultural organizations to understand and communicate with their audiences to avoid “losing significance” (Van der Ploeg, 2006).
   - The increase in the offer of cultural and leisure goods and services has reduced the potential number of participants and resources available to cultural initiatives.

b) Mediation function:
   - The technological revolution has reduced the production costs of some cultural goods and enabled the reproduction of most cultural and artistic product(ion)s.
   - The deepening of economic inequalities has prompted the appearance of artists as social actors with a specific contribution to be made to society (Leveratto, 2000).

c) Consumption:
   - The globalization of the market for all types of art, not just cultural industries, as shown by the myriad of contemporary art fairs and events attracting foreign audiences.
   - The democratization of travel has been accompanied by the development of cultural tourism with roots in local communities.

With regard to internal factors, embracing strategic planning or a market-versus-product organizational orientation creates new challenges for the organizations. For instance, the marketing notion that customer-driven organizations “have the greatest likelihood of achieving their goals” (Gainer and Padanyi, 2002: 183) is widely confirmed by studies on service quality, which emphasize the relevance of this construct with regard to the financial performance of the organization (Rust et al. 1995) or customers’ future behavioral intentions (Zeithaml et al., 1993). However, “one of the characteristics of the arts sector is that artistic vision takes precedent over market considerations” (Colbert, 2003: 289). In this light, the product-to-customer approach displayed by many art and cultural organizations inverts the traditional customer-to-product marketing approach (Colbert 2003b), while the commitment to a cultural goal expressed in the mission of many arts organizations calls for a more traditional customer-oriented marketing approach.

While the causality between external and internal factors remains to be clarified, the increase in the adoption of rational procedures usually belonging to the traditional business field is undeniable. This observed tendency toward rationalization in the cultural sector becomes starker in the form of the linguistic inflation whereby expressions related to business and financial stability abound. This linguistic shift carries an ideological connotation that ultimately creates a new order with a new set of values and ideals (Caust, 2003: 53). An interesting case of such pervasive trend is represented by the “movement toward quality” currently at work in the cultural and arts organizations. Prior to such trend, however, the production, mediation and consumption of artistic goods and services had always functioned around specific standards of “artistic quality.” It can be argued that compliance with (or at least
awareness of) these de facto quality “standards” has always been required in the cultural sector if audiences were to create meaning and make it culturally profitable (in addition to the economically profitable). The uniqueness of the present situation for the sector is the clashing of externally-dictated, mostly quantitative quality measurements as opposed to standards originated in subjectivity of the artistic experience. Such conceptual and practice-related crossroads, together with the existing research void, make the topic of quality in cultural and artistic organizations an attractive field for scholarly inquiry.

Three reasons can be advanced to explain the void in terms of research on structured measurement models of quality in artistic contexts. The first one revolves around the conceptual confusion in terms of boundaries between cultural, creative and artistic sectors. Becker (1982) and Moulin (1997) advanced two of the most notorious attempts to describe the complex system of artistic production and how the three main cultural functions (production, mediation and consumption) are fulfilled by different socio-economic agents following different logics. In order to make sense of the panoply of “cultural enterprises” authors like Colbert (2000) have proposed valuable tools based on two criteria: the orientation of the mission (focus on the market versus focus on the product) and the way in which cultural works are produced (prototype production versus prototype reproduction). The urgency of such conceptual clarifications stems from the diverse economic and organizational logics at work in the opposite extremes of the spectrum covered by Colbert’s representation. The coexistence of these logics in a sector labeled as “cultural” represents a hindering element to the development of models applicable to the entire sector.

Secondly, the notion of quality in the arts remains often associated to “a subjective assessment of the degree of excellence of an artistic endeavor, which may or may not include customer expectations” (Weisinger et al., 2006: 132). As a result, these authors note that very often customer expectations are simply ignored. However, art marketing scholars have recently posed that, a component of service is present in most artistic encounters, even for art-producing organizations which are not particularly devoted to the production of artistic services. Such a finding opens the door to the possibility of reviewing some of the traditional marketing tools and strategies with an eye on adapting them to fields of activity where organizations mobilize resources from sources other than the market (Peattie and Peattie, 2003).

Thirdly, the difficulty of setting boundaries to the experiential component of the artistic or cultural encounter and of identifying the level of service produced in specific artistic and cultural situations. As a result, most of the work done has focused on visitors studies, which stresses the relevance of quantitative measurement. Moreover, this strand of research comes from the museum and galleries sector, thus limiting the validity for other sectors of the theories, models and tools developed.
4.2. Assessing and operationalizing quality in arts organizations

The ways in which quality is modeled and measured have received growing attention by marketing scholars in recent years. The disconfirmation paradigm between customer service expectations and service perceptions constitutes the pillar of perceived service quality in most of the services marketing literature (Grönroos, 1984; Brady and Cronin, 2001; Zeithaml et al., 2004). Based on this paradigm, Parasuraman et al. (1985, 1988) proposed the SERVQUAL model, which included five quality dimensions (reliability, assurances, tangibles, empathy and responsiveness) and inspired subsequent conceptual models of quality developed for specific sectors of activity. Most of the work has been done in service delivery organizations belonging to commercial sectors such as the banking, the traveling and the IT sectors. Nevertheless, the last decade saw the arrival of a new wave of interest in quality and customer satisfaction in non-commercial fields such as voluntary organizations (Vaughan and Shiu, 2001) or the public sector (Wisniewski, 2001). In this case, and as a result of the idiosyncrasies of service production in different contexts, revisions and adaptations have been necessary so as to adapt the dominant SERVQUAL model to service sectors.

To illustrate this wave, the second case of empirical research selected for this article includes an exploratory research project based on a multi-case study focused on understanding the dynamics around quality conceptualization at work within a specific research setting (the arts, in particular third sector arts organizations or TSAOs). The ultimate goal of this exploratory research project was to identify the unique characteristics of the artistic goods and services which may be responsible for value attributions by customers. Based on the experiences of organizational representatives (staff in charge of strategic management and frontline employees), three different dimensions of the services provided were perceived as having the potential of impacting customer perceptions of quality:

1. The artistic content: in terms of “self-oriented aesthetic creativity” (Voss et al., 2000: 330) and advancing the inquiry and practice of art-making.
2. The service experience created for the customer, including the environment and the extent of the personalization; and
3. The sacrifice required to participate, in terms of the monetary investment needed or the amount of resources in exchange for participation (in the case of volunteers, time and energy as they receive reductions or even free access to the services offered in exchange for their involvement).

With regard to the artistic content of the experience, the research focused on the place it occupies within the organization. In the case studies conducted, the place of the

---

4 While no unanimous consensus exists regarding the definition of third sector organizations, we will refer to them as those organizations issued from civil society with the aim of delivering services in response to unaddressed social needs (Evers and Laville, 2004). The lack of agreement about what third sector organizations are has resulted in the use of their legal status, their social goal and/or their multi-stakeholder nature as traits suitable to identify them. We fused this definition with Kaple’s broad notion of arts organization to come up with a working definition of TSAOs. According to Kaple, an arts organization is “one that is non-profit and open to the public, one that has at least one paid professional employee or the equivalent, one that produces or exhibits art, and one that must perform or exhibit on a regular basis” (Kaple, 2002: 1607). All the organizations studied in this second research project produced arts-related services and half of them also directly presented works of an artistic and cultural nature (whether in progress or completed).
advancement of the artistic practice for its own sake was central albeit not exclusive. The multiplicity of organizational goals (i.e. social or integration objectives) present in all four case studies was managed by putting in place different prioritization rationales for each goal, and distributing organizational resources accordingly.

The following traits characterized the service experience present in the artistic encounters included in the research:

- **Specific characteristics of the services offered.** In general, the four characteristics of services first enunciated by Parasuraman et al. (1985) and then transformed into the SHIP acronym by Iacobucci (1998) – simultaneity, heterogeneity, intangibility and perishability – apply to these concrete experiences. However, these service encounters are also characterized by Pestoff’s (2001) traits of the services delivered by third sector organizations: they can be further defined as high-involvement, high-contact and often enduring services; are co-produced by the employee and the customer; are language- and communication-intensive; and require high-qualified staff.

- **Symbolic versus material goods.** When compared with material goods, Bilton (1999) noted that the symbolic content of services is higher than that of manufactured goods: thus, the material function of the service becomes less relevant to the customers, while the qualitative or peripheral elements of the service prevail. According to this author, “the material function of the product itself remains strictly marginal” as “the balance shifts decisively towards the product’s symbolic properties” in a cultural service environment (Bilton, 1999: 5).

Among the various attempts to define exactly what quality is, Brady and Cronin (2001) consider service quality as “defined by either or all of a customer’s perception regarding (1) an organization’s technical and functional quality; (2) the service product, service delivery, and service environment; or (3) the reliability, responsiveness, empathy, assurances and tangibles associated to the service experience” (Brady and Cronin, 2001: 36). Departing from Brady and Cronin’s definition, a summary of the various dimensions of quality present in the research setting of this study was built and occurrence of these dimensions was tested in the four selected case studies. As a result, two basic dimensions (service product and service relational dimension) were defined, each of them including several indicators based on Guetzkow’s (2002) classification of the multiple sources of value of the arts, on the analysis of in-depth interviews and on direct observation. The table summarizing these findings can be found in Appendix 1.

---

5 Score ratings were attributed to each organization by the researcher for each of the dimension indicators on a subjective basis departing from the analysis of the in-depth interviews and direct observations. The scoring did not reflect the organizations’ real levels of service quality but rather perceptions of quality from management and frontline staff members; the goal of the exploratory research was rather to provide a comparative basis for future research to be conducted on other stakeholder groups (staff members, customers or funding sources).
4.3. Rationalizing culture: The complex legitimization of formal quality assessment of free expense artistic experiences

Firstly, as noted earlier, the issue of quality is not foreign to the arts and culture. It could even be asserted that the search for a certain degree of formalized and objective quality regarding artistic experience constitutes a source of legitimacy for the arts in a wide sense. If such a proposal is to be accepted, then it could be underlined that, in the case of artistic and cultural activities *stricto sensu*, the relationship between culture and rationalization is somewhat inverted, in comparison with what we previously put forward: “culture” does not appear as a source of legitimacy any longer, but rationalization does – or, at least, some forms of rationalized assessment of quality. Compared to Weber's argument, it then appears that a possible source of legitimacy resides in the ability to balance culture and rationalization, inutility and utility, in different spheres of human activities.

Naturally, artistic and cultural goods and services have often benefited from a certain transcendent approach towards quality. From this standpoint, quality is seen as an essence, somewhat timeless, “absolute and universally recognizable” (Garvin, 1988: 41). Formally, however, artistic quality has always been linked to a certain social representation of its value; and as far as the artistic production is concerned, there exist three main paradigms for assessing its value, depending on whether the value accorded to the artistic endeavor comes from market mechanisms (*market paradigm*), the notion of collective interest (*industrial paradigm*) or from a so-called artistic ethics (*gift approach*, from the French “don”). Concerning sources of value, they vary depending on the paradigm under discussion: a close circle of experts in the market paradigm; a wider sector of the general public in the industrial paradigm; and artists or sensitive, creative individuals in the gift approach. In this context, recent strategies, such as the formal assessment of quality, identified as being sources of organizational added value, do not benefit from a homogeneous understanding in the field. A series of well-established quality-related concepts were found in the proposed research: the relational aspect of the service exchange (Gainer and Padanyi, 2005; MacMillan *et al.*, 2005); customers expectations and expectations management (Teas, 1994); repeated visits and loyalty as goals (Yi-Ting and Dean, 2001); active involvement of the audience in the implementation of the program or co-production (Wikström, 1996); and implementation of evaluation mechanisms (formal or informal) to gauge quality. However, the ways in which quality-related notions were conceptualized by participants in this research do not fully correspond to those used in the traditional services marketing literature.

There exists a perception among staff members that these organizations operate under constraining conditions (i.e. budget and staff limitations, special nature of contemporary art-making, etc). At the same time, these conditions have an impact on the ability to conceptualize and implement formal, rational strategies. Nevertheless, if such constraints were to overcome the general level of awareness and to dominate entirely the activity of artistic organizations, they would result in counter-productive effects and destroy any source of artistic experience. That is why *quality assessment mostly occurs through informal 'quality check points' rather than through formal procedures*, which includes meetings with the artists (if service co-producers), onsite visits, presence of staff members in public events, proposal submission and selection process, and more formal and/or quantitative measures (evaluation
forms, in-depth voluntary self-evaluation, and/or information sessions). As a result, the gathering of data is spurious and inconsistent, which diminishes its formal organizational impact and tends to make comparison across events and over time almost impossible. In some cases, the information gathered through the use of these informal 'quality check points' serves as feedback and provides ideas for future service delivery process improvement but it rests on anecdotal grounds.

Following such a perspective, a lack of a clearly stated organizational commitment to service quality was identified. Having said so, staff members perceived that expectations from the general public and the artist audience were earnestly addressed, although not always in a formal manner. Indeed, the four case studies included in the study rely on a variety of opportunities to interact with target groups to monitor expectations and constructions of quality perception. The underlying rationale is that dissatisfaction or disappointment can be avoided (or minimized), regardless of the target group, if expectations are correctly managed: “They [the artists] are sometimes disappointed in the sense that they expect too much... because sometimes they don’t have enough experience with realistic terms” (manager of artistic laboratory). Therefore, the implementation of a formal quality measurement is not always seen as a priority by the staff and artists themselves, except for some of the frontline staff members who are directly in touch with the public in the service encounter.

As for the operationalization of quality assessment, it entails a high level of awareness in terms of the necessary choice of conceptualizations, tools and methods. A major obstacle of the most well-known quality management tools (such as formalized evaluation mechanisms) identified by the case study respondents is the highly formalized language and the burdensome procedural nature of these tools. The use of these tools is perceived as additional labor requiring extra support, as confirmed by one of the respondent’s answers: “A staff structure is needed on order to have the luxury of being able of doing self-evaluation and translate it into ways of advancing…”

But that is also the reason why, again, the legitimacy argument appears as restrictive and limited. Despite its consistency, it remains unable to explain artists’ resistance to organizational rationalization, despite their awareness of its growing necessity. Indeed, this research points out the key issue of domination and organizational control, which appears directly in relation with formal quality assessment, particularly when artists are involved in the evaluation process. If the reason for implementing rational quality assessments is to modify organizational behavior based on the results of the customers’ evaluations, where is then the artistic freedom of artists? In other words, who and when is to trace the boundary between censoring and quality control when the object being assessed is of an artistic nature? Such a concern was felt as deeper in the artistic laboratory devoted to supporting the creation by contemporary artists due to the very nature of contemporary arts. Indeed the notion of risk - and failure - associated with the experimental nature of the practice of contemporary art (Colbert, 2003b) is more obvious in environments that thrive on experimentation. In one of the respondents’ words: “We don’t work in terms of success and failure, because when experimenting failure is almost as important.” It is not the possibility of failing that scares contemporary artists as much as not having the chance of trying. Therefore it is only by
embracing the free expense aspect of contemporary art-making that future artists can be nurtured.

Such an argument opens two complementary perspectives. From the artistic point of view, it firstly contributes to clarify the fact that the possibility of free expense is a pre-condition of artistic experience, and should not be considered as a simple artistic option. It somehow could be described as an obligatory passage to enter the world of artistic experience, thus explaining the controversial relationships between artists and the aforementioned sense of failure. However, it must be strongly noted that such a possibility, as well as the will to resist excessive rationalization, has to take place within artistic and cultural organizations, not in places isolated from any possible public dissemination and recognition. As a result, the possibility of maintaining areas of free expense should be defined as a subversive process towards rationalization, rather than as an explicit expression of gratuity or artistic genius. Secondly, such an argument offers new reflection in terms of policy-making regarding quality. If quality is to appear as the simple product of a whole and complex organizational fabric, in which artistic sense would be considered as nothing but a fragment, it is very likely that the perceived sources of quality would be substantially reduced. In fact, policy-makers are not in a position to excessively increase the degree of control over artistic activities. More than that, they may have to let the public know about the remaining areas of free expense in which artists find the sources of their talent, whatever the ways and channels of such a communication could be.

In the light of such a discussion, alternative approaches to quality and its measurement in the arts are desirable. These new perspectives will have to pertain to changes of a conceptual, procedural and organizational nature, and will have to take into consideration the personal investment required from customers (i.e. price, donation of time and energy, etc.). In our view, the limitation of the several attempts carried out in the cultural sector to date lies precisely in the privilege granted to one or other category of stakeholders and to one sector over others. The result has been tools that measure only some dimensions of value at work in the complex cultural experience where emotional and cognitive factors are activated thanks to the specific selection and arrangement of elements following a combination of rational and irrational choices. Recent research by Caldwell (2002) has allowed museum visitors a “voice” to articulate their own idealized images and expectations before engaging in an artistic experience, describing the dimensions of quality that are relevant for them and stressing those to which they assign value. In the same direction but with a different approach, latest findings in consumer experience marketing suggest that the process of appropriation at work during artistic encounters determines greatly customers’ perceptions of quality (Carú and Cova, 2005). Therefore, appropriation of the cultural objects (or initiatives) represents a valid complementary approach to understanding the logic of “consuming” cultural goods, and thus measuring its artistic quality.
V. Conclusion: a critical outlook over the "cultural turn"

The objective of building a theoretical reflection on the basis of radically different pieces of research was multiple: to describe existing balances between economy and culture, should it be in the sphere of industrial production or in that of artistic activities; to analyze the challenges of such balances, regarding the modalities of gaining a better understanding of social arrangements at the workplace or analyzing the sources of quality in the arts without prohibiting artistic unpredictable talents; to identify some shortcomings resulting from the risk of over-rationalization in both domains, in light of Weber's legitimization argument and Bataille's free expense argument; and to advance some promising research initiatives tackling the key issue of a better orientated rationalization, in the fields of industrial production (to grasp more accurately the nature of social changes at the workplace and to increase the negotiation power of organizations' members) and artistic activities (to set up quality assessment that would be more in tune with the nature of artistic production, by taking into account both the purely cultural specific dimensions of such activities as well as the more functional aspects of the cultural experience). The potential difficulty of conducting comparative analysis among the plethora of organizational modes and functioning logics could be overcome by the articulation of a global interpretative framework that allows for variation according to the modes of production, mediation and consumption, while isolating the unique components of the cultural experience.

In all, as illustrated by these two distinct research projects (respectively on flexibility and culture), the present text points toward three possible sources of criticism of the "cultural turn". The first one relates to the absence of interaction between different organizational contexts and stakeholders’ views in the analysis of culture. In fact, the increased contact among these elements allows us to deepen the intertwining between economy and culture, should it concern the cultural backgrounds that support utilitarian choices in the industrial domain or the challenges raised by rationalization within artistic activities, as a critical track for quality assessment. What appears as a fact of primary importance is that culture does not only stand as a source of legitimacy, but as an expression of life that has to be experienced both by organizations' members and by customers of arts or culture.

As a result, it should not be neglected that the wide utilization of the term "culture" in economy and management hides a high heterogeneity of cultural contents, with different and sometimes opposite political implications (Cuche, 2004). There again, it should be kept in mind that flexible arrangements set up a conflictual scene between organizational systems' will to partly withdraw from strict utilitarian rationale in order to exploit unproductive expenses to their own purposes, and the workers' attempt to freely decide what their own cultural orientations should be. Simultaneously, the ambiguous relationship between artists and rationalization, the latter designing an area that could at the same time prohibit or expand their perceived talents, shows that balancing both sides refers to the artists' resistance to excessive managerial interferences. In fact, the issue of domination and organizational control appears as the political bottom line of the increasing intertwining between economy and culture: the adequate balance to be promoted remains largely a political issue, situated in the social subjects’ ability to balance control through their own needs of sense-making.
Thirdly and lastly, our comparative research clearly shows that culture is not measurable by using a standard quantitative basis. Though not being revolutionary, such an observation reinforces the necessity to develop new epistemological tools when looking at the incorporation of meanings, symbols, values or artistic activities under the economic umbrella. This was quite clear when looking at flexible arrangements: the whole cultural controversy was either about newly designed professional values (chemistry sector) or emerging needs in work-life balance, as a counterpart of dominating utilitarian patterns (banking sector). But this was even clearer in the cultural and artistic sector when looking at the adequacy of quality assessment tools. As illustrated by current attempts to measure the quality of artistic experiences via customer satisfaction questionnaires, such an approach has severe limitations. Despite the advantages of quantitative measurement tools (availability of quantitative data or identification of market niches), it privileges the concerns and areas of inquiry of relevance for the management and staff and not to other stakeholders (Caldwell, 2002). The risk of ignoring information that does not easily transform into figures or manipulating numbers is greater than what managerial rhetoric pretends. To summarize, it appears that culture designs an expression of humanity that partially escapes rationally-based reflections and measurements, as Bataille’s work constantly puts forward. This has a clear epistemological consequence: tools have to be developed to grasp such an aspect as such, above the current descriptions of culture’s ability to enhance effectiveness potentials or to widely accept unquestionable processes of rationalized evaluation.

Having said so, it would be absurd to deny the appeal of the research conducted under the “cultural turn.” If there is a convergence of logics, with aspects being “transferred” from one to the other, what are the resulting dynamics, actors and forces at play? In conclusion, we would like to propose three possible ways for overcoming the aforementioned critiques. Firstly, to promote a high variety of spaces in which the intertwining between economy and culture could be observed, especially by matching the standpoints of the organizations’ members, consumers and other stakeholders. Secondly, to critically evaluate cultural contents encapsulated in contemporary economy, with regards to the sources of autonomy and control they tend to set up. Lastly, to complete measurement tools by “mutual conventions” whereby the rationalization of culture would not only be recognized as a determining factor of organizational effectiveness or artistic quality, but as an issue to be adapted to specific contexts and people, thus allowing social subjects to maintain their own critical potential vis-a-vis the conditions under which such rationalizing processes are being created and implemented.
VI. Bibliography


Bilton, Chris (1999), The New Adhocracy: strategy, risk and the small creative firm, Centre for Cultural Policy Studies, University of Warwick, UK.


Caust, Jo (2003), "Putting the arts back into arts policy making: how arts policy has been captured by the economists and the marketers." International Journal of Cultural Policy, 9 (1), 51-64.


Guetzkow, Joshua (2002), How the Arts impact Communities: An introduction the Literature, Working Paper Series 20, Princeton University, USA.


Hofstede, Geert (1995), Cultures and organizations. Software of the mind. Amsterdam: Contact.


Nanteuil (de), Matthieu (2005), "La flexibilité est-elle un choix rationnel ?", in Nanteuil (de), Matthieu and Assaad El Akremi (eds) (2006), La Société flexible. Travail, emploi, organisation en débat, Ramonville: ERES.


Appendix 1. Dimensions and indicators of service quality in third sector arts organizations based on internal stakeholders’ perceptions:

The service product dimension was composed of eight indicators:

*Indicator 1: Level of artistic content* included in the service provided, which is of utmost importance given the symbolic nature (previously discussed) of artistic goods and services discussed above.

*Indicator 2-6:* Enjoyment; Self-expression; Sense of belonging to a community/group; Skills and creative abilities; and Relax/stress-relief. These five indicators were borrowed from Guetzkow’s classification of arts impact and are applicable only to a firsthand arts service experience.

*Indicator 7: Professional development,* which pertains only to an audience composed of artists.

*Indicator 8: Relevance of augmented services* was included as a reflection of the perceived coherence between the services added and the main goal sought by the organization.

The service relational dimension proposed here combines aspects from all three points that form Brady and Cronin’s definition: the functional quality (point 1), the service delivery and service environment (point 2) and reliability, responsiveness, empathy, assurances and tangibles (point 3). As for the TSAOs setting, eleven relevant indicators were defined:

*Indicators 1-4:* Professionalism of the staff; Interaction with employees; Expert supervision; and Positive work environment. These four indicators stem from the customer-staff member interaction.

*Indicators 5-7:* Convivial/safe atmosphere; Symbolic associations with the space; and Care for physical appearance-space. These three indicators pertain to the physical space and the atmosphere.

*Indicator 8: Care for materials.* This indicator points to the tangibles associated with the service.

*Indicators 9-10:* Collaboration with other associations and Collaboration with neighboring community. These indicators reflect the relational nature of the organization itself.

*Indicator 11: Evaluation mechanism.* This indicator refers to the existence of an evaluation mechanism, whether formal or informal.