FLEXIBLE CAPITALISM

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Flexible Capitalism

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Jens Kjaerulff

Copenhagen, 2014

Introduction

Jens Kjaerulff

This volume is concerned with the social aspects of 'work', understood broadly as the practice of paid labour, in market environments which in recent decades have received attention under banners such as 'flexible capitalism' (Sennett 1998) and 'flexible accumulation' (Harvey 1990). At this level of discourse, we refer in the first instance to 'flexible capitalism' simply as an umbrella label for the general field in which the collection's enquiry is set, rather than a more strictly defined analytic or empirical notion. What sets the volume apart from the wider literature on the topic is its anthropological approach to work as a matter of exchange, and to empirical enquiry about work thus conceived through fieldwork in settings variously qualifying as part of flexible capitalism. From the perspective of anthropology, exchange is not confined straightforwardly to economic transactions. Rather, exchange amounts to a 'total' phenomenon, as Mauss (1990) famously put it, appreciated in light of the fuller contexts to which fieldwork gives access. A key focus through much anthropological enquiry on exchange has been the ways in which transactions serve as vehicles for 'making and breaking' relations, that is, as modes of (re) producing and transforming the quality of sociality (e.g. Malinowski 1961; Lévi-Strauss 1969; Bourdieu 1977; Strathern 1988). In light of this legacy, it is striking that the practice of work in contemporary 'flexible' settings has remained largely unexplored from this perspective, because the wider literature on such work has converged on a concern falling squarely within its scope of enquiry. This is the concern with the detrimental impact of flexible capitalism on social

relations and morality, hinted at for example in the title of Sennett's seminal book, *The Corrosion of Character* (Sennett 1998). From the perspective of anthropological scholarship on exchange, this kind of concern has long been familiar, even if it has gained new force in recent decades. One might say, to use Polanyi's well-known term, that social life in contemporary work regimes appears forever more 'disembedded' (Polanyi 2001), or to paraphrase Marx (1990), that it appears to reach forever more 'alienating commodity forms'. What this familiarity suggests, however, is that the current concern may be partly shaped by what Maurer has called a 'Western folk theory' (Maurer 2006: 19), a teleological view pivoting on an essentialist 'gift/commodity' divide, according to which contemporary Western worlds are liable to consolidate themselves ever more firmly in the latter realm (e.g. Bloch and Parry 1989; Carrier 1995; cf. Macfarlane 1993). The view 'comes full circle' through selective descriptive renderings informed by, and in turn confirming, the stereotype (cf. Carrier 1995: 97). What is thereby obscured is a reality of economic practice comprising a more entangled and ambiguous mix of 'gift and commodity' exchange, in which relationships not only decline but simultaneously proliferate. It is this more complex reality of flexible capitalist work practice, and in particular the emergence of new forms of sociality through it, which is the volume's focus. The volume's title, *Flexible Capitalism*, alludes to this focus through a pun on the touted notion of flexibility, conventionally associated with contemporary capitalism as a distinguishing managerial and organizational trope. The title invokes this conventional association, but it simultaneously hints at the volume's approach to contemporary capitalist work practice as a 'flexible', that is, ambiguous matter of exchange and sociality exceeding the commodity form.

At one level, the volume aims to contribute to wider interdisciplinary literature by introducing a perspective which may shift the terms of enquiry. Contemporary economic practice is a subject deservedly attracting the attention of many scholars and students of various disciplinary backgrounds, whom we hope to engage. Anthropological exchange theory on the other hand is a specialized domain of expertise even within anthropology. In consideration of a wider uninitiated readership, part of this introduction therefore outlines the legacy of anthropological exchange theory, including that of the 'gift/commodity' distinction. What this perspective contributes is an alternative framework for approaching the social implications of flexible capitalism. Where wider enquiry has tended to be conceptually cast in terms of grander and culturally biased tropes such

as 'society' (reflected in the commonplace notions of post-industrial, network or risk society), anthropological exchange theory is rooted in an enquiry into the dynamics through which sociality, in a more open and basic sense, is forged (e.g. Strathern 1988; cf. Long and Moore 2013). The collection thus aims to convince a wider readership that an anthropologically informed perspective on exchange provides a way of deepening and extending our understanding of the dynamics of sociality at work in flexible capitalism, by introducing some of this perspective's core analytical notions, and by engaging these notions in empirical contexts of contemporary 'flexible' work practice. Substantially, the volume's chapters contribute to this wider literature by exploring and documenting how, across diverse settings of contemporary flexible capitalist work, 'gift-like' moralities and socialities proliferate in, and even sustain, the kind of intensified commoditization that more widely has been touted as tearing social relations apart.

At another level, the volume is intended more specifically as a contribution to anthropological literatures, both on work and on exchange. Considering how central a part work is of many people's lives, there is a sense in which anthropologists have been remarkably inattentive to the subject. It is concisely captured in a passage from a recent book by Spittler, a German anthropologist who specializes in the study of work. He observes that while one might 'expect the subject of work to be as important a topic in anthropology as, for instance, exchange, magic [or] marriage . . . this is not the case . . . [T]here are only a few theoretically oriented anthropological monographs and collections of articles in English' (Spittler 2008: 11). The catch here is theory. Anthropologists have long paid attention to work, understood in the widest sense of how people wrest a living from their environments, as an element in attending to social life more broadly. There have, in fact, also been a fair number of anthropologists writing on work in the narrower sense of paid employment (see e.g. Nash 1998; Ortiz 2002). But there has hardly been a level of marked consensus within anthropology as to what work 'means' or comprises, or in terms of how to theoretically approach it, sufficing to clearly distinguish an 'anthropological' approach to work (cf. e.g. Sahlins 1972; Wallman 1979; Collins and Gimenez 1990; Ortiz 1994; Spittler 2001; Procoli 2004; Durrenberger and Marti 2006). Instead, the growing number of anthropologists taking an interest in contemporary work practices in recent years have, to a degree that contrasts with the study of other anthropological topics, such as exchange, magic and marriage, looked for theoretical inspiration

elsewhere, such as from political economy (e.g. Roseberry 1988), the sociology of work (e.g. Burawoy 1979; Thompson 1989) and cultural studies (e.g. Willis 1977; du Gay 1996). While interesting and insightful research has ensued, an effect has been to reinforce a lack of common ground among anthropologists as to what questions and ideas about work and its contemporary transformations are worth pursuing. Against this background, our collection begins to explore an approach to sociality in a keenly debated contemporary work regime, drawing on a distinct and rich anthropological legacy. The formulation 'at work' in the volume's subtitle thus alludes to more than its focus on work in flexible capitalist settings. It highlights its specific approach to such work as *practice*, that is, the practice of *exchange* in the encompassing anthropological understanding. Paid work is by definition an exchange of money for a service, but as the volume's chapters demonstrate, transactions in the context of paid work exceed the economic aspects underlying this definition. It is the significance of these wider transactions in flexible capitalist settings which the volume's distinct anthropological orientation helps to investigate, and which the volume's chapters converge on teasing out.

By the same token, the volume also contributes to the anthropological literature on exchange by introducing work in flexible capitalist settings as a focus worth more sustained attention. It is curious that, while Marx's writings on labour (understood as a commodity) retrospectively have become adopted as an important legacy in more recent anthropological exchange theory – not least via Gregory's *Gifts and Commodities* (1982), considered further below – practices of work in contemporary flexible settings have remained largely ignored in this more recent body of exchange theory. This is in contrast with the attention devoted to other novel commodity forms that have emerged in recent decades in the realm of 'property', which have provided a focus for innovative enquiry, in significant measure building on the legacy of anthropological studies of exchange (see e.g. Hirsch 2010). One might say that a key element explored here has been the 'disambiguating' efforts that go into the creation of new kinds of property, which from this perspective are seen as inherently comprising 'fractal' relations (e.g. Strathern 1991; cf. Law 1999). Property claims are recursively conceived in terms of ownership relations. Yet the 'substance' of potential property is simultaneously and variously 'related' more widely – for example to communities of scholars and informants, in the case of intellectual property to which anthropological institutions might lay claim (see

Strathern 1999: 173–75) – so that claims to property require a wider network of relations to be 'cut' (Strathern 1996; Hirsch 2010). Some studies broadly falling within this recent thrust of enquiry do focus on contexts of paid work, but mainly attend to the 'cutting', such as the audit exercises that reduce work practice to entities that lend themselves to quantitative measures and exchanges (e.g. Strathern 2000). However, less attention has been devoted to the substance of flexible capitalist work in terms of the continued significance of the broader exchanges, moralities and relations that exceed the commodity form. It is here the emphasis lies, in the studies collected in this volume. As its subtitle suggests, such exchanges and relations are 'at work' in ambiguous ways. At the more obvious level, they remain central to the practice of paid work, yet they also remain outside its conception as economic practice. In its own right, such dynamics are hardly novel to the anthropological exchange perspective. What deserves renewed attention, however, is the ways such exchanges and relations proliferate, and in turn how such ambiguities 'work out' in the wake of the structural changes which have come to define flexible capitalism. It is here our collection concentrates the focus.

Flexible Capitalism

Flexible capitalism is not of one piece. It is in the first instance an expression, used among other umbrella phrases to collectively designate dimensions of economic practice that have emerged (roughly) since the 1970s, contrasted with a recent past of, for example, 'industrial' or 'Fordist' capitalism. Other expressions put to similar use include 'new', 'late', 'disorganized' and 'fast' capitalism. While 'flexibility' has become an emblematic concept, it must be made clear at the outset that it is a somewhat nebulous notion. In some contemporary economic contexts it is used for more particular effects (analytically as well as empirically); in others, it is used interchangeably with synonyms such as 'adaptability' and 'versatility'; while in yet other contexts clearly affected by dimensions falling within the rubric of 'flexible capitalism', the concept of flexibility itself is rarely used. This disparity is reflected in the collection, where the concept of flexibility itself figures more prominently in some chapters, and less so in others. It must be emphasized, therefore, that the concept, or its etymology or social life per se, is not the focus of this volume (in such regard, see for example Martin 1994).

For the sake of overview, the trajectory and distinguishing features of what is framed as 'flexible capitalism' may be characterized, in rather general terms, in the following way. The late 1960s and early 1970s saw the postwar boom of Euro-American economies grind to a halt, and inflation rise to a point where the Nixon administration decided to detach the US dollar from the gold standard, thus allowing for a greater measure of fiscal flexibility (e.g. Gregory 1997: 265–96; McMichael 1998). In slightly delayed parallel with this development, liberal market ideology surged to new prominence on the political scene (see e.g. Harvey 2005), not only in Europe and America but also in Latin America, Asia and later Eastern Europe, as a number of states in these areas found new enthusiasm for expanding market economy. Coupled with various technological advances during the same period, most conspicuously in the fields of computing and communication infrastructure (see e.g. Castells 1996), these developments expanded and opened up new markets, and above all enabled new kinds of market dynamics and engagements. Malleability in the realm of economic abstraction took on a more tangible life of its own, as the science of economics grew more powerful across the political spectrum and in economic practice (Carrier and Miller 1998). A greater dispersal of investment, production and recruitment of labour allowed for greater flexibility in terms of the accumulation of capital, the production process and the organization of labour (see e.g. Harvey 1990: 141–72). Product design and production processes came to entail higher measures of 'flexible specialization' (Piore and Sabel 1984), such as in terms of 'tailor-made' and 'just-in-time' production, and so at the level of the skills and tasks involved. New flexible affiliations with the labour market emerged, as 'subcontracting', along with 'network' and global 'follow-the-sun' production, became more prevalent (see e.g. Castells 1996; Felstead and Jewson 1999).

These developments have attracted considerable attention in the social sciences over the last three decades, and a number of prominent scholars have linked the emergence of this diffuse but pervasive regime of economic practice to broader social and cultural transformations. To mention just a few examples, Harvey's seminal excursus on 'flexible accumulation' was part of his wider exploration of 'the condition of postmodernity' (Harvey 1990). Beck saw the contours of a 'risk society' emerge from the volatile environments that followed the demise of stable forms of work organization (e.g. Beck 1992). Castells wrote of the 'rise of the network society' (Castells 1996), while Sennett outlined how the 'new flexible capitalism' undermined work as a source of identity (Sennett 1998). In a similar

vein, as Boholm observes, a 'central thought' in works by Giddens and Bauman has been that, as 'the market assume[s] novel structural features . . . traditional social relationships, groupings and identities erode' (Boholm 2003: 157). In turn, other scholars have taken such views for granted as fact, adopting them as 'axioms' when approaching contemporary change (Baca 2005: 39). In a more comprehensive review, Strangleman indeed points to a 'trend' in contemporary mainstream scholarship on work (Strangleman 2007). This trend consists in a shared lament of 'loss' (ibid.: 88), a lament that 'the kind of economy that could provide a measure of stability for some through a "job for life" is no longer possible' (ibid.: 87), and that contemporary economic practice entails 'a process of individualisation and fragmentation which spans the workplace and the wider communities in which individuals live' (ibid.: 88).

While the aim of this collection is to move beyond this wider discourse of 'loss', it must be emphasized that the aim is not to promote an uncritical approach, let alone a defence of neoliberal infatuations with flexibilization. Indeed, there is an important place for this kind of discourse as a device for bringing wider critical attention to the social dimensions of contemporary economic transformations (cf. Maurer 2006: 17). To appreciate this, it is useful to briefly consider a longer trajectory of what is arguably one of the main effects of the features listed above as particular to 'flexible' capitalism. This effect fundamentally resembles the kind of abstraction which for Marx distinguished and enabled conventional capitalist exploitation – a point acknowledged by Harvey (1990: 186–97). Although Marx did not put it this way, one might say that it was the abstraction of value (reflected in and mediated by the prevalent use of modern money) which made value 'flexible' enough to be treated as an entity in its own right, that is, to be extracted, circulated and accumulated as capital. In essence, there is much to suggest that this kind of abstraction has in recent decades reached yet more extreme levels in the guise of flexibility, partially spurred by what Marx saw as the inherent capitalist need for the continuous expansion of value extraction (cf. e.g. Harvey, ibid.; Carrier and Miller 1998). One thing that the wider discourse on 'loss' helps bring out of the dark then, if not necessarily into focus, are contemporary practices of exploitation, even if they are more commonly cast in the more approachable and evocative terms of declining social relations. But this is also where the 'Western folk theory' alluded to above begins to act its part, so that, for example, past circumstances of industrial and colonial exploitation ironically come to serve as images of ostensibly more benign forms of sociality that are now

lost (Strangleman 2007; Neveling, this volume). Concisely stated, the widely prevailing and intuitively compelling stereotype (also entertained within anthropology) that 'gift-like situations' are essentially benign, while 'commodity-like situations' are essentially malign, is both the strength and limitation of the 'folk theory'. The wider discourse on 'loss' is of course reinforced by a related stereotype, which sees 'work-like situations' as all about commodities. There is no doubt that exploitation and powers of capital continue to shape capitalist practice to an effect where those who mostly benefit in monetary terms are few, or that such power also operates at intimate levels (e.g. Burawoy 1982; du Gay 1996; Pongratz and Voss 2003). Moreover, as we will see below, it is not that 'gift' exchange is lacking dimensions of power, calculation or exploitation. But there is more to the practice of flexible capitalist work, and the image conjured in the wider discourse on 'loss', to an effect where all that is significant boils down to power and exploitation to the detriment of sociality, seems overly simplistic. And whereas such dimensions have by now been rather well traversed, the simultaneous proliferation of sociality has so far received little attention. Concentrating on the latter dimension does in this way not amount to denying or belittling the malign aspects of flexible capitalism; rather, it is a quest for understanding a part of a more complex picture, which on closer inspection seems empirically compelling.

The volume's chapters are all based on fieldwork in settings which in different ways exhibit features highlighted as distinctive of flexible capitalism in the wider literature, although as stressed above, these features are not consistently conceived in terms of 'flexibility'. Most explicit in this regard is the chapter by Garsten, a comparative study based on three different pieces of fieldwork, making concrete how flexibility is a multiple phenomenon. In Garsten's chapter, one setting concerns flexibility at the level of employment among temporary staff; in another, flexibility is what is required in the context of frequent organizational change; while in the third case, flexibility in terms of social roles is entailed in traversing an extensive network across different organizations. Two chapters, those by Cross and Neveling, are based on fieldwork in formally designated settings of 'offshore' production. Here, flexibility occurs in the first instance in terms of the organization of global production vis-à-vis local regulations. In the two settings considered in Narotzky's chapter, flexibility also occurs in terms of global production, respectively related to increasingly open and competitive markets in agriculture as a result of EU market integration, and to subcontracting in shoe manufacturing.

In Cross's chapter, 'flexible specialization' at the level of skills is also at issue, as it is in a different way in the chapter by Knox, based on fieldwork among 'knowledge workers' in the (global) ICT and media industry. Wood's chapter examines a work environment in North America's booming oil and gas sector shaped by fiscal flexibilities in the realm of speculative finance capital; Grétarsdóttir's chapter considers a case of aggressive export promotion through flexible transnational networks and identities; while Kjaerulff's chapter is based on fieldwork among people working from their homes via the internet, where flexible work time is at issue. In different ways then, all the chapters engage with practices of work in environments affected by features highlighted in the wider literature as distinctive of flexible capitalism. As this terse listing suggests, the chapters cover overlapping features of flexible capitalism that can be somewhat hard to meaningfully segregate. Yet, the chapters converge in documenting a more complex situation than is commonly portrayed of the social entailments of such work. It is in order to appreciate the 'workings' of this more complex picture that anthropological exchange theory is useful.

Work, Exchange, Ambiguity

Exchange is a key dimension of the practice of work. Understood in the modern colloquial and generic sense of paid labour, any activity may be considered 'work', so long as the person undertaking that activity does so in exchange for money (cf. Marx 1973: 100–108; Godelier 1980). In this, exchange (of labour for money) is a defining criterion of the modern conception of work. People may also undertake the same activity without receiving a money payment for doing it. While this does not qualify as work in a formal modern sense, it may be considered work of a more informal kind, such as 'housework'. Underlying this more informal notion of work is a social dimension, a social contract about the division of labour, which again suggests a fundamental dimension of exchange in work, also in this broader sense. This dimension of work is found in all human societies, and has been subject to enquiry for a long time in the social sciences.

Anthropological studies of exchange have not focused narrowly on modern formal work in its own right (but see e.g. Carrier 1992; Mollona 2005; Spittler 2009), which is arguably a reason they remain somewhat overlooked in mainstream scholarship on work. On

the other hand, enquiry about the social aspects of exchange more broadly, as they are entailed in notions such as 'housework', has been particularly developed in anthropology. It is in part this attention to the intricate social dimensions of exchange which distinguishes anthropological from other approaches to exchange, prevalent in academic disciplines such as sociology and economics (e.g. Carrier 1991; Hann and Hart 2011).

Anthropological approaches to exchange vary considerably, but they may be said to broadly share some additional features. First, exchange is understood in a wide sense, ranging from exchanges of objects and even people in some cases, to exchanges of more ephemeral entities such as words and gestures in others. Second, anthropological approaches often see, or at least invoke, exchanges as concrete events of ongoing 'process' in terms of which cultural life and social relations are (re)created and changed, events which in turn also reflect a much wider spectrum of cultural and social life than granted in sociology and economics.

While most approaches to exchange in anthropology reflect some measure of these features, a distinction is commonly made between what has respectively been called 'collectivist' or 'holistic' orientations on the one hand, and 'individualistic' or 'transactionalist' ones on the other (e.g. Ekeh 1974; Kapferer 1976; cf. Carrier 1991; Graeber 2001: 23–47; Macfarlane 1993). The latter, to different degrees, share aspects of approaches to exchange in sociology and economics, in that individual reasoning, and sometimes also a rationality of a presumed universal individualist kind, is perceived as underlying exchange activity. While focused on social life in a wider sense than is common at least in economics, such approaches have often proved limited, for example, in their appreciation of cultural dimensions, at least from the perspective of anthropology. On the other hand, some versions of such approaches pay keener attention to the actual 'process' aspects in terms of which events of exchange are often invoked, than is generally the case with more holistic orientations (e.g. Barth 1981, 1989). According to convention in anthropology, these individualist orientations are sometimes also classified 'formalist', following a distinction made in the 1950s considered further below (see also Kjaerulff, this volume). But the legacy of this orientation goes further back, notably to works of Simmel and Weber (Barnard 2000: 80–98) and to strands of phenomenology.

In contrast to what is sometimes the case among anthropologists, this volume does not treat holistic and individualistic orientations as fundamentally incompatible. Indeed, the divide between them may

not be as clear-cut as it is often made out to be, and a theme explored in the volume and detailed below, may be said to turn on the simultaneous coexistence of both individual pursuit and social considerations as motivating factors in exchange. However, it is particularly the holistic orientation which is associated with anthropological exchange theory (e.g. Carrier 1991), and which forms the point of departure for this book.

From a historical perspective, two scholars in particular have inspired this orientation, and they are used in what follows to frame the volume's approach. One is the Austrian-born economic historian Karl Polanyi (1886–1964), and the other is the French sociologist Marcel Mauss (1872–1950). Both Polanyi's and Mauss's writings on exchange were in part inspired by empirical anthropological studies of exchange in so-called primitive societies. These included studies of ceremonial exchange in Melanesia and on North America's north-west coast (respectively by Malinowski and Boas), where items such as seashells and blankets were exchanged on special occasions (known respectively as *kula* and potlatch), involving complex dynamics of prestige. In such societies, 'economic' exchange did not appear as segregated from other forms of exchange, as seemed to be the case in monetized economies. It is not least this dimension which has comprised the 'holistic' impetus in so-called holistic exchange orientations.

Polanyi and 'the Great Transformation'

The term 'embeddedness', invoked earlier, reflects this holistic orientation, and is commonly attributed to Polanyi's celebrated book *The Great Transformation* (Polanyi 2001). Originally published in 1944, the book is a historical account of what Polanyi saw as a fundamental shift in the relation between society and economy over the centuries prior to his lifetime (see also Isaac 2005; Hann and Hart 2009). Drawing on anthropological and historical studies, Polanyi argued that economic practice prior to agrarian capitalism had been 'embedded' (Polanyi, 2001: 60) in more widely prevailing patterns of social organization. He distinguished different patterns, and corresponding principles of exchange, in terms of which economic practice unfolded (ibid.: 45–58). The principle of reciprocity (reciprocal exchange) was dominant in so-called primitive societies, where social relations were conceived of in terms of clans and extended kinship, such as Malinowski had described it in his research on Melanesia. Exchange of prestigious seashells and marriage partners between

members of two specific clans were accompanied by exchanges of other items used to sustain a livelihood between the same two clans, thus comprising what might be called an 'economy' consisting of exchanges between those clans, as well as within them along lines of perceived relatedness (such as matrilineal descent). A different principle of exchange, 'redistribution' (ibid.), was predominant in so-called archaic societies, where a more centralized and stratified organization of social relations prevailed. Here, items such as food – paid as rent for land use to a feudal elite, for example – were redistributed 'for use and consumption mainly to the nonproducing part of the population' (ibid.: 54), thus comprising an economic system underpinned by this wider form of social organization.

Polanyi's main focus, however, was on the emergence and development of market exchange as the predominant form in modern economies, where food and labour are simply bought and sold for money. Polanyi linked this development to yet a distinct principle of exchange, that of barter, which he saw as underlying early forms of market trade, and as existing simultaneously with other principles of exchange in clan-based and feudal societies, albeit it was peripheral to these in terms of economic importance. But in contrast to Adam Smith's famous claim about mankind's intrinsic 'propensity to truck and barter', Polanyi did not see barter as a straightforward or natural precursor to capitalist economic practice (Polanyi 2001: 59–70; see also Humphrey and Hugh-Jones 1992). Rather, drawing mainly on historical material from England, his hunch was that modern capitalist markets had emerged (in tandem with the consolidation of state power) through a deliberate and partially state-enforced promotion of market exchange across a radically expanded canvas: in geographical terms, in terms of volume of commodities produced and exchanged, and in terms of numbers of people affected. In the latter regard, Polanyi outlined how a poverty-ridden and socially uprooted population emerged and was shaped as part of this process, an element that was essential for modern industrial production (and states), which depended on it for labour power (Polanyi 2001: 35 ff).

The 'great transformation', then, consisted for Polanyi in the fundamental shift this development entailed in terms of the relation between social organization and economic practice. As he famously observed: 'the control of the economic system by the market is of overwhelming consequence to the whole organization of society: it means no less than the running of society as an adjunct to the market. Instead of [the] economy being embedded in social relations, social relations are embedded in the economic system' (ibid.: 60).

Polanyi used the term 'embeddedness' in a descriptive rather than a strictly analytical sense, but the concept became emblematic for the holistic approach to economic practice that he subsequently staked out. In a later publication (Polanyi 1957), seminal in the development of economic anthropology as a disciplinary specialization, Polanyi reformulated what he saw as distinctive about his approach. Distinguishing two meanings of the term 'economic', a 'substantive' and a 'formal' one, and two corresponding approaches to enquiry, he held that the substantive approach (which he promoted) was based on empirical investigation, whereas the formal one (pursued in mainstream economics, and by some anthropologists) was based only on logic (ibid.: 243–50). A main point Polanyi made with the distinction was that the two meanings had been conflated because of the extent to which formal economics had been institutionalized empirically in modern market economies (cf. Miller 1998). Extending from this point, he advocated approaching economic practice as a matter of what he called 'instituted process'. The process aspect was conceived of as the movement of items (between hands, and through space); the institutional aspect consisted of the social circumstances upon which such movement rely, to in fact function as an economy (Polanyi 1957: 243–50). For Polanyi, this institutional dimension in large measure extended from the patterns of social organization he had outlined in *The Great Transformation*.

In the heated debate that ensued between scholars of substantivist and formalist orientations, George Dalton – the main substantivist spokesman after Polanyi's death in 1964 – conceded that the formalist approach was more appropriate for understanding modern market economies, leaving the substantivists mainly to focus on other kinds of economic practice (Isaac 2005: 20–21). Isaac observes that Polanyi would likely have been 'deeply shocked' by this (ibid.), as Dalton thereby undermined Polanyi's comparative ambition of also examining modern economies in terms of embeddedness or 'instituted process'. This reorientation stymied the impact of Polanyi's holistic orientation on the study of modern market economies (ibid.).

More recently, Polanyi's notion of 'embeddedness' has been taken in new analytical directions (e.g. Granovetter 1985; Callon 1998; cf. Barry and Slater 2002, Beckert 2009). But it was the patterns of social organization and the corresponding principles of exchange which analytically comprised the more substantial lead, both in Polanyi's work and in the subsequent developments it inspired in economic anthropology, which are an important part of the holistic approaches' legacy (Gregory 2009; Hann and Hart 2011: 55–71).

In the context of our approach to flexible capitalism, the continued relevance of Polanyi's work and the studies of exchange it inspired is in the first instance in terms of the focus on embedded economic practice that was brought to the context of transforming market dynamics. Extending this spirit of Polanyi's enquiry, the volume's chapters thus concur on suggesting that a core feature of flexible capitalism turns precisely on its continued wider embeddedness, even if the configuration of this embeddedness (capitalism as 'instituted process', following Polanyi's later conceptualization) may be undergoing transformation. Paraphrasing a succinct formulation in Narotzky's chapter (this volume), our collection demonstrates how contemporary 'flexible' procurement of profit works, 'not so much through disembedding the economy from other social relations and value realms, but rather through pervasively embedding capitalist objectives in all spheres of responsibility . . . the accumulation of surplus value hinges on not fully commoditizing the labour force'.

At the same time, an instructive shortcoming of Polanyi's approach (accentuated by Dalton's version of it) is its underlying evolutionary outlook. This is reflected in the grand narrative of *The Great Transformation*, where different 'types' of societies are seen to represent stages in a grand evolution of economic practice. A similar mind-set (the 'Western folk theory' mentioned above) has effectively informed approaches to transforming economic practice more broadly (Bloch and Parry 1989; Carrier 1995; Macfarlane 1993; Maurer 2006). From the perspective developed in this volume, the vocabulary of 'eras', 'ages' and 'isms' often deployed in the context of flexible capitalism is suggestive (see also Strangleman 2007). It is in part to move beyond this limitation that the chapters draw on the legacy from the other key historical figure in anthropological exchange theory, Marcel Mauss.

Mauss and 'the Gift'

The inspiration that stems from Mauss in the development of anthropological perspectives on exchange has arguably been more profound, and had a more lasting impact than is the case with that of Polanyi. It has also resulted in a more diverse range of theoretical perspectives, owing more to various influential interpretations of Mauss's scholarship than to Mauss's writings in their own right (e.g. Hart 2007). It is therefore more accurate to speak of 'Maussian approaches' (Carrier 1991), which in different ways relate to aspects of Mauss's writings, above all his famous essay *The Gift* (Mauss 1990), originally

published in French in 1925. In what follows, a few key elements in this essay are considered, and then developed with reference to two more recent Maussian orientations.

Like Polanyi (and drawing on several of the same anthropological sources), Mauss's interest in so-called primitive exchange was rooted in an evolutionary outlook. But as will be apparent below, Mauss believed exchange in some respects resembling market trade had been more prevalent in primitive forms of exchange than Polanyi allowed for. Mauss saw exchange in primitive and archaic societies as 'total social phenomena', as he called it (ibid.: 3), simultaneously entailing religious, juridical, moral, aesthetic and economic dimensions. In other words, 'the economic' dimension of such exchange (here in quotation marks as it was not clearly segregated), had a range of entailments reflecting a wider 'social contract', which in Mauss's view had been 'hidden' (ibid.: 4) by modern laissez-faire market ideology. Underlying the project in *The Gift* was a polemical engagement with intellectual and ideological traditions which saw political and military power as a precondition for peaceful trade, restraining humanity's presumed natural acquisitive and self-interested propensity. Mauss, in contrast, wanted to explore exchange as an inherently moral and social activity, that is, one that is not dependent on a social contract apart from exchange, but where that activity is the very foundation and source of social relations (Sahlins 1972: 149–83; Graeber 2001: 152–55). This is reflected in his main question in *The Gift*: 'what rule . . . compels the gift that has been received to be obligatorily reciprocated' (Mauss 1990: 3).

A famous lead for Mauss was an anthropological account which in his reading suggested that gifts exchanged among the Maori remained entangled with their donors. Gifts were perceived to contain a 'spirit' which, although gifts were given voluntarily on the face of it, compelled a return gift to the donor. This spirit not only reflected social relationships, but literally took part in them, and more prestigious exchange items could even have 'personal' names (ibid.: 24). The 'spirit of the gift' also reflected and evoked wider ontological (that is, cosmic, social and moral) orders, in terms of which exchanges and social relations were conceived. Exchanges of gifts were thus instrumental in creating and maintaining these orders, and Mauss traced these dimensions of exchange using a considerable range of anthropological and philological sources. He especially concentrated on what he called 'agonistic' or competitive gift exchange, epitomized by the so-called potlatch found on North America's north-west coast. He elevated this to a general form of exchange that he argued existed in

many places, and he further argued that this form reflected something like the acquisitive dimensions of modern market exchange while retaining the social and moral dimensions apparently lacking in the latter (e.g. ibid.: 75). On the one hand, such exchanges were displays of lavish and apparently generous giving; on the other, they were marked by underlying interests and competition, both motivated and contained in terms of wider social, cosmic and moral considerations (ibid.).

It is these wider and ambiguous dimensions of exchange, including 'economic' exchange, which have subsequently comprised a major focus of so-called Maussian approaches. While the chapters in the volume draw on a broader range of such approaches, a few key works and conceptual distinctions will be considered here.

Gregory on Gifts and Commodities

A conceptual distinction often invoked in more recent Maussian orientations is that between 'gifts' and 'commodities'. By extension this distinction is also applied to forms of exchange (gift exchange and commodity exchange), and to types of social relationships and moralities (gift and commodity relations and moralities). The distinction is commonly attributed to a landmark study by Gregory, entitled *Gifts and Commodities* (Gregory 1982; cf. Sahlins 1972: 185–277). Broadly speaking, this book had two aims. Firstly, drawing on the one hand on Lévi-Strauss's anthropological study of kinship structures and marriage exchange (Lévi-Strauss 1969), itself partly inspired by Mauss's *The Gift*, and on Marx's seminal contributions to political economy (Marx 1990) on the other, Gregory developed a synthesis that expanded the scope of the 'Maussian' orientation considerably, both analytically and in terms of the empirical realms to which it could usefully be applied. This dimension has subsequently been both widely acclaimed and critically engaged. The second aim of *Gifts and Commodities* was to show that, in postcolonial Papua New Guinea (PNG), both forms of exchange prevailed simultaneously, if in ambiguous ways. This second ambition of the book has been both overlooked and misunderstood (e.g. Gregory 1997: 47–48), but it is important in the context of our approach to flexible capitalism, which is why it is highlighted here.

Gregory contrasted gift and commodity exchange by saying that where gift exchange is the exchange of 'inalienable things between transactors who are in a state of reciprocal dependence', commodity exchange is the exchange of 'alienable things between transactors,

who are in a state of reciprocal independence' (Gregory 1982: 12). While the conceptual distinction is clear, Gregory intended it as a tool for understanding complex practices of exchange in PNG, which involved both gift and commodity elements. Among other things, he showed how land used for postcolonial commodity production continued to belong to clans rather than to individual owners, and how commodity production was, as a result and in considerable measure, underpinned by and sustaining a wider system of gift-exchange that had proliferated in postcolonial times. At issue was not only the material sustenance and 'reproduction' of clans and labour power (ibid.: 112–65), but also an intricate system of prestige competition. Prestige was achieved by inflicting gift debts on gift recipients by means of lavish gifts, the availability of which was in turn related to the production and exchange of commodities (ibid.: 166–209). Gregory showed how in some cases even money (in the form of modern banknotes) served as gifts (ibid.: 187–91). Where this 'gift-money' was given as a sacrifice to God, the gift was in fact 'alienated' and provided, in the shape of banknotes, a basis for the accumulation of capital in the system of commodity exchange from which the banknotes originated (Gregory 1980). An important thrust of Gregory's book was thus that the conceptual distinction between gifts and commodities was useful for understanding practices that were complex and ambiguous matters, simultaneously involving both gift and commodity elements.

It may be helpful at this point to briefly illustrate some of what the gift/commodity distinction implies in the context of work through a concrete and simple example. One way of doing so is to relate it to Marx's distinction between 'use value' and 'exchange value'. As is clear from the opening chapter of *Capital*, Marx saw the distinguishing feature of a commodity as its exchange value, set apart from the same item's use value (Marx 1990: 125–77). Referring to an example credited to Aristotle (Gregory 1994: 912; Marx 1904: 19), a pair of shoes may be said to have use value, in that they protect the feet. Shoes may also have exchange value, in that they can be exchanged for different items judged to be of equivalent value as far as that transaction is concerned. Use value then is concrete and is measured in quality: how well shoes protect the feet. Exchange value, on the other hand, is abstract and is measured in quantity: a given number of shoes may be exchanged for a given number of items of any other kind judged to be of equivalent exchange value. Or, the shoes may simply be exchanged for a quantity of money, the measure in terms of which exchange value is commonly expressed. From this perspective,

money is the commodity par excellence, in that its use value *is* its exchange value.

Marx claimed to be the first among political economists to point out that work too had both use value and exchange value (Marx 1990: 132), and these two dimensions of work are of course in part what is entailed in the contrast between housework and paid labour, mentioned above. The notion of housework may cover a number of activities, such as cleaning, cooking, or child minding. As housework, such activities are of concrete use, they have qualitative value for people in a household who in some measure share or 'exchange' such tasks, as part of a wider endeavour of caring for each other. Their performance further reflect and produce the quality of those social relations (cf. e.g. ibid.: 168–71). As an example, 'mother's cooking' is (at least according to a saying) unique. Following Gregory's formulation, such exchanges of housework may be said to amount to exchanges of 'inalienable things between transactors who are in a state of reciprocal dependence'; that is, to gift exchange in an expanded analytical sense. As paid work, on the other hand, the exact same activities may be exchanged as commodities between anyone who wants to sell or buy them, irrespective of their lack of social relation otherwise. This form of exchange in turn contributes to producing a corresponding 'commodity relation' of independence.

The point however, is that the practice of paid work is a more complex and ambiguous matter, where these two dimensions are at issue simultaneously. Marx developed the distinction between work's use and exchange value precisely to interrogate the implications of such ambiguity. He concentrated in particular on bringing out the exploitation and alienation exercised by reducing the use value of work to its exchange value. Taussig captures this by saying that, in Marx's view, 'what the capitalist acquires in buying the commodity of labour power as an exchange-value is the right to deploy the use-value of labour as the intelligent and creative capacity of human beings to produce more use-values than those that are reconverted into commodities as the wage' (Taussig 1980: 26). Extending from this formulation, one might say that, from the perspective of Gregory's synthesis of Marx and Mauss, part of the use value at issue (beyond what is counted as exchange value), is the rather basic cultural and social (that is, 'intelligent and creative') capacities which indeed enable humans to engage collectively in concrete practices of paid work at all, and such capacities are in no small measure produced and deployed as 'gifts' (cf. Gregory 1982: 29–35). This perspective in turn entails appreciating what sort of use value paid work might

have as conceived by those who practice it, in terms of their engagements in wider social relationships and cultural schemes. It is in part to elucidate such dimensions to the practice of paid work that the gift/commodity distinction is useful.

Several chapters in this collection invoke the distinction, but they concentrate in particular on 'gift' dimensions in the work practices under consideration. Extending from the orientation outlined here, this does not amount to contradicting or trivializing the escalated commoditization or the 'cutting of networks' more commonly highlighted in literature on contemporary capitalist exchange. Rather, the essays add to such perspectives by exploring how the 'flexibilization' of such exchange seems accompanied, even sustained, by a simultaneous (if subtle) proliferation of gift dimensions, through which new forms of sociality arise. Cross's chapter (this volume), for example, examines an Indian setting of flexible offshore production, where hidden exchanges among employees on the shop floor of literal gift items and of work favours across divides of task specialization not only enhance cooperation and production, but also foster new relations across traditional divides of gender and caste that otherwise prevail in this Indian environment. Paraphrasing Martin (this volume), the approach thus allows the contributors to collectively demonstrate how, 'far from simply removing sociality from workplaces, "flexibilization" leads in many contexts to its intensification'.

Bloch and Parry on the Short and Long Term

While several of the volume's chapters invoke or build on the gift/commodity distinction, others engage a related conceptual framework turning on a distinction between 'short-term' and 'long-term' transactional and moral orders. The distinction was developed in a seminal collection of essays edited by Parry and Bloch, entitled *Money and the Morality of Exchange* (Parry and Bloch 1989). Focused specifically on exchanges involving modern money, this volume is relevant for ours in part because we focus on a particular and prevalent kind of monetary exchange, that is, paid work.

In the introduction to the volume, Bloch and Parry (1989) develop a critique of the prevalent idea that modern monetary exchange undermines morality and social relationships, as reflected in Polanyi's thesis about 'the great transformation' and indeed in the 'Western folk theory' mentioned above (see also Maurer 2006). The volume's ethnographic chapters suggest a more complex picture, by showing that exchanges involving money vary enormously in terms of how

they are informed and assessed. Where the chapters converge is in terms of a unity which, in Bloch and Parry's words,

> is to be found neither in the meanings attributed to money nor in the moral evaluation of particular types of exchange, but rather in the way the totality of transactions form a general pattern which is part of the reproduction of social and ideological systems concerned with a time-scale far longer than the individual life. (Bloch and Parry 1989: 1)

It is this totality they conceive of in terms of a relationship between the long and short term. For Bloch and Parry, short-term transactions and moralities concern individual and often acquisitive activities, whereas long-term transactions and moralities are concerned with 'the reproduction of social and cosmic order' (ibid.: 2), that is, the kinds ontological orders (broadly conceived) also touched on above in the context of Mauss.

To appreciate the distinction, it is important to understand that the place of monetary exchanges within this scheme cannot be taken for granted. The chapters in Parry and Bloch's volume amply illustrate how monetary exchanges can be both of a short- and long-term nature even 'within one society', as it were. But whether monetary exchanges in their own right are of a short- or long-term nature (or both), the two domains prevail as distinct in all societies. Bloch and Parry suggest that this is because their coexistence constitutes:

> a symbolic resolution of the problem posed by the fact that transcendental social and symbolic structures must both depend on, and negate, the transient individual . . . If the long-term cycle is not to be reduced to the transient world of the individual, they must be kept separate . . . But if the long term is to be sustained by the creativity and vitality of the short-term cycle, they must also be related. (ibid.: 26)

Bloch and Parry's approach is interesting in the context of our volume for several reasons, two of which are highlighted here. First, transformations associated with flexible capitalism are often held to affect dimensions of temporality. Yet much has been made of this connection in the literature we take issue with in terms of sweeping generalizations. In a critical review, Wajcman rhetorically sums this up by saying that the idea of 'time-space compression' coined by Harvey (1990) has become 'a constant theme in mainstream sociological accounts of post-modern society' (Wajcman 2008: 59). One example is Sennett who, presumably unfamiliar with Parry and Bloch's volume, observes that a key question 'posed by the new flexible capitalism' is how 'long-term goals [can] be pursued in an economy devoted to the

short term' (Sennett 1998: 10). Sennett's answer is essentially that the long term becomes completely overtaken by the short term (cf. e.g. Adam 2006; Eriksen 2001). Parry and Bloch's approach, on the other hand, seems an interesting way to explore the question, if in a manner different to that of Sennett. Neveling's contribution (this volume), for example, draws on and adds new dimensions to Bloch and Parry's distinction by showing that 'the long term' in Mauritius has a long historical trajectory closely related to colonial trade. Developing his argument in part as a critique of Bloch and Parry, Neveling shows that the pursuit of long-term goals entails a measure of uncertainty (commonly associated with the short term, as Sennett sees it), which has long been part of the experience of working in Mauritius. From this perspective, continuity with the past, more than radical rupture, is what distinguishes contemporary flexible capitalist practice in Mauritius.

Secondly, one may wonder why Bloch and Parry's arguments about the simultaneous and ambiguous coexistence of the short and long term became so widely acknowledged (though see Maurer 2006), while Gregory's similar argument about commodity and gift exchange did not, as touched on above. A possible reason for the different reception might have to do with their respective ethnographic objects of study: exotic exchanges of various kinds in PNG in Gregory's case, versus monetary exchange, on the surface of things so universally familiar (like work), in Bloch and Parry's. The merit of Bloch and Parry's perspective with regard to the manner in which it complements Gregory's is the way it traverses highly different cultural settings. This drives home, more convincingly perhaps than Gregory's focus on PNG, the *general* importance of the *specific* social, cultural and historical dimensions that underlie exchange, which is also this volume's focus (cf. Joyce 1987). In the context of our focus on work for example, Weber's famous study of 'the Protestant ethic' (Weber 1958) may seem a wonderful case study of paid work as a long-term transactional order and morality. In its own right it is. Yet, as Joyce observes in his introduction to an interesting collection of historical studies of paid work, Weber's thesis has too often been invoked in impressionistic fashion as 'a single, monolithic ethic' (Joyce 1987: 4), disregarding cultural and social diversity across the Protestant realm. Where Gregory's approach complements that of Bloch and Parry is in the way its combined focus on concrete objects, exchanges and relationships in fact helps direct ethnographic attention to such cultural and historical specifics in contexts of paid work. Again, Neveling's contribution (this volume), with its combined

historical and ethnographic focus on Mauritian sugar and textile production and trade, and on gender relations, is an excellent point in case.

Outline of the Book

The preceding sections on flexible capitalism and approaches to exchange in anthropology are intended as a general introduction to the volume's subject matter and theoretical orientation. The sections have not attempted a more thorough review of either subject. The works considered above are widely acknowledged contributions to the anthropology of exchange, yet they have also been critiqued on different accounts. Some chapters in this volume draw on these works, others extend from them by drawing on related exchange orientations, while yet other chapters engage critically with elements considered in the above. What in the first instance unites the chapters is the way practices of paid work in contexts of flexible capitalism are interrogated in terms of this general theoretical orientation on the basis of anthropological fieldwork. The chapters are all based on fieldwork in settings which in different ways comprise features highlighted as distinctive of flexible capitalism in the wider literature on that subject. Where this literature has emphasized (what we conceptualize as) commodity and short-term entailments of such features, the chapters converge on exploring work practice in such settings as a more ambiguous matter, for example by highlighting the place of gift and long-term dimensions in such practice.

As the volume aims at reaching a broad readership, the empirical chapters are at one level organized with readers in mind whose knowledge of anthropological exchange theory at the outset is limited to what has been outlined above. The first two empirical chapters (by Cross, Grétarsdóttir) examine examples of gift exchange to explore the significance of gift relations and moralities in flexible capitalist work practice. The third chapter (Garsten) engages both the 'short/long term' and the 'commodity/gift' distinctions through a comparative enquiry about social relations in three different settings of flexible work. The fourth chapter (Wood) complicates the commodity conception of labour and capital by interrogating practices where constructs in investment finance are exchanged as partial payments for labour. In the fifth chapter (Knox), a distinction between 'inalienable and alienable objects' is introduced (extending from that between gift and commodity) to enquire about knowledge and skills

as ambiguous entities of exchange, while the sixth chapter (Narotzky) develops the concept of 'reciprocity' by drawing on literatures on respectively moral and political economy, its aim being to interrogate ambiguities pertaining to notions of value. The two chapters which then follow focus on different temporal dimensions of exchange. The seventh chapter (Neveling) is a historically informed engagement with long-term aspects of work, critiquing certain aspects of Bloch and Parry's framing of the concept, while the eighth chapter (Kjaerulff) draws on so-called 'individualistic' exchange orientations, where uncertainty related to the passing of time in exchange has been highlighted as a core dimension. This organization of the book does not reflect a progression in terms of the subtlety of arguments, but it does reflect an ambition to funnel uninitiated readers along, as the chapters progressively engage with more dimensions of exchange theory not considered in this introduction.

At another level, the volume's empirical chapters are organized in terms of overlaps with regard to substantial focus. The first three chapters (by Cross, Grétarsdóttir, Garsten) converge on exploring the proliferation of social relations through exchanges and in terms of moral discourses of very different kinds, which they demonstrate are instrumental for the practice of work, yet exceed economic rationality.

The opening chapter by Cross is set in a Belgian-owned, on-demand diamond-processing factory in southern India, located in what is known as a free trade zone (also known as export processing zones; see Neveling, this volume). Such zones, where strictures to economic competition in terms of taxes, wages and legislation are deliberately eased to attract foreign-based production, have proliferated in recent decades, and become icons of the kind of offshore production often highlighted as a core feature of global flexible capitalism. Another distinguishing feature of this diamond-processing factory is that the craft of diamond cutting, as practised in Belgium, is here broken down into a series of smaller tasks, which are then distributed among a greater number of employees than is the case in Belgium. This kind of 'flexible specialization' facilitates both the transfer and dispersal of production, and the control of it in offshore settings. As Cross notes, most discussions of such settings have primarily focused on the increased commoditization and alienation they facilitate. Yet, what Cross found in the course of his fieldwork was a developed and complex pattern of social relations sustained by exchanges of gift items such food and consumer goods, both among employees and between employees and managers. The argument Cross pursues

is that the competitiveness of this offshore manufacturing plant (in terms of efficiency and cost, for example) in fact depends upon the kinds of gift exchanges and relations that he documents. He shows how this has to do with the social circumstances of such work, both with respect to the local Indian context and in the context of shop-floor action and interaction. In the former regard, the factory is seen among Indian employees as a space relatively free of social restrictions in terms of caste and gender, an important factor both in attracting labour power and in facilitating the building of social relations within the plant. In the latter regard, relations between less experienced staff on the one hand, and more experienced and managerial staff on the other, are 'smoothed' by the frequent exchanges of gifts, in ways that variously enhance production efficiency. Moreover, flirting relations between male and female workers underpinned by gift exchanges help them cope with the intensity of the factory's production regime. Cross's chapter thus demonstrates that gift relations are critical for high rates of productivity: workers are dependent on the latter for secure wages, and high rates of productivity are of course central to the company's rationale for pursuing offshore production in the first place.

Where Cross's focus is a relatively circumscribed ethnographic setting, the following chapter examines a more dispersed but spectacular case of gift exchange, aimed at fostering expanded business networks. The context for Grétarsdóttir's chapter is the neoliberal turn that has marked Icelandic political and economic life over the past couple of decades. Grétarsdóttir's chapter centres on how efforts to 'put Iceland on the map of global business' have also comprised pursuits at the level of social and cultural engineering on the part of the Icelandic government. An imagined 'Viking' past has thus been invoked in imagining contemporary Icelandic identity as transnational and entrepreneurial, well beyond the shores of Iceland. Qualities seen as important from the perspective of neoliberal business ideology have in this way been promoted in terms and ways that far exceed a conventional commodity exchange rationale. Grétarsdóttir's focus is the circumstances of the ceremonial giving of a gift by the state of Iceland to the state of Canada in the year 2000, commemorating the millennium of the alleged first 'Icelandic' immigrants to North America. The gift in question is a piece of art, a sculpture based on a legend from the Icelandic Sagas about a woman and her son, to whom she (according to legend) gave birth while on a journey to the New World; hence the title of the artwork, *The First White Mother in America*. Like supremely inalienable gifts described

in the literature on gift exchange, the sculpture has rich and intricate evocative potential. Grétarsdóttir demonstrates what this entails, as she describes how the gift donation and the sculpture's narrative aids the mobilization of ethnic (Icelandic-Canadian) networks, which serve as concrete conduits for Icelandic business pursuits in Canada, while simultaneously giving participants a sense of social efficacy and ethnic pride as they volunteer time and effort to develop them. More than showing how 'flexible' notions of nationality and nation-states continue to play a role in neoliberal economic practice, Grétarsdóttir argues that the gift of the sculpture, as well as the 'gift relations' pursued in the Icelandic-Canadian volunteer networks considered, bear resemblance to aspects of gift exchange discussed in Melanesian contexts, where gift giving and the development of gift relations serve as ways of spreading 'fame' and of achieving social efficacy (see Munn 1986).

The following chapter by Garsten draws on fieldwork conducted in three different settings over the course of Garsten's research career. Contrasting the organization and practice of work among clients of temporary staffing agencies ('temps'), employees of Apple Computer and experts working for so-called 'think tanks', Garsten shows how flexibility amounts to various things, and the chapter examines the dynamics between the organization and practice of flexible work across this diverse material. Drawing on Turner (1967), Garsten suggests that flexible work has 'liminal' dimensions, in that it denies many structural features of work while simultaneously opening up new configurations of work relationships, which are critical for work performance. Garsten explores this ambiguous character of flexible work in terms of what she calls 'an economy of connection'. In one way, the flexible forms of work considered all accentuate commodity qualities and short-term moralities. 'Temps' work in a social periphery, as replacement for other staff and in various locations; Apple Computer staff experience frequent restructuring and are moved about within the organization to keep it versatile in the fast-paced computing industry; and because 'think-tankers' collect and produce information by consulting with a large number of agencies, they too traverse a social periphery, although of a more prestigious kind than is the case for 'temps'. Yet, Garsten shows that in practice, investing in social relations is critical for continued performance across such economic environments. Precisely because of the tenuous character of such work, connections become critical. Temps care in particular about the quality of their relations with assignment coordinators, and actively cultivate long term

relations with them; Apple Computer staff pursue long-term relations with colleagues both within the company and beyond it to be able to maintain working networks despite, or even because of, frequent organizational changes; and think-tankers are dependent on an array of connections in their pursuit of specialized and reliable information. Garsten suggests that these relations are more 'gift-like' than the flexible environments might suggest, but also that such relations amount to investments in connections in an expanded economic sense, similar to the relations developed through strategic gift exchange in the kinds of exotic settings anthropologists have traditionally studied. Both Apple staff and think-tankers, for instance, may obtain highly valued insider information from strategically well-placed sources, but only if the latter trust that the former can offer valuable information in return at some later point in time. By exploring flexible work's 'liminal' dimensions, Garsten thus demonstrates that, in practice, longer-term relations are creatively pursued through gift-like exchanges, partly in response to the ways in which short-term and commodity aspects of work relations are accentuated at the level of flexible organization.

Taken together, the three first chapters thus demonstrate that gift exchange and gift relations proliferate in flexible capitalist practice, in ways which serve to underpin the exchange of commodities and capital accumulation. As Garsten observes in her chapter (see also Martin, this volume), the very contingency of work that is highlighted more widely as a defining characteristic of flexible capitalism, may in fact foster more 'transactional' ways of cultivating relations in work contexts. However, gift exchange and relations are here, as these chapters also collectively bring out, neither to be conceived in simple terms of an altruistic mind-set, nor in narrow terms of calculated gain. As with Mauss's examples of agonistic gift exchange, such exchanges and relations are better conceived of as 'interested' in a broad sense. Whether in terms of flirting or paternalistic gift relations (Cross), ethnic nostalgia and 'fame' (Grétarsdóttir) or in terms of 'expert distinction' across institutional divides (Garsten), there is an 'economy of connection' at work (in Garsten's words), concerned with durable long-term relations conceived in various moral terms, which simultaneously serve as an underlying and ambiguous premise for pursuits of gain in the narrower monetary sense. What these chapters collectively underscore is thus the diverse ways that diverse kinds of sociality come to flourish in, and underpin, the practice of work in flexible capitalist settings. The chapters by Cross and Grétarsdóttir also highlight wider but specific historical and cultural

dimensions which shape such work, dimensions which are variously brought in focus throughout the volume (see esp. Narotzky, Neveling, this volume), but are often ignored in the wider literature on the subject (see e.g. Baca 2005).

Where the volume's first three chapters in the first instance bring out the proliferation of gift relations and the ways they bolster commodity exchange, the three following chapters by Wood, Knox and Narotzky, take a blurring of the distinction between gift and commodity (and corresponding relations and moralities) as their point of departure. Knox suggests one significance of this ambiguity lies in the way workers are able to reclaim the kind of reciprocal ties seemingly erased in flexible capitalist work contexts. Wood explores how tokens of finance capital serve use-value functions and as spectacles of worth, fostering commitment to work and underpinning longer-term outlooks. Narotzky in turn emphasizes how such ambiguity helps accentuate the exploitation of use value lodged in reciprocal relations.

Wood's chapter is set in the Canadian province of Alberta, a major centre of North America's booming oil and gas sector, both in terms of resource extraction and associated speculative finance. As Wood notes, whereas the world of flexible capitalist finance (such as the trading of derivatives on Wall Street) has in recent years been consolidated as an important domain of ethnographic enquiry, less attention has been devoted to the kind of 'financialization of work' in corporate offices that is the focus of this chapter. Wood concentrates on junior energy corporations seeking financing for the purpose of short-term value creation for shareholders. For such junior corporations, Alberta's recent energy boom has been marked by accelerated merger and acquisition activity, where employees, along with oil and gas assets, often circulate between one corporation and another. In order to attract labour to the kind of short-term contracts this corporate environment affords, junior companies tend to offer stock options as part of their employees' compensation packages, thus promising a chance to earn equity and unevenly share in the corporation's production of surplus value. In this way, workers' labour is exchanged only partly for wages, and partly for optioned capital. Wood's ethnography is focused on the ambiguous nature of this kind of exchange as it works in practice. On the one hand it constitutes workers as direct participants in market exchange of financial energy-related commodities. On the other hand the exchange of work for optioned capital also comprises gift-like expectations of returns affecting long-term outlooks and the sense of social worth.

The tension is brought to a peak during the takeover events which the chapter investigates, where one company is absorbed by another, and the ambiguous value of stock options is realized. Not only is an employee's share (or loss) in terms of earned surplus value measured out; so is the employee's use value (as a labourer) in the process of negotiating a new contract with the acquiring company, a process where an existing option package may be substituted for a new one that mirrors an employee's future deemed worth in the spectacle of finance capital. Wood argues that options and work in this setting thus comprise forms of contested value underpinning social worth, as reflected in employees' ambivalence over the risky business of work that hinges on periodic windfalls that accrue from corporate takeovers in the energy market.

The empirical context of Knox's chapter is the information and communication technology (ICT) sector in the United Kingdom around the turn of the millennium. ICT developments and their implications for capitalist practice have been widely touted, to a point where knowledge and ICTs have achieved a status as icons of 'the new economy' (e.g. Woolgar 2002). Knox considers the significance of this hyperbole through a focus on notions of skills and knowledge invoked in the ethnographic setting of a business initiative in Manchester called MediaNet. MediaNet aims at stimulating economic growth by fostering the Manchester region's development as a hub for the creation of so-called 'new media'. In concrete terms of national and EU policy and funding, the wider discourse on knowledge and ICTs tangibly frames the project. MediaNet first pursued its goals, referring to policy documents rehearsing this discourse, by attempting to facilitate the sharing and circulation of skilled knowledge across different professional specializations involved in the production of new media. As the project unfolded, however, this approach fell short of engaging the project's envisioned participants, and was abandoned in favour of different strategies, resonating in different ways with the same policy documents. Eventually, MediaNet aimed at simply functioning as a broker in the labour market for those who already possessed the relevant conjuncture of skills, as opposed to facilitating the sharing of those skills. Drawing on Weiner's (1992) distinction between alienable and inalienable possessions (which extends from the commodity/gift distinction), Knox suggests that MediaNet's initial approach relied on framing skills and knowledge as alienable entities to be circulated devoid of context and attachment for general economic prosperity. In the subsequent approach, skills and knowledge were

effectively imagined as inalienable and embedded in particular persons and social relations. MediaNet's task then became framed as one of matching already skilled personnel with 'market needs' for the benefit of a public in the Manchester region (rather than merely for profit in a general sense), now imagined as a locality against a wider and precarious global situation invoked in policy documents. Knox shows how, underlying this development, the discourse on the economic significance of knowledge and ICTs continued to serve as an important resource for framing MediaNet's undertakings, simultaneously being co-opted and subverted in contests over the in/alienable value of knowledge and skills. What Knox's informants particularly underscored was the importance of workers' capacities for adjustment in the face of shifting market demands, that is, their 'potential' for continuous learning and creativity as (effectively) inalienable qualities, lodged in wider reciprocal relations such as on-line communities of computing expertise (cf. Kelty 2008). One might say that the use value of labour (that is, the 'intelligent and creative capacity of human beings' in Taussig's formulation, quoted above), here becomes highlighted ethnographically precisely in terms the wider social ties it entails. Knox argues that what we can discern in this ethnographic emphasis on workers' 'potential' as lodged in reciprocal ties is a reworking of public forms, through which people recover some of the sociality seemingly erased in economic and political practices where skills and knowledge are assumed to function simply as alienable commodities.

The ethnographic focus of Narotzky's chapter is two settings in Spain, each of which in their different way has been exposed to wider conjectures of recent economic transformation. One concerns agriculture in rural Catalonia, the other shoe manufacturing in the region of Vega Baja, in the region of Valencia. In both settings, Narotzky suggests globalizing market dynamics have accentuated ambiguities pertaining to value, conceived as economic value on the one hand and moral value on the other. To develop her analysis, Narotzky draws on discussions in moral and political economy, and on the history of labour relations in the regions, to show how notions of economic and moral value have a history of entanglement. In the context of multi-generation family farms in rural Catalonia, known as *casa*, contracts between family members that specify mutual obligations of unpaid work transfers comprise 'reproductive' work such as care for the farm's oldest and youngest generations. Inheritance of the farm as an economic means of sustaining a livelihood has in turn been conditioned on such work, conceived as a 'payoff of love', as Narotzky

puts it. Value has in this way had simultaneous economic and moral dimensions for a long time, but the ambiguity has in recent decades taken on new significance. Whereas earlier the farm's economic viability was assessed in terms of its capacity to sustain household reproduction, it is now being cast more in terms of 'market viability', and its capacity to sustain an urban lifestyle. The sense of reciprocal moral obligation underpinning farming operations in the region has concomitantly become more susceptible to evaluations in terms of 'market value'. In the context of shoe manufacturing in Vega Baja, Narotzky outlines similar developments accentuating the ambiguity of value. Since the 1970s, large-scale factory production of shoes has in large measure been replaced by subcontracting networks, which in turn have proliferated in the Vega Baja area. An effect has been that reciprocal (kinship and neighbourhood) relations underpinned by a sense of moral obligation (a 'traffic of favours' as Narotzky puts it) have come to play a key role in the production of footwear here. Market volatility and dynamics in the global footwear industry therefore have a range of repercussions in the region at the level of reciprocal relations. Such relations are increasingly perceived as 'part of' the market, hence the accentuated ambiguity pertaining to notions of economic and moral value here. Narotzky's argument is that, while such ambiguity is not particularly novel, it is being exploited in new ways, as moral values underpinning reciprocal obligations increasingly become a source of value extraction in the economic sense: use value is being converted in new ways into surplus value. Against the wider literature on flexible capitalism, but complementing this volume's general thrust, Narotzky thus suggests that flexible capitalist exploitation in fact hinges on not fully commoditizing the labour force.

Where these three chapters overlap is not so much at the level of social 'outcomes', as they highlight respectively the persistence of long term outlooks and social worth (Wood), reciprocal relations (Knox) and their exploitation (Narotzky). Their overlap is more in terms of bringing ambiguities into focus on which such outcomes hinge, as they work out across different scales of interaction and imagination. Narotzky concentrates her argument in this regard at the analytical level. 'Exploitation' (understood as the extraction of surplus value) requires paying attention to value as an abstract entity from the perspective of wider scale market exchange, the conventional domain of political economy approaches. Moral economy approaches on the other hand have underscored a lack of 'emic' appreciation of such abstract dynamics, and explored how

the perception of distinct realms of value came about historically in reaction to experiences of exploitation. Narotzky's hunch is that the present circumstances of transformation require a simultaneous focus on both levels so as to appreciate the dynamics of exploitation on the one hand, and on the other the experience of blurred value realms. Knox concentrates in this regard on what in Tsing's phrase might be conceived as practices of 'scale-making' (Tsing 2000). This is most obviously at issue in MediaNet's shifting attempts to frame the significance of its pursuits with reference to policy documents, serving as scale-making devices. These documents allowed MediaNet to accentuate the project's significance in terms of different regional and global scales of community and market relations and exchange, despite the documents' wanting framing (as it turned out) of skills and knowledge as alienable entities. Yet, Knox's chapter also brings out how different scale-making devices (such as on-line forums) simultaneously made reciprocal exchange recognizable as such, more broadly among an emergent self-conscious public of ICT knowledge workers. Conceived as an artefact of scale making, this new public is in part accentuated also by the scale-making effects of aforementioned policy documents. Such productive overlaps – what Tsing conceives as 'contingent articulations' (ibid.: 119 ff.) – hinge on the ambiguous quality of entities exchanged across different scales of interaction and imagination, and the relations and moralities involved. Similar dynamics are at work in Wood's chapter, where constructs of speculative finance capital serve as ambiguous scale-making devices. The dramatic performance that for Tsing distinguishes economic scale making (indeed Tsing [ibid.] draws on examples from Alberta's resource finance sector), is in Wood's analysis played out in terms of the value of labour. Following Graeber (2001: 49–89), one could say that the social 'importance of actions' – that is, the value of work in the broadest sense – for Wood's corporate employees becomes dramatized not only at the time of contract negotiations in terms of option packages, but at an everyday level through more mundane spectacles, ranging from various fantastical news broadcasts focused on Alberta's place in the economy (cf. Tsing 2000) to the stock tickers that Wood notes could usually be seen on employees' computer screens. As Wood shows, such spectacles ambiguously underpin longer-term outlooks and a sense of social worth, even if the work contract's more tangible returns at a further remove are uncertain. Taken together, these chapters thus suggest how ambiguities pertaining to value and exchange as they work out across different scales of interaction and imagination can not only enhance exploitation, but

simultaneously constitute a canvas in terms of which to frame new inalienable forms of sociality and identity. Such dynamics have been brought out in various idioms in exchange-related literature (e.g. Graeber 2001), and they are also at issue in other contributions to the volume, though at the level of argument the emphasis in these chapters lies elsewhere. In Grétarsdóttir's chapter they can thus be discerned in ethnic terms, in Martin's chapter in terms of tradition (*kastom*), while in Neveling's and to an extent in Garsten's chapter it is in terms of temporal horizons.

The next two chapters partially overlap in terms of their engagement with temporal entailments of exchange in flexible capitalist practice. As Munn observed in a famous review essay, as an 'inescapable dimension of all aspects of social experience and practice', temporality 'frequently fragments into all the other dimensions and topics anthropologists deal with' (Munn 1992: 93). In this vein, temporality has often figured as a more underlying or superficially engaged element in literature on exchange and in that on flexible capitalism. Some temporal dimensions of flexible capitalist work are brought out for more sustained consideration in these two contributions.

Neveling's chapter simultaneously engages two such dimensions, one being the widely entertained Occidentalist assumption that flexible capitalism constitutes a radical historical break with earlier forms of capitalist practice (cf. Carrier 1995). Neveling confronts this assumption by exploring important historical continuities between colonial labour regimes and contemporary flexible labour in offshore production. The setting of Neveling's chapter resembles that considered by Cross, albeit in the context of Mauritius, which Neveling investigates, the notion export processing zones (EPZs) prevails. Where Cross mainly concentrates on the practice and significance of gift exchange on the factory shop floor, Neveling develops his arguments through a combined ethnographic and historical perspective on economic practice in Mauritius, from the colonial incorporation of the island into the global sugar industry in the nineteenth century to the time when EPZs became established in the 1970s. Such a combined ethnographic and historical approach is rare in research on flexible capitalist practice, and it allows an empirically rich basis for Neveling's critique. The trajectory of capitalist practice in Mauritius shows that many of the ills now attributed to flexible capitalism are not particularly novel. Vulnerabilities to wider global trade, and related insecurities of work and beyond, were familiar to people in Mauritius long before the introduction of EPZs. Neveling shows that attempts to cope with such circumstances are hardly novel either,

and the latter provides his leverage for developing two related points on the second dimension of temporality considered in the chapter. The first point (according with Bloch and Parry's argument) is that work in capitalist settings should not necessarily be interpreted as a short-term moral engagement or transactional pattern. Neveling indicates that work from the perspective of Mauritian workers, also in contemporary EPZ settings, may be understood in terms of long-term moralities and transactional cycles. Neveling's fascinating account of ghost attacks and exorcism on factory shop floors, and his critical engagement with Ong's account of similar phenomena in Malaysia (Ong 1987), serve to underscore how work indeed involves long-term horizons of existential proportions, not only lying ahead in a worker's life time, but also going back to the concrete colonial context that Neveling considers, which has shaped Mauritian cultural outlooks and social relations. The second point Neveling argues on this basis (against Bloch and Parry), is that the notion of long-term moralities and transactional cycles is often confounded with notions of firm structure and stability, indeed even in Bloch and Parry's famous introductory chapter (Bloch and Parry 1989). This allows for false dichotomies, between an ostensibly stable past and unstable present, for example, which underlie not only literature on flexible capitalism, but also a good few anthropological conceptions of exchange, cast in terms of stable gift and unstable commodity relations. Neveling's argument here is that long-term morality and transactions should be understood more as something to strive for, which requires deliberation and action, and which does not necessarily 'work out'.

Kjaerulff's chapter complements and extends the second point developed in Neveling's chapter, although from a different theoretical perspective. The chapter critically engages the prevalent rationale that flexible work produces a heightened sense of risk and uncertainty, and suggests that a reverse causality may also be at work. Here, uncertainty as a more basic dimension of living fosters a proliferation of the kind of flexible work which is the chapter's empirical focus. Kjaerulff develops his argument by juxtaposing a careful examination of Sennett's famous book *The Corrosion of Character* (Sennett 1998), and his research in rural Denmark among people practising flexible work via the internet from their homes, work known as 'teleworking'. He concentrates on the way Sennett develops his key analytical notion of 'routine' in the historical context of industrial work to show that Sennett's argument here bears implicit affinity to a body of more 'individualistic' exchange-oriented theory

(e.g. Berger and Luckmann 1966; Bourdieu 1977). This body of theory has highlighted the place of routines and agency in cultural change and reproduction, along with the temporal and representational dimensions of exchange. What Kjaerulff notes is that this theoretical affinity becomes strikingly absent when Sennett turns to the ostensible demise of routines and rise of uncertainty in contexts of flexible capitalism. Drawing on this body of theory and on his telework research, Kjaerulff then develops an expanded conception of uncertainty and flexibility. The kind of temporal dimensions of exchange famously discussed by Bourdieu (1977) imply that something like 'uncertainty' is an inherent predicament of living (cf. Garsten's, Wood's and Knox's arguments in this volume, respectively about 'liminality', 'meantime', and 'potential'). Kjaerulff suggests this predicament may account for a finding brought out by his research, namely that telework unfolds not only as straightforward 'active' engagements, but also as more symbolic ones, turning on ICTs ambiguous potentials. The latter, he argues, may serve to achieve what he conceives of as a measure of 'flexibility' against socially reinforced ideals of work and family, which his informants regularly found compromised. As with 'uncertainty', Kjaerulff suggests such symbolic practices of 'flexibility' are familiar from the wider exchange-oriented literature, here commonly cast as a matter of representation and performance (e.g. Bourdieu 1977). From this perspective, he argues that, in trying to cope with a kind of uncertainty that has long prevailed, new means of creating flexibility afforded by telework are added to familiar ones, and as such teleworking is embraced as an asset.

Through different theoretical routes, Neveling and Kjaerulff thus challenge connected elements underlying a widely entertained idea, namely that flexible capitalism entails a 'great transformation' in terms of temporality (e.g. Harvey 1990; Sennett 1998; Eriksen 2001; Adam 2006). Through their exploration of the dynamic and normative dimensions of the 'long term' understood as historically situated ideals, the realization of which cannot be taken for granted in lived experience, these chapters also demonstrate the merit in moving beyond the conception of an entrenched divide between collectivistic and individualistic approaches in anthropological exchange theory. The 'long term' from this perspective bears affinity to notions of 'tradition' as discussed in another rich body of anthropological literature (see e.g. Otto and Pedersen 2005), allowing for a different understanding of the 'nostalgic' lament (Strangleman 2007) of flexible capitalism's detrimental effects.

In an afterword, Martin considers some wider significances of the collection from the perspective of two ‘end points’ which can be said to frame it. One is the recent global financial crisis; the other is Melanesian ethnography, which has been particularly influential in the development of anthropological exchange theory.

Concluding Introductory Remarks

Against a wider trend in mainstream literature on flexible capitalism, this volume explores a more complex picture. In the context of paid work, where change has been a core theme of debate, it interrogates dimensions of contemporary social changes along with continuities which have received limited attention. The chapters converge in suggesting that sociality proliferates in flexible capitalism, in ways which simultaneously sustain work regimes more conventionally seen as simply tearing social relations apart. By exploring the conjunction of anthropological fieldwork and exchange theory in this context, an aim of the volume is to introduce a wider readership to a promising direction for further inquiry. In the comprehensive literature review cited above, the sociologist of work Tim Strangleman (2007) not only identifies the ‘trend’ which our volume aims to move beyond. He also suggests a need for a reorientation of research within this field of study, both theoretically and methodologically in terms of situated qualitative empirical studies of contemporary practices of work. The collection of essays presented here outlines the contours of a way in which such a reorientation might be focused. In as much as the practice of paid work remains at heart a practice of exchange, we hope to convince a broad audience that this volume is only just a beginning; that is, that an anthropological approach to empirical enquiry on exchange has much to contribute to further research on work in flexible capitalism. Given this ambition of the book, it is pertinent to end this introduction by also alerting the reader to a possible limitation when attempting this approach, all the more since ‘ethnography’ (divorced from anthropology) in recent years has become increasingly embraced across a broad interdisciplinary canvas as a ‘method’. To the extent that ethnography is taken to offer an empirically richer picture from ‘the native’s point of view’, and that picture in turn is accepted as the whole picture, it can lead to a kind of reductionist approach which is no less problematic than the kind this volume aims to move beyond, whether executed within or beyond the discipline of anthropology (see e.g. Kapferer 2005; Carrier 2012). It is for this

reason that the legacy of anthropological enquiry on exchange has been emphasized in the above as an important resource for the kind of approach which this volume aims to advance. At least part of that legacy is not quite as alien to an interdisciplinary readership as the framing of it here might suggest, as the references above to Polanyi, Marx and Durkheim's close collaborator Mauss amply indicate. On the other hand, an anthropologically informed engagement with the kinds of issues brought in focus in this book may in fact be close to the spirit in which such foundational social scientists carried out their enquiries around a century ago.

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