“Total Money Makeover”: Culture and the Economization of Everything

Economic models now occupy a central place in the analysis of American culture. The “hegemony of economic explanations of cultural practices” (Koritz 1999) has been with us for some time. Concepts such as “cultural capital,” “the literary marketplace,” and “modes of exchange” are regularly deployed to demystify culture’s relationship with power and profit. As useful as economic models have been for opening up new avenues of analysis in American studies, we wonder if this turn to economy in American studies doesn’t privilege economic models in ways that ought to be scrutinized. Indeed, it can be argued that the recent financial crises in the United States and Europe are consequences of unquestioned faith in the explanatory and organizing power of economics as a field of knowledge. We must ask whether the economization of everything, along with the dominance of economic models for analysis, has deprived culture, and cultural study more generally, of modes of resistance and a distinctive field of action. Is it possible or desirable, without reverting to an untenable idealism, to recover a sense of culture as a privileged domain?

The 2013 CAAS conference invites proposals for papers on the topic of culture and economics, but especially papers that privilege culture as a field of knowledge and subject the economic to its critical gaze.

Papers on other topics relevant to the interdisciplinary study of American culture, history, and society are also welcome.

Please submit abstracts of 300-words, along with a brief bio, to the conference organizers, Victoria Lamont and Kevin McGuirk, Department of English, University of Waterloo, at caas2013@uwaterloo.ca by March 15, 2013. Presentation time for papers is 20 minutes maximum. Panel submissions will also be considered.

$ With apologies to Dave Ramsey.
Some points of departure:

What is value?
economics as an art
materialisms (other than the economic)
alternative economics
ecologies versus economies
material culture between art and economics
art and commodification
art without money
art and class
art and philanthropy
“Money is a kind of poetry” (Wallace Stevens)/ Poetry is a kind of money
culture and economic anxiety
economic prosperity and cultural prosperity
figures of poverty and negation in culture
figures of the economic in culture (cultural capital, etc.)
the art market, the literary market
the artistic career as an economic phenomenon
economic metaphors we live by
making sense and making money
semiotics of money
culture and/as waste
the humanities, social sciences, and the commercialization of research
government and the subsidy of culture
stories of the economy in media and art
thematics of money, exchange, etc.
things, thingness and monetary value
histories of money
money and political cultures
labour and art/ leisure and art
“cultural work”/ cultural leisure
religion with and against profit
piety and/as resistance
“the creative class” and/or the uncreative
collecting culture for and against profit
idling, loafing and other unproductive activity