Placing the ‘post-social’ market: Identity and spatiality in the xeno-economy

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Abstract
Following Knorr Cetina and Bruegger (2002), an understanding of financial markets as ‘post-social’ environments has gained sway. This claim is premised on the idea that new technologies, in particular screen displays of complex real-time financial information, have displaced ‘the market’ from the social and economic relations in which it might otherwise be assumed to be embedded. We argue that recent historical transformations in trading and markets are better characterized as ‘re-spatializations’ involving shifts in the placing and mediation of market spatiality. Material from the City Lives project and other sources is analysed to explore the transformation of the London International Financial Futures Exchange (LIFFE) from the early 1980s onwards. Using the notion of ‘xeno-economy’ (cf. Rotman’s (1987) ‘xeno-money’) it is argued that the spatial redistributions of the market did not so much efface sociality as set up new kinds of relations between local traders and institutions, notably mediated through geographical displaced ‘trading arcades’. The immanence of modes of sociality to markets as intrinsically and necessarily social objects is thereby emphasized.

Keywords
financial markets, post-social, practice approaches, traders, xeno-money

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Introduction

It is commonplace to acknowledge a ‘turn to practice’ across a broad range of social science areas, including marketing (see Araujo et al., 2008). While the precise terms of this turn differ markedly across each instantiation, it is possible to discern a number of key general characteristics. These include a rejection of simplistic cause–effect relationships in favour of a focus on the contingent emergence of phenomena and the ‘work’ which goes into their ‘making’; a general tendency towards a form of constructionist epistemology often coupled with process-based ontology; and a refusal of dualistic thinking – e.g. subject/object; mind/body; theory/practice – with a particular concern to suspend the analytic category of ‘the social’ as a catch-all explanatory device. We might then describe the turn to practice as the empirical programme of post-structuralism (in the same way that conversation analysis is viewed as the empirical programme of ethnomethodology).

It is the last of these characteristics – the move towards ‘post-social’ or ‘object-centred’ analysis – which concerns this paper. To what extent is it possible to think about markets and economics without some version of the social acting as the basis for explanation? Can one really think consumption and exchange without associations between persons forming the core object of analysis? That is to say, without considering the determination of events through differentiated non-human actors?

Practice-based approaches do, of course, concern themselves with human action. In fact it might be said they consider little else. The ‘performative’ approach to economics developed by Donald MacKenzie, Michel Callon, Fabian Muniesa and Yuval Millo, for example, aims to dispense with the model of the market as a set of autonomous inhuman mechanisms and in its place offers a sophisticated image of calculative practices, techniques and associations between people and things that form assemblages which perform themselves as ‘markets’ (see Callon, 1998; Callon et al., 2007; MacKenzie, 2008; MacKenzie et al., 2008). This performance is accomplished through the constitution of new economic objects (or ‘market devices’) such as financial derivatives and the Black-Sholes model which although appearing to have an independent objective existence are in fact entirely contingent upon the network of social and technical relations through which they have emerged (see MacKenzie, 2008). Thus practice-based approaches of this kind might at first glance be seen as offering a complete socialization of economics and markets.

This proves ultimately not to be the case. MacKenzie and colleagues (2008) argue that once they have been constituted, market devices rapidly acquire their own capacity to act within a network of relations. Moreover, market devices allow for connections and associations with other networks, thereby amplifying and ramifying the potential to act for the network as a whole in a way which far exceeds the abilities or desires of its human participants, as recent financial crises have powerfully demonstrated. The performative approach to economics then takes the capacity to act of networked relations between people and things as its object of analysis without apportioning greater relevance a priori to one or the other (an analytic stance once termed the ‘second principle of symmetry’ by Callon, 1986).

Our argument in this paper is that while such an analysis quite properly draws attention to the mediation of human action by technical procedures and devices, the social nevertheless stubbornly persists as a matter of concern. More specifically, there are distributions of identity between human actors within markets which remain relatively intransigent in their form, despite massive changes in the networked relations and practices which make up these markets. The example we will use to advance this argument is the way that the subject position of the ‘local trader’ has remained a relevant live concern for LIFFE and Intercontinental Exchange Futures (ICE Futures), despite the
globalization and technical transformations of international financial futures markets. We argue that LIFFE and ICE Futures are not ‘post-social’ markets but rather ones which have been subject to successive re-spatializations which have dis-placed and re-placed the subject position of ‘local trader’ over time.

In the following section we outline our objections to the concept of a ‘post-social’ market and the necessity of considering market spatiality. We then provide a series of examples to support our claims for the relevance of the figure of the ‘local trader’ drawn from first-hand accounts of market change. These are taken both from previously unanalysed interview-elicited accounts provided by participants about the history of LIFFE to the British Library’s ‘City Lives’ project researchers, and from our own ongoing research into the transformation of the ICE Futures, primarily conducted with that market’s ‘local’ traders. Finally, we offer some reflections on the relative persistence of the social within complex, self-referentially defined market spaces that we refer to as the ‘xeno-economy’.

Market space

In their much cited article on the rise of the ‘post-social’ market, Knorr Cetina and Bruegger argue that technical shifts in the nature of trading in financial markets has depersonalized, dehumanized and, in so doing, fundamentally transformed the nature of market interaction. The contrast they make is between the sort of interpersonal trading found in telephone based and open cry trading with screen based trading. As they put it (2002: 163):

After the introduction of screens, the market became fully available and identified as a separate entity in its own right for the first time – with prices, interests and the relevant information all visually indicated on screen. The market on screen is a ‘whole’ market and a global presence; it subdivides into different information feeds and dealing systems, but these are configured to form a global picture framed by the boundaries of the screen, which also serves as a medium for transactions.

Knorr Cetina and Bruegger argue, in effect, that through the virtualization and reframing of market information the social element of interacting with the market is somehow ‘lost’. As a consequence it is irrelevant to ask what sorts of subject positions are involved in managing these interactions, since there are no substantive social relations in the usual sense of that term. But we would point out that the most striking aspect of the changes they describe is not so much a de- or re-socialization as a re-spatialization. The sociality of a market is undoubtedly altered by the technology through which it is delivered, but this was as true of the introduction of ticker-tape, the telegraph, the telephone and earlier generations of computers as it is of advanced screen-based trading. As markets are fundamentally interactive environments, any new form of communications technology or mode of communication introduced to them will necessarily alter their social form and the sorts of subject positions they afford. The assertion that a screen-based market is therefore post-social implies that previous markets were in some sense ‘more social’ – in other words, they were less prone to determination by non-human agents.

For Knorr Cetina and Bruegger, the screen that displays complex financial information is the critical mediator in the market. They claim that it enables traders to develop the belief that the information brought together on the screen has a relative autonomy in relation to the human actors and actions in which it is entangled:
The argument we make is that the exteriorization, assemblage and contextualization of ‘the market’ on screen construe the market, which at one time was dispersed among isolated and specific human connections, as an external ‘life form’ to which traders relate in sometimes adversarial forms of bonding while at the same time remaining able to ‘enter’ the life form and to become part of it. (Knorr Cetina and Bruegger, 2002: 164)

The danger inherent in this argument, of course, is that in rendering screen based markets as in some sense exceptional, it misses and/or sidelines the non-human content of all markets. That is to say, all markets are mediated to some extent by artefacts that expand and complexify human action – indeed, markets themselves and the products that are traded there are both such artefacts. Or put slightly differently, interpersonal subjective relations have always been mediated by objects or ‘interobjective’ relations during the course of interactions with the market. Notwithstanding this, Knorr Cetina and Bruegger (2002) have clearly identified something important that takes place with the introduction of the screen, but we would nevertheless argue that the fundamental shift here is a spatial rather than a social one tout court.

Geographers (Harvey, 1990; Crang and Thrift, 2000; Pickles, 2004); literary theorists (Ross, 1989; Moretti, 1999, 2007); social, historical and scientific theorists (de Certeau, 1984; Latour, 1993); political economists (Cohen, 2000; Cameron and Palan, 2004); and many others have all analysed spatiality not just as the setting for social and economic activity, but moreover, as constitutive of it. In many social scientific contexts space is treated as an essentially passive ‘container’ for the complex drama of human interaction and development taking place within it. History is regarded as the essential locus of social dynamism while space provides little more than a backdrop. As the writers cited above and many others have argued in recent years, however, spatiality is never simply passive. Subject positions are worked out and given a historicity through spatial practices which combine formal institutional systems (e.g. local, national and international legal codes) and informal, interpersonal practices (e.g. divisions between private and public, hierarchical and permeable social relations) which are articulated through language and individual practice (e.g. the performance of gender, identity, status, being-in-the-know, etc.) (see de Certeau, 1984; Lefebvre, 1991 (1974) for classic accounts).

To be ‘post-social’, a market would have to be ‘postspatial’ and there is simply no such thing yet in our experience as a market that so exceeds the spatial as to be sensibly rendered in such terms. Rather, and rather more modestly, there are complex, contingent and highly mediated transformations in the socio-spatial formations that compose markets. This results in sometimes dramatic and sometimes subtle redistributions of the spatially grounded subject positions that are threaded across a given market. The socio-spatial content of the market may change with the introduction of the screen – it cannot do otherwise – but it does not disappear.

While we clearly take issue, therefore, with some aspects of Knorr Cetina and Bruegger’s (2002) characterization of contemporary markets as post-social, we do agree with them that markets are being (re)constituted in the context of significant changes in the nature of socioeconomic life. Specifically, the spatiality of the market is being reconstituted not simply with respect to existing spatial forms – states, national economies, international systems, etc. – but with respect to an increasingly pervasive and, at first sight, anomalous space that we describe here as the ‘xeno-economy’.

The idea of a xeno-economy is developed out of Brian Rotman’s relabelling of Eurodollars as ‘xeno-money’. As he put it:
For ‘Euro’ and ‘dollars’ one should write ‘xeno’ and ‘money’ respectively. The Eurodollar has long since shed its attachment to Europe. It is in fact, no longer geographically located, but circulates within an electronic global market which, though still called the Eurodollar market, is now *the* international capital market. (Rotman, 1987: 90)

This superficially seemingly unlocatable market allows its product – xeno-money – to take on the mode of being of the signifier of value that is related only and inevitably to its own future states of value, as exemplified by the relation between the futures and spot markets for the imaginary currency of the Eurodollar. The value of xeno-money is then entirely self-referential. Of course, things have not stood still in the 20 years since Rotman wrote his account. In the intervening period one could perhaps say that currency has somewhat lost its currency or at least its absolute primacy as a medium of exchange. The Eurodollar market is not now *the* international capital market. Rather, what we inhabit is a world in which all manner of financial instruments of ever more abstruse nature and derivation can and are being traded against each other in a dizzying whirl.

As Rotman (1987) also implies, the geographical dislocation of capital markets from states has not taken the form of a *relocation* somewhere else. Rather, through various legal means, capital markets have been constituted outside of any recognizable or (for the moment at least) regulated socioeconomic space (Palan, 2003). They are everywhere and nowhere – they are placeless and increasingly so. Where there was once a relatively legible market space, trading now takes place in everything, everywhere, in a system of exchange that, despite its reliance on various forms of general equivalence, resembles more and more a barter based bazaar.

As the various processes unleashed in the 1970s have accelerated and proliferated, they have come to encompass more and more aspects of economic activity and, as a result, increasing aspects of everyday life. We use the term xeno-economy in this context to refer to the overall delinking of markets from conventional spatial locations (often captured by concepts such as ‘globalization’ or ‘offshore’, cf. Cameron and Palan, 2004) in contrast to that partial aspect of this process that Knorr Cetina and Bruegger describe as the ‘post-social’.

From this it ought to follow that if the markets which make up the xeno-economy become decoupled from clear spatial location then this ought also to result in the sort of de-socialization that Knorr Cetina and Bruegger assert. But the history of LIFFE and ICE Futures tells us otherwise. In the move from ‘open-pit’ trading to a largely electronic system, both individual and institutional responses sought to replace the lost spatial relations (social as well as business) in order to restore a legible, humanized spatial form to the market. These responses took the form of resistances (traders staging walkouts), exclusions (new boundaries being set and policed) and inclusions (new participants entering and reshaping the market). Some were the result of planned transitions (though not always with planned outcomes). Others were spontaneous reactions – positive and negative – to the new market structure. In other words there was a re-spatialization of the market in response to changes which re-inscribed social relations and subject positions – notably that of the ‘local trader’.

In the following sections we will now turn to consider LIFFE and ICE Futures. We will offer an account of the ways in which these particular markets and their various participants have responded to changes in the socio-spatial context – some planned, some not – in which they function. We will argue that having been confronted with the unsettling openness of virtualized markets, the response came in the emergence of processes of ‘re-placement’ which reinvested economic activities with a legible and usable spatial form and meaning. The ‘local trader’, which constituted a problematic subject position often seen as an obstacle to the globalization and virtualization of markets, returned through processes of re-inscription and re-placement. This does not
necessarily imply the simple rediscovery of lost spatial forms and subjectivities but rather a complex set of processes whereby old and new spatial forms are being created and/or reasserted by individuals and groups within and across a variety of institutional forms (public and private, corporate and state, personal and collective).

**The Glocalization of LIFFE**

The London International Financial Futures Exchange, LIFFE, which began trading in 1982, in many ways typifies the transformation of financial and securities markets during the 1980s and 1990s. Starting out as a self-consciously innovative futures market based on experiences of the Chicago futures exchange, LIFFE was from the outset regarded as a pioneering city institution (Kynaston, 1997). Not only were the traded products new in their increasing abstraction, but over time LIFFE was to innovate trading practices that would later become the norm for all city institutions. Read in one way, LIFFE’s history is the archetype of the developmental trajectory of the post-social market. Revelling in the language of deregulation and globalization, and deliberately adopting the brash and often aggressive individualism of the Chicago exchanges, LIFFE began trading as a consequence of the Thatcher government’s removal of exchange controls from British markets in 1979. LIFFE was a self-consciously ‘global’ player even before the idea of globalization had fully entered the public or media lexicon.

The account here of LIFFE’s transformation into a fully screen-based market is derived from materials gathered under the auspices of the ‘City Lives’ project, whose results are held by the British Library’s Sound Archive (see Courtney and Thompson, 1996, for a brief account of this resource as well as some of its highlights). The project encompasses extensive interviews with some 200 participants in ‘the City’ during a period of rapid transformation and thus constitutes an invaluable resource against which more recent changes can be assessed. The interviews with participants are exemplary in the ways in which they have encouraged and elicited deep reflection and huge self exposure across whole swathes of life, work, family background and dynamics and, indeed, the broad historical and institutional context in which they worked. The material we discuss here is offered as supporting material for the argument we are making – we are not presenting a thorough analysis of either the whole corpus or the individual interview in question. Our interest here in the material is then theoretically driven and the use we make of it is illustrative and for the purposes of exemplification.

The extracts we will discuss come from an interview with John Barkshire, the central figure in the founding of the LIFFE (Kynaston, 1997: 20). In his interviews, Barkshire outlines the background to the creation of LIFFE in complex spatial terms:

> It really started with the five months that I spent in New York and Chicago on Mercantile House’s behalf, looking at the futures markets to see what was in it for us. And that led me to come back in September of 1979 with two recommendations, one was that Mercantile House should be involved in the futures market . . . and secondly a view that the futures markets were going to spread outside Chicago, and they were already beginning to spread into New York, and that if they did spread outside Chicago they were likely to become international, as international players were starting to become members of the Chicago markets, and if they became international there ought to be a market in Europe, and if there was going to be a market in Europe it jolly well ought to be in London. And so ... I mean they weren’t very clever thoughts, they were just logically looking at the way futures had developed since they’d been invented in 1975, till that period in 1979. In 1975 they were, like all of the
futures markets in Chicago, dominated by the locals, individual traders, who made up all the trading. By 1979 the major Wall Street houses were becoming involved in the markets; one or two were beginning to become members, or just starting to buy seats on the markets, and it was quite plain that the markets were going to become institutionalized rather than dominated by locals. And it was not as plain but fairly plain that they were going to become international. (BLSA interview)

The spatial redistribution that Barkshire claims as his vision of the future of the market requires a little unpacking. On the one hand it clearly embraces the possibilities of internationalization (and, later, globalization) opened up by deregulation, but does not present a simple spatial displacement of existing market forms. Barkshire’s internationalism is one in which the existing spatiality of the markets spreading from Chicago to New York are further internationalized within and through specific spatial networks and centres – ‘it jolly well ought to be in London’ – and, of course, within the bounded market of futures transaction. As such, Barkshire’s vision was, from the outset, ‘glocalized’ (Swyngedouw, 1997) or, more specifically, ‘glurbanized’ (Jessop, 2000). These twin portmanteau terms direct attention to the negotiation of the global in the local (and vice versa). In other words, despite what would later become a rather simplistic narrative of ‘globalization’, LIFFE was always couched within a complex and emergent urban spatial matrix. Barkshire’s vision is of a market with clear boundaries to entry and activity, but one that is already international, and distributed across several sites and their interrelations.

At the centre of this spatial mix is Barkshire’s distinction between a market dominated by ‘locals’ and one that is ‘institutionalized’. ‘Locals’ are professional traders that trade on their own account, as opposed to trading funds for clients. Their main activity is speculation on the movement of prices within markets, typically through short-term positions. The practice of local trading is perhaps to be witnessed in its purest form in the act of ‘scalping’ – the trading off of the difference between the bid price of an instrument (the price at which participants in the market are willing to purchase) and its ask price (the price at which participants in the market are willing to sell). In Chicago in the 1970s locals were central to the operation of derivatives markets: ‘the army of professional speculators . . . who traded on their own account in the futures market there . . . provided up to 60% of total turnover’ (Kynaston, 1997: 10).

The subject position ‘local trader’ is seen as a key ingredient to successful futures trading because of its association with risk. In trading discourse, locals provide the ongoing bedrock of trading activity that delivers the liquidity deemed to be essential to any functional market. Locals boost the number of participants and transactions in a particular market and thus are key to maintaining market dynamism that might otherwise gradually be dominated and trammelled by big investors. In addition to their sheer number, the ‘local trader’ is taken as the source of fine-grained market knowledge that adds a depth of analysis of particular trading opportunities unavailable to the institutional investor. As one of our informants from the IPE comments:

When trading in the pit, most of us would trade over the very short term, trying to capture small profits quickly with little risk, taking advantage of brief inefficiencies that made a certain price either cheap or expensive. This could be done by watching the flow of orders into the market and knowing exactly what every traded month was worth against another. We could also buy the market if we saw Goldman Sachs for instance, buying the market. And taking a loss was far easier because we could see where the orders were to get out. (Trader T: personal email)
Barkshire’s most significant claim, therefore, is less the macro-spatial distribution of the futures markets across national borders than his belief that the market could and would function more effectively once the institutions took over from locals such as Trader T, whose local knowledge is expected to be effaced by the demise of pit trading. The displacement of the market is, thus, two-fold for Barkshire – internationalism and institutionalism replace localism both in the sense of the ‘locally’ concentrated market and the ‘local’ knowledge embedded in the social and personal networks of the traders themselves.

This hostility to the ‘local’ was not just Barkshire’s personal preference but also a strategic choice based on assumptions about the risk aversion of the investors he needed to create LIFFE in the first place. Although a key feature of futures markets in their initial form, locals and market localness (particularly in Chicago) were regarded as sources of potential instability. Barkshire believed that big institutional players would need to be reassured that entering a derivatives market still seen by many as inherently risky would not entail an organization swimming in the seemingly tawdry and dangerous waters of a market of speculation:

Why should these commercial people, who were good at making soap powders or ball-bearings, or whatever it may be, why should they take a risk of moving into what they perceived as a risky market? And their treasurer might well stand there and say, ‘it’s the avoidance of risk’. And they’d say, ‘well we did read something about it, and it’s locals taking risks, whatever locals might be. We’ve read words like “speculators”; we’ve read things like “gambling” and all those sorts of things. Doesn’t this happen in the market?’ (BLSA interview)

As this extract implies, assessments of market risk were to some extent linked to the spatiality of the participants. It was perhaps because of this that at the outset risky, speculative locals were specifically excluded from LIFFE – all the trading ‘seats’ being taken by institutions (Kynaston, 1997). Although LIFFE wanted to reassure its clients by restricting access in this way, it also recognized the significance of the subject position of the ‘local trader’ to market function. The physical architecture and appearance of the trading floor, for example, specifically emulated the set up of the locally dominated Chicago exchanges:

There was never any doubt that it would be an open outcry market, but it was a conscious decision to base it physically on the Chicago model of futures markets rather than on, say, the cocoa or coffee markets in London. This model had three prime characteristics: pits (not rings), with steep steps; open, low booths (not boxes that allowed private conversation); and a big display board. The Chicago model also dictated that the traders would wear coloured jackets, never before seen in the city. Each member chose something different, and almost the only one rejected by LIFFE was a Union Jack design, the worry being that it would be seen on television as selling the pound down the river. (Kynaston, 2001: 610)

All aspects of the new market, both inside and out, were designed, consciously or not, with a view to ‘public’ consumption. The placing of a Chicago-style market in the Royal Exchange Building in the City of London, and the initial relative marginalization of the locals were used to send a variety of messages about the nature and function of the market to a range of viewers and actors. LIFFE used the physical space of the trading floor both to narrate its spatial and institutional relationships to others markets and to discipline the behaviours and identities of its (selected and exclusive) market participants. This was done in response to perceptions of the changing nature and spatiality of the wider markets in which LIFFE was situated, including, perhaps rather
anachronistically, the national sensitivities of British investors and commentators over the fate of Sterling. As such, LIFFE constituted itself as a ‘special public’ (cf. Merrill and Clark, 1934), wrought within a complex matrix of boundaries and identities. It was not long, however, before one aspect of the initial set up had to be radically transformed. Soon after opening to an exclusively institutional clientele, LIFFE felt obliged to admit locals in order to deliver not only the enhanced liquidity with which their presence is often associated but also the willingness to engage speculatively on their own part in order to enable an opposite party to hedge (Kynaston, 2001: 610).

**Screens and arcades**

Much as Barkshire and other powerful market makers might have been able to plan and construct their trading environments to a degree, they could only do so in the wider context of a rapidly changing economy. While Barkshire’s designs for LIFFE were a response to the increasing international reach of emerging futures markets initially based elsewhere in the early 1980s, the rapid globalization of securities and derivatives markets soon brought about further significant changes in trade spaces – specifically the introduction of screen-based trading. LIFFE began to move to electronic trading in June 1998 (Kynaston, 2001: 780), emulating many other markets’ initial partial moves away from complete mediation of trade by open outcry pits, by offering an electronic trading platform to run alongside activity taking place in its pits.

Given the obvious significance placed on the physical design of the market space, even this partial shift to screen-based trading constituted a very fundamental change and one that triggered complex responses. Ostensibly, moving away from the open pit promised to further remove the risky idiosyncrasies of ‘localness’ from the trading process. While the screen did not render the individual trader wholly obsolete, particularly while the possibility of open outcry trading persisted, it began to modify the subject position of the ‘local trader’ in part by altering what traders actually did. The most immediate change brought about by the screens – not fully realized until the pit was suspended in favour of total electronic trading – was that part of a trader’s business melted away. As one of our informants who experienced a similar process of partial to complete electrification of trading at the International Petroleum Exchange (IPE)/ICE put it:

“In the pit, traders either made money by doing business for trading firms or they made money by buying low and selling high. On the screens, there is no need for trading firms to use traders as they have their own computer terminals and merely have to type the orders in themselves. (Trader T: personal email)

This is not the only change wrought here. For a second means of making money for the local also seems to ebb away in the face of the screen:

But the biggest difference for myself and other similar traders trying to buy low and sell high is the lack of transparency on the screens. [...] On the screen, however, we have no idea who is buying or how many they want to buy due to various computer programs available that disguise amounts or even pretend to look like they wish to buy when they actually don’t. And when taking a loss, the price you see on the screen is rarely the price you will receive because the speed and hidden/non-existent orders often mean that you just press the button and hope. I for one am trading much less volume than I did in the pit because it is much harder to quantify my risk. (Trader T: personal email)

Just as the physical design of the original LIFFE exchange constrained the relative visibility and audibility of trades, so the design of screens at the ICE Futures disciplined trader behaviour
by only showing them certain aspects of the market. It did this not by erasing sociality or by according the market an autonomous ‘form of life’ as Knorr Cetina and Bruegger (2002) suggest, but rather through a process of social complexification. For example, hidden and non-existent orders are understood by traders as the manifestation of social strategies played with other traders, although they can appear to take on a kind of autonomy when they are ‘read’ through the constantly updated data on the screens. The local interpersonal practices are still there – they remain intransigent and immanent to the technological shift to screen-based trading. Rather than reduce the figure of the ‘local trader’ the screen now makes the potential presence of local traders a continuous and ongoing concern. Every fluctuation in the quantitative movements continuously updated on the screen may be read as the trace of local traders’ strategic activities. The ‘local trader’ now became everywhere, legible in every flicker and fluctuation of market data.

The introduction of the screens certainly altered the social and spatial dynamics of trading behaviour, yet it did not eliminate them. Individual traders instead adapted their ‘style’ to accommodate the constraints and possibilities of the electronic market space:

[M]ost ex-pit traders have had to change their trading style due to the reasons I mentioned earlier. These changes mean quite a few fail, and many I know have left the business completely, becoming plumbers, taxi-drivers, etc. But most of us have relearned our trade and continue trading daily, with some going on to even greater heights making even more money than they did in the pit. (Trader T: personal email)

Perhaps even more significantly for our argument, with the final closure of the pits and obligatory electronic trading, new forms of engagement with the market have developed which either recreate aspects of the pit, or which create new arenas of interaction altogether. Specifically, the responses of the dealers and wider stakeholders have been to re-place it in a variety of ways. It is not simply that the subject position of ‘local trader’ has persisted through the changes in trading, it has become actively re-elaborated and re-placed in new forms of spatial relations.

Of these, perhaps the most important have been their relocation into ‘trading arcades’. Arcades developed in parallel with the rise of screen-based trading in markets such as LIFFE and partly as a reaction against them. The arcade offers individual traders a space and the necessary facilities to engage in precisely the sort of idiosyncratic, ‘risky’, socialized trading characteristic of the open pits. Silverman (2001: 16) described the original American arcades in the following terms:

An arcade may have a hundred or more traders in it, or as few as two. The traders may trade for a proprietary ‘house’ account in which all in the house share in the trading results, or they may be individual customers, each trading his or her personal capital and responsible for his or her own profits, losses, and business expenses. Demographically, arcades are melting pots, mixing professional traders with novices, mid-career changers with those fresh from a university, and both men and women (at this time there are still far more men, but the disparity in numbers is diminishing). Many different products may be traded in an arcade. A single screen may accommodate electronic markets in NASDAQ securities, stock index futures, cash bonds, and scores of other products from exchanges all over the world. The traders may have access to analytical information such as charts and news services, software that allows them to test trading ideas, and Internet connectivity. There is also likely to be a squawk box service that broadcasts live prices from various open outcry markets. Finally, no trading arcade is complete without a television monitor hanging from the rafters tuned to CNBC.
The arcade embraces the distanciated and distanciating technologies of the xeno-economy – particularly the multiplicity of screens – but draws it into a physical trading environment which deliberately reproduces the possibilities of interpersonal, social, interaction that characterized the open pits. That the pits are not simply reproduced in this process is seen in the radically different demographics of the arcade participants. And intriguingly, the arcade also reshapes possible modes and media of engagement with the market, outsourcing ownership of the trading seat, its mode of connection to the servers hosting the electronically enabled market clearing mechanism, and often the analytical and visual software through which the market is realized as entity for the trader, re-engineering the differently integrative institutionalizing trend initiated by Barkshire and colleagues.

This differential and even oppositional aspect of the arcades could, in some cases, be expressed by their physical location with respect to the exchanges. In 1997, for example, the Kyte Group opened an arcade – one of the first in the UK – directly opposite LIFFE and populated by LIFFE traders. As Peter Green, currently Director and Chief Executive of the Kyte Group Ltd, put it:

> We opened it across the street from LIFFE so that traders could move between the floor and our dealing room very quickly… At the time, most traders worked on the screens during quiet periods in the market, but almost invariably they would run – literally – back to the pits if there was any real excitement in the markets. (Cited in Zwick, 2007: 60)

Thus although the arcades offer the potential to redress the spatial imbalances of the institutional scale markets and to ‘resocialise’ trading (though this is not perhaps what their designers thought they were doing), they have not simply replaced the locales in markets such as LIFFE take place. Rather, they have reintegrated themselves into the institutional structures of the markets in ways that both reintroduce and reassert the importance of locals, but which have subsequently also opened up new spatial and temporal trading forms.

**The intransigence/immanence of the social to ‘post-social’ markets**

Our argument in this paper has been that a practice-based approach which rejects ‘the social’ as part of its analytic apparatus does disservice to the historical changes which have occurred in financial markets since the 1970s. While we welcome the focus on technical mediation and the relative displacement of markets through the shift from supposedly ‘interpersonal’ trading in favour of screen based trading, we think that the approach of MacKenzie and colleagues, as recommended by Araujo et al. (2008), is problematic because it fails to foreground the link between spatiality and identity. Subject positions are grounded in spatial arrangements, and changes in the one always result in transformations of the other.

We have offered some brief extracts which convey some sense of the changes that have occurred in IFFE and ICE Futures. Our aim has not been to offer a thoroughgoing analysis of these changes but rather instead to state that even minimal engagement with the accounts provided by participants demonstrates that a ‘post-social’ reading is lacking. The re-spatializations taking place throughout these accounts of market change are complex. They are both integrative – drawing together elements of the market that had previously been spatially separate, often invisible and ‘territorially nested’ – and disintegrative – they fragment established markets’ relationships and redistribute functional, interpersonal networks and groups. While some of these become – in Knorr Cetina and Bruegger’s terms – (partially) ‘post-social’, what emerges in the trading arcades is a re-socialized and, therefore, re-spatialized form of market interaction. And with the new spatial,
sectoral and ethical boundaries come new modes of market identity. As this implies, wholly post-social markets are either unworkable – they need some form of socio-spatial ‘proximity’ (real and/or virtual) to function – and/or undesirable – for all the apparent predominance of technology, markets remain intrinsically human institutions.

We conclude then with a warning. There can be little doubt that one of the most pressing analytic tasks facing marketing theory is understanding how ‘the market’ comes to appear as an autonomous actor for both consumers and marketing researchers. Practice-based approaches quite rightly draw our attention to the labour which underpins the constitution of markets as such, including financial markets. But in doing so there is a danger of seriously downplaying the way in which certain kinds of subject positions – such as the ‘local trader’ within financial markets – are critical to the functioning of markets. It is not the case that humans make markets, but neither is it the case that markets make persons. Rather, we need to understand the complex historical dynamic of shifting placings and re-placings of identities, mediated by technology, which have delivered us the markets we are now obliged to inhabit.

Note

1. We use the term subject position to refer to the constitution of a recognizable social subject within a given practice (see Hollway, 1989; Davies & Harré, 1990). This happens through a combination of techniques, discourses and material arrangements. Foucault’s (1972) notion of an enunciative position describes this process well although it is important to grasp that Foucault is concerned with simultaneous discursive and non-discursive production of subjectivity (see Brown & Stenner, 2009).

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