1 Accounting as social and institutional practice: an introduction

Peter Miller

In the space of little more than a decade, there has been a profound transformation in the understanding of accounting. Accounting has come to be regarded as a *social and institutional practice*, one that is intrinsic to, and constitutive of social relations, rather than derivative or secondary. This concern with the social and institutional aspects of accounting has entailed a move by researchers beyond organizations as the exclusive level of research. Attention has been directed to the ways in which accounting exerts an influence on, and in turn is influenced by, a multiplicity of agents, agencies, institutions, and processes. Particular accounting events have been analysed in terms of their conditions of possibility, as well as their consequences. The manner in which accounting has become embedded in so many areas of social and economic life has been a continuing concern. And the focus throughout has been on accounting as a *practice*, a view that accounting is, above all, an attempt to intervene, to act upon individuals, entities and processes to transform them and to achieve specific ends. From such a perspective, accounting is no longer to be regarded as a neutral device that merely documents and reports 'the facts' of economic activity. Accounting can now be seen as a set of practices that affects the type of world we live in, the type of social reality we inhabit, the way in which we understand the choices open to business undertakings and individuals, the way in which we manage and organize activities and processes of diverse types, and the way in which we administer the lives of others and ourselves.

To view accounting in this way is to attend to the complex interplay between ways of calculating and ways of managing social and organizational life. For accounting techniques, ranging from double-entry bookkeeping to costing, invent a particular way of understanding and acting upon events and processes. There are complex linkages between the calculative practices of accounting and other managerial practices. These calculative practices are more than imperfect mirrors of economic reality. They do more than distort or modify results after the event. Accounting practices create the costs and the returns whose reality actors and agents are asked to acknowledge and respond to. Accounting practices define the profits and the losses to which various parties react. Accounting practices make up the realm of financial flows to which certain Western societies have come to accord such vital significance. And, as a body of expertise, accounting competes with and intrudes onto the terrains occupied by other bodies of expertise, whether these terrains be those of the engineer, the lawyer, the economist, or the business strategist. In all these different ways, the calculative devices of accountancy have shaped and formed the possibilities for action in many organizations. It is in these multiple respects that accounting can be analysed as a social and institutional practice. The emergence, distribution, location, and intensity of accounting practices are thus research issues that promise to tell us something about the type of social relations that obtain in different national settings, and at different points in time.

At least three distinctive aspects of this view of accounting as social and institutional practice can be identified.

First, there is an emphasis on accounting as a *technology*, a way of intervening, a device for acting upon activities, individuals and objects in such a way that the world may be transformed. As one of the pre-eminent means of quantification in certain Western societies, accounting accords a particular form of visibility to events and processes, and in so doing helps to change them. It is this transformative capacity that is emphasized here. For to calculate and record the costs of an activity is to alter the way in which it can be thought about and acted upon. To reconfigure an organization into profit centres, cost centres, investment centres, strategic business units, or whatever is to change lines of responsibility and the possibilities of action by a change in the form of visibility. To evaluate performance by reference to normalized returns on investment, or by benchmarking costs against those of competitors, is to change incentive structures and impose the requirement that actions conform to the calculations that will be made of them. To insist that investment opportunities be quantified by the use of discounting techniques is to alter the ways in which the options open to managers are represented and assessed. Even if individuals seek to avoid or subvert the calculations made of and by them, the economic norm installed by such calculations remains in place and provides a more or less enduring reference point.

It is a singular capacity of accounting to be able to change the world in these different ways. Whilst accounting shares with other means of quantification such as statistics the ability to translate qualities into quantities, it does so largely by translating these qualitative differences into financial values which seek no further referent. In those Western societies that have given such elevated status to these financial summaries, this capacity of accounting has had far-reaching effects. By reducing diverse activities and

processes to the end point of the single figure, accounting makes comparable the entities of which it produces calculations. In the process, accounting helps make possible a particular way of governing individuals and activities. For such numbers can be used to evaluate and compare individuals, departments or divisions. And they can also be used by individuals themselves to compare where they are with where they should be, what they have achieved with what they should have achieved. Whether this single figure takes the form of a Return on Investment, a Net Present Value of an investment opportunity, Earnings Per Share, Profit, or the labour efficiency variance of a department, accounting draws much of its social authority from the objectivity and neutrality accorded to the single financial figure in certain Western societies. By this device, accounting can claim a legitimacy that is set above the fray, apart from political interests and intrigue. Even if this objectivity and neutrality is questionable and always open to dispute, the elegance of the single figure provides a legitimacy that, at least in certain Western societies, seems difficult to disrupt or disturb.

Secondly, there is a focus on the complex language and meanings intrinsic to accounting. The term *rationales* can be used to designate this aspect of accounting as a social and institutional practice. For accounting practices are more than the numerical computations of costs, profits, losses, and returns. Accounting practices include particular discursive representations and vocabularies. These are assembled at various collective levels, articulated in diverse locales, and in relation to disparate concerns. It is these rationales, often borrowed from other bodies of expertise, that mobilize the calculative technologies of accounting. It is through such meanings that accounting practices are endowed with a significance that extends beyond the task to which they are applied, yet without determining the consequences or outcomes of their deployment in any particular setting.

For instance, calculations of costs are inextricably linked with the language of costliness and efficiency. Evaluations of investment opportunities are reciprocally related to the value of choice, embodied in the notion of managerial decision-making. And the selection of cost and profit centres as ways of organizing activities is mutually related to the vocabulary of responsibility. Reciprocally, notions such as efficiency and competitiveness often come to be translated into, and held to require, the calculative apparatus of accounting. Through such means, abstract notions of economic discourse are made calculable and knowable.

An understanding of accounting as a social and institutional practice suggests a need to attend to these rationales, as well as to the calculative practices that make up accountancy. For it is these rationales, rather than ones specific to the activities and processes in question, that come to articulate ways of knowing and managing organizations. And it is these rationales that provide the basis for a wider elaboration and diffusion of the calculative devices that make up accounting. Rationales of costliness and efficiency, of decision-making, of responsibility, of competitiveness, and much more besides come to constitute truths in the name of which organizations are to be remade, processes reconfigured, and attempts made to redefine the identity of individuals. Once established, these truths come to be taken as essential for the proper government of economic and social life.

Thirdly, in referring to accounting as a social and institutional practice, we seek to draw attention to the ways in which the 'economic' domain is *constituted and reconstituted* by the changing calculative practices that provide a knowledge of it.[1] For it is through the calculative machinery of accountancy that highly disparate ways of producing and providing things are made knowable in economic terms. The calculative technologies of accountancy make operable at the levels of firms, organizations, departments, divisions, and persons the abstract images of economic theory. Such entities can be construed as streams of discounted cash flows, costs of varying types, income defined in differing ways, collections of assets and claims, choices construed as decisions, and much else besides. Rather than begin from the assumption that there exists an irreducible sphere of economic events forever distinct from social practice, the perspective is inverted if one understands accounting as a social and institutional practice. The domain of economic processes is itself seen to be in important part the outcome of calculative practices and rationales. It is accounting that renders such processes visible in financial terms. It is accounting that 'makes up' the financial flows into which organizations come to be transformed.

By transforming the physical flows of organizations into financial flows, accounting creates a particular realm of economic calculation of which judgements can be made, actions taken or justified, policies devised, and disputes generated and adjudicated. This calculative expertise changes over time. In emphasizing the constitutive and changing nature of these calculations, attention is drawn to the reciprocal relations between the technical practices of accounting and the social relations they form and seek to manage. It is the historically specific assemblages, the fragile relations formed between a multiplicity of practices, and the tensions that traverse such complexes, that enable accounting to achieve such heightened significance at particular moments. The technical practice of accounting is intrinsically and irredeemably social.

These three dimensions of accounting are complementary. Technologies depend on rationales as a way of setting out the ends and objectives of particular ways of calculating. Specific rationales can entail appeals for more accounting, or a new way of accounting. And, at different points in time, or in different settings, a particular calculative technology can be linked up to different rationales. The combined effect of calculative technologies together with the rationales that give them their wider significance can be to constitute and reconstitute the realm of financial flows into which organizations can be transformed. To identify these three dimensions of accounting is in part to formulate working hypotheses, in part to offer an empirical description of what accountancy is and does. To address all three dimensions together is to address the conditions, capacities and consequences of accounting. It is to the formation of this distinctive and still developing agenda that we now turn.

The contexts of accounting

The concern with accounting as a social and institutional practice emerged in large part within the discipline of accounting itself. It was principally management accounting practices that provided the reference point for this new research agenda. The starting point here was a concern with the *contexts* of accounting.

Accounting practices had been studied by a number of social scientists since at least the early 1950s.[2] But these pioneering studies remained relatively neglected by researchers interested in analysing how accounting operated in particular organizational settings. As late as 1978, Hopwood (1978: 4) could argue[3] that:

> Even in cases where accounting has been studied in its organizational context, emphasis still has been placed on gaining a comparatively static understanding of the more individual, or at the most group, aspects of the process.

Budgeting, a key focus of accounting research during the 1970s, tended to be examined without consideration of its social and organizational aspects, according to Hopwood (1978). Studies of participation in the budgeting process, one of the principal objects of research in this area, had a largely static conception of the relationship between participation and managerial attitudes and styles (Hopwood, 1978). There was little attempt to analyse the organizational dynamics by which budgeting was interrelated with other organizational control structures and strategies.

This appeal for a more dynamic appreciation of accounting in its organizational context was to be one of many. But, by 1980, the appeal to study accounting in the contexts in which it was located was given a wider social science setting. By this date, a view was emerging that a much bolder step was required. It was important that accounting be situated in its *social* as well as its *organizational* contexts. It was not sufficient simply to develop and extend the analyses of accounting in its organizational contexts. It was necessary to look beyond the boundaries of organizations, and to address the interrelations between particular calculative practices and other managerial practices.[4] Moreover, a changed concept of organizations, and of the ways in which they were linked to their 'environments', was in the process of being formulated.[5] A further, and hitherto neglected, dimension was thus to be added to the study of accounting. The study of the organizational and social roles of accounting was declared, portentously but accurately, to be 'an area of enormous and largely uncharted complexity' (Burchell *et al.*, 1980: 22).

As accounting had come to occupy an ever more significant position in the functioning of modern industrial societies, it had become one of the most influential modes of management of organizational and social arrangements (Burchell *et al.*, 1980). Whether within private sector firms, the public sector, or in the management of financial resources more generally, accounting had become a dominant feature of social and economic life. Accounting research, it was argued, should recognize these broader aspects of the operation of the accounting craft. And to do so, such research needed to draw upon a much wider range of social science tools, and to deploy these across a more extensive terrain.

This appeal to study the roles of accounting in their organizational and social contexts entailed a distinctive understanding of the conditions and consequences of accounting technologies. These were to be understood as devices that constituted and shaped particular organizational and social arrangements, often in concert with other practices. Accounting was held to be central to the creation of specific patterns of organizational visibility, the articulation of certain forms of organizational structure and segmentation, and the formation and reinforcement of relations of power (Burchell *et al.*, 1980). It was these broader social roles of accounting that were to be brought into the picture. The mundane calculative routines of accounting were to be accorded the significance their social role merited. If accounting was a central and influential mechanism of economic and social management, then it should be studied as such. It was no longer sufficient to study accounting more or less wholly within the boundaries of organizations.

The call to study accounting in its organizational and social contexts took as its starting point accounting as it operated within organizations. But it added a rider which may now appear self-evident: organizations do not exist in a vacuum. Organizations, and accounting practices within them, are intrinsically dynamic and social entities. Organizations are reciprocally linked to a multiplicity of interests. Some of these interests are located primarily within organizations, some of them are located in the environment within which organizations operate, and some of them straddle the boundaries between organizations and their environments.

The dynamics of agency relationships, a research topic with its own distinct traditions and concerns, was identified as a key example of such processes (Hopwood, 1983). A focus on agency relationships should, or so it was argued, make possible an analysis of the ways in which the relevance of accounting information was determined within the contexts within which it was used, rather than limiting research to the formal and declared property of accounting systems. The operation of regulatory institutions was seen to offer another opportunity for the analysis of accounting as an organizational and social practice. In this case, one might investigate the political dimensions of accounting policy formulation. The technical components of accounting regulation, and the search for technical 'solutions', could be studied as key aspects of a complex pattern of institutional and political influences. In these different ways, an appreciation could be gained of the manner in which the roles of accounting were shaped by the pressures and demands for accounting innovation, rather than by having recourse to a presumed essence or purely technical function of accounting.

The issue of interests, and their influence on accounting practices, provided a focal point for researchers concerned with financial accounting. This gave further support to the view that accounting research should move beyond the boundaries of organizations. There was a concern with the rise of the notion of 'economic consequences'.[6] This referred to the impact of accounting reports on the decision-making behaviour of business, government, unions, investors and creditors. A concern with 'economic consequences' entailed a questioning of the assumption that accounting policy-making was neutral in its effects, or at least that it was not responsible for any such effects. Accounting standard-setting thus came to be seen as a practice that transcended traditional questions of accounting measurement and fair presentation. It came instead to be viewed as a process fundamentally imbued with 'economic consequences'.

The issue of 'interests' was made a key feature of a related research agenda that has come to be called 'positive accounting'.[7] The model here was drawn from an economic theory of the political process, one that views politics as consisting of a competition among individuals for wealth transfers. Within such a model, politicians and bureaucrats, like all other individuals, are held to have incentives to seek wealth transfers via the political process. Numbers in accounting reports can thus be seen as used by politicians in creating or resolving 'crises', reported earnings receiving particular attention. Price- and rate-setting by government regulatory agencies is held to provide further opportunities for interests to impact on accounting policy. For, in those cases where the rates or prices are set on the basis of formulae that use accounting-determined costs, incentives are held to be created for corporate managers to lobby regulatory agencies and standard-setting bodies for accounting procedures that yield the most favourable rates.[8]

But despite these developments, the research agenda at the beginning of the 1980s still tended to be weighted in favour of the organizational aspects of accounting practices. A conference held at the Graduate School of Management of the University of California at Los Angeles in July 1981, under the auspices of the journal *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, signalled the still nascent nature of research into the social contexts of accounting practices.[9] Indeed, the theme of this conference was 'Accounting in its Organizational Context'. Papers were presented that drew upon a wide range of approaches, including contingency theory, analyses of intraorganizational power relations, studies of the implication of accounting within other organizational processes, and historical analyses of the ways in which accounting had contributed to the emergence of the modern business enterprise.[10]

However, a wider agenda was present also, one which drew attention firmly and explicitly to the social and institutional contexts in which accounting operated.[11] There were suggestions that research should focus on the symbolic as distinct from the technical uses of accounting. To the extent that the symbolic roles of accounting help to define the real, and to give legitimacy to existing practices, then organizational life can in turn be modified in the name of the symbolic roles. And there were calls more generally for a greater appreciation of the broader social and ideological factors that had contributed to the rise of accounting.

These calls to address the social and institutional contexts of accounting practice were in part the result of an empirical observation: in so far as the agencies of the modern world increasingly appeal to accounting as a way of demonstrating the rational nature of organizational processes, then accounting research should address such institutional pressures. These pressures arose from bodies such as the State, the media and professional institutions. They arose also in a much more diffuse manner from appeals to notions such as 'efficiency', 'effectiveness', 'value for money' and much else besides. Accounting was, and still is, often held out as the means by which such ideals could be made operable.

The proposals to study the social and institutional dimensions of accounting were also in part the result of intellectual agendas from disciplines such as sociology and political science permeating accounting research. These disciplines started from the presumption that the study of

discrete practices, events and processes needed to be conducted in relation to the changing nature of social institutions, structures, roles, and processes. As accounting sought to establish itself increasingly as a broadly based social discipline, so it came to take note of such intellectual agendas.

Reflecting on the complementary nature of the distinct agendas present at the 1981 UCLA conference, Hopwood spoke of 'the external origins of internal accounts'. Accounting, he argued, 'can never be seen in purely organizational terms' (Hopwood, 1983: 302). The paradox of this conclusion to a conference dedicated to exploring the organizational nature of accounting was not accidental. Rather, it was a way of highlighting the complex of pressures, demands and influences that operated on accounting practices. It was a way of signalling how much further accounting research needed to develop if it was to address such factors. And it was a way of registering the severe limitations that would result from continuing with an exclusively intraorganizational approach to the study of accounting. For to restrict the study of accounting to that which took place within organizations was to limit arbitrarily and mistakenly the terrain of accounting research. The factors influencing accounting change and innovation, the dynamics of accounting in its relations with other organizational processes, and the broader consequences of accounting, did not respect organizational boundaries. Whether one was interested in conducting field studies of accounting in action, historical analyses of the changing forms of accounting practices, or even conventional analyses based on contingency theory, the conclusion was the same. Accounting could not and should not be studied as an organizational practice in isolation from the wider social and institutional context in which it operated.

Accounting and institutional environments

A concern with the social and institutional aspects of accounting emerged also in disciplines beyond accounting. Most notably, and with enduring effects, this occurred at a particular juncture between sociology and organization theory. Here, institutional theorists depicted accounting as a key element in the 'myth structure' of rationalized societies (Meyer and Rowan, 1977). Quite apart from its possible efficacy, the myths of accountants were held to have become part of the taken-for-granted means to accomplish organizational ends. The myths of the accountant – whether with respect to particular categories of costs, or the more general ceremonial value attached to financial values in a rationalized society – were placed on a similar footing to the myths of the doctor and other rationalized professions.

Institutional theorists argued that formal organizations are driven to incorporate the practices and procedures defined by prevailing concepts of what is rational (Meyer and Rowan, 1977). The labels of the organization chart, the conventions of modern accounting, and the vocabularies of personnel experts were identified as key mechanisms for isomorphism between environmental institutions and organizational practices. Institutional theorists argued that to the extent that organizations incorporate such practices and procedures, they increase their legitimacy and their survival prospects. In the process, they transform the formal structures of organizations in line with powerful institutional rules. These rules can then come to be binding on particular organizations. The formal structures of organizations can thus reflect the myths of their institutional environments, rather than the demands of their work activities.

This process by which formal organizations come to take on more and more of the rationalized aspects of their environments was held to be a general one. Professions were identified as one aspect of this process. Individually, the professions provide rules and procedures for taking activities out of the realm of 'moral mysteries', and bringing them within the realm of impersonal techniques. Taken as a system, the professions were also seen to be highly institutionalized. Legal obligations, the delegation of activities, and squabbles over jurisdictions, all demonstrated the importance of allocating activities to the appropriate professional domain. Various programmes for formalized organizations were also identified as highly influential in institutionalizing conceptions of the appropriate ways of conducting various functions. These ranged from programmes deemed appropriate to a business, to programmes deemed appropriate to a university. Such programmes tended to be ready-made formulae, held to be relevant to any organization of a given type. Institutionalized techniques were also seen as a key part of the process by which organizations take on the rationalized aspects of their environments. Technical procedures of production, accounting, personnel selection and much else besides were part of this process. Aside from their possible efficiency, such institutionalized techniques helped establish a conception of an organization as rational, responsible, and modern.

From an institutional perspective, accounting was seen as just one of the ways in which organizations come to incorporate rational conceptions of ways of organizing. Accounting was not unique. But it was nonetheless an increasingly central aspect of the institutionalization process of modern societies. Accounting provided a set of techniques for organizing and monitoring certain activities. Accounting also provided a language or a vocabulary by which to delineate organizational goals, procedures and policies. These vocabularies of motive were held to be analogous to the vocabularies of motive used to account for the activities of individuals. As Meyer and Rowan (1977: 31) commented:

> Just as jealousy, anger, altruism, and love are myths that interpret and explain the actions of individuals, the myths of doctors, of accountants, or of the assembly line explain organizational activities.

This irreverent view of a practice that had long claimed the title 'profession' was much more than mere cynicism. It was the opening up of a substantial new research agenda. Accounting could henceforth be studied with much the same tools, and in a similar fashion, to the way in which organization theorists and sociologists had so fruitfully studied other professionalized practices such as law, medicine, and psychiatry. One could study modern accounting as a ceremonial function that legitimates organizations with the mythical 'users' of accounting information: internal participants, stockholders, the public, and with agencies such as the Securities Exchange Commission. One could study the origins of particular accounting practices in relation to their roles as rational institutional myths. One could study the impact of particular forms of accounting on organizations as an institutional process, rather than being limited to asking questions of their presumed efficiency effects. One could seek to explain organizational change in terms of isomorphic tendencies with collectively valued elements. And one could study the ways in which different environments determine the amount of accounting done in a particular society or organization, rather than tacitly accepting that this derives from intrinsically necessary technical work processes (Meyer, 1986).

The notion that accounting was a part of the institutionalized and rationalized myth structure of a society contributed to a significant broadening of the agenda of accounting research.[12] It helped reinforce and elaborate the already emerging shift in focus away from accounting viewed as a functional and neutral response to organizational imperatives.

More recently, a number of studies have demonstrated that accounting can be understood in this way as part of the cultural apparatus of a society. Covaleski and Dirsmith (1988a, 1988b) examined how, by whom, and for what purposes, societal expectations of acceptable budgetary practices were articulated, enforced, and modified during a period of organizational decline. The emphasis here was on the active political agency involved in the process of institutionalizing budgeting within a particular university's administrative apparatus. Fligstein (1987, 1990) studied the increasing dominance of finance personnel in the control of large corporations by pointing to changes in the strategy and structure of organizations, changes in anti-trust laws, and a process of mimicking of firms in similar environments. In this instance, a structural theory of power illustrated how key actors gain power both as a result of events outside their organizations and as a result of their definition of key problems within them. This institutional process was, Fligstein argued, one of the key ways in which a shift in intra-organizational power in favour of finance professionals was brought about. In a similar vein, Mezias (1990) studied the factors that explain the financial reporting practices used by large for-profit enterprises, and sought to explain these by adopting an interorganizational level of analysis. A study of financial reporting practices should, Mezias argued, focus primarily on entities in the institutional environment of firms, rather than on the focal firms themselves.

Other studies drew more loosely on the institutional perspective, whilst reinforcing the importance of analysing the effects of institutional environments on accounting systems and other organizational practices. Berry *et al.* (1985), in a study that drew in part on an institutional frame of reference, demonstrated that management control in an area of the National Coal Board could be used to enhance ambiguity and to provide legitimacy in and about the organization. In such a context, accounting statements were ambiguous documents with well known uncertainties about the reliability of the data and the extent of the controllability. But the ambiguity of such documents permitted management to cope with conflicting and often inconsistent demands from trades unions and government. Espeland and Hirsch (1990) also addressed the roles of accounting in legitimating and facilitating certain ways of organizing. The focus here was the conglomerate movement in American business during the 1960s. A proliferation of conglomerate mergers contributed, Espeland and Hirsch argued, to a reconceptualization of the nature of the corporation that emphasized its financial rather than its productive capacities. And the notion that accounting systems can help provide external legitimacy was further supported in Ansari and Euske's (1987) longitudinal field study of the patterns of information use in a military organization. The introduction of a particular costing system was argued to be a way of demonstrating to Congress and other external constituencies the rationality of internal control processes.

In their different ways, these studies reinforced the move towards analysing accounting as a social and institutional practice. For institutional theorists, the point was to address those pressures within the environment that led organizations to incorporate institutionalized activities, and thereby to establish or enhance legitimacy. To understand accounting practices from this perspective, one needed to trace the causal processes that linked accounting with its institutional environment. The nature and direction of these causal processes was to be the object of research. But the implications of this research agenda were more far-reaching than simply the demonstration that institutional factors needed to be addressed in seeking to explain the emergence, persistence and transformation of accounting practices. Institutional theorists substantially strengthened the intellectual case for accounting research moving beyond the confines of the firm and the organization, to address all aspects of accounting understood as a social and institutional practice.

Economic calculation, economic policy, and economic discourse

Developments on the borders between economics and sociology gave further support to the concern with culturally specific forms of economic calculation (Cutler *et al.*, 1978). Yet the debates here were more localized, and tended to develop in parallel to research within the discipline of accounting, rather than in a close interrelationship with it. Nonetheless, the concern in this literature with the constitutive capacity of particular ways of calculating was remarkably similar to that which began to emerge within accounting in the late 1970s.

Enterprise calculation, it was argued, needed to be analysed in the concrete conditions of specific capitalist national economies, rather than by reference to general laws or tendencies of capitalist economies (Cutler *et al.*, 1978). Attention needed to be directed at the forms of organization and the conditions of operation of enterprises. For the criteria of calculation and the forms they took were shaped within particular institutional and social arenas. The measurement of returns, the calculation of costs, the manner in which the magnitude of the capital involved was determined, the mode of assessment of the enterprise's assets, and the overall evaluation of the performance of an enterprise in terms of 'profit' were all potentially variable. Different ways of calculating would produce different results. The category of profit was seen to be an outcome of particular forms of measurement, in conjunction with the choice of particular time periods for its application. Norms of calculation were thus seen as always potentially threatened by the existence of alternative and competing norms.

This concern with the formative effects of particular techniques of calculation was linked to a concern with economic policy, a concern that was again paralleled in the work of accounting researchers.[13] 'Policy' here was defined as much broader than simply State or governmental policy. Policy was taken to include the objectives and practices of any agent in the economic sphere. It was taken also to include the means and instruments through which these objectives were to be realized. This focus on the means and instruments of policy gave particular significance to techniques of economic calculation. For, if policies are articulated and made operable through particular calculative practices, and if those calculative practices define the costs, the revenues and the profits of enterprises, then it is difficult to disentangle economic policy and economic calculation. Moreover, policy and calculation require some agent or agency that calculates. Since such agents are always institutionally located, it was argued that the study of accounting as a particular form of economic calculation should be similarly located as an institutional practice. Analyses of accounting practices should address the dispersed organizational matrix within which they operate (Thompson, 1986: 9).

In a distinct, yet related vein, attention was focused on the historical nature of the categories of economic discourse. The point here was that it is not only the practices of economic calculation and measurement that change over time. The categories, concepts and meanings of economic discourse themselves change also, and these changes are linked to attempts to govern the domains in question in different ways. In so far as the management of a domain such as the economy is dependent on particular ways of conceptualizing the processes and entities to be included within it, then attention to the categories of economic discourse can have major implications for understanding changing forms of economic calculation.

The analysis of such apparently immutable categories as 'land' and 'labour' demonstrated the links between categories of economic discourse, and particular forms of economic calculation. For instance, in place of the moral or theological principles concerning the good performance of husbandry prevalent in the seventeenth century, there emerged around the middle of the eighteenth century a conception of the farm as a process (Tribe, 1978). In this new discursive formation, 'profit' was held to result from the good management of the farming process, rather than from the diligence of individuals who tended the resources provided by God. The farmer was understood as part of a series of exchanges in the economy which combined to effect the circulation of the product. The farm was understood as a unit of production, and could be compared with other units.

Within this new discursive formation, accounting came to occupy a number of important roles: it was the means by which texts were validated; it was the means by which the farmer organized and recorded his activities; and it was the means by which a landlord might control the actions of his estate manager. More generally, a numerical principle provided a means of 'discursive validation' (Tribe, 1978: 71). Calculation was the means by which the texts on farm management were validated. And once the farm had come to be regarded as a production unit, arguments could be advanced concerning the most appropriate size of such enterprises. Detailed records could be kept of items such as labour costs and working capital per acre. One could calculate the most profitable proportions for grass and arable farms, with differing capitals available. And one could construct 'ideal farms'. A plethora of calculations could be made, which would have significance and meaning only through the discursive formation within which they emerged.

In these different ways, and in disciplines at the margins of accounting, there emerged a concern with accounting as a social and institutional practice. A number of new research agendas were opened up. Accounting could now be studied with the same variety of social science tools as were available to other established disciplines.

Multiple agendas

The concern to analyse accounting as a social and institutional practice has taken many forms. Thus far, the aim has been to set out some of the coordinates that helped shape the type of research present in this volume. But there has emerged in recent years a multiplicity of approaches to the study of accounting in its social and organizational contexts. The present volume presents just a selection of some of the key studies from this literature. Before proceeding to consider some of the issues raised by the chapters in this volume, it may be useful to identify briefly some of the related research agendas which have emerged in the accounting literature over the past decade or so. Of course, any review of this wider literature is inevitably selective. It is necessary to characterize broad themes or agendas to avoid simply listing all that has been said or done in the area. But if one is careful not to regard such themes or agendas as mutually exclusive categories, such a review can be of value as a way of indicating the multiplicity of ways in which accounting may be analysed.

One agenda in this literature can be termed an *ethnography* of accounting practices, to indicate a concern with accounting research that pays particular attention to the meanings and perceptions of those actors who develop and use accounting techniques or systems in particular settings.[14] Early research in this mode identified the importance of empirical research of the actual operation of accounting systems, and the need to commence from specific, real-world situations.[15] Such research would go beyond descriptive accounts of accounting systems, and would study the conditions and consequences of actual accounting practices in specific organizations. Case analyses should address accounting as a 'lived experience' for individual actors, and should recognize the symbolic use of accounting for individuals, whilst taking a critical view of the actor's definition of the situation (Boland and Pondy, 1983). Research of this type would, or so it was hoped, make possible an understanding of the way accounting practices contribute to the production and reproduction of organizational life (Roberts and Scapens, 1985).

This broad injunction to understand and explain accounting practices in concrete situations that have actually occurred, to focus on what was said and done in such situations, can be deployed in a wide variety of settings. It can be utilized when seeking to understand the apparently technical question of the changing relations between volumes and costs in the context of advanced manufacturing systems (Jonsson and Gronlund, 1988). For in such settings, practices and procedures are worked out in local settings. It is these local settings that need to be analysed and researched. Equally, a concern with the meanings people attach to their social world can prove valuable if one is seeking to understand accounting change within a particular organization, as Nahapiet (1988) has demonstrated. New ways of accounting have to be understood and made sense of. Even if resource allocation is thought of as an essentially routine activity, when new calculative practices are introduced, existing understandings can become problematic. In a similar manner, the emergence of a new organizational culture, one based on accounting rather than engineering, can be analysed in an interpretive frame (Dent, 1991).

An ethnography of accounting practices opens up new possibilities for accounting research. An allegorical tale of learning can convey the point that, in financial accounting, the communication of reality is also the construction of reality (Hines, 1988, 1989). A drama in five acts can convey the processes by which clinical budgeting practices are elaborated and articulated (Pinch *et al.*, 1989). The process of fabricating budgets can be traced by examining the chains of reasoning and mechanisms of influence involved in the building of a new budgeting system (Preston *et al.*, 1992). Internal accounting processes can be understood as powerfully influenced by the inspection and review processes of the British Inland Revenue (Preston, 1989).[16] And an *ex post* ethnography of the professional examination system of a professional accounting body can indicate some of the conditions and consequences of 'becoming' a professional accountant (Power, 1991).

A second agenda can be termed a *political economy* of accounting practices. As with the ethnography of accounting, this is a diverse agenda, rather than a unitary approach or method. At its most general level, a political economy of accounting means drawing attention to the conflicting political and economic interests at stake in accounting. It means emphasizing the fundamental interrelationship between political and economic forces in society. In place of a view of accounting as the provision of neutral technical information for decision-making, a political economy approach insists that accounting systems are often a mechanism through which power is exercised. In place of an image of accounting as the objective depiction of reality, it substitutes the view that accounting is a partial and

interested language, one that furthers the interests of particular classes and occupational groups. And in place of an abstract notion of market equilibrium, a political economy approach highlights issues of social welfare and distribution.[17]

Political economy approaches in accounting have consisted in important part in a critique of other positions, in particular marginalist economics. There have also been a number of substantive studies conducted using such a framework. *Annual Reports* have been held to change in form and content in relation to strategies of capital accumulation (Neimark and Tinker, 1986). Modes of regulation of accounting practices have been held to vary according to the institutional and political structures in particular countries (Puxty *et al.*, 1987). The interrelations between accounting and industrial relations in a particular local context have been studied, via an analysis of the linkages formed between accounting and a variety of organizational priorities, structures and processes (Bougen, 1989). There has been a call to give greater attention to the conflicts of interest that divide the negotiating parties in contexts such as wage determination negotiations, illustrated by the example of British coalfield industrial relations (Bougen, Ogden and Outram, 1990).[18] The relative prominence of accounting controls over the labour process in British capitalism has been addressed in terms of the 'collective mobility project' of the accounting profession in the UK (Armstrong, 1985). This mobility project has, in turn, been analysed in terms of the key problems confronting British capitalism, and how these enabled the accounting profession to attain such a dominant position within the 'economic functions' of the global function of capital (Armstrong, 1987). And an historical–comparative method has been used to analyse the differential spread of practices of standard costing, budgeting, and the use of performance reports in the United States and Great Britain (Wardell and Weisenfeld, 1991).

Other studies have been conducted in a related mode. There has been an analysis of the interaction between State actions and the distributional consequences of accounting policies adopted by the US Medicare health insurance programme (Arnold, 1991). The links between cost accounting techniques and historically varying attempts to control the labour process have been addressed (Hopper and Armstrong, 1991). Laughlin (1987) has argued for the use of the critical theory of Habermas in the analysis of accounting change more generally.[19] Accounting has been held to play an active part in enhancing social conflict, particularly in a crisis context (Gallhofer and Haslam, 1991). And, more specifically, the political issues involved in economic calculation have been addressed in relation to the issue of transfer pricing (Picciotto, 1992). Transfer pricing is, according to this analysis, a political issue within the firm in relation to the strategic factors that affect pricing; and it is a political issue externally, in relation to State regulation and international taxation.

A third agenda entails a concern with issues of *organizational design and environments*, and their relations to accounting systems. Cast in the particular terms of contingency theory, this has of course been a long-standing concern of researchers in accounting. Contingency theory demonstrated the importance of bringing factors such as technology, environment, and managerial structures within the field of research.[20] But contingency theory tended to have a restrictive and static understanding of the ways in which accounting systems were affected by a number of factors (Hopwood, 1983). Contingency theory gave little attention to the processes through which accounting and ways of organizing were *reciprocally* related.

A distinct research tradition, one associated most notably with the work of James March, helped to give a new and fruitful direction to the concern in accounting with issues of organizational design and environments.[21] This research had demonstrated its value in the fields of organization theory and analysis for a decade or more before it was deployed in the accounting literature. Starting from models of rational decision-making, March weakened the rationality assumptions of such models, but did so by retaining a notion of the purposive action of individuals. Individuals might not conform to the idealized and naive models of rational behaviour. But their actions could nonetheless be understood by means of concepts such as limited rationality, contextual rationality, game rationality, and process rationality (March, 1978).

Such concepts have considerable implications for accounting. For accounting texts are adorned with images of rational individuals who search for complete information, evaluate it rationally, and then make decisions (Miller and O'Leary, 1990). March demonstrated conclusively that individuals and organizations do not operate in this manner. Individuals are much more constrained and much more uncertain of their preferences than the dreams of accounting textbook writers suggest. The notion of 'organized anarchies' conveys this sense of organizations as characterized by problematic preferences, unclear technology, and fluid participation (Cohen, March and Olsen, 1972).[22] Understood by means of such concepts, decisions can be viewed as outcomes or interpretations of several relatively independent streams or processes in organizations. Solutions do not follow from problems in a simple one-to-one manner. Solutions and problems are relatively uncoupled from one another. Problems, solutions and participants move from one choice opportunity to another. Decisions are only made when a shifting combination of problems, solutions and decision-makers happens to make action possible.

These ideas have much relevance for accounting researchers. March himself, in an address to the American Accounting Association in 1986, set out the implications for accounting of his research on the ambiguities surrounding individual and organizational decision-making (March, 1987). Arguing that the concepts of 'limited rationality' and 'conflict of interests' are an incomplete representation of the problems of decision-making, March identified four ambiguities of organizational decision-making: ambiguities of preferences; ambiguities of relevance; ambiguities of intelligence; and ambiguities of meaning. In terms similar to those of institutional theorists, March argued that theories of rational choice, and decision processes, are ways of celebrating central values of a society, in particular the idea that life is under intentional human control, and that control is exercised through individual and collective choices based on an explicit anticipation of alternatives and their probable consequences (March, 1987). To the extent that decision-making in organizations is surrounded by the four ambiguities identified, March argued that the design of information systems must be attentive to such characteristics, even when they are disconcerting.

Within accounting, others developed related ideas. Swieringa and Weick (1987) addressed the role of a technique such as Return on Investment in terms of its effects on action, rather than as an aid to decision-making. Accounting systems and techniques are so powerful, they argued, because they can initiate and sustain forceful action. This distinction between action-generating processes and decision-making processes was made by others. Brunsson (1982) suggested that an effective decision process that facilitates action generation breaks nearly all the rules for rational decision-making: few alternatives are analysed; only positive consequences are considered; and objectives are not formulated in advance. In a similar vein, Hedberg and Jonsson (1978) argued that accounting systems tend to stabilize organizations, by establishing fixed and standard repertoires over time. But organizations in changing environments, they argued, need information systems which destabilize. Organizations need information systems that are flexible enough to cope with unexpected developments. Accounting systems are needed that can be used to stimulate organizational curiosity, facilitate novel decision processes, and increase the ability to cope with variety and change in environments. And the notion of 'organized anarchies' was used as a way of understanding how budgets in particular, and accounting systems in general, can provide a basis for the rationalization of behaviour rather than as an input into decisions.

In their different ways, and to varying extents, all three of these research agendas indicate a concern with accounting as a social and institutional practice. However, they also highlight concerns or issues in a manner that is distinctive. The ethnographic approach suggests the importance of treating accounting practices as 'alien'. To this extent, accounting practices need to be explained in much the same ways, and possibly with some of the same tools, as those used by anthropologists and others to understand unfamiliar cultures and practices. The political economy approach places considerable emphasis on overt interests and conflicts, and on the links between such factors and accounting systems. This aspect of accounting continues to remain relatively undeveloped in accounting research. And a focus on questions of organizational design and environments highlights the importance of attending to the actual processes occurring within and between organizations, environments, and accounting systems. Questions of organizational design and accounting systems should no longer be subordinated to abstract and idealized images of rationality. In their respective ways, these three research agendas point to different possibilities for developing and extending the concern with accounting as a social and institutional practice.

Analysing the emergence of calculative practices

The analyses of accounting as a social and institutional practice in this volume are primarily historical. But they are historical in a particular sense. Moving beyond earlier analyses of accounting in its organizational contexts, the studies collected here emphasize the social and institutional emergence of accounting. This is not to suggest that analyses of accounting within organizations are unimportant. But it is to suggest that if we are to understand fully how particular ways of accounting have emerged, and why such significance is accorded them, we have to move beyond the boundaries of the organization and examine the social and institutional practice of accounting. What links the chapters in this volume is this concern to analyse the relations between particular calculative practices and other practices of management and organization. It is the emergence of such practices in particular, localized historical settings, the 'how' of such processes, that is the focus of attention. For accounting is often formed out of an ensemble of diverse techniques that only come to be called 'accounting' after the event. It is the analyses of this process of emergence, that elsewhere has been termed 'genealogies of calculation',[23] that is one of the principle concerns of the studies collected here.

A concern with the multiple sites of emergence of accounting suggests that accounting has no 'essence'. For what we call 'accounting' is an entity that has been made up out of techniques and practices drawn from diverse disciplines and domains. Accounting changes in both content and form over time, only ever achieving a temporary stability. Such arguments are most persuasively illustrated by the contribution of Hoskin and Macve (chapter 3). Hoskin and Macve focus on the invention of that practice which is so often taken to be the core or essence of accounting: double-entry bookkeeping. They argue that we need to look to the apparently marginal field of education if we are to understand the emergence of double-entry bookkeeping. And it is, they suggest, one practice in particular that should be addressed: the examination. They focus first on the oral and ungraded examination of the twelfth century. They then address the written graded examination of the late eighteenth century. Drawing on the 'disciplinary' perspective of Foucault, they argue that a focus on educational institutions makes it possible to understand the emergence of accounting, and its role as a disciplinary mechanism. Accounting needs to be understood in this institutional sense as a powerful new way of 'writing the world', not as a means of recording data for rational economic decisions.

A focus on the institutional matrix within which particular accounting practices emerged is present also in the chapter by Thompson (chapter 2). But it is the early sixteenth century to which he directs his attention. He addresses three contingent and historically specific institutions: the church, the pedagogic apparatuses, and the publishing house. Together, Thompson argues, these institutions provided the conditions of possibility of accounting in its particular 'modern' form. Understood in these terms, double-entry bookkeeping is an effect of particular institutional and organizational configurations. Accounting takes its place alongside other political and economic discourses. Accounting is rhetorical, but rhetoric in this context is institutionally grounded.[24]

The emergence of cost accounting is the concern of the chapter by Loft (chapter 5). Addressing the rise of cost accounting during the First World War, Loft gives further support to the view that it is important to attend to the local conditions under which particular accounting techniques emerge and spread. Loft terms this process the 'coming into the light' of cost accounting. The decisive event here was the adding by the government of a clause to the Defence of the Realm Act in 1916. This clause was added in response to accusations of profiteering on the part of manufacturers of munitions and other supplies for the war. The new clause concerned the price which the war ministries would pay manufacturers for war supplies it purchased from them. That price was to be the cost of making the items in question, plus an allowance for profit. Rather than let the market set the price, costs were henceforth to be the arbiter. Through this route, accountancy was to gain a social status and a degree of acceptance which had been absent before the War. Knowledge about cost accounting, and expertise in using its techniques was to spread via technical books and journals, as well as by the few courses in cost accounting available at universities at the time.

Cost accounting remains the focus in the contribution by Miller and O'Leary (chapter 4), but in this case it is standard costing and budgeting that is the object of attention. It is the period between 1900 and 1930 that is of concern to Miller and O'Leary. For it is across this period that cost accounting was transformed and its domain massively expanded by the emergence of standard costing. Henceforth, cost accounting was to be concerned with the future as well as with the past. With standard costing it was possible routinely to calculate variances at the level of the firm as a whole, and at the level of every accountable person with the firm. This was more than a technical modification to accounting. As a way of rendering visible the inefficiencies of the person within the enterprise, standard costing made possible a new way of governing individuals within the firm, a new way of governing economic life within the enterprise. But standard costing was not an isolated phenomenon. Within the firm, it was closely allied to that vast project of standardization and normalization that has been called 'scientific management'. Beyond the firm, it was linked to a number of other normalizing initiatives, including a programme of 'national efficiency' and intelligence testing. Together, these diverse strategies helped to articulate the ideal of a rationally administered social order in which efficiency would be made visible at both an individual and a collective level.

The linkage between particular calculative techniques and broader rationales and policies is addressed by Tomlinson (chapter 7). The concern here is with techniques for measuring labour productivity, and the more general rise of the 'productivity problem' in the UK in the late 1940s. As argued above, attempts to change accounting practices, or to invent new ones, are typically linked to particular meanings or rationales. And these processes of invention are often faltering and uncertain, they involve experimentation and the discarding of one half-formed technique in favour of another. Tomlinson demonstrates the complexity of such processes with respect to the attempts to develop techniques for measuring labour productivity in the late 1940s in the UK. The setting here is the rise to prominence at this time of the concept of 'productivity'. This was a dual concern: at the macroeconomic level, there was an increasing preoccupation with the measurement of the national economy as part of the growth of national economic measurement; at the level of the enterprise, there was a rapid escalation in attempts to regulate the enterprise in the name of increased output and efficiency. Enterprises were to be encouraged to account for themselves in a new way, to measure labour productivity as part of their everyday management activity. By this period in the UK, techniques such as standard costing were still only weakly developed within enterprises. But attempts to transform the accounting practices of enterprises by arm's-length means are not always wholly successful. Notwithstanding the rise of the 'productivity problem' in the late 1940s, the reform of the management accounting practices of enterprises by governments was to remain an elusive goal.

The links between the macroeconomic concerns of governments and particular calculative techniques are addressed also in the chapter by Hopwood, Burchell and Clubb (chapter 9). These authors address the sudden upsurge of interest in value-added that occurred in the UK in the late 1970s. The concept 'value-added' appears as an indicator of the value created by the activities of an enterprise in a number of different sites, including private companies, newspapers, government bodies, trade unions, employer associations, and professional accountancy bodies. The concept was given form in a number of different practices, including financial reporting, payment systems, profit sharing schemes, economic analyses, and information disclosure to employees and trade unions. Hopwood and his colleagues address this sudden interest in the calculation of value-added by identifying three arenas: standard-setting for corporate financial reporting, macroeconomic management, and the system of industrial relations. In each of these three arenas, they chart the shifting patterns of relations between the various agencies functioning in the respective fields – the accounting profession, the government, and trade unions – and the changes in their modes of operation and objects of concern. Taken together, it is argued, these three distinct arenas can be addressed as an 'accounting constellation', a specific ensemble of actors and agencies pursuing interests and producing unintended consequences. The historical specificity of the value-added event is further demonstrated by the sudden decline in interest in value-added in the early 1980s. As each of the three arenas within which value-added emerged were transformed, the significance which had been attached to the idea no longer seemed salient. The concept of value-added declined almost as suddenly as it had emerged.

But a focus on the broader arenas within which particular calculative techniques emerge should not obscure the firm-specific conditions which can bring about accounting change. Also, an emphasis on the 'constructive' or constitutive capacities of accounting should not lead to a neglect of its 'destructive' potential. Bougen (chapter 6) examines the profit sharing scheme that emerged in one particular firm during the 1920s. He examines how and why accounting became integrated with industrial relations issues such as wage levels, bonus payments, managerial surveillance and control of work practices, changes in work practices and redundancies. He discusses how accounting became entangled in a web of heterogeneous elements, including the practices and procedures of scientific management, a paternalist managerial philosophy, the dictates of financial markets, and managerial discourses of business science. And he considers the clashes of truths and knowledges that accounting can become enmeshed within, ways of defining what accounting is to do, and what it is not to do, its legitimacies and illegitimacies, its continuities and discontinuities. As Bougen demonstrates, accounting is able not only to integrate at a technical level various organizational activities and resources. Accounting is also able to silence the voice of labour or confine it to the margins of interest and validity. However, the success of such strategies is not guaranteed. Such an ensemble can only be temporarily stabilized. The downfall of the profit sharing scheme studied by Bougen can thus be understood in much the same way as its emergence: by reference to the multiple linkages it made explicit between various organizational processes and structures, and by reference to the tactic of allowing labour voices and knowledges to be articulated.

The linkages between accounting and industrial relations are addressed also in the contribution by Armstrong (chapter 8). The concern here is with corporate control in large British companies, in particular the intersection of management accounting and industrial relations in the postwar period. Armstrong analyses the changes in company structure and accounting control systems that provide the context for postwar British industrial relations. He addresses the increased influence of accounting control systems on the managerial conduct of industrial relations from the mid-1970s onwards. What has developed, he argues, is a dual linkage of establishment level industrial relations with corporate policy: on the one hand, corporate industrial relations policy is enacted through local personnel management; on the other, accounting indicators of performance, in particular budgetary targets, connect local line managers with a corporate planning process that largely excludes industrial relations considerations. The policy trend during the 1980s and 1990s, Armstrong suggests, has been towards a devolution of collective bargaining, accompanied by a reliance on budgetary constraint as a means of retaining headquarters control. Local management initiative is thus increasingly likely to take place under the aegis of budgetary pressure, rather than under the broad framework of industrial relations policy.

One of the most consistent observations that emerges from the studies gathered here is that accounting has attained an increasing ascendancy over other managerial practices in the UK in the twentieth century. Nowhere is this more clearly demonstrated than in the recent changes in the UK public sector. As McSweeney (chapter 10) demonstrates, the notion of good management in the UK public sector has become synonymous with 'management by accounting'. Whether in Civil Service departments, or an increasing number of public sector organizations, accounting has come to be seen as the unquestioned cornerstone of 'good management'. McSweeney examines the stages in accounting's rise to such a dominant position. He begins by addressing the Financial Management Initiative launched in May 1982. For this initiative made accounting the central mechanism in attempts to identify and allocate responsibilities between managers, to define objectives, and to assess clearly costs and outputs. But McSweeney warns against the dangers of locating the emergence of management by accounting solely in relation to the rise of the entity that has been called 'Thatcherism'. As he shows, management by accounting predates the coming to power of Margaret Thatcher. The trajectory of management by accounting can be traced to the 1968 Fulton Committee Report, and the subsequent attempts to 'modernize' the Civil Service. Management by accounting can be traced also in the post-Fulton era of 'programmatic analysis', and its intensified concern with efficiency in the Civil Service. In so far as the public sector was identified as at 'the heart of Britain's economic difficulties' by the Conservative Government that came to power in 1979, the strategy of management by accounting was further reinforced by programmes such as the 'Rayner scrutinies', a 'Management Information System for Ministers' (MINIS), an inquiry by the Treasury and Civil Service Committee and, most recently, the Next Steps initiative. Notwithstanding the diversity of such schemes, there is, McSweeney argues, a common theme present in all these programmes. This common theme is that of 'performativity', the imperative to reduce diverse activities and services into a series of input–output relationships.

The accounting profession has not gone uncriticized. As Cooper *et al.* demonstrate in chapter 11, the legitimacy of those accounting practitioners who claim the status of 'professional' has been challenged repeatedly in recent years. In the UK, there have been changes in the legal framework, an increase in competition between the major players in the industry, and a series of scandals. Together, these events have cast doubt upon existing claims to independence and objectivity. Cooper *et al.* examine the dynamics of these processes by analysing three episodes in the regulation of accountancy: the negotiations over the scope and impact of the EC 8th Directive; the reactions of the accountancy bodies to the Financial Services Act 1986; and the continuing efforts of the professionalized accounting bodies to secure the powers of self-regulation conferred upon them by the State. The localized historical conditions of each of these issues are addressed. They are also taken as exemplars of the changing relationship between the accountancy 'profession' and the 'State'. This changing relationship, they argue, is at the heart of accounting regulation. Each of the three episodes examined indicates the tensions associated with the movement of accountants into new markets. For instance, in different ways, the EC 8th Directive and the Financial Services Act had the unintended consequence of raising the visibility of accountants' operation in areas such as consultancy and the selling of financial services, areas from which they had previously been absent. Such moves can unsettle or compromise existing claims to legitimacy. The claim to neutrality and objectivity so characteristic of bodies of expertise has to be re-established, and in relation to new tasks and self-images. In the process this self-image undergoes a transformation. The three episodes addressed by Cooper *et al.* inadvertently expose the extent to which accountancy has become a major industry. Cooper *et al.* analyse the ways in which accountants have sought to neutralize the diverse threats to their self-image as responsible, independent professionals. Whilst the accounting 'industry' has sought to reaffirm the concept of professional self-regulation, the accountancy bodies have had in turn to accept new regulatory structures that threaten to erode the ideals of neutrality and independence.

Yet, accountancy increasingly comes to appear as the image in which organizations and activities are fashioned in certain Western economies. As Power argues in chapter 12, this has developed to such an extent that we can speak now of the 'audit society' as a constitutive principle of social organization. The word 'audit' is no longer the prerogative of financial audit. We now hear of environmental audits, value for money audits, management audits, quality audits, forensic audits, data audits, intellectual property audits, medical audits, and many others besides. There is more at stake here than the adoption in diverse arenas of a fashionable label. Even though 'audit' practices are heterogeneous, and even though the descriptive utility of the concept itself is doubted by practitioners, the concept of audit has become a generalizable social practice. The variability of audit practices is less important than the ways in which the idea of audit is appropriated and mobilized. Audit, Power argues, can be understood as the 'control of control', for audits function at a temporal and often spatial distance from the organizational processes to which they are applied. As a distinctive administrative rationality, audit embodies three principles. Firstly, the invisibility of audit; for despite the rhetoric of transparency which has accompanied the growth of audit, the audit process itself remains publicly invisible. Secondly, the politics of 'regulatory failures'; for audit practices are constantly seeking to reproduce and intensify themselves. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, the construction of auditees; for the audit society is one characterized by an incessant desire to make environments auditable, an endeavour to structure organizations, activities and processes in such a way that they conform to the imperative of monitoring rather than to their own intrinsic agendas. In these different ways, Power demonstrates that audit is as much a distinctive principle of social and economic organization as it is a technical practice.

The studies gathered together in this volume share a concern to examine accounting as a social and institutional practice. In their differing ways, they address the conditions and consequences of accounting. They demonstrate the multiple, and often marginal fields in which accounting practices emerge. They analyse the frequently *ad hoc* ways in which accounting develops. They illustrate the extent to which the calculative technologies of accounting have become so central to diverse attempts to govern organizations, individuals and social relations more generally. They explore the tensions and clashes that are intrinsic to such processes, as they take shape within particular organizations and in relation to diverse agendas. And they document the growth and diffusion of accounting across the twentieth century in a particular national context. The social authority of accounting has not gone unchallenged in the process. But the skirmishes concerning the objectivity and legitimacy of accounting have not prevented it from becoming one of the pre-eminent devices for governing social and economic life in certain Western nations.

Accomplishments and agendas

As the chapters in this volume demonstrate, a distinctive research agenda has recently emerged within accounting. This novel agenda, based as it is on the study of accounting as a social and institutional practice, broadens and extends existing concerns with accounting in its organizational and social context. The numerous appeals to study accounting in action in specific organizational settings are reinforced. But there is a further injunction: to move beyond organizations to include the social and institutional matrix within which individual organizations seek to innovate.[25] Accounting innovation is to be understood by analysing the complex interplay between the multiple arenas within which new ways of accounting emerge. Rather than making a clear-cut distinction between the 'inside' and the 'outside' of firms, attention is to be directed at the reciprocal relations formed between distinct locales.

But research that is novel soon comes to be regarded as routine. To this extent, it is worth registering the important accomplishments of the research traditions sketched here. Less than 20 years ago, the research gathered together in this volume would not have been possible.[26] New ways of posing questions about accounting have transformed the terrain of accounting research. As has been suggested above, this is more than a matter of importing methodologies from neighbouring disciplines, whether from anthropology, sociology, organization theory, history, or cultural analyses more generally. In large part, the achievements have been the result of innovations within the discipline of accounting itself. The novel ways of understanding the emergence and functioning of accounting that are now available were developed in important part out of analyses of specific calculative devices, and out of a concern to understand how particular ways of calculating, in alliance with other practices and processes, helped transform the world. The study of accounting has thus taken its place within the social sciences in a manner not dissimilar to early twentieth-century social science: out of the analysis of a practice.[27]

New topics are beginning to appear within accounting research. The rhetoric of accounting knowledge is becoming an important domain of analysis.[28] For accounting is as rich in meaning, as imbued with values and cultural significance as any other social practice. But it is more than the meanings of accounting that are to be addressed. The intrinsic links between accounting and 'economic reason' are being addressed.[29] For in so far as economics presupposes a capacity to calculate, and in so far as such calculations have consequences, accounting may well contribute to the eclipsing or obscuring of explicit value judgements. To this extent, accounting may be a key part of a self-fulfilling process in which economic reason becomes calculable, and thereby validates its own terms of reference. As it becomes increasingly possible to make social relations conform to the models of economic rationality, then the models themselves are declared as vindicated. And in so far as accounting knowledge depends on inscriptions, the quantitative orientation of accounting can be understood in relation to attempts to act upon and transform social relations by 'acting at a distance'.[30]

The borders between accounting and other bodies of expertise, in particular law, are being given increasing attention of late.[31] This can be attributed in part to the shifting institutional territory of these two professionalized practices, their changing claims to competence, and the growing interdisciplinarity between them at the level of their knowledge bases. The phenomenon of 'multi-disciplinary partnerships' and the opening up of new international markets gives rise to new territorial battles that are more than zero-sum games, since they have the potential to transform the practice of both accountancy and law.

Other topics gain a relevance within accounting, once it is understood in social and institutional terms. The issue of gender, so long marginalized in accounting, comes to the fore.[32] For if accounting helps to construct and make governable particular forms of subjectivity, analyses in terms of gender help to expand the account we currently have of accounting. Feminist scholarship focused initially on those social practices and institutionalized knowledges – medicine, biology, psychoanalysis – that are most overtly and intimately related to the condition and experience of the gendered individual. But accounting is now beginning to be studied in related terms. The position of women in the whole of the accountancy function, rather than just in professional accountancy, is being addressed. This means analysing historically the development of a situation where women are predominant in the lower levels of function (bookkeeping), and in a minority in the higher levels (accountancy). It also means analysing the different forms of discrimination against women that occur in the specific setting of accountancy. For whilst one might expect comparable patterns of discrimination to those that exist in other occupations, the particular images and norms that serve to discriminate against women in the field of accountancy need to be analysed. More generally, the roles of accounting in making possible gender-specific modes of governing individuals is an important topic for further study.

Accounting can be regarded as an intrinsic and constitutive component of the government of economic life.[33] The growth and deployment of accounting, that is to say, can be understood in relation to the emergence of particular political systems, and particular ways of seeking to govern the conduct of individuals. For accounting is one of the key ways in which attempts have been made to exert influence on individuals through indirect means. Such modes of government can be regarded as characteristic of liberal democratic societies. In so far as such societies mark out the economy as a distinct sphere with its own laws and regularities, and make the individual a fundamental locus of responsibility, accounting has a central place. Understood as a mode of government of economic life, accounting can be appealed to as a way of seeking to act upon the conduct of individuals to remedy deficits of rationality and responsibility. Accounting makes possible actions on the actions of others, by recourse to the single figure that is the end product of so many of the calculative technologies of accounting. In the single figure is located the neutrality and objectivity claimed for expertise. By this device, accounting seeks to accord itself a legitimacy based on a claim that it is above the fray, apart from the realm of politics and intrigue.

Understood in such terms, the studies gathered together in this volume have potential implications beyond the discipline of accounting. They have a particular relevance for the related fields of management and organization studies. For despite recent theoretical developments,[34] much of the research within these allied disciplines continues to retain an intraorganizational focus. When it moves beyond the organization, as in the writings of the neoinstitutionalists for example, such research tends to invoke conventional distinctions such as those between the macro and micro level, and between organizations and environments.[35] However, as the chapters in this volume indicate, there is much scope for extending and developing research agendas in the management area, through a dialogue between different research traditions and approaches.

And if accounting is understood as a social and institutional practice, then this has implications for the way in which policy is understood and operationalized. For from such a perspective, issues such as accounting harmonization within the EC can no longer be divorced from the distinct institutional and cultural histories of the member states. Attempts to put in place new ways of accounting for advanced manufacturing systems need to be understood in relation to the profound changes that are taking place in wider conceptions of economic citizenship in advanced industrial societies. Debates concerning the boundaries of a practice such as management accounting need to recognize the ways in which this boundary has been redefined over time. And the regulation of accountancy needs to be understood in terms of the historically specific ways in which attempts have been made by government agencies to act indirectly upon individuals, organizations, and bodies of expertise.

But this is not a question merely of extrapolating from the analyses presented here and elsewhere to policy implications. This would be to trivialize the policy process, and to mistake what it means to analyse accounting as a social and institutional practice. The matrix of actors, agencies, objectives, and aspirations in any individual policy issue is of such a complexity that simple recipes for action are unlikely to be contained in any particular study. Moreover, one of the principal implications of the material gathered together in this volume is that the past is not likely to be a reliable guide to the future. The multiple conditions of emergence of a particular calculative practice are institutionally localized and historically specific. Patterns may emerge as further studies are conducted, and particular classes of factors may come to be identified, but this does not amount to a prediction as to how they may operate under different conditions.

One final observation may be appropriate. The study of accounting as a social and institutional practice is only in its early stages. Much has already been accomplished. But the material discussed here, notwithstanding its achievements, has so far only begun to open up new possibilities for the study of accounting. There has been a burgeoning of topics, issues and methodologies. Each of these is worthy of development and further exploration. Single studies of particular events should be the starting point for new literatures, rather than a sign that the issues are now settled. The deployment of new methodologies, and the extension of existing ones, need to be further encouraged, with the proviso that this should be experimental rather than canonical or exegetical. And the implications of research on accounting for other social sciences need to be more explicitly registered. For there is little doubt that accounting is increasingly one of the most influential bodies of expertise in a number of Western nations. It is only by analysing the multiplicity of practices that make it up that we will be able to understand how it has come to assume such a dominant position. This is of profound sociological and institutional significance, rather than a matter of concern only to technical specialists and those within the discipline of accounting. To develop an understanding of such practices, the achievements of the research presented here need to be consolidated and supplemented, if the promise which these initial steps hold is to be fulfilled.

NOTES

I am grateful to Keith Hoskin, Anthony Hopwood, Ted O'Leary, Brendan McSweeney and Michael Power for comments on an earlier draft of this Introduction.

1. See Hopwood (1986, 1992).
2. See for instance the studies of Argyris (1952); Bower (1970); Roy (1969); Simon, Guetzkow and Tyndall (1954); Whyte (1955); Wildavsky (1964). See Birnberg, Turopolec and Young (1983) for a useful overview.
3. These reflections were in the context of an introductory essay to a collection of papers, most of which were initially presented at the Workshop on 'Designing Management Accounting Systems for Organizations in a Changing Environment', held in San Francisco in 1976, under the auspices of *Accounting, Organizations and Society*. The papers are published in *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 3(1) (1978).
4. A parallel, and related development occurred around the same time in relation to the multi-disciplinary concept of 'management control'. The Management Control Workshop Group in the UK, and the Management Information and Control System Workshop in Europe more generally, provided a focus for work in this area. On this, see Lowe and Machin (1983). For an example of work in this vein, see Lowe, Puxty and Laughlin (1983).
5. On this point, see Miller and O'Leary (1993).
6. Cf. Zeff (1978).
7. The most accessible collection of this material is to be found in Watts and Zimmerman (1986).
8. These research agendas centring on the question of interests, and typically invoking an economic model of political processes, provide an exception to the generalization that a concern with accounting as a social and institutional practice developed in relation to management accounting. However, to date there has not developed a body of research on financial accounting comparable to that featured in this volume. This is curious, for financial accounting would seem to be just as suitable a target for such research as management accounting.
9. See *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 8(2/3) (1983) for the published papers arising from this conference.
10. See, for example: Birnberg, Turopolec and Young (1983); Boland and Pondy (1983); Johnson (1983); Markus and Pfeffer (1983).
11. See in particular the papers by Cooper (1983) and Meyer (1983).
12. In a related case, Gambling (1977, 1987) suggested that accounting could be understood as a ritualistic activity. In so far as Gambling argued, following Cleverley (1973), that such rituals were part of the 'age-old responses of man to uncertainty' (Gambling, 1977), his concerns are distinct from those of institutional theorists to analyse the influence of historically specific practices.

13. Cf. Thompson (1986, 1987) and Burchell, Clubb and Hopwood (1985). It is worth noting that the latter was circulating in manuscript form in the early 1980s.
14. Sometimes this type of research is termed 'naturalistic'. For the purposes of exposition here, 'naturalistic' and 'ethnographic' research are taken to be equivalent. See for instance Tomkins and Groves (1983), and the commentaries on this paper by Abdel-Khalik and Ajinkya (1983); Morgan (1983); Willmott (1983). The term 'ethnographic' is used to refer here to a wider literature than that conventionally defined as ethnography. The term 'interpretive' also provides a label for designating this strand of research; cf. Chua (1988).
15. See for instance: Boland and Pondy (1983, 1986); Colville (1981); Roberts and Scapens (1985); Tomkins and Groves (1983).
16. Preston (1989) draws explicitly on the notion of discipline as set out in the work of Foucault. But the detailed attention to the meanings and significance attached by individuals to their actions justifies the use of the term 'ethnography' to characterize this study.
17. For arguments in favour of a political economy of accounting, see, for instance: Cooper and Hopper (1987); Cooper and Sherer (1984); Hopper, Storey and Willmott (1987); Tinker (1980, 1984, 1985); Tinker, Merino and Neimark (1982).
18. See also Ogden and Bougen (1985). For a different perspective on the issue of 'adversary accounting' see McBarnet, Weston and Whelan (1993).
19. See also Dillard (1991) on the use of critical theory in accounting research.
20. See for example Waterhouse and Tiessen (1978) for a classic statement of this research. See Cooper (1981) and Otley (1980) for useful overviews and assessments of this literature.
21. Of course, many other researchers have contributed, often in association with March, to this research. See March (1988) for a useful collection of some of the key pieces of this literature.
22. In accounting, cf.: Cooper, Hayes and Wolf (1981); Hedberg and Jonsson (1978).
23. Cf. Miller and Napier (1993) on this notion.
24. For a different approach to analysing the rhetoric of accounting, see Arrington and Francis (1989).
25. The 'Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Accounting' Conferences held in 1985, 1988 and 1991 have provided an ongoing international forum for research of this type. See Miller, Hopper and Laughlin (1991) for an introduction to some of the papers from the 1988 Conference.
26. Although the intellectual tools to carry out such research are now widely available, outside the UK the institutional preconditions are not equally widely available within departments of accounting.
27. There are analogies here between the development of studies of accounting, and studies of a number of other bodies of expertise such as statistics, psychiatry and the natural sciences. On the history of statistics, see: Hacking (1990); Porter (1986). See Power (1992a) on the use of statistical techniques in accounting. On the history of psychiatry, see Castel (1976); Foucault (1972); Miller and Rose (1986). On the sociology of science and technology, see Bijker *et al.* (1987); Latour (1988); Pickering (1992).

28. See for instance Arrington and Schweiker (1992).
29. See Gorz (1989); Hopwood (1992); Power (1992b).
30. See Robson (1992) and Miller (1991, 1992).
31. See, for instance, Freedman and Power (1991) and Dezalay (1991, 1992).
32. See the collection of essays on 'Accounting and Gender' in *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 12(1) (1987). See also the collection of essays on 'Feminist Perspectives on Accounting Research' in *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 17(3/4) (1992). See also Hammond and Preston (1992); Shearer and Arrington (1993); Kirkham and Loft (1993); and the collection of papers in *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal* 5(3) (1992).
33. Cf. Miller and Rose (1990). See also Miller and O'Leary (1993).
34. See for instance: Burrell (1988); Clegg (1989, 1990); Cooper and Burrell (1988).
35. The most accessible collection of this material is Powell and DiMaggio (1991). For an assessment of ways in which the neoinstitutional tradition may be extended and developed, see Miller and O'Leary (1993).

REFERENCES

Abdel-Khalik, A.R. and Ajinkya, B.B., 1983. 'An Evaluation of "The Everyday Accountant and Researching his Reality"', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 8(4): 375–84

Ansari, S. and Euske, K.J., 1987. 'Rational, Rationalizing, and Reifying Uses of Accounting Data in Organizations', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 12(6): 549–70

Argyris, C., 1952. *The Impact of Budgets on People*, School of Business and Public Administration, Cornell University

Armstrong, P., 1985. 'Changing Management Control Strategies: The Role of Competition Between Accountancy and Other Organisational Professions', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 10(2): 129–48

1987. 'The Rise of Accounting Controls in British Capitalist Enterprises', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 12(5): 415–36

Arnold, P.J., 1991. 'Accounting and the State: Consequences of Merger and Acquisition Accounting in the US Hospital Industry', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 16(2): 121–40

Arrington, C.E. and Francis, J.R., 1989. 'Letting the Chat out of the Bag: Deconstructionism, Privilege and Accounting Research', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 14(1/2): 1–28

Arrington, C.E. and Schweiker, W., 1992. 'The Rhetoric and Rationality of Accounting Research', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 17(6): 511–33

Berry, A.J., Capps, T., Cooper, D., Ferguson, P., Hopper, T. and Lowe, E. A., 1985. 'Management Accounting in an Area of the NCB: Rationales of Accounting Practices in a Public Enterprise', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 10(1): 3–28

Bijker, W.E., Hughes, T.P. and Pinch, T.J. (eds.), 1987. *The Social Construction of Technological Systems: New Directions in the Sociology and History of Technology*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press

Birnberg, J.G., Turopolec, L. and Young, M.S., 1983. 'The Organizational Context of Accounting', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 8(2/3): 111–29

Boland, R.J. and Pondy, L.R., 1983. 'Accounting in Organizations: A Union of Natural and Rational Perspectives', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 8(2/3): 223–34

1986. 'The Micro Dynamics of a Budget-Cutting Process: Modes, Models and Structure', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 11(2/3): 403–22

Bougen, P.D., 1989. 'The Emergence, Roles and Consequences of an Accounting–Industrial Relations Interaction', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 14(3): 203–34

Bougen, P.D., Ogden, S.G. and Outram, Q., 1990. 'The Appearance and Disappearance of Accounting: Wage Determination in the UK Coal Industry', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 15(3): 149–70

Bower, J.L., 1970. *Managing the Resource Allocation Process*, Division of Research, Graduate School of Business Administration, Harvard University

Brunsson, N., 1982. 'The Irrationality of Action and Action Rationality: Decisions, Ideologies and Organizational Actions', *Journal of Management Studies* 19(1): 29–44

Burchell, S., Clubb, C., Hopwood, A. and Hughes, J., 1980. 'The Roles of Accounting in Organizations and Society', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 5(1): 5–27

Burchell, S., Clubb, C. and Hopwood, A.G., 1985. 'Accounting in its Social Context: Towards a History of Value Added in the United Kingdom', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 10(4): 381–413

Burrell, G., 1988. 'Modernism, Post Modernism and Organizational Analysis 2: The Contribution of Michel Foucault', *Organization Studies* 9: 221–35

Castel, R., 1976. *L'ordre psychiatrique*, Paris: Editions de Minuit

Chua, W.F., 1988. 'Interpretive Sociology and Management Accounting Research – A Critical Review', *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal* 1(2): 59–79

Clegg, S.R., 1989. *Frameworks of Power*, London: Sage

1990. *Modern Organizations: Organization Studies in the Postmodern World*, London: Sage

Cleverley, G., 1973. *Managers and Magic*, Harmondsworth: Pelican

Cohen, M.D., March, J.G. and Olsen, J.P., 1972. 'A Garbage Can Model of Organizational Life', *Administrative Science Quarterly* 17(1), March, republished in J.G. March, *Decisions and Organizations* (1988)

Colville, I., 1981. 'Reconstructing "Behavioural Accounting"', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 6(2): 119–32

Cooper, D., 1981. 'A Social and Organizational View of Management Accounting', in M. Bromwich and A. Hopwood (eds.), *Essays in British Accounting Research*, London: Pitman

1983. 'Tidiness, Muddle and Things: Commonalities and Divergencies in Two Approaches to Management Accounting Research', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 8(2/3): 269–86

Cooper, R. and Burrell, G., 1988. 'Modernism, Postmodernism and Organizational Analysis: An Introduction', *Organization Studies* 9: 91–112

Cooper, D.J. and Hopper, T.M., 1987. 'Critical Studies in Accounting', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 12(5): 407–14

Cooper, D.J. and Sherer, M.J., 1984. 'The Value of Corporate Accounting Reports:

Arguments for a Political Economy of Accounting', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 9(3/4): 207–32

Cooper, D.J., Hayes, D. and Wolf, F., 1981. 'Accounting in Organized Anarchies: Understanding and Designing Accounting Systems in Ambiguous Situations', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 6(3): 175–91

Covaleski, M.A. and Dirsmith, M.W., 1988a. 'An Institutional Perspective on the Rise, Social Transformation, and Fall of a University Budget Category', *Administrative Science Quarterly* 33: 562–87

1988b. 'The Use of Budgetary Symbols in the Political Arena: An Historically Informed Field Study', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 13(1): 1–24

Cutler, A., Hindess, B., Hirst, P. and Hussain, A., 1978. *Marx's 'Capital' and Capitalism Today: Volume Two*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul

Dent, J., 1991. 'Accounting and Organizational Cultures: A Field Study of the Emergence of a New Organizational Reality', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 16(8): 705–32

Dezalay, Y., 1991. 'Territorial Battles and Tribal Disputes', *The Modern Law Review* 54: 792–809

1992. *Marchands de droit: La restructuration de l'ordre juridique international par les multinationales du droit*, Paris: Fayard

Dillard, J.F., 1991. 'Accounting as a Critical Social Science', *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal* 4(1): 8–28

Espeland, W.N. and Hirsch, P.M., 1990. 'Ownership Changes, Accounting Practice and the Redefinition of the Corporation', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 15(1/2): 77–96

Fligstein, N., 1987. 'The Intraorganizational Power Struggle: Rise of Finance Personnel to Top Leadership in Large Corporations, 1919–1979', *American Sociological Review* 52: 44–58

1990. *The Transformation of Corporate Control*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press

Foucault, M., 1972. *Histoire de la folie*, Paris: Gallimard

Freedman, J. and Power, M., 1991. 'Law and Accounting: Transition and Transformation', *The Modern Law Review* 54: 769–91

Gallhofer, S. and Haslam, J., 1991. 'The Aura of Accounting in the Context of a Crisis: Germany and the First World War', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 16(5/6): 487–520

Gambling, T., 1977. 'Magic, Accounting and Morale', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 2(2): 141–51

1987. 'Accounting for Rituals', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 12(4): 319–29

Gorz, A., 1989. *Critique of Economic Reason*, trans. G. Handyside and C. Turner, London: Verso

Hacking, I., 1990. *The Taming of Chance*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Hammond, T. and Preston, A., 1992. 'Culture, Gender and Corporate Control: Japan as "Other"', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 17(8): 795–808

Hedberg, B. and Jonsson, S., 1978. 'Designing Semi-Confusing Information Systems for Organizations in Changing Environments', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 3(1): 47–64

Hines, R., 1988. 'Financial Accounting: In Communicating Reality, We Construct

Reality', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 13(3): 251–61
1989. 'The Sociopolitical Paradigm in Financial Accounting Research', *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal* 2(1): 52–76
Hopper, T. and Armstrong, P., 1991. 'Cost Accounting, Controlling Labour and the Rise of Conglomerates', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 16(5/6): 405–38
Hopper, T., Storey, J. and Willmott, H., 1987. 'Accounting for Accounting: Towards the Development of a Dialectical View', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 12(5): 437–56
Hopwood, A.G., 1978. 'Towards an Organizational Perspective for the Study of Accounting and Information Systems', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 3(1): 3–13
1983. 'On Trying to Study Accounting in the Contexts in Which it Operates', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 8(2/3): 287–305
1986. 'Management Accounting and Organizational Action: An Introduction', in M. Bromwich and A.G. Hopwood (eds.), *Research and Current Issues in Management Accounting*, London: Pitman
1992. 'Accounting Calculation and the Shifting Sphere of the Economic', *European Accounting Review* 1(1): 125–43
Johnson, H.T., 1983. 'The Search for Gain in Markets and Firms: A Review of the Historical Emergence of Management Accounting Systems', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 8(2/3): 139–46
Jonsson, S. and Gronlund, A., 1988. 'Life With a Sub-Contractor: New Technology and Management Accounting', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 13(5): 512–32
Kirkham, L. and Loft, A., 1993. 'Gender and the Construction of the Professional Accountant', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 18(6): 507–58
Latour, B., 1988. *The Pasteurization of France*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press
Laughlin, R.C., 1987. 'Accounting Systems in Organizational Contexts: A Case for Critical Theory', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 12(5): 479–502
Lowe, T. and Machin, J.L.J., 1983. *New Perspectives in Management Control*, London: Macmillan
Lowe, E.A., Puxty, A.G. and Laughlin, R.C., 1983. 'Simple Theories for Complex Processes: Accounting Policy and the Market for Myopia', *Journal of Accounting and Public Policy* 2: 19–42
McBarnet, D., Weston, S. and Whelan, C.J., 1993. 'Adversary Accounting: Strategic Uses of Financial Information by Capital and Labour', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 18(1): 81–100
March, J.G., 1978. 'Bounded Rationality, Ambiguity, and the Engineering of Choice', *Bell Journal of Economics* 9(2), Autumn; reprinted in J.G. March, *Decisions and Organizations* (1988)
1987. 'Ambiguity and Accounting: The Elusive Link between Information and Decision Making', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 12(2): 153–68
1988. *Decisions and Organizations*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell
Markus, M.L. and Pfeffer, J., 1983. 'Power and the Design and Implementation of Accounting and Control Systems', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 8(2/3): 205–18

Meyer, J.W., 1983. 'On the Celebration of Rationality: Some Comments on Boland and Pondy', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 8(2/3): 235–40
1986. 'Social Environments and Organizational Accounting', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 11(4/5): 345–56
Meyer, J.W. and Rowan, B., 1977. 'Institutionalized Organizations: Formal Structure as Myth and Ceremony', *American Journal of Sociology* 83(2): 340–63, reprinted in J.W. Meyer and W.R. Scott, *Organizational Environments: Ritual and Rationality*, Beverly Hills, CA: Sage (1983) (page references are to the latter)
Mezias, S.J., 1990. 'An Institutional Model of Organizational Practice: Financial Reporting at the Fortune 200', *Administrative Science Quarterly* 35: 431–57
Miller, P., 1991. 'Accounting Innovation Beyond the Enterprise: Problematizing Investment Decisions and Programming Economic Growth in the UK in the 1960s', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 16(8): 733–62
1992. 'Accounting and Objectivity: The Invention of Calculating Selves and Calculable Spaces', *Annals of Scholarship* 9(1/2): 61–86
Miller, P. and Napier, C., 1993. 'Genealogies of Calculation', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 18(7/8): 631–74
Miller, P. and O'Leary, T., 1990. 'Making Accountancy Practical', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 15(3): 479–98
1993. 'Neoinstitutionalism and Practices of Government', *Working Paper*, LSE
1994. 'Accounting "Economic Citizenship" and the Spatial Reordering of Manufacture', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 19(1): 15–43
Miller, P. and Rose, N. (eds.), 1986. *The Power of Psychiatry*, Cambridge: Polity Press
1990. 'Governing Economic Life', *Economy and Society* 19(1): 1–31
Miller, P., Hopper, T. and Laughlin, R., 1991. 'The New Accounting History: An Introduction', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 16(5/6): 395–403
Morgan, G., 1983. 'Social Science and Accounting Research: A Commentary on Tomkins and Groves', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 8(4): 385–8
Nahapiet, J., 1988. 'The Rhetoric and Reality of an Accounting Change: A Study of Resource Allocation', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 13(4): 333–58
Neimark, M. and Tinker, T., 1986. 'The Social Construction of Management Control Systems', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 11(4/5): 369–95
Ogden, S. and Bougen, P., 1985. 'A Radical Perspective on the Disclosure of Accounting Information to Trade Unions', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 10(2): 211–24
Otley, D., 1980. 'The Contingency Theory of Management Accounting: Achievements and Prognosis', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 5(4): 413–28
Picciotto, S., 1992. 'International Taxation and Intrafirm Pricing in Transnational Corporate Groups', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 17(8): 759–92
Pickering, A., 1992. *Science as Practice and Culture*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press
Pinch, T., Mulkay, M. and Ashmore, M., 1989. 'Clinical Budgeting: Experimentation in the Social Sciences: A Drama in Five Acts', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 14(3): 271–301
Porter, T.M., 1986. *The Rise of Statistical Thinking*, Princeton: Princeton University Press

Powell, W.W. and DiMaggio, P.J. (eds.), 1991. *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press

Power, M., 1991. 'Educating Accountants: Towards a Critical Ethnography', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 16(4): 333–53

1992a. 'From Common Sense to Expertise: Reflections on the Prehistory of Audit Sampling', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 17(1): 37–62

1992b. 'After Calculation? Reflections on "Critique of Economic Reason" by Andre Gorz', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 17(5): 477–99

Preston, A.M., 1989. 'The Taxman Cometh: Some observations on the Interrelationship Between Accounting and Inland Revenue Practice', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 11(4/5): 398–413

Preston, A.M., Cooper, D.J. and Coombs, R.W., 1992. 'Fabricating Budgets: A Study of the Production of Management Budgeting in the National Health Service', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 17(6): 561–93

Puxty, A.G., Willmott, H.C., Cooper, D.J. and Lowe, T., 1987. 'Modes of Regulation in Advanced Capitalism: Locating Accountancy in Four Countries', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 12(3): 273–91

Roberts, J. and Scapens, R., 1985. 'Accounting Systems and Systems of Accountability – Understanding Accounting Practices in their Organizational Contexts', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 10(4): 443–56

Robson, K., 1992. 'Accounting Numbers as "Inscription": Action at a Distance and the Development of Accounting', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 17(7): 685–708

Roy, D., 1969. 'Making Out: A Counter-System of Workers' Control of Work Situation and Relationships', in T. Burns (ed.), *Industrial Man*, Harmondsworth: Penguin

Shearer, T.L. and Arrington, C.E., 1993. 'Accounting in other Wor(l)ds: A Feminism Without Reserve', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 18(2/3): 253–72

Simon, H.A., Guetzkow, G.K. and Tyndall, G., 1954. *Centralization vs Decentralization in Organizing the Controller's Department*, New York: American Books – Stratford Press

Swieringa, R.J. and Weick, K.E., 1987. 'Management Accounting and Action', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 12(3): 293–308

Thompson, G., 1986. *Economic Calculation and Policy Formation*, London: Routledge

1987. 'Inflation Accounting in a Theory of Calculation', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 12(5): 523–43

Tinker, A.M., 1980. 'Towards a Political Economy of Accounting: An Empirical Illustration of the Cambridge Controversies', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 5(1): 147–60

1984. 'Theories of the State and the State of Accounting: Economic Reductionism and Political Voluntarism in Accounting Regulation Theory', *Journal of Accounting and Public Policy* Spring: 55–74

1985. *Paper Prophets: A Social Critique of Accounting*, New York: Praeger

Tinker, A.M., Merino, B.D. and Neimark, M.D., 1982. 'The Normative Origins of Positive Theories: Ideology and Accounting Thought', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 7(2): 167–200

Tomkins, C. and Groves, R., 1983. 'The Everyday Accountant and Researching his Reality', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 8(4): 361–74

Tribe, K., 1978. *Land, Labour and Economic Discourse*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul

Wardell, M. and Weisenfeld, L.W., 1991. 'Management Accounting and the Workplace in the United States and Great Britain', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 16(7): 655–70

Waterhouse, J.H. and Tiessen, P., 1978. 'A Contingency Framework for Management Accounting Systems Research', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 3(1): 65–76

Watts, R.L. and Zimmerman, J.L., 1986. *Positive Accounting Theory*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall

Whyte, W.F., 1955. *Money and Motivation*, New York: Harper & Row

Wildavsky, A., 1964. *The Politics of the Budgetary Process*, Boston: Little, Brown

Willmott, H.C., 1983. 'Paradigms for Accounting Research: Critical Reflections on Tomkins and Groves' "The Everyday Accountant and Researching his Reality"', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 8(4): 389–405

Zeff, S.A., 1978. 'The Rise of "Economic Consequences"', *The Journal of Accountancy* December: 56–63