public space; and the three the case studies of pre-Columbian and Conquest plaza architecture in Belize and Mexico are particularly informative. Throughout this entire section Low does an excellent job of demonstrating that such historical contextualization "is not just a backdrop for the ethnographies and interviews, but an integral part of the social production and social construction" of the plazas today (p. 51). This work therefore makes a noteworthy contribution to the emergent field of historical anthropology as well as to the contemporary ethnography of urban Costa Rica.

"Part III: Ethnographies" is arguably the strongest section of the book. The three chapters included here set out fascinating and detailed ethnographic accounts, photographs and mappings of daily life in Parque Central and Plaza de la Cultura. The section begins with a discussion of spatializing culture, meaning "to locate—physically, historically and conceptually—social relations and social practice in space" (p. 127). Earlier in the book, this concept was explained primarily in ecological terms and the assertion was made that by focussing on the spatialization of culture, *causal* relationships between sociopolitical economy and urban environment could be determined (p. 36). Fortunately, such a deterministic goal is set aside in this third section and the discussion is far more complex as readers learn about the movement of police officers, the contested presence of evangelical healers and preachers, the debates over plaza renovations, the fear of "clandestine" and dangerous activities, and the decidedly masculine space that characterizes both plazas. It is obvious that plaza life—so often taken for granted by so many residents of San José as well as by visiting anthropologists—is indeed an important part of the daily negotiation of Costa Rican "cultura," a notion that is popularly employed "as a value from the past, a cultural ideal that is desired but that conflicts with aspects of modern life" (p. 157).

A compelling chapter is devoted to the ways in which the construction of social differences is reified and resisted in public plaza space. Low begins with a timely theoretical discussion of boundaries that does not negate their symbolic and metaphorical importance but reminds readers that they are also "political devices for social control and discipline. In situations of social or political inequality, boundaries may provide the logic for inclusion or exclusion, with tragic consequence for those without power" (p. 155). She then moves on to discuss how these inclusions and exclusions are forged through the daily rhythms of movement and mood in the plazas. While there is much here to commend—perhaps most notably the effectiveness of the mapping strategies—it is hard not to notice that in spite of an apparent attention to power, there is no in-depth analysis of the obvious gender inequities that result in a predominantly masculine space and that inform much of the prostitution that occurs in the vicinity of these plazas. Similarly, the unproblematized integration of data collected over a 10-year period, as if it were all happening simultaneously, denies the importance of time. A more careful theorizing of time and space would have undoubtedly enhanced this analysis further.

The last section in the book, "Part IV: Conversations" offers a series of literary and interview-based recollections and accounts of plaza life in Costa Rica. These excerpts anecdotally support and enrich the ethnographic and historical material presented earlier, and readers are sure to be engaged by the often nostalgic and touching passages. However, the lack of any explicit analyses of these conversations or integrated reflection on their potential meaning is ultimately quite frustrating.

Overall, this book is a strong work that contributes to our ethnographic knowledge of San José, public space, historical anthropology and methodology. It would be well suited for upper-year undergraduate curricula and is sure to appeal to a wide variety of readers.

Erik Cohen, *The Commericalized Crafts of Thailand: Hill Tribes and Lowland Villages,* Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2000, xiii + 316 pages.

Penny Van Esterik, *Materializing Thailand,* New York: Berg (Oxford), 2000, xi + 274 pages.

Reviewer: *Tony Fisher*
University of Alberta

These books are quite dissimilar. *Commercialized Crafts* is focussed on the contemporary marketing and production of crafts in Thailand. It is a collection of previously published articles and chapters from anthologies. There is an introductory chapter and two sections, one with chapters on "Hill Tribes Crafts" and the other on "Lowland Village Crafts." The first section focusses on Hmong arts, the second on villages in northern Thailand.

The chapters or articles are tightly focussed on their individual subject matter and not easily interconnected. For example, "International Politics and the Transformation of Folk Crafts; the Hmong of Thailand and Laos" (pp. 27-49), discusses the role of various Hmong subdivisions in the Second Indochina War and how their treatment by Thai, Pathet Lao, and Vietnamese military (not to mention the CIA) altered the circumstances of Hmong groups and the craftspersons in those groups. It concludes with a discussion of how craft production was influenced by international NGOs in Hmong villages and refugee camps.

The section on lowland villages begins with, "Touristic Craft Ribbon Development in Thailand" (pp. 165-184). This is a discussion of "ribbons" of craft retail shops along major roads outside Chiang Mai in northern Thailand. The ribbons of workshops, stalls and retail venues along major routes came about during the expansion of Thailand's road network, because the new, hard surfaced roads allowed tourists ease of access to the "hinterlands" surrounding Thai cities. These "ribbons" offer consumers a different experience from the ubiquitous city market venues. They are an enjoyable alternative to the markets, or "night bazaar" forms of retailing. Having recently visited one of these "ribbons" leading out from

Chiang Mai I found the descriptions very interesting. Indeed, there are ribbon-like shopping areas along highways and out of villages in many northern Thailand locations. This clustering of like vendors and similar selections of goods is intriguing.

Materializing Thailand is quite different from the above. It is about the big picture, representation or palimpsest (pp. 41-43) of Thailand (or "Amazing Thailand"). The author, Van Esterik, has been deeply influenced by her lengthy Thai involvement and her recurring analyses of this Thai experience. It is a fine book, but sometimes hard to come to grips with.

This comment is not a criticism of the author or her writing/organizing abilities. Rather it relates to her subject, Thailand. Thailand and its people are different and a subject which likely escapes the anthropological discipline's conventional tools, in part because Thailand has taken pains to become a popular tourist destination and by doing so has hidden many aspects of Thai life.

In her chapter, "Representing Thai Culture" she talks about " . . . the new temples of prosperity, shopping malls," and contrasts them with the " . . . unpredictable and undignified bargaining in hot, dark, noisy markets for locally made goods" (p. 123). Both malls and markets have quantities of goods which cannot be "authenticated," but tourists happily "buy into" the business of instant antiques and fake Rolex watches. These commercial ventures are right next to "The Grand Palace" or restored ruins of historic palaces at Sukhothai or Ayutthaya. These and, "the Grand Mall" through which one exits Bangkok International Airport and Thailand are difficult to categorize. The analysis of this prominent aspect of Thai culture surely requires a new set of anthropological tools.

Van Esterik's work is rewarding to the diligent reader. Her attempt to look at Thai culture and Thai studies from a more feminist perspective is successful in bringing out interesting insights into Buddhism, into the AIDS epidemic, and "kalatesa."

Thais believe that "kalatesa," the wedding of context and activity with manners and speech, makes for a better life for all. And, it excuses the excesses of foreigners—both tourists and anthros one suspects (pp. 38, 39, 40). One also suspects that this is one reason that Thai culture and behaviour and its description are hard to come to grips with. It makes everyday Thai Buddhism hard to grasp, and it makes it hard to understand Thai prostitution, globalization, and the AIDS/HIV problem. "Kalatesa" plays a major part in hiding issues of poverty, class, and women by making them inappropriate to discuss in most contexts. "Materializing Thailand" gives you the chance to think about all this, however.

James Carrier (ed.), *Meanings of the Market: The Free Market in Western Culture,* Oxford and New York: Berg, 1997, xvii + 276 pages

Reviewer: *Anne Vallely*
Concordia University

On July 4th of this year, Adbusters magazine unveiled a new American flag. In place of the familiar white stars were corporate logos such as those of Nike, McDonald's, Shell, IBM and Coca-Cola. The intention, of course, was to highlight the power that big corporations now have over the political process, but its resonance attested to something closer to home: increasingly, the very meaning of "America"—what it stands for in the popular imagination—is being truncated and reduced to little more than that of "economy." Alternately put, the economy is increasingly the discourse through which Americans define their culture and themselves. Whether this is understood as a flattening and narrowing of social life to fit the dictates of instrumental rationality, or a re-definition of social life in terms of the language of the market, it essentially amounts to the same thing: the idea of the "free market" is now a central organizing principle in American culture.

Meanings of the Market is a collection of essays that explore the complex and often contradictory meanings of the market in Western culture. The reified free market model is pulled out of the skies and down to a level of empirical analysis, to reveal its historical, cultural, and ideological underpinnings. It is an impressive collection of six original essays and a wonderful introduction by James Carrier which weaves the chapters into a coherent theoretical whole. Carrier persuades us to see the free market model as a type of discourse through which we talk about ourselves and others; a lingua franca that imposes a particular type of order and meaning of experience, and through which we understand ourselves. Central to the model is the idea that the world is comprised of detached individuals, free of cultural and social constraints, rationally calculating the costs and benefits of their economic transactions. Carrier reveals this model to be more artifact than fact—one that concerns our idealized selves, and our beliefs about the way things "should" work, far more than it reflects the actual workings of the economy.

So, in spite of the Asian financial crisis, Russia's faltering economy, the dot.com disasters and growing absolute poverty for the vast majority of humankind, we continue to be told by the high priests of capitalism that "the fundamentals of the world economy are sound." To the faithful, the free market model is impervious to criticism: successes are all its own, failures are attributed to deviations from the model, and alternative non-market successes are "anomalies." The model has all the makings of a cultural myth: its meanings are multiple, condensed, and its boundaries are hard to delimit. Within its scope are such strongly held cultural values as anti-authoritarianism, equality, self-reliance, individual responsibility, freedom from constraint, and private property—it is a deep well whose riches can never be used up.