From Valuation to Instauration: On the Double Pluralism of Values

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Abstract

At the request of Valuation Studies, Antoine Hennion reflects on his own investigative trajectory as a way to explore the ways in which the sociology of attachment, which lies at the heart of his pragmatist approach, can refine our understanding of a number of recurring problems with which the sociology of valuation is confronted.

Key words: attachment; value; constructivism; amateurs; pragmatism; James; Latour; Souriau

I have been struck by the ruthless collective self-criticism in 21 points written by the editorial board of Valuation Studies in 2014 under an expressive title: 'Valuation Studies [no italics...] and the Critique of Valuation' (2014: 87-96). I will thus echo some debates that took place in previous issues, as the journal invites us to do, rather than pretending to contribute to a ready-made frame of analysis: no such thing exists. Mostly, it is not wanted. Notably, points 14 to 17 of this editorial note were seriously questioning some trends already taken by VS in its understandable effort to focus on specific matters. Heavily drawing on authors defending pluralistic ontologies, as Haraway and Latour, or, recently, Scott and Puig della Bellacasa, the Board raised issues very close to my own concerns about the value of things: a plea for considering attachments rather than values, in order to counter the idea of liberal choices made between clear alternatives; a redefinition of objectivity as what we are the more committed with, not the more detached from; the necessary involvement of valuers into ongoing situations that they themselves help perform. Finally, a plea was

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© 2017 Author LiU Electronic Press, DOI 10.3384/VS. 2001-5992.175169 http://valuationstudies.liu.se explicitly made with activism: a politically decentered care does not only concern human beings, but the world, and any fragile entities: if she had to rethink valuation, no doubt Haraway (2016) would speak of a 'becoming-with', rather than of measuring and preserving a resource for our own sake.

Here I will not address the emphasis put on economics in many VS papers: the editors rightly consider economization as a crucial matter of concern in the present time. Discussing it is legitimate in VS, and VS is an appropriate place to do so. Among the other trends pinpointed in the editorial note, I will discuss two of them, maybe less explicit and more pernicious: a shift from coping with the value of things to describing valuation as an activity; and still, in this description, a stress put on technical devices rather than on a global approach of valuation as work. This implies first, the risk of reinforcing the opposition between valuation and the thing valued; and second, the risk of reducing the necessity of taking objects into account to such devices. In fact, these two trends are connected. One may assume them, in what I would consider a restricted STS perspective, that a slogan as the following one could catch up: "Valuation studies are not dealing with values but with valuing." In other terms, they should not be directly concerned by the value of things but by how valuations are made. To me, such a stance does not refer so much to the long-run debate on facts and values (Dewey 1939; Vatin 2017) or to the famous Parsons' Pact on value and values (Stark 2009: 7), as to a long-standing problem in social analyses: the role granted to objects. To take valuation only as an activity amounts to maintain a dualist conception staging a human action operating on passive things. But then, how and to what extent can we grant objects agency?

Drawing on my background in STS, my work on music and amateurs, and the sociology of attachments I try to elaborate, I will relate the present issue on the status of valuation to the ambiguous notion of social construction, which tends to evacuate the objects in question in favor of human practices; I will lean on amateurs' experience in order to learn more about other forms of 'valuing things'; defending the necessity of the present ontological turn, I will indicate how it may also be of help here to specifically resort to James' pragmatism (1912): far from defining a pluralistic perspectivism on inert objects, this amounts to sketching a conception of valuation as a co-sustainment of plural worlds 'in process of making'.

A Sociology of Attachments

How then can current debates on *valuation* benefit from lifelong experience in the sociology of *attachments*?¹ In many ways, probably. I began my career by analysing hit parades and charts in popular music (Hennion and Vignolle 1978). Music also features quite prominently in the problem of prices and markets. Take this question, for example: why does not the price of recordings first depend on the music itself or the artist, but mostly on the material medium? Or this one: why is there not something comparable to the art market for musical works? Those idiosyncrasies are certainly a challenge for economic sociology. Conversely, in contrast to those peculiarities, music is certainly a rich field for the study of varied forms of assessment and valuation, from international competitions, grand prizes and school juries (McCormick 2015), to highly diverse forms of media and literary criticism. If I take music as a case study, indeed valuing, prizing, estimating, rating and marking is everywhere. Even the fact that ranking or pricing music is not that easy is interesting from that perspective.

But as I said, I will not borrow questions, concepts and arguments from the sociology of valuation and apply them to music or wine (Hennion 2015a), or care (Hennion and Vidal-Naquet 2017) or other forms of attachment. My point is to insist on the resistance of things. I rather see valuation as a way of sustaining their openness and not of domesticating their plurality. The reason why, from my beginnings in sociology, I was interested in music is precisely that I was highly frustrated by the inability of the social sciences to take into account its quality. What is the meaning of dealing with music, if you meticulously avoid addressing the only issue that matters for any music lover—i.e. is it good or not? The word 'value' itself is highly problematic here, so heavily loaded with paralysing dualisms: good/bad vs true/false, normative vs descriptive, or conceptual vs empirical (Abbott 2016), and, more specifically with regard to the social sciences, 'value' vs 'values', following Parsons' Pact. The point has been thoroughly discussed in VS. So, in the steps of Stark's shift to 'worth', why not drop the word value and go back to the question behind it? The question, as Stark puts it, is: what counts? If we understand 'valuing' as 'making things count', and if we try to apply this to empirical sociological inquiries, then the notion is very close to what I am after with the notion of 'attachments': what we hold to and what holds us; but also and mostly, a way of keeping unseparated our objects of attachment and our ways of keeping us attached to them (Hennion 2007). This is what I would like to explore by outlining some

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problematic issues—problematic insofar as they lead to more or less radical reconsideration of what the social sciences and social inquiry consist (see also Hennion 2016).

Social Sciences in Trouble when Confronted to Objects

For sure, things have troubled the social sciences from their very origins (Latour 2005). But the problem is even more serious now, when new issues as diverse as climate, gender, health, markets and finance, or energy and access to natural resources, migrations and war all take the form of open realities, uncertain, inextricably engaging science and technology, ethics and law, politics and economics (Latour 2013; Haraway 2016). What is left then to a purely social analysis, taking all objects *either* as natural things out of its scope, or as signs, stakes, beliefs, or even constructions, that need to be returned to their social foundation? Be it in a top-down model, as in critical sociology, or in a bottom-up one, as in labelling theory, can sociologists continue to stop at the point where they show that things are not what they are, but what we pretend or believe they are? As science and technology studies and pragmatic sociology have shown, from different angles, to answer 'no' requires that we radically revise sociology, in order to make it less dissymmetrical, and at last capable of properly taking objects into account: to me, this is the hidden stake lying behind the 'value issue'.

But giving more space to objects is not a side issue. Even if we speak of construction, if we insist on instruments and devices, if we describe assemblages and elaborate on performativity (Callon 1998; Callon et al. 2007; MacKenzie et al. 2007; Muniesa 2014), we still run a high risk of emphasizing the collective action of human beings, while letting things observe us from their passivity. It is not only a matter of *building* things, then, but of having them exist more—exactly what 'valuing' says better: things only exist to the extent that they are worth something, to the extent that they are 'for' something. But what for, then? Are we to get back to the old 'value issue' we wanted to escape from? And not only that: reciprocally, what if objects make us as much as we make them? What if 'valuing' them (recognizing, materializing, testing what they are worth) also means that, as their own agency overflows our action to make them exist, they in turn 'value' us and make us exist more (individually or collectively), in the uncertainty of worlds still to come?

Were We Really Constructivists?

There is a crucial factor here, which is that of recognizing in objects this 'making' of things, both the fact that they are made and the fact that they make their making. This is a making that cares for things and

does not oppose them (does not denaturalize or deconstruct them) because they are fabricated—the latter being quite a different aim, that of social constructivism. This moment of divergence and explication was a very important one for the tradition I contributed to in the past, that is, for this 'us' that links me to my colleagues at the CSI (Centre de Sociologie de l'Innovation) in Paris, known to many as the birthplace of actor-network theory (ANT). At the beginning the theme was confused, the question difficult and open to all sorts of misunderstandings. Bruno Latour, a crucial part of that 'us', suggested various solutions for extricating ourselves. One was to contrast constructivism as such to social constructivism, call it 'constructionism' and not 'constructivism'. Another was to talk instead of 'fabrication', of 'factishes', these hard *facts* that positivists were throwing at us but whose very name carried the mark of them being actually made (Latour 2009). The word 'pragmatism' no doubt helped us realize that in reality we were not constructivists at all, in the sense of 'the social construction of'. Of course, initially, every sociological move is constructivist in the broad sense of the term. Faced with its object, whether it is art, religion, truth, morality or culture, sociology shows that it is historical, that it depends on a time and a place, that it is conveyed via corporeal practices and that it varies according to context, that it has procedures, that it is underpinned by convention, that it is supported by institutions. The initial move of a sociological enterprise is certainly to show the believer how belief is produced, as Bourdieu claimed (1980).

Doing sociology necessarily means that you, to some extent, partake in the original constructivism of the discipline. On the topics of science and culture, we thus travelled along with sociologies very different from our own, as long as it was a matter of being opposed to the absolutism of truth in itself, or the beauty of 'Art for Art's sake'. But as we went further, our use of the same term-constructivism-came to designate two divergent paths: showing that things are constructed, and that therefore they are nothing (to be more precise: that, for instance for critical sociology, they are everything, absolute when they relate to science; and they are nothing, purely arbitrary signs when they relate to culture). Or, on the other hand, giving things themselves a role to play in these matters. We, of course, were following the second path. And we first had to understand ourselves, and then make understood at what point this path radically departed from what is generally understood as constructivism, whether it is Bourdieu's version or that of the linguistic turn, the one put forward in the sociology of scientific knowledge, a large part of science and technology studies, or cultural studies. From a common starting point, the paths go in completely opposite directions.

Obviously, things do not have an inherent nature. The work of the social sciences is to show their *instauration*. But once this is done, the next question that arises is even more arduous, a decisive bifurcation that Latour expressed admirably with his 'factishes'. Does this fabrication of things have to be played out *against* them or *with* them? Why not treat the objects in question in the same way that Bourdieu repeatedly treats bodies, collectives or apparatuses (but notably not objects)? Why not see them as beings in formation, open, resistant, making each other in a reciprocal fashion, acting reflexively on those who cause them to come into being? The social sciences will remain at the threshold of this new territory as long as they maintain at any price their two founding intangible distinctions—between human action and the agency of objects, and between social interpretation and natural realities—the very distinctions that ANT had challenged (Latour 2005).

Not to throw the baby (sociology) out with the bathwater (sociologism) is a real issue. The stake is not to return to 'deeper', eternal philosophical questions, but to improve our ways of making social inquiries after having borrowed (as far as I am concerned, in a minimal dose!) what is imperiously needed (and only that) from other modes of thinking, such as philosophy. Why is philosophy 'needed' here? Precisely because in breaking Parsons Pact—and thus, beyond this, in reconsidering Durkheim's foundational gesture (see Hennion 2015b, ch. 1)—whether we want to or not, we once again have to face questions of ontology: exactly the ones that positivism and scientism succeeded in chasing away. For sure, this is a demanding task. It is the price to pay to regain a capacity of coping with worthwhile objects.

Attachments to Objects Rather than Values of Things

At first glance, attachments are very close to what have been elaborated as 'values' in sociology. At the same time, I use the word precisely because it goes in an opposite direction. What attaches us, and what we are attached to is everything but an abstract, dualist, a priori or arbitrary choice made by a free subject. The word is a breaker of dualisms: first between objectivity and the social (Latour 2005; Daston and Galison 2007), but also between the passive and active modes (Gomart and Hennion 1999; Hennion 2017). To hold to something is a relationship which is fundamentally reciprocal. Be it about love, taste or political opinion-or smoking, as in Latour's Mafalda (Latour 1999)-it is not that easy to say who holds what or what holds whom, what is determining and what is determined. Attachment is neither a cause nor an effect; it is rather an action and its results, seized together, a performance. One is not attached without doing many things; in that sense it is very active, but most of those actions are unable to directly produce a result: as a musical enchantment, it is never the sole effect of voluntary purposes. Rather, their value precisely emanates from the fact that they cannot be reduced to their causes. When such things emerge (or do not emerge), they exceed the efforts made to make them happen (Hennion 2007).

Finally, it means that attachments are highly political: by using the word, I also advocate making social inquiries on sensitive matters and things that count for people and thus require making choices; to fight against other choices, and to engage in favour of actions made in order to make things better.

The Amateur's Lesson

Objects have their own presence. They make themselves by making us. What a mysterious relationship: works that we create, that we fabricate, that escape us and come back changed! The amateur is the *lover*, not the layperson. Amateurs are experts in this consequential testing of objects they are passionate about. They confront them; they do whatever is necessary to test and feel them (in French, *éprouver* has these two meanings), and they thus accumulate an experience that is always challenged by the way in which these objects deploy their effects. Rather than experts, they are experimenters, *éprouveurs*, or even, why not, 'valuers', as long as we take them not just as experts, but as active producers of value? It is from this perspective that I would like to draw on amateurs and go back to the issue of taste: both taste as an appreciation of things, and as what comes about via the act of appreciation itself. In other words, I take taste less as an object of study, than as an experience to be approached (Hennion 2007).

Amateurs are not believers caught up in the illusion of their belief, indifferent to the conditions under which their taste came about. On the contrary, their most ordinary experiences are those of doubt and hope. They are well placed to know, experiencing one disappointment after another, that there is nothing automatic about the appearance of the work or of their emotion. They are on the hunt. The experience of taste continually forces them to question its origin: is it my milieu, my habits, a quirk of fashion? Am I being taken in by an all too easy procedure? Could I be too much under the influence of so-and-so, or the plaything of some projection that makes me see something that isn't there? This question of the determination of taste is at the very heart of the formation of the amateur subject. It is a long way from being the sociologist's discovery of a truth that everyone has repressed. No one feels more than do amateurs the open, indeterminate (and hence disputable, contestable) character of their object of passion. De gustibus EST disputandum [in matters of taste, there can be dispute].

Amateurism is the worship of what makes a difference. It is the opposite of indifference, in the two timely meanings of the word. That is why I treat amateurs as teachers of pragmatism. They know better

than anyone (by truly living it) that there is no opposition between the need to 'construct' an object-having permanently relied, to that end, on a body trained by past experience and the techniques and tastes of others-and the fact that from the entanglement of criss-crossing experiences out of which the object arises it is just as capable of surprising, escaping or doing something else entirely. If the smallest brick is missing from this fragile construction, it all collapses. But they also know, like the sculptor considered in Étienne Souriau's philosophy of the work of art in the making (Souriau 1956; Hennion and Monnin 2015), that, far from implying a reduction of the object to 'only being' a reflection of those that make it, this is the very condition for it to emerge in all its alterity, and that in return it alters its 'constructors'. The passion of the amateur is not a state or an accomplishment: it is a self-dislocating movement that starts with the self, via a deliberate abandonment to the object. The word passion expresses it beautifully, even if one has to be careful of its grandiloguence. If it is the right word, it is not because it adds a supplement of soul to our relations with things, but because it is the exactly autochthonous expression of our specific relations to those things that seize us.

No one thinks of 'passion' as passivity. If something is to seize you, then you have to 'make yourself love' it. But we are no longer talking about mastery, action, or a theory of action. Passion is not this kind of calculation; it is being transported, transformed or taken, and despite all these passive turns of phrase, it is anything but passive. For things to appear, something has to be made of them! One has to actively abandon oneself, as it were, to do everything so things can take their course (Gomart and Hennion 1999). A strange grammatical construction, no doubt, but the very one that lays out the rules, and that the word passion refers to: to be taken/to allow oneself to be taken by whatever arises in the midst of experiencing things. This uncovers another, less expected aspect of the activity of amateurs: the ethical dimension of an obligation, of a sustained engagement with the things one loves, with oneself, with the quality of the ongoing experience. There is clearly a dimension of obligation in taste; an obligation to run the course, to respond to the object holding out its hand, to rise to the demand that its very qualities call forth. Étienne Souriau puts this beautifully when he talks about creators being obliged to do what their own work *demands* of them: he even speaks of 'exploitation' of the artist by the artwork (1956: 210)! This also implies that this obligation in relation to oneself and to things is an ethical task that certainly extends to the social scientist as well, when he/she values and makes more widely known the experience of amateurs. For my own part, I find that this spurs my interest in pursuing a sociology of taste. It is not just the amateur that the object puts under an obligation, but also the philosopher or the sociologist.

Pragmatism Rather than Pragmatics?

To reinstall common objects into social analysis, one way of getting some support is to look at how pragmatism, before being buried by analytical philosophy, had radically enlarged the definition of objects, by seeing them as open, ongoing and relational. There are only 'not things made, but things in the making' (James 1909b: 263). Such things are 'matters of concern' (Dewey 1927) that can only be caught up by being debated, put to the test and changed into public problems. Such a definite refusal of any dualism between facts and values was one of the founding pragmatist stances. This said, there is no way to apply this only to sociology. Analogous approaches first have to be translated into another world (Hennion 2015c). Since then, social matters have been thoroughly investigated. One result is that dualisms shifted from philosophical oppositions such as object/subject, or matter/mind, to new ones such as nature/culture or, for sociologists, essentialism/constructivism. However defined, 'the social' has taken the place of the subject.

But dualisms are still there. I insist on this point because it requires moving from a pragmatist sociology-not only a 'pragmatic sociology' (Boltanski, Thévenot 2006)-to go beyond the simple notion that objects are 'made' or 'constructed' (Hennion 2016), which is still a way of explaining them by the social. What about the other way round? If things are 'for' something, and if they make us as much as we make them, then and only then are we rid of dualisms separating facts and values, what things are and what they are for. This is a necessary condition to recover the ethical dimension (what do we want?) and the political dimension (how to make it happen?) of any social activity, inseparably defined through its objects and concerns. Those 'things that matter' are not labels stuck on actors, but constitutive of our collectives. For sure, this makes the necessity of valuing them of utmost importance. How can sociology become an art of participating with concerned people to the valuation of things that count and make us count?

Pluralism, mode 1

This is where, in my opinion, we should have no scruples in borrowing and reformulating for our own purposes existing formulations, regarding the sort of ontology we must shift to in order to deal with worlds 'still in process of making', in William James's words (1909a: 226). Among other pragmatists, he was stressing the fact that beyond a method, pragmatism was an ontology—a pluralist and relational understanding of objects themselves, not only a way of seizing them after their effects. I quote James, because it was he among the founding fathers of pragmatism who took the notion of *pragmata* most seriously in the battle against dualism. It was he who formulated the symmetry

principle avant la lettre in the most radical way. The symmetry between the knowing subject and the world to be known was his problem as a philosopher, but he also defended this symmetry in relation to beings and things. It is *pragmata*—things-relations, plural and extended, things as they are not given but 'in the making', 'in their plurality' (1909a: 210)-that are at the heart of pragmatism, not practice, which does not require anyone to challenge the grand divide between human actions and the things they act upon. Let me just sum up what James sketches as a 'pluralistic universe': James describes an expanding world that is plural and open, made of layers of realities that can neither be reduced one to the other, nor defined, in the strict sense of the word: they are but the provisional result of relations. This is very similar to ANT's so disputed ontology: an expanding web of realities, with no exteriority, distinct and heterogeneous, but connected loosely (1909b: 76). Pluralism, first and foremost, expresses this irreducibility of ongoing realities, each one following the mode of existence that they are producing in the same move as they are developing—but each one nonetheless connected to all the others. There are only relations, and this 'there are only' is not understood in a critical and sociological mode (in fact these are only social relations), but in a full and ontological mode. Yes, things are themselves relations. This is the lesson of pragmatism.

Pluralism, mode 2: Instauration of a 'work to be done'

There is something present but still incompletely deployed in this vision. I used the expression 'modes of existence', which is not from James. Latour (2013) borrowed it from Souriau (1956) who wonderfully expresses the idea that we are all confronted not with a passive world, but by with a 'work to be done' [*oeuvre à faire*]. He adds a very inspiring point about pluralism, especially with regard to valuation. Following Souriau, there is no real pluralism if it is not 'double': a pluralism of objects, and a pluralism of their modes of existence. This is a profound way of avoiding both what James called a first-degree empiricism (a multiplicity of objects seen from only one viewpoint); and perspectivism (the same objects seen from a plurality of viewpoints). Things in the making develop both themselves, and their own mode of existence.

This is the reason why Souriau speaks of *instauration* rather than of creation or construction. The word instauration expresses more strongly this idea of incomplete worlds, made of realities that are then 'calling us' because they need to be sustained to get 'more' existence, as he puts it in a radically non-dualistic way. At this point, his philosophy resonates also with that of Dewey, who has stressed in a more political tone this collective process: matters of concern emerge through an active and reciprocal process, defining in the same move what we make and what makes us. It is easy to see the close relation with attachments.

Conclusion

What then to make of valuing, measuring, objectifying, quantifying, rating and ranking? I take the pluralistic, open and demanding ontologies characterized above as a possible basis to conceive valuation not as a measure of inert things made from outside (there is no outside!), as if in an Euclidean space, but as multiple 'additive' relations, experimentations that help sustain those very things. There is no method 'in general' in social science, no all-terrain toolbox or tricks of the trade. We have to pay a minute attention to people's objects, issues and concerns, to fragile or indeterminate beings who demand support. We have to be interested in what it is about, what happens, what is going on here, and each time it is different.

This entails implementing renewed ways of making social investigation, ways that become closer to experiments: more performative than constative, propositional rather than descriptive. This has two main dimensions. First, that far from being 'neutral', the research directly aims at sustaining emergent beings (Kohn 2013; Tsing 2015; Haraway 2008). And, second, that in as much as such issues remain open, unanswered, debated, it also makes them demanding, requiring us to make choices, only graspable through our own engagement. How far that leads us from objectivism!

Descriptions, assessments, figures, charts—the tools sophisticatedly designed to size what we are making while we are making it—then look like scaffolds helping those very objects develop. As a result, such scaffolds are quickly outdated precisely because they have achieved their work, played their part, fulfilled their purpose. I only hope this effort to 'loosely connect' my own work on attachments to valuation studies may add to its instauration!

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