Valuation Studies

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Valuation Studies is a new open access journal connecting several vibrant research fields working on the study of valuation as a social practice.

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For What It's Worth: An Introduction to Valuation Studies

Claes-Fredrik Helgesson and Fabian Muniesa

Welcome to *Valuation Studies*! We are very glad that you have set your eyes on the very first editorial of this new journal. The aim of this inaugural editorial is manifold. We aim, firstly, to provide some reflections about the starting of this journal. This will bring us both to the issue of the perceived topicality of the study of valuation as a social practice as well as our provisional answers to the many questions embedded in the very embarking on such an endeavour. (Why a new journal? Why open access? Why a transdisciplinary scope? Etc.)

Secondly, we want to take the opportunity to discuss what we take as the scope of the journal. We feel that the topic of valuation as a social practice would benefit from a large amount of openness. Yet, there are also limits to the amount of diversity that can be fruitfully embraced within the (digital) covers of any journal.

Thirdly, we would also like to address the many questions concerning valuation of academic work that relentlessly surface in an endeavour such as this one. (Will the contributions be any good? Will the journal provide a good arena for scholarly discussions about valuation and the study of it? Will an article published in *Valuation Studies* given any value in the valuation practices performed by the universities to evaluate faculty and candidates for positions? Etc.) Finally, we would want to touch upon the issue of further actions, ours as well as of others.

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On the Topicality of Valuation

Valuations appear to be performed almost everywhere. Countries, restaurants, schoolchildren, damages, pets, waste and indeed academics, appear all to be subject to a wide variety of valuations to assess such things as creditworthiness, performance, aesthetics, or return on investment.

Turning to popular culture and the world of cinema we can learn that the movie *Moneyball*, to take one example, in the opening weekend in the US grossed $19.5 million.[1] (The same source reports first weekend ticket sales of $16,800 in Sweden and $539,000 in France. Presumably, though, in other currencies than USD.) The movie furthermore received six Oscar nominations, among them the one for best picture and best adapted screenplay. None of the nominations were translated into an award, but, as we know, a nomination is in itself treated as a valuation signifying a value to those being nominated. In addition, *Moneyball* appeared on a number of US critics' top ten lists for best movies of 2011.[2] According to the site IMDb[3], the movie has an 87 of 100 metascore of critics, and 125,000 users have on the same site produced a 7.6 average rating on a scale from one to ten. Turning to the movies provides a telling illustration of the propensity in current society to gauge things, assess them, rate them, put monetary value on them and so on. In short, valuation appears to be an engaging social practice.

There is something with the topic of the movie *Moneyball* as well. The movie depicts the story of how a general manager of the baseball team Oakland Athletics together with a young economics graduate tries out new ways to use statistics to value players. The aim is to deviate from the established practices to raise the poor team's sportive performance above what it's budget normally would allow for. In short, the main plot concerns the experimentation with new valuation practices to perform better on the baseball field. Also, it depicts how much of the social ordering in baseball, not the least including the practices of the scouts and the coach, was ingrained with the traditional ways to value baseball players. The movie thus provides a suggestive illustration of how both the outcomes of valuations might have re-ordering effects, and how the making of the valuations performs certain orders that needs to change if the way of doing the valuations is to change. The new valuation practices translated into contracting other players, and the new valuation practices entailed a transformation in how scouting for new players was performed, and by whom.

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[1] http://boxofficemojo.com, accessed 25 October 2012.

[2] http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1210166/, accessed 25 October 2012.

[3] International Movie Data-base.

Moneyball might be a bit of an exception among movies in how the plot foregrounds valuation as a social practice. Yet, we would argue, it is indeed a challenge these days to find areas where there are no valuation practices whatsoever going on. Movie stars, to stay and further add to the cinematic theme, have, for instance, been subject to statistical assessments linking their worth to the rental income of their past movies (cf. Wallace, Seigerman, and Holbrook 1993). Wherever we set our eyes, there appear to be a plethora of valuations going on at the same time. Most things are, it appears, subject to a complex matrix of valuations. These valuations are, moreover, often performed by highly complex socio-technical orderings involving several actors and instruments. (Think of the practices related to the grading of pupils in education to highlight one such highly complex valuation practice.)

For those a bit daring, there might actually even be a potential party game here. Drawing cards with random words (nouns or verbs presumably), contenders could be tasked to name distinctively different practices of valuation that currently are in place focusing on the referred object. The contender making the longest list would be the winner (and would be the one that most exhaustively substantiated our point about the proliferation of valuation as a social practice).[4]

The various valuations carried out do also regularly matter. Some choose what movie to watch based on critics reviews, and others might look at the first weekend ticket sales for the same purpose. Valuations of creditworthiness regularly translate into interest rates (Poon 2009), the valuation of the worth of damaged nature might translate into economic damages (Fourcade 2011), and the valuation of academics might translate into who gets research grants or attractive positions (Lamont 2009). The performance of valuations are thus not only ubiquitous; their outcomes participate in the ordering of society.

Why a Journal?

There is a variety of scholarly work merging on the topic of valuation in various forms. This work furthermore appears in many places and in many guises in the interface of a variety of approaches from several disciplines such as sociology, economic sociology, science and technology studies, management and organisation studies, social and cultural anthropology, history, market studies, institutional perspectives in economics, accounting studies, cultural geography, philosophy, and literary studies. It is our view (or perhaps hunch) that this work would benefit from a good amalgamating arena that facilitates dialogue and debate between different scholars of different approaches and disciplines. That was what made us contemplate

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[4] The curious might want to learn that bingo today is the highest ranked party game at the site boardgamegeek.com [http://boardgamegeek.com/partygames/browse/boardgame?sort=rank&sortdir=desc, accessed 12 November 2012]

starting *Valuation Studies*. Our perception was further substantiated by a recent review article, where Michèle Lamont identified no less than eight different literatures related to sociology alone that "concerned with how value is produced, diffused, assessed, and institutionalized across a range of settings" (Lamont 2012, 203). Furthermore, she notes that these literatures thus far "have not been in a systematic dialogue with one another" (ibid., 204).

The aim of the journal is therefore plainly to be a hub for work from the variety of disciplines and approaches that are related to the study of valuation as a social practice. Specifically the journal will provide a space that allows for dialogue and debate about this topical topic. We therefore envision the duality of a focused scope on valuation as a topic, while fostering a broad scope as to what kind of valuations are empirically examined or indeed how valuations are approached theoretically and methodologically. A slight majority of the thus far submitted contributions are in the realm where economic aspects are central to the valuation practices examined. This is all fine and very welcome. We will, however, encourage and make efforts to make *Valuation Studies* a site with a scope as broad as possible when it comes to the valuation practices under scrutiny.

Challenges to the Study of Valuation

Stating that "valuation as a social practice" is a specific and interesting topic to study brings on several challenges. Valuation has many objects as well as many subjects, and is a process that takes many forms. Sometimes it is about assessing value, sometimes about producing it, and sometimes about both at the same time. Finally, valuation might be appreciated and analysed in many ways. This is both a blessing and a curse when claiming that "valuation studies" is an emerging field that is possibly identifiable. State it broadly, and valuation becomes everything and its study meets the entire field of the social sciences and humanities. State it narrowly, and the study of valuation as a social practice becomes the business of a handful of contributions locked up inside a closed and abstruse field of inquiry.

It is clear that we, within this journal, want to work with a broad, inclusive, and malleable scope that brings contributions in conversation with one another, a conversation that would have been harder or more unlikely in other outlets. We need, for sure, lines of demarcation: some studies are clearly not studies that take "valuation as a social practice" as their main topic of inquiry. Below, we will provide some tentative lines of demarcation of the scope. We also have to acknowledge that such a task is most productively done in broad collectives. That is one reason why we are so happy with the contributions made by members of the advisory and editorial boards of the journal under the guidance of Hans Kjellberg and Alexandre Mallard (Kjellberg et al. 2013). What we might mean with valuation and how we might approach and study it, and with what questions, are also topics that we hope could nurture interesting discussions and debates on the pages of this journal.

One interesting challenge regarding what we might mean with valuation emerged early in this work and relates to the question of languages. Barbara Czarniawska, a member of the editorial board, approached us in e-mails about the polysemy of the notion of valuation, and specifically the possible differences in polysemy between different languages. Drawing on her Polish mother tongue she illustrated it:

> In Polish, there are two different verbs: one (wyceniać) means "to price", the other (wartościować) "to valuate", the latter very clearly a qualitative endeavour. To wit, one would say: "you must price the value of the diamond you inherited", indicating that these are two different things. . . . Further, there is a word, "waluta" (currency), which is a clear loan from Latin, but has no linguistic connection to "cena" (price) or "wartość" (value). But then, the root "cena" is the basis of the word "to appreciate" (cenić), with a semantic, not linguistic, connection to Latin (in contemporary Italian "apprezzare", which comes from "prezzo", price).[5]

In Swedish, the noun for valuation ("värdering") change face when put in the plural ("värderingar"). It then comes to also signify values or norms in the plural rather than only valuations in the plural. It is as if to remind of an intimate connection between valuations and values, without spelling it out. For the French, the distinction is quite strong between "valoriser" and "évaluer", but the usual mixtures of meanings do also apply. The article by Francois Vatin in this first issue is precisely a discussion on these lines, as regards these French terms (Vatin 2013). David Stark introduced his reflection on value with a similar exploration on the meanders of the Germanic vocabulary of worth (Stark 2009).

To these reflections on the differences between languages, one can bring John Dewey's:

> [W]hen attention is confined to the usage of the verb 'to value', we find that common speech exhibits a double usage. For a glance at the dictionary will show that in ordinary speech the words 'valuing' and 'valuation' are verbally employed to designate both prizing, in the sense of holding precious, dear (and various other nearly equivalent activities, like honouring, regarding highly) and appraising in the sense of putting a value upon, assigning value to. This is an activity of rating, an act that involves comparison, as is explicit, for example, in appraisals in money terms of goods and services. The double meaning is significant because there is implicit in it one of the basic issues regarding valuation. For in prizing, emphasis falls upon something having definite personal reference, which, like all activities of distinctively personal reference, has an

[5] Email correspondence from Barbara Czarniawska to the editors of *Valuation Studies*, 9 August 2012.

> aspectual quality called emotional. Valuation as appraisal, however, is primarily concerned with a relational property of objects so that an intellectual aspect is uppermost of the same general sort that is found in 'estimate' as distinguished from the personal-emotional word 'esteem.' That the same verb is employed in both senses suggests the problem of upon which schools are divided in the present time. Which of the two references is basic in its implications? Are the two activities separate or are they complementary? In connection with etymological history, it is suggestive (though, of course, in no way conclusive) that 'praise,' 'prize,' and 'price' are all derived from the same Latin word; that 'appreciate' and 'appraise' were once used interchangeably; and that 'dear' is still used as equivalent both to 'precious' and to 'costly' in monetary price. (Dewey 1939, 5–6)

There are thus interesting shifts of signification of valuation that are both challenging for, and useful to, the study of what we could take as practices of valuation. One feature appears to recur, and that is the one between the variable presence or absence of economic registers of worth when specifying what valuation stands for. Valuation might both denote something like the establishing of a monetary price for the sale of a book and the non-monetary assessment of the academic quality of a scholarly journal article. This flexibility of the notion is unequivocally central for this journal since it allows for interesting juxtapositions of studies of different phenomena. It also opens for examination precisely the concurrent co-existence of different valuations, much as Viviana Zelizer explored the multifaceted concurrent economic and affective aspects of intimate relations (Zelizer 2005).

Is Value Socially Constructed? A Few Hints

Of course, it is quite obvious that a call for studying valuation "as a social practice" means dealing with the problem of social construction, a problem that contributing authors are expected to stumble upon. A few candid questions can be asked in this regard, and a few provisional answers to engage with discussion can be provided.

Is value a social construction? The general agreement is that the answer to that question is: Yes, quite. But it is sometimes unclear what "social construction" means, and social-scientific debate on this is far from closed. The sense of this expression is often associated, in the social sciences, with an idea of something being the outcome of a shared belief: value exists because people think it does. But take a bridge over the river: it is a construction—and quite a social one insofar as it is the outcome of organized social work. This idea of social construction, quite different than the preceding one, could very well be applied to value: value is then seen as the outcome of a process of social work and the result of a wide range of activities (from production and combination to circulation and assessment) that aim at making things valuable.

Is value objective, then? Of course it can be—as soon as it undergoes a felicitous process of objectification. If valuation studies can learn something crucial from the tradition of science studies, it is precisely to take objectivity seriously, that is, as a very demanding business, historically contingent and materially consequential (Daston and Galison 2007). What counts (and should be investigated as such) is what makes valuation solid or weak, meaningful or flawed, useful or useless in particular situations. What counts are the contingent circumstances that allow, sometimes, for the construction of the objectivity of value.

Is value subjective, then? Well, it is too, in a way. But what shall this mean? Valuation is indeed tied to the conditions of desire and desirability, to the entanglements that are created between people and things, and between people themselves—to "values" too, as standard sociology would have it. And those entanglements constitute a most suitable topic for valuation studies. But this would barely translate into a simple idea of the value of things being just about the confluence of "wants" as in the so-called liberal theory of value. Of course, one may find empirical situations in which subjectivity is indeed reduced to a scheme of consumer preferences. But a more refined view of subjectivity is generally in order, one attentive to the shifts of agency and the transformations of consciousness that are at work in processes of attachment and detachment.

So do people have several values? Yes—except that "to have values" is indeed a practical process, not some kind of a natural state. Caution, in particular, with the constructive effects that methodologies for the elicitation of values do have is of particular relevance to valuation studies. Valuation studies operate indeed in the realm of reflexive modernity. It should also be noted that the classification of several regimes of value or the establishment of different patterns of valuation has been, for decades, an acknowledged ambition of the sociological and anthropological old school. We are definitely aiming for something newer and beyond that here.

And do things have several values? Yes, what things are worth can be manifold and change—and these values can be conflicting or not, overlapping or not, combine with each other, contradict each other. All, or almost all, depends on the situation of valuation, its purpose, and its means. Broad segmentations such as the distinction between "economic" and "non-economic" value can make sense at some level, only the devil is in the detail. Something valued as a financial asset, for example, can be valued differently by different accountants or different investors. And then this thing can be valued in an entirely different way in other circumstances (i.e., not as financial asset, but as a political project, as personal property, you name it).

Valuation Studies in the Valuation Metrics of Academic Work

Valuation Studies is also itself embedded in the practices of valuation that characterises academic life. First, we rely on the same review process with double-blind reviewing of journal articles, as do many credible academic journals these days. This is a convention, of course, and perhaps some alternative ways of reviewing should be explored in the future. In this we want to make the review process as valuable as possible to all parties involved in this (non-reimbursed) work of valuation. Secondly, as an academic journal we are unavoidably caught in the multitude of valuation practices that take place in academia. This involves also the indexing of journals (where a journal is indexed is sometimes taken as an indicator of the quality of its content).

When discussing the *Valuation Studies* venture with colleagues, one of the recurrent topics is precisely the rating or ranking of the journal. As a new venture, *Valuation Studies* is naturally not ranked. It is, as we like to say, in the strange state of being unranked that it shares with other luxury products. We realise, of course, that such arguments might not carry much weight in research assessment exercises or in appointment committee meetings, that is, in settings where the valuation practices truly can have reordering effects in academia. We will, to that effect take great pains in getting the journal recognised where it needs to be recognised. It is also here where the format of open access is helpful. The ease by which texts in *Valuation Studies* can be disseminated will facilitate them being read, provided, of course, that the content we as a collective put on those pages is valuable. Being read and being in conversation with others do carry weight in valuations and is something we will strive to facilitate in the operation of this journal.

The Worth of the Pudding Lies in the Conversations

Ending the inaugural editorial is just the beginning. The worth of the venture to start a new journal has to be assessed in how it engages to create new conversations and new ideas. The test, then, lies in the ability of Valuation Studies to do exactly that. We do, to this effect, want to encourage whoever thus inclined to join in. Manuscripts are welcome and we are looking for traditional journal articles as well as short opinion pieces or research notes, interviews, staged debates, or indeed longer than normal journal articles. To join in, also implies participating in the review of manuscripts considered for the journal as well as reading, (ap)praising, debating, and citing the published contributions. For what it's worth, let's talk!

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Valuation Studies? Our Collective Two Cents.

Hans Kjellberg*, Alexandre Mallard*, Diane-Laure Arjaliès, Patrik Aspers, Stefan Beljean, Alexandra Bidet, Alberto Corsin, Emmanuel Didier, Marion Fourcade, Susi Geiger, Klaus Hoeyer, Michèle Lamont, Donald MacKenzie, Bill Maurer, Jan Mouritsen, Ebba Sjögren, Kjell Tryggestad, François Vatin, and Steve Woolgar

Abstract

This article presents the results of a poll made among the members of the editorial and advisory boards of Valuation Studies. The purpose is to overview the topic that is the remit of the new journal. The poll focused on three questions:

1. Why is the study of valuation topical?
2. What specific issues related to valuation are the most pressing ones to explore?
3. What sites and methods would be interesting for studying valuation?

The answers to these questions provided by sixteen board members form the basis of the article. Based on these answers, it identifies a number of themes concerning the study of valuation, elaborating on the rationale for attending to valuation, the conceptual challenges linked to this, and the specific issues and sites that deserve further attention.

Key words: value as noun and verb; valuation processes; topicality of valuation; conceptual challenges; sites of valuation; research agenda

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Introduction

The launch of a scientific journal is an important moment. Historians teach us that new publications usually appear at key points in scientific practice: the identification of new objects and phenomena, the emergence of disciplines, the structuring of novel research fields, the development of specific methodologies and modes of enquiry, etc. We cannot, in the present context, speak for the two editors who have taken the initiative to create "Valuation Studies" but we can quite easily decipher two of their intuitions in the matter: first, the feeling that we are currently experiencing significant shifts in the valuation of various entities—objects, products and services, people, projects, organizations, etc.—in society; second, the perception that the underlying transformations are actively scrutinized by a number of scholars in a research field that is extremely broad, heterogeneous and interdisciplinary.

This research field involves sociologists, economists, marketers, STS (Science, Technology and Society) researchers, anthropologists, philosophers, semioticians, specialists in accounting or management science, and probably scholars of other scientific domains. All of them discuss and share a series of questions, hypotheses, agreements and disagreements, empirical results concerning the changing processes through which value and values come out. A number of emergent surveys and review papers, already available, enable us to grasp the extent of this field and suggest possibilities for ordering the abundant research that it hosts (see for instance Beckert and Aspers 2011; Adkins and Lury 2011; Lamont 2012). On the occasion of the publication of its first issue, Valuation Studies wishes to propose its own contribution to the task of delineating and marking out this research landscape.

For this, we have opted for a simple method, based on two principles: on the one hand, we decided to build on the knowledge and skills of the journal's own experts, i.e. the advisory and editorial boards' members, who largely display the variety of contemporary analytic standpoints towards valuation processes; on the other hand, we mobilized a very light protocol and equipment, so as to obtain a quick and schematic idea of the stakes and research issues at play. Thus, we have invited the board members to answer briefly three questions:

1. Why is the study of valuation topical?
2. What specific issues related to valuation are the most pressing ones to explore?
3. What sites and methods would be interesting for studying valuation?

Sixteen board members kindly took time to answer our request, provided a couple of sentences or paragraphs in response to each question, and accepted to be listed as secondary authors of this article. Hence, it should be clear to the reader that although the "we" used in this text refers to the two first authors, who organized the poll and analyzed the results, this article is a collective achievement, based on the active contribution of all the respondents. The collection of short texts that we gathered this way constitutes a quite unusual empirical material. It is obviously not suited to mapping thoroughly a research field, as one usually tries to do when writing a literature review. However, it offers a series of viewpoints and prospective attitudes on the issues posed by the transformation of valuation processes, so as they can be apprehended from each contributor's position in the research field. In a sense, we have gathered a set of snapshots taken in this field along particular angles, showing situated conceptual objects of interest and concrete pieces of reality, and pointing to specific vantage points. This paper is an attempt to organize and synthesize the content of this material and to provide a picture, even if a multiple one, of the territory circumscribed by the study of valuation practices. Our ambition is not to draw a detailed map based on these snapshots. The aim is rather to sketch borders, to qualify the relief and catch sight of the uneven grounds, to detect already existing avenues and to identify some possible new ones. We are inviting the reader to follow us in this exploratory exercise.

Reasons for Studying Valuation

Our first poll question concerned the topicality of valuation studies. What are the reasons for researchers from different fields to engage with questions about valuation and worth? In compiling the answers provided by the board members, we identified four main lines of argument. The remainder of the section is structured according to these, starting with the most common type and ending with the least common one.

Because It Is Empirically Relevant/Important

By far the most common answer to the question of topicality was anchored in observational statements about the state of the world. Our conclusion is that questions about valuation are generally perceived to be of considerable and/or growing interest in society at large. Within this category there was variation between answers that were general and sweeping and others that concerned specific empirical contexts. There was also variation among the respondents in terms of the specific observations called on, often related to their disciplinary home and general research interests.

According to some of the contributors, macro-level trends underlie current changes concerning the ways in which value and values are produced and transformed: such factors as neoliberalism, the rise of new public management, the spread of meritocracy, consumerism or ICT development are evoked, in a more or less diffuse way, in several of the responses. The most obvious domain where this relation between valuation and macro-social change is empirically expressed is finance: Donald MacKenzie recalled the laborious search for stable and robust values that we are witnessing in the current credit and Eurozone crises. But even when valuation issues don't give birth to such spectacular globalized concerns, their topicality can be linked to developments at the societal level. The idea that the current period experiences changes and controversies in the practices of valuation was raised by several of the board members, even if this idea is tackled from diverse angles.

Emmanuel Didier pointed to the evolution and even, to some extent, to the extinction, of the bourgeois regime of values, changing for instance the nature of what is publicly valued in society. Ebba Sjögren saw a proliferation of values in the contemporary period, triggering contestations of the particular dominant models of valuation. Klaus Hoeyer expressed another concern, that of the ever growing role of technical systems and complex metrologies in the characterization of value, for instance in the healthcare domain where large and powerful information systems are used to define and measure the quality and performance of services. In a similar vein, Bill Maurer pointed to the rise of "big data" infrastructure, changing the transactional regime and architecture of value creation and circulation. In a period where the conventional warrants of value—labour, the state, the market, etc.—would experience a reconfiguration of their relations, these would lead to planetary realignments in the channels of valuation.

Steve Woolgar evoked the proliferation of web based rating systems, a category of devices that derive from traditional instruments of valuation in the political and organizational context (appraisal and comparison of value for money) but that have expanded to support claims about the emancipation and democratization of practices in the online realm. Patrik Aspers perceived in the contemporary period an erosion of the traditional standards supporting evaluation, and the rise of arenas where valuation processes tend to integrate new aesthetic dimensions.

Because It Is Theoretically Challenging/Interesting

The second most common type of motive for the topicality of valuation had theoretical roots. Board members argue that there are problems with currently dominant theoretical approaches to the issue of valuation. The way in which economic models conceive of value is seen as particularly troublesome, but other models are also evoked, e.g. from sociology and marketing.

Diane-Laure Arjaliès pointed to the paradox that academics and experts in various domains search for "objective" and "performance generative" assessment tools despite the fact that it is widely acknowledged that valuations are socially constructed. Financial markets might be a case in point here. A refined theoretical understanding of the issues at stake should doubtlessly help reconcile this tension, notably through a better attention to the dynamic and processual nature of valuation, as opposed to a static conception considering mainly the implementation of already given sets of values —a point that we will return to below.

Susi Geiger observed the theoretical status-quo at stake in the interdisciplinary space bounded by economics and marketing: the dominant traditional economic view, according to which price is the main regime of valuation, has been somehow adopted by marketing research, leading to the idea that differences in value can be expressed in monetary numbers even when they imply psychological perceptions. Geiger called for a shift in this perspective, and for a new conception of the valuation processes: instead of assuming that all expressions of value can be translated into a common metric, it should account for the collective, non linear, multi-dimensional character of valuation processes, and refuse to reduce them either to price or power.

François Vatin proposed another formulation of the theoretical puzzle at stake. According to him, the Walrassian revolution in economics has led to a sort of Yalta in the reflection on valuation: on the one hand, moral and philosophical approaches have dealt with values without measurement; on the other hand, management science and economics approaches have provided mathematic tools for measuring value in organizations and markets. To this scenario, that recalls David Stark's description of "Parsons' pact" (Stark 2009), Vatin added that the failure of general equilibrium theories has helped to bring sociology back in the debate on measured values, and that a current theoretical challenge is to articulate better the analysis of moral values and economic value.

These are three examples of specific theoretical challenges that research on valuation should meet. At this stage, the way in which such challenges should be made compatible and articulated remains an open question. Let us notice, however, that some of the respondents adopt an ambitious stance towards the question of theory building: in their collective response, Stefan Beljean and Michele Lamont stressed theory development as one of the more pressing issues, arguing for the need "to go beyond a mere accumulation of case studies and follow a more ambitious and cumulative approach to theory building." Moving to a higher degree of abstraction so as to identify similarities and differences across studies would enable us to provide a comprehensive picture of valuation processes.

Because It Allows Us to Do Interesting or Fun Stuff

The third argument, which links to the previous one, could be said to concern affordances in the sense of entities that lend themselves to certain uses. These arguments were not primarily framed in terms of shortcomings in existing theoretical edifices, but rather more hands-on in recognizing that by using new theoretical tools or by assuming a different vantage point (e.g. attending to the *process* of valuation) new areas of investigation had opened up. This is a little like the situation described by Shove and Araujo (2010) where a man who had newly acquired an angle grinder suddenly found himself looking for things to grind!

While valuation appears to be a general concern in several disciplinary areas, some respondents argued that new conceptual approaches and analytical moves have the potential to revitalize its study. The exploration of new possible alliances between pragmatism and theoretical approaches to which it is traditionally opposed—semiotics, statistics, epistemology, phenomenology...—could for instance shed new light on valuation processes.

Alberto Corsin saw several opportunities in the notion of valuation to explore conceptual areas as well as practical fields of investigation. As world-making and sense-making activities, valuation processes partake in the ontological practices through which human and non-human entities make room for themselves in their environments. They constitute an invitation to rethink the currencies of art-science cooperation, or to study novel experiments in democratic, political, urban assemblage and “cosmopolitics”.

Because We Can Improve the World

The fourth and final type of argument for the topicality of valuation had a distinctly different flavour. In a nutshell it suggested that research on valuation could contribute or promised to improve the world. The argument was explicitly visible in a couple of answers, but implicitly present in a few more.

Kjell Tryggestad offered one example of a direct connection between valuation research and its application for political or industrial purposes. He suggested the elaboration of theoretical and methodological perspectives supporting the valuation of projects beyond the mere application of traditional economic tools and routines as one important challenge. In areas like the construction and engineering industries, the project, which constitutes the basic form of organization and coordination, is still valued in reference to standard concepts like price/cost or assets/liability. Such projects deliver major infrastructures of contemporary life like housing, circulation, healthcare institutions, etc., many of which play a crucial role in determining the sustainable performance of our predominant mode of co-existence, the city. Consequently, there is a need for more multidimensional, more dynamic, more comprehensive methods and metrics to apprehend their characteristics. A clear contribution of research in this domain would be to inform the decision-making processes at play in the context of design, production or commercialization.

Another way to apprehend the concrete impact of research on valuation is to be found in the critique of the dominant model at work in this conceptual area—clearly the economic one—or in unveiling the invisible or hidden realities lying in the routine and non-creative application of existing norms and procedures to the various situations that pose new concerns on value and values. This is what one can read in Hoeyer's statement that academic research can contribute to "unpacking the implicit normative assumptions" that become black-boxed in diverse technical infrastructures.

Beyond any explicit proposition to generate policy recommendation, the importance of the practical impacts of research on valuation can be identified in a more diffuse way in many contributions: it is present behind a perceptible broad worry concerning the valuable activities that can be legitimately pursued, behind the curiosity of knowing the value—and not only the price—of many things, behind the necessity to struggle against the inequalities that result from the contemporary changing orders of values.

What Do We Mean by Valuation?

As a matter of fact, this plurality of concerns for the topicality of valuation accordingly hides a plurality of definitions of *what is* valuation. While the poll did not specifically ask the board members to define valuation or discuss how they conceived of terms such as value, worth, valuing, evaluation, etc., their answers nonetheless allow us to point out a few things about this conceptual landscape. Below, we offer a few observations concerning conceptual challenges linked to the study of valuation raised by the responses to the poll, without any ambition of completeness, or even coherence.

Starting with the very concept of valuation, a couple of our board members were kind enough to offer tentative definitions. For instance, Patrik Aspers suggested valuation could be viewed as the process of "bringing order to mere 'differences'". On a similar note, Ebba Sjögren suggested that valuation concerned "how people, things and idea(l)s are ordered in relation to one another". The connection to order(ing) figuring in both these remarks suggests that valuation is intimately related to classification. This made us recall Bowker's and Star's (1999, 1) quip "to classify is human", as well as their definition of classification as "a spatial, temporal, or spatio-temporal segmentation of the world" (ibid., 10).

However, as Diane-Laure Arjaliès emphasized, valuation aims to *signify* the world rather than accurately account for it. Possibly, this complicates its relation to classification. Although one could argue that signification is central also to many if not most classification efforts, the reasoning nonetheless provides an argument that classification and valuation is not precisely the same thing. One way of recognizing the link between the two while retaining a distinction is to imagine valuation and classification as ordering activities in which the relative emphasis on signification and representation differs (see Figure 1). Classification in its pure form would then be an ordering that emphasizes representation over signification, while valuation would do the opposite. Whether this introduces yet a layer of complexity to the study of valuation, or in fact simplifies matters, is debatable. Nonetheless, as Arjaliès pointed out, the role of signification in valuations suggests that the meaning of valuation is not to be found in the object to which it refers, but in how that object is being referred to.

Figure 1. Valuation and classification as ordering practices with different emphases.

The latter point provides a link to another important conceptual issue that figured in several of the responses, but nowhere as clearly as in Jan Mouritsen's contribution. Valuation, he argued, is related both to *the noun value* (as in there being things that are values, and objects that have value) and *the verb value* (as in things being the objects of certain activities—being valued). This dual, noun–verb character of valuation—emphasized already by Dewey (1939)—could be found in many of the responses to the poll. We have chosen to structure the remainder of the section according to this duality, but also discuss issues that concern the interrelation between value as noun and value as verb.

Value as Noun

In discussing value as noun, several board members emphasized the existence of multiple values, often as a way of throwing the notion of economic value in relief. Several of these remarks recall Parsons' pact (Stark 2009) and the classic distinction between *value* (singular) as the outcome of an individual valuation effort, and *values* (plural) as the standards, rules, norms or ideals used to perform such valuations (Taylor 1961; Holbrook 1999).

In terms of value (singular), the dominance of *economic* value in contemporary society was something that both fascinated and bothered the respondents. The fascination mainly concerned how different values (plural) were being translated, aligned, or co-ordinated into one value (singular). Several contributors called for increased conceptual precision on this, including Kjell Tryggestad who pointed at the prioritization of economic/financial methods and metrics in the valuation of projects. Donald MacKenzie raised a more specific issue related to economic valuation, namely how valuations relate to prices, which is of central importance in the financial markets. In a more critical vein some respondents objected to conceptual approaches to valuation that simply assume that different values are reducible to a single measure (notably in the fields of economics and marketing). In this connection it can be useful to recall, as some respondents did, that there are also different conceptions of value (singular), including notions such as exchange value, use value, and semantic value (we could also add the labour theory of value to this list).

Related to the above, but more clearly linked to values (plural), many of the respondents emphasized the need to conceptualize the existence of multiple values. Here, Susi Geiger provided another take on the link between value and price, raised above by MacKenzie, arguing for the need to "explore those aspects of value that cannot readily be translated into price". Of course, discussions about the relation between value and price become particularly interesting if we adopt the idea that valuation aims to signify the world, and that it thus revolves around a process of investing various elements with meanings. Based on this, Arjaliès argued for the need to "explore the disputability and multiplicity of value regimes", a theme that recalls, but moves beyond the different forms of worth examined by Boltanski and Thévenot ([1991] 2006).

Another critical line of argument concerning the multiplicity of values revolved around the emergence of increasingly powerful valuation regimes that affirm certain values over others. Indeed, as Marion Fourcade noted, the very concept of valuation is strongly associated with the process of attaching *economic* value to some object. In contrast, the term worth is broader and can be used for non-monetary registers as well. In this connection, Klaus Hoeyer emphasized the risks associated with black-boxing the process of ascribing value (singular) given the dominance of certain values (plural) over others in technical systems of evaluation. Consequently, the multiplicity of values that may or may not enter into the determination of value provides one reason to address the notion of value as verb (see below).

Another argument for a process view, raised by several respondents, concerned the poverty of conceptualizations that considered only given values (plural). Emmanuel Didier stressed that values—things that have worth—change and that we need to address the process through which such changes take place, while Aspers argued that standards of evaluation have gradually eroded in society thus putting greater emphasis on the process of valuation. Alexandra Bidet, finally, argued against approaches that "only consider already given sets of values or principles of worth and use them as explanatory entities, or black-box the meaning of behaviours and attitudes instead of exploring their normative creativity." There are thus several links to our next subsection and the issue of value as verb.

Value as Verb—the Valuation Process

We should make clear at the outset that the verb/process perspective on valuation implied by value as verb, figured very prominently in the responses to our poll. Indeed, some board members seem to equate the notion of *valuation* with a process perspective; a move away from "units of value" to "world-making and sense-making practices", as Alberto Corsin put it. Besides responding to the concerns above about considering values as given and failing to elucidate how certain values come to carry more weight than others, he underscored the affordance of localized accounts of valuing in specific contexts as another merit of a process focus.

Several contributors proposed more fine-grained/precise conceptualizations of the valuation process. First, Beljean and Lamont argued for a distinction between *valuation* (the process of giving worth) and *evaluation* (the process of assessing). This echoes Francois Vatin's distinction between *valorizing* (production of value) and *evaluating* (assessment of value) (see also the article by Vatin in this issue of VS). Second, Arjaliès and Bidet both suggested a need to go beyond these processes and to consider the very genesis of orders of worth/value regimes, borrowing from the pragmatist perspective. Bidet linked this process to experience, to the inquiry on what our interests and desires are and should be, an inquiry that creates meaning in the sense that it changes the way we are intertwined with the world. Third, Bill Maurer highlighted another facet of the valuation process by questioning the extent to which values can travel. Do the various arrangements put in place to *channel value* ("carriers of value") also contribute to *constitute value*? A fourth challenge raised, concerned how to conceptually handle the *linking of different values*. This issue is relevant at the level of individual valuation (systems), but as Sjögren noted, also involves the issue of contestations and conflicts between different sites of valuation. Understanding this type of process, the centrality of which some contributors attribute to the need for collective/intersubjective agreements on matters of valuation, emerges as one central conceptual challenge in the study of valuation.

A final facet of the valuation process, raised most clearly by Steve Woolgar and Jan Mouritsen, concerns its procedural facet. In linking valuation to current accountability and audit regimes, e.g. the need to show that you are getting value for money, they both question whether valuation needs to follow certain procedural rules to be effective. Such observations raise further questions not only about how valuation procedures are put in place and the quality of the output they produce, but also about their wider import on our lives in the sense of what they make us do. On a related but perhaps slightly more optimistic note, Corsin emphasized how valuations also offer new action alternatives, providing ways in which actors can "make room for themselves". To some extent, these notes also invite us to shift from theoretical concerns to engagements with what we see.

Studying Valuation—What, Where and How?

This section is likely to be instructive at least as far as prospective authors of Valuation Studies are concerned. In a sense, what we are offering here is a compilation of issues and associated empirical fields that the advisory and editorial boards consider pressing and would like to see research on. While the poll questions specifically asked the respondents to elaborate on both pressing issues to address (Q2) and specific sites/methods for studying valuation (Q3), the responses we received indicated to us that these questions were closely intertwined. We will first report on the issues that the board members raised, and then move on to discuss their comments regarding sites, before discussing the interrelation between the two. We will finally make some observations concerning the question of methods.

What Issues Are Worth Examining?

As will become clear, we have already introduced in the preceding sections many of the issues judged as important by the board members. Looking at the process aspect of valuation (which, as we noted above, dominated the responses) with a more thematic lens, it seemed possible to identify three main questions. The first revolves around the relations between diverse forms of valuation; the second tackles the organization and technical dimension of valuation processes; the third deals with the political dimension of valuation, and its relation with democracy.

How are valuation processes interrelated? In a way, one of the consequences of shifting the analytical perspective from value/values to valuation is that it enables—or obliges—us to address the question of the relations between a plurality of practices and processes. Boltanski and Thevenot ([1991] 2006) once justified their preference for worth over values in a similar way: they argued that while the theories of values would generally recognize the existence of innumerable and incommensurable potential qualifications of the same object or situation, potentially leading to unbridled relativism, the *economy of worth* would focus on a limited set of reference principles linked by a specific architecture of mutual relations. The interest for valuation leads us to make a similar move: although it doesn't aim at establishing a general framework—a "grammar of worth", so to speak, as in the model proposed by Boltanski and Thevenot—it requires to go beyond the mere observation of a plurality of valuation processes and to actively deal with their interrelations.

When are the outcomes of different valuations competing and when do they lead to substitutions? Do their relations involve causal processes – for instance when a given valuation would lead to another one or would require another one to be present? When are they unrelated and when can they co-exist in a space without any mutuality apart from temporal and spatial co-presence? These questions go through the responses to the poll given by Mouritsen, Sjögren, Geiger and many others. Aspers phrased the stake a bit differently, proposing to investigate how valuation relates to other forms of co-ordination, while others were specifically concerned with the links between use values, economic values and semantic value. Notice however that dealing with the issue of plurality and interrelations requires to take into account a relative asymmetry: as Fourcade recalled, due to its specific relation with value, and not only values, economic valuation very often occupies a particular place in the network of relations linking the various processes. Although it can be tackled in different ways, it seems difficult to ignore this particular asymmetry.

What are the organizational and technological supports of valuation? Here again, the importance of the question originates in the shift from value/values to valuation. Since we are no longer talking about static realities but about dynamic processes, the modalities of enactment of these processes become an inevitable focus of inquiry. Further, as we distance ourselves from a perspective where these processes would result from a pure logic of emergence, making value miraculously appear from the interaction of unconnected actors, we have to investigate the concrete web of rules, instruments, routines, and devices engaged in valuation. How do actors set up the collective socio-technical agencements that make valuation possible, stable, credible, accountable, and liable to compete with alternative perspectives on value? No less than half of the responses in some way touched upon the role of arrangements/metrics/socio-technical devices/infrastructures in the process of ascribing value (singular) to entities or behaviours.

Sjögren stressed the necessity to investigate how valuing arrangements are created and maintained, how different sites of valuation are interrelated and what role "mundane technologies" play in this system. A related issue, well worth examining, is the relations between everyday and more formalized, institutionalized forms of evaluation. Tryggestad recalled the complex organizational and technological nexus that constitute large projects and infrastructural activities, a nexus within which valuation processes might, in a sense, be embedded. The possibility of human intervention in and accountability for valuation processes engaging more and more technology is also a concern raised by several contributors. MacKenzie and Arjaliès mentioned the role of automated trading systems like high frequency trading as technologies that are still quite controversial: they are sometimes praised not only for their capacity to accelerate transactions but also for their propensity to avoid human intervention in certain parts of the valuation processes. Hoeyer suggested that automated valuations are similarly present in healthcare settings, where complex technical systems control resource allocations and implicitly or explicitly ascribe monetary values to treatments, lives and sometimes even body parts. Finally, as we noted above, several responses highlighted the extent to which socio-technical systems may hide the fact that specific values (plural) are being prioritized. In this connection, Beljean and Lamont suggested that the mobilization of evaluative devices "contribute to objectifying or institutionalizing interpersonal agreement (Karpik 2010)."

How does valuation contribute to the construction of democracy (or more modestly, to the realization of various democratic values)? Here again, a possible way to put this issue into perspective is to contrast the current situation with traditional debates mobilizing the dichotomy value/values. Besides being a point of crystallization of the debate between academics of various disciplinary denominations, the opposition between value and values is also a classic rhetoric figure in the democratic debate: economic freedom of initiative is meant to help create value whereas welfare intervention is supposed to secure such values as equity, justice or diversity in the construction of society. A focus on valuation (processes) does not do away with the democratic debate and reflection, but it should lead us to move away from the traditional format of this discussion. Attention to valuation does not require the staging of a dualist conflict between economy and politics but encourages us to investigate the plurality of conceptions of value/values that lies in a variety of social spheres. Here, we should not forget that democracy may also have its own conflicting plurality of values. In a sense, the question that the issue of valuation raises concerning democracy is not only that of the government of the economy: it refers in a much broader way to the inscription in the democratic regime of dynamic processes contributing to the construction of possible, and sometimes conflicting, social orders in a variety of situations.

The responses to our poll provide various illustrations and suggest possible avenues for research here. Arjaliès proposed to inquire on what we desire and hold precious and she suggests that making public, debatable and revisable these valuations is a way to contribute to the democratization of institutions. Research on valuation could help elucidate the extent to which innovative valuation processes contribute to citizen participation, as might be the case with rating systems of various sort (Woolgar)—or in a very different context, to elucidate how valuation processes support the development of non-representational forms of collective actions endowed with their own specific 'cosmopolitics', like in the Occupy movement (Corsin). Several contributors noted the interest of examining how changing frames of reference concerning values can lead to new social inequalities or new distributions of power (Didier, Geiger and others). Beljean and Lamont suggested that social and policy relevance should guide the choice of empirical fields to investigate: according to them, situations involving high stakes for individuals and social groups (stigmatized groups, low-income population, downwardly mobile occupational groups, etc.) should be preferred over the traditional niche markets on which much value research has focused.

Where and How to Study Them

The sites and methods proposed for studying valuation are not independent of the issues proposed by the contributors above. Nonetheless, we will in this section simply present the proposed sites, in the form of an emerging typology. The subsequent section will then seek to link issues and sites.

A first set of sites could be characterized as highly economized (Çaliskan and Callon, 2009; Çaliskan and Callon, 2010). This group includes various kinds of financial markets, or flow markets to speak with Knorr-Cetina (2006), but also commodity markets where physical products are exchanged under highly standardized conditions. Financial accounting and analysis also belong to this group of sites—involving highly standardized economic valuations—but differ from the financial and commodity markets in how they are organized. Indeed, the interrelation of these two types of economized sites constitutes an interesting site in its own right. Two strong arguments for studying these sites are that they revolve around (particular types of) valuation and that they are too important in contemporary society to be left unattended. Another argument is of course that some of these sites are subject to strains that to a considerable extent can be attributed to the kinds of valuations they produce (Sjögren, Arjaliès, MacKenzie, Fourcade).

A second group of sites could be characterized as complex and/or rapidly changing valuation situations. Here we find "hot" market situations in which the current valuation regime is being questioned or where such a regime has yet to be established, including for instance ecologically/morally/politically concerned markets. These sites engage conflicting conceptions of value and they often prompt open discussion about value systems (Geiger, Fourcade). Another type of sites in this category is large infrastructure projects, both because their valuation exhibits complexity and because they engage the evolution of important societal concerns (Tryggestad). As should be clear, this group of sites could include highly economized ones, with the important addition that this economization is being questioned.

A third group of sites could be characterized as sites of construction and reification of valuing systems, tools and organizations. This category would include technical and knowledge regulatory agencies, for instance in the healthcare sector, because these contribute to the shaping or reification of value systems (Hoeyer). Sites occupied with the construction and/or subsequent enforcement of accounting conventions would be another example (Sjögren, Arjaliès, Vatin). The construction and deployment of rating systems for various types of feedback (customer, supplier, expert, etc.) is yet another example of this type of site (Woolgar). A final example could be organizations that produce statistics, including both national statistics offices and market research agencies, because of their contribution to valuations (Didier).

The fourth and final type of sites proposed in the poll could be characterized as sites of social change. This type would include the rise of active political movements as well as the silent re-ordering of social groups. Specific examples of this type of site include: places where social movement and change occur, like social media, indigenous and Occupy movements (Corsin); politically and socially relevant places where social and political stakes are at play (Beljean and Lamont); studying emerging social elites since their emergence typically is linked to new values that are being embraced in society (Didier); studying mundane settings like workplaces and streets, sites that are critical for democracy in routinely provoking encounters between strangers (Bidet).

As a final remark concerning sites, we want to highlight that a couple of our respondents argued that valuation could be studied anywhere in society. Hence, they did not suggest any particular sites as more interesting than others. We interpret this as an encouragement for future contributors to VS to explore situations beyond those suggested in the proposed typology.

Combining Issues and Sites/Methods

In compiling and thinking through the responses presented in the previous two sections, we devised a tentative sorting grid based on the two dimensions of sites and issues. This provided us with an admittedly rough, yet productive framework (see Table 1) for discussing some questions and stakes that come out of our exercise at a prospective level.

Table 1. Specific objects of interests/challenges emerging from the combination of issues and sites for studying valuation.

	Relations between valuations	**Technology and organization**	**Relation to democratic process**
Highly economized sites	How to deal with the structural asymmetry between economic and other forms of valuation?	How is valuation entangled in the organizational and technological processes of economic exchange?	How to mobilize valuation in the confrontation and cooperation of political and economic orders?
Complex and/or rapidly changing valuation situations	Examining mechanisms of combination, prioritization, selection, and/or extinction of values.	How organization and technology act as levers or impediments in the reconfiguration of value systems.	How control is exercised over the inscription of emerging valuation schemes in democracy.
Construction and reification of valuing systems, tools and organizations	Unpacking the mechanisms that lead to the reinforcement of particular valuations.	Questioning how valuation processes become (or fail to become) efficient, productive, reliable.	How to keep valuation debatable and open to change while allowing for accountability and consistency?
Sites of social change	Understanding and challenging the transformation of value systems underlying social change.	How organizational and technological resources of valuation relate to emerging social orders?	How to mobilize valuation in the democratic government of social change?

Highly economized sites (site 1) are sites where objects circulating in social space are constituted as goods endowed with a value defined as exchange value. From the point of view of the relations between valuations (issue 1) these sites would lead us to study the conditions of emergence, construction and negotiations of alternative conceptions of value under such asymmetric conditions. They offer the interesting feature that the valuation devices are inscribed—embedded, entangled—in the socio-technical networks of exchange themselves, which probably provides particular technological and organizational stakes (issue 2). As far as the inscription of valuation in democracy is concerned, one may encounter here the traditional problem of the compromises and negotiations that can make exchange value compatible with political orders (issue 3).

Complex and rapidly changing valuation situations (site 2) are sites where the question of the relations between valuations (issue 1) refers to the processes of prioritization, combination, hybridization, selection, etc. In these contexts, the transformation of the resources supporting the qualifying, ordering, quantifying, comparing of entities involve dynamic technological and organizational mechanisms: inertia of infrastructures, path dependency, flexibility, adaptive processes, etc. (issue 2). In terms of the issue of democracy (issue 3), one important question concerns the control of these dynamic mechanisms, from the point of view of the legitimacy of the normative principles that should be enforced in the transformative process, and from the point of view of the means to mobilize in order to achieve this goal.

Studying the construction and reification of valuing systems, tools and organizations (site 3) seems to offer a possibility to unpack specific relations (of dominance, balance, conflict, etc.) that have been, or are being forged between different valuations (issue 1). It would also allow inquiries into the role of specific technologies and forms of organizing in performing valuations, maybe offering a possibility to discuss questions about their efficiency and reach (issue 2). These sites would finally allow us to ask questions about possible conflicts with democratic processes, e.g. while things need to be debatable and open to change in democratic processes, this is not necessarily a quality that is nurtured in the construction of valuing systems (issue 3).

Studying valuation in sites of social change, finally, would allow us to examine, and maybe also to discuss, the alternative options between contrasted systems of values that are at stake in the transformation of collective life (issue 1). It would further offer possibilities to inquire into the architecture of shifting valuations, including how such shifts are organized and how existing technologies of valuation may contribute to or impede social change. Finally, such sites would take us to the heart of the issue of valuation in democratic processes (issue 3), opening up for inquiries into the role of valuation processes in the practical performance of democracy.

A Note on Methods

The second part of our final question brought up the issue of methods. There is one very clear tendency in the comments received on this: as a group the board members propose a wide variety of different qualitative methods and approaches that could generate important results regarding the issues they outline. These included, but were not limited to; case studies, ethnographic methods, participant observation, comparative and mixed methods, etc. Some respondents explicitly said that any method could be used, making us recall the slogan "anything goes" (Feyerabend [1975] 1993). However, very strikingly, none of the respondents called for any kind of quantitative approach. Even when studying the construction of value through quantitative devices, the recommendations tended to be to 'draw on qualitative methods to study the quantitative'. One reason for this omission can perhaps be found in the conceptual link made between valuation and ordering/classification (see section 2). Based on this link, the kind of classifications necessary for the use of quantitative approaches are perhaps perceived as being too invasive into the very subject matter at hand. While this is certainly an important caveat, we cannot refrain from asking if we should not also be thinking about possible quantitative methods that could be used for studying issues related to valuation? If we are allowed to put forward a suggestion of our own it would be to see efforts within this journal to encourage the development of new and imaginative uses of quantitative methods for the study of valuation processes.

Concluding Comment

In their comments to our first draft, the editors asked us to provide a short concluding section "where you reflect on the coherence as well as diversity of themes". This is both an interesting and challenging task. We started this project by inviting members of the editorial and review boards to engage in valuation, provoking responses to our poll questions. Our attempted ordering of these responses similarly represents a valuation of their views. Finally, we have now invited readers of this text to engage in their own process of valuation. Such observations of valuations of valuations of valuations are likely to be common across valuation studies. This challenge of infinite regress emphasizes the centrality of recognizing our own participation in the phenomenon we study. Seeking to understand valuation is to engage in a continuous task of exploring what keeps ourselves as well as the systems we study going.

Taking a step back from our own valuation process, we noted two things. On the one hand, our collective two cents are not very easy to add up; the light protocol and equipment that we decided to employ for this exercise was never intended to render such an adding up possible. Perhaps that is a lesson in itself concerning processes of valuation. On the other hand, the responses provided by the board members did allow us to generate/suggest a number of currencies that appear to have purchase across individual members of this collective. That, too, carries a lesson regarding valuation.

Finally, the editors suggested that we "invite readers to contribute to the conversation by submitting pieces that further charts the terrains sketched, as well as challenges this very sketch." In the spirit of our approach, we have chosen to end by doing precisely that.

Acknowledgments and disclaimer. The "poll-article" is a genre that neither of the main authors has ever tried before. Given this, we want to make the following remarks: The text was written by Hans Kjellberg and Alexandre Mallard, but draws extensively on the responses we received to the poll sent to the members of the editorial and advisory boards of Valuation Studies. We circulated a draft version of the article to the editors of Valuation Studies and received useful comments that allowed us to make improvements. A second draft was then circulated to all respondents of the initial poll, asking for further comments and also for their approval to use their contributions to the poll in the manner we had outlined. This allowed us to further polish on some of the arguments, and also gave us license to publish the text. To conclude: although this text was inspired by and indeed would have been impossible to write but for the contributions of our fellow board members, as the authors of the final text we assume full responsibility for any shortcomings and errors.

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Valuation as Evaluating and Valorizing

François Vatin

Abstract

The notion of valuation often blurs a distinction that is crucial to the understanding of economic processes: the distinction between processes of assessment (in which things undergo judgements of value) and processes of production (in which things are produced so as to be of value). Adapted from the introduction of an influential collection of essays edited by François Vatin and first published in French in 2009, this essay aims to clarify this problem. Based on a collective research venture by a group of social scientists in France, this essay revisits the sociology of evaluation using the sociology of work, and signals the analytic distinction between the two faces of valuation: evaluating and valorizing (in French, *évaluer* and *valoriser*). The text was translated from French by Juliette Rogers and revised by Alexandra Bidet.

Key words: evaluation; valorization; Marx; sociology of labour; metrology

The French language helps us to understand valuation as a creative process, by distinguishing evaluating (*évaluer*) and valorizing (*valoriser*). At first glance this may seem paradoxical, because, as John Dewey demonstrated so well (1939), the English language favours verbs over nouns, and valuation over value. However, I argue here that the French language helps us to stress, within valuation, the difference between "assessment of value" (*évaluer*) and "production of value" (*valoriser*), both confused in English by the most common words: "valuation", "valuing," or "valuating."

In this programmatic paper, I contend that valuation studies need to draw this distinction in order to build on the achievements of the sociology of work. At the core of John Dewey's valuation theory, the ordinary process of inquiry continuously bridges the cognitive and the affective, the intellectual and the emotional sides of valuation (Bidet, Quéré, and Truc 2011). While seeking what is valuable or desirable, or

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what worth is, we do not dismiss prices or limit interpretations to social values. Contrary to David Stark, I think that "how prizing and appraising translate to pricing" should not be left to corporate research departments or economists (Stark 2011), for two reasons. The first is because they are part of what valuation studies are about: studying everyday inquiries about what is desired, cared about, or held precious—inquiries through which, according to John Dewey, people go from immediate valuations to more reflexive ones (asking themselves "Is it really worth it?"). The second reason, as true for economic sociology as for the sociology of work, is that these inquiries are conducted on both sides of the production equation: by users and consumers, but also by workers, managers, and engineers. For the latter, performing valuations has to do with producing economic value, namely, valuable transformations in the world that will be worth the price for others (asking "Is it worth something?").

Hence, in the relatively neglected field of work and organizations (with the exception of Stark 2009), I argue here for an approach to valuation based on evaluation and valorization. This stance has multiple consequences, one of which is that prices are not—as one may think and as suggested in a way by David Stark (2011)—an (overly) simple metric of what is valuable, something that economic sociologists should avoid in favour of more valuable metrics. In fact, prices are indeed in play, as means and as consequences, in many inquiries on what is valuable.

Valuation and Measurement: From Economic Theory to Economic Sociology

> ***Evaluer* [to evaluate]**: Transitive verb (fourteenth century, variation of *avaluer,* composed of *value*.
> 1) To determine (precisely or approximately) the value, the price of something. See *estimer*, *priser*, *expertiser*, *calculer*, *chiffrer*, *supputer*, *coter*… [to estimate, appreciate, appraise, calculate, number, work out, quote…].
> 2) By extension, to fix approximately. See *apprécier, estimer, juger* [appreciate, estimate, judge].
>
> ***Valoriser* [to valorize]**: Transitive verb (early twentieth century, after *valorisation*; derived from *valeur*).
> 1) To produce an increase of market value, to increase the price.
> 2) To increase the value, the esteem given to something. (As with *valable* (valuable), this word is criticized in quantitative usages. It is in frequent and normal use in philosophy and psychology.)

If one is to believe these two definitions, taken from the *Dictionnaire alphabétique et analogique de la langue française*, a classic French dictionary by Paul Robert (1966), the primary meanings of "*évaluer*" (to evaluate) and "*valoriser*" (to valorize) are both of an economic nature. *Évaluer* is the older word, based on the old French *avaluer,* which passed through an intermediate form *esvaluer* in the 14th century; its metaphorical meaning has come into common usage.[1] On the other hand, Paul Robert tells us that purists criticize the parallel semantic extension of *valoriser*; its primary definition dates to 1925, and has a strictly economic meaning, "to increase market value," and its first figurative definition, "to give a greater importance to something," dates to 1943.[2] *Évaluer*'s large semantic field is surely commensurate with the polysemy of the word "*valeur*" (value). This is also what allows us to predict, despite the purists, a growing extension of the usage of *valoriser* (to valorize, to give worth to). But whether we interpret these words in their strictly economic senses or whether we consider them in a wider semantic field, their comparison brings us to a classic opposition in economics: "to evaluate" (*évaluer*) corresponds with a static judgement attributing a value to a good, a thing, a person; on the other hand "to valorize" (*valoriser*) has a dynamic meaning—increasing a value, adding an increment to it, a surplus value.[3]

This detour through semantics thus brings us to classic economic theory, that of Karl Marx, in particular. Based on Aristotle's theory of exchange, Marx wondered if in fact a "surplus value" might emerge in an economic process composed of a group of exchanges, since each exchange establishes equivalence between two goods (Marx 2011). This equivalency manifests itself in the swap M-M^1 (merchandise for merchandise), but also in simple monetary exchange (M-m-M^1), which corresponds to two symmetrical evaluations of the two goods, M and M^1, in a single monetary sum (m). In other words, and using the terms that interest us here, *evaluation* doesn't create value; it only updates a value present in the good. Marx thought that escaping the paradigm of exchange, based as it is on the principle of equivalence, was essential in order to explain *valorization*, the creation of value. According to his famous phrase, it is only "in the secret laboratory of production" that one can hope to cast light on this mystery. This is why he devoted himself to a refined analysis of industrial organization, where labour emerges as the creative power at the origin of all value. For Marx, thinking of valorization is thinking of the creative act leading up to the

1 See *Trésor de la langue française informatisé* (http://atilf.atilf.fr/), which traces *avaluer* to 1283 and *esvaluer* to 1366.

2 *Trésor de la langue française*, *op. cit.*, which refers to Le Corbusier for the first meaning and Gaston Bachelard for the second.

3 Economic theory borrowed this opposition between "static" and "dynamic" from physics. See Vatin (1998) for the exemplary case of Cournot, or Mirowski (1989) for a more general treatment of relations between economics and physics.

mercantile sphere; on the market, only the values which are *already there* are fulfilled, and these values are the product of labour.[4]

Contemporary economic theory, however, seems to have rid itself of this problem. According to the theory of general equilibrium proposed by Léon Walras (1984), the notion of value (understood as economic) wouldn't have meaning outside of the mercantile sphere. Goods don't have intrinsic value; they acquire it on the market through the encounter of the ensemble of supplies and demands, each of which manifests the conditions of its technical acquisition by "producers" and those of its usage by "consumers." If one were to adopt such a schema, evaluation and valorization could no longer be dissociated. Value is created by the complex combination of the ensemble of evaluations (the confrontation of supplies and demands). The limitation of Walras's schema has been acknowledged by some of his greatest admirers, including Joseph Schumpeter: it is fundamentally static;[5] the schema could be used to consider the equilibrium of values, but not the process of the accumulation of value. Léon Walras's undertaking is in this case antithetical to Marx's: where the latter maintained that the focal point should be shifted, turning away from the mercantile sphere in order to think about valuing, the other deliberately limits his investigation to the mercantile sphere alone. Put another way, for Léon Walras's "pure" political economy, the goods are already there, as are consumers' uses, for that matter. The conditions of their production concern technology, even applied political economics, but not pure political economy, which determines the rules of exchange.[6] As much as Karl Marx subjected the question

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[4] My objective here is not to study how Marx intended to resolve this "mystery" as such. Let's quickly recall that he proceeds in two steps: first, in the wake of classical economists, he establishes a relationship of equivalence between monetary magnitude and quantities of labour (labour theory of value) which assumes that the labour is calibrated to a homogeneous metric; next, he identifies a particular good on the market, the "labour power," which has the ability to produce labour, that is to say, value. The work force will produce more value than it costs, thus releasing "surplus value" to be appropriated by the capitalist (the theory of exploitation).

[5] The explicit goal of Schumpeter's theory of entrepreneurship (1911/1926) was indeed to complement static economics with a dynamic economics. He considered Walras's schema, which concludes with the theorem of the zero-profit entrepreneur in a situation of pure and perfect competition, to be the most successful expression of economic statics. It should be completed with a dynamic economics based, according to Schumpeter, on the supra-rational behaviour of the entrepreneur-innovator. If Schumpeter's theoretical construction is very different from Marx's, their initial problem—getting past the static inherent in the concept of economic equilibrium with a dynamic approach—is quite similar.

[6] Remember that Léon Walras distinguishes three branches of political economy: pure political economics (abstract exchange theory), applied political economics, and social economics.

of *evaluation* to that of *valorization,* which he considered the major problem to be solved, Léon Walras reduced the question of *valorization* to that of *evaluation.*

Why spend so much time here on such a seemingly pedantic issue? For the great majority of current economists, Karl Marx's theory is at best of only archaeological interest. As for Léon Walras, even if they recognize the foundational importance of his theory, it seems to have been overtaken by contemporary developments in the theory of the market. What I have to say doesn't bear on these theories themselves, but on their logical foundations—and from this perspective the question remains active. The question is just this: is a theory of the market enough in and of itself?

For the last twenty-odd years, what is known as the "economics of conventions" has been giving a negative response to this question.[7] According to its authors, economic exchange is only possible to the extent to which there is a pre-existing understanding (a "convention") on the "quality" of the exchanged goods and on the cognitive instruments that allow that quality to be measured. As they have shown, Walrasian theory itself includes a preconditional hypothesis that such a convention exists, in admitting that there is already a nomenclature of goods in place before the exchange which allows its actors to "understand each other," in the linguistic sense of the term. Because all the other characteristics of goods are supposedly known in the same terms by the actors in the exchange, they can debate the price as the only variable up for discussion. The market doesn't hold itself up solely by the force of its mechanism, or by logical coherence, as one might say. It is plunged into a vast and shimmering universe of social values constantly under construction and discussion. Convention theory thus invites another mode of articulation between *evaluation* and *valorization*, in considering *evaluate* now in a wider sense, in contrast to the more strictly economic meaning of *valorize*. Conventionalist economists show that before being able to exchange economically (to *valorize* one's products on the market), there must be agreement on some common measures or evaluations. In short, you have to *evaluate* in order to *valorize*.

According to such a schema, the economic value can't be dissolved into the market alone. But the sequence remains linear, with the market as point of leakage: it's a matter of thinking of the social conditions that make the market possible. The "new economic sociology," as it has developed in France over the past 15 years, has focused itself primarily on the mercantile relationship.[8] As with the economics of conventions, it's a matter of conceiving of the social

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[7] See the summary presented in André Orléan (1994).

[8] See Philippe Steiner's summary (2012).

conditions (cognitive, material, relational, etc.) that make the market possible. In this respect, we can cite the seminal article of Marie-France Garcia-Parpet (1986, 2007) on the Sologne strawberry market, which shows that the achievement of a pure market, in the Walrasian sense (an anonymous encounter between a supply and a demand) supposes the establishment of a mercantile institution using particular technical mechanisms, namely here, the organization of an auction-clock market. Likewise, the inspired thinking of Mark Granovetter (1973, 1974) underlines the importance of social networks in the fulfilment of mercantile relations, aiming to show that the market could not sustain itself alone, but is "built into" an ensemble of social relations that make it possible. Other authors, inspired by the sociology of science and technique, have shown the role of the socio-technical arrangements and devices (packaging, the material structure of stores, etc.) that equip market actors and thus render the exchange possible (Barrey et al. 2000; Cochoy 2002). Economic science itself contributes to the performation of such types of calculation, as Michel Callon (1998) has demonstrated; the so-called *homo oeconomicus* is not at the foundation of economic relations, but rather a product of mercantile institutions.

From the economics of conventions to the sociology of markets, this line of thought has sought to open the "black box" of the market of neoclassical theory. In various forms, this body of research has addressed the issue of valuation and measurement. We saw it in the economics of conventions, which has the construction of places of shared judgement as its core issue. Likewise, authors who have worked on the equipping of markets have insisted on the importance of non-monetary measuring mechanisms, such as industrial norms, mercantile certifications (such as organic and other labels; see Cochoy, 2000), classifications made by prescribers or market intermediaries (Michelin restaurant guides, store-generated informational schemes),[9] and so on. Consumers, they have shown, bathe in a teeming metrological universe. Price may well be the ultimate market operator, but the mercantile relationship can't alone be reduced to the question of price formation, as standard economic theory would have it.

The metrology of the market described by both economics of conventions and sociology of markets increasingly affirms itself, as we leave the traditional universe of commerce based on interpersonal confidence (which links "suppliers" and "demanders" according to a logic of mutual knowledge of the concerned individuals) to enter into

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9 See Karpik (2000), and more generally Karpik (2010). For the notion of "prescriptors," see also the classic article by Armand Hatchuel (1995).

that of the industrially normed market.[10] Trust, which is indispensable to the fulfilment of the mercantile exchange, is then based on the certification of the quality of goods by actors private (businesses, business groups) or public (state and international agreements).[11] Less and less frequently, then, do products present themselves "naked" to the gaze of a client armed solely with his own intuitive capacity for judgement. They are first of all framed by the multiple metrologizations which are represented by what is written on the packaging and information on the modes and precautions for use, but they can also be traced back through the tentacular universe of organizations for normalization, certification, and evaluation; in laws, decrees, circulars, and international commercial agreements; and lastly in the archives of the tribunals which have to settle contentious disagreements (Stanziani 2005).

We approached the question via the market of goods, because it is the approach that is at the conceptual heart of "standard" economic theory, inspired by the neoclassical schema. According to this theory, labour is considered to be a good like any other, its price fixed on the market in relation to its "utility" for the buyer, or in other words, its productivity. This conceptual framework, indispensable to the completion of the Walrasian theory of general equilibrium, obviously constitutes a theoretical fiction requiring numerous arrangements to somewhat convincingly account for the observable facts. As Karl Polanyi pointed out, labour can't fully be merchandise, because it "is only another name for a human activity which goes with life itself" (1944, 72). As a result, it has always been the object of aggressive public control in order to guarantee the public order and social peace. Moreover, the exchange of labour is by its nature an interpersonal relationship, since labour is not dissociable from the person who "bears" it.

The very particular character of the merchandise "labour" explains how the study of its exchange (what's known, through the misuse of language, as "the job market") was at the origin of numerous critical analyses of the "standard" economic representation of the market. Thus Mark Granovetter (1973, 1974) highlighted the importance of social networks in market relationships to describe the pairing between employers and employees. Likewise the notion of the "qualification" of goods, as developed by the economics of conventions, transposes a

[10] There we see the opposition between the "domestic world" and the "industrial world," as developed by Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot (2006). There is also the seminal article of Pierre Boisard and Marie-Thérèse Letablier (1987).

[11] Although many consider that the political is declining in favour of the mercantile, states and supra-national organizations have the dual possibilities of legal recourse when confronted with private engagements and establishing their own norms, which is significant—and continually growing—for everything relating to people's safety.

concept developed for studying labour markets into the ensemble of markets, and in a context less concerned with the theory than with the practice of labour management. It seems obvious indeed that the valuation of workers is not exclusively an affair of the market—the professional hierarchy trains itself, well before the market, especially in educational institutions. Put another way, workers arrive on the market already marked by social certifications, and their "qualifications" are forged and valued in other metrological spaces. In a prolongation of network theory, conventionalist economists have also insisted on the importance of intermediation of the "job market," where the pairing isn't always achieved spontaneously, nor solely thanks to the informal networks highlighted by Mark Granovetter, but also through the bias of public or private institutions responsible for the valuation of work qualities to transform the demand for employment, especially that of the unemployed, into normalized qualities destined for employers (Eymard-Duvernay and Marchal 1997).

In many respects, the works gathered in Vatin (2009) took their inspiration from the research cited above, and illustrate them with new examples.[12] This book has studies from the socio-economics of work bearing on modes of job qualification and regulation: the measurement of employability (Rémillon and Vernet 2009), the regulation of intermittent worker status in performance art professions (Grégoire 2009), and the transformation of the unemployed person into entrepreneur (Giraudeau 2009). Other contributions delve more into the organization of work itself: in telephony (Bidet 2009), at the hospital (Belorgey 2009), in the petrochemical industry and the national association for adult professional education (the AFPA) (Le Bianic and Rot 2009), and in the daily press (Cabrolié 2009). A third group of contributions is affiliated with research on the qualification of products: the normalization of the pressure cooker (Leymonerie 2009), the "red label" certification of Quercy farmhouse lamb (Escala 2009), the normalized definition of medications (Nouguez 2009), and the genesis of a new norm of "social quality" (Barraud de Lagerie 2009).

On diverse objects and with equally diverse approaches, this set of studies has kinship with already well-documented research that supports its findings. Approaching our objects through the issue of measurement allows us to place the problem of market equipment at the heart of our interrogations, namely, the study of the ensemble of prerequisite mechanisms which make exchange possible: goods and workers arrive on the market already calibrated, classified, and measured in many ways. The market price doesn't freely invent itself on the market as "standard" economic theory would have us believe; the price doesn't result from a disembodied negotiation in the

[12] We are also grateful to Michel Callon, who kindly agreed to write an afterword.

marketplace, because the objects being exchanged are already indexed by all these prior metrological operations that the market sanctions with a greater or lesser flexibility. As Lucien Karpik (2010) convincingly argued, price is thus not necessarily the exclusive variable for adjustment, the keystone of the entire economic structure, as postulated by standard economic theory.

On this point, Etienne Nouguez's paper on the market for generic drugs should be cited (Nouguez 2009). He shows us that a medication is a strange good, to say the least: it is the object of price differentiation, yet it is certified as equal by public health authorities. How to conceive of such a "monster" in standard economics, this two-headed object made of two goods certified as "equivalent" which are only distinguished by price? Etienne Nouguez shows us what is at stake in this confrontation between two registers of equivalence: the "objective" equivalence granted by a tutelary authority (scientific–legal) and the "subjective" equivalence, left to consumers "free" of economic theory. The tension between these two registers of equivalence causes the growth of the economic surplus value, which then distributes itself among various market actors. In any case, the monetary price here is not the market adjustment variable, as assumed by economic theory; the price is even heavily controlled. And yet one can analyse strong tensions between actors on the distribution of value.

Measurement in Action: The Work of Valorization

After this review of the rich line of research that has fruitfully criticized the standard representation of mercantile relations and elaborated other instruments to apprehend them, I would now like to turn to what is needed to take the next step in analysis. I believe we need to move the focal point of study. The economics of conventions, as well as the new sociology of economics, are mainly focused on the study of mercantile relations, which practitioners sought to prove couldn't be reduced to the standard model of economic theory. Of course this work doesn't ignore questions of productive organization and firm management, but study of these aspects remains subordinate to that of the comprehension of the market mechanism itself. This choice may be understood first of all by the organization of scientific work: France has a rich tradition of sociological research on organizations and work, along with work by managers on productive organization. Moreover, in these cases, there was an entirely justifiable research strategy: tackling the study of mercantile relations, going straight to the heart of economic theory itself to identify its inadequacies, targeted right where it seemed to have the final response. But the risk then, in ignoring Marx's critique, was of adopting the perspective of the economists themselves by focusing all economic relations on a single point of leakage, the market.

Our undertaking reconnects in a way with Marx's interrogations on the necessary link that should be established between a theory of production and work, and a theory of the market and value. It is not, however, to return to a dogmatic construction of labour value, according to the solution Marx thought he'd found to the problem. That would close the question before even having raised it, by maintaining the existence of a universal metrology that could only have philosophical foundations.[13] Opposite to this perspective, we situate ourselves in the spirit of an empirical sociology which seeks to identify the metrological spaces elaborated by actors, the meaning they give to them, and the effect of these measuring devices and equipment on social relations. In moving the production chain to this side of the mercantile realm, we seek to understand, in practical terms, the process by which valorization is ingrained in acts of work, by combining economic sociology and the sociology of work in a spirit of cross-pollination between the two research traditions.

One key concept that runs through the collected volume (Vatin 2009) is the agreed-on status given to the notion of work in economic sociology.[14] The usual sequential schema is based on an opposition between the spaces of work and market, which reinforces the opposition between the technical instance and the economic one. Such a schema has the advantage of being compatible with the Walrasian representation of the market, according to which one may indeed isolate a productive space that results in products, determined by its own assemblage of norms (predominantly technical but also social, in the sense of social engineering—labour management techniques, for example). Subsequently, the question of the valorization of these products on the mercantile scene is raised, that of the establishment of the market price. The economist's work concerns only this second phase, the first belonging to technicians, managers, or even sociologists of work and organizations.[15]

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[13] The issue here is not to critique the Marxist conception of labour value, which is in line with a theoretical economics that must be resituated in the internal and external contexts of elaboration of Marx's theory. I wish only to underline that here I borrow Marx's question, and not his response.

[14] The notion of work here should be understood as a "productive action" (work activity) and not as an object subjected to the market (work merchandise). From Mark Granovetter's sociology of networks to François Eymard-Duvernay's economics of conventions, studies are indeed numerous on the economic sociology of "job markets."

[15] This sharing of role between economists and managers has been well analysed and critiqued by Philippe Lorino (1989).

I have shown why such a disconnection from reality is unsatisfactory (Vatin 2008a, 2008b). A clear dividing line cannot be established between the economist and the technologist, because technical thinking itself is fundamentally economic. The technical norm in fact relies on the efficiency principle, which is essentially economic, since it consists of setting a ratio between something considered to be a result or product and something thought of as an expense or cost. It's even the very definition of such a ratio relating products to costs, which is *economic,* and not the nature of the measurement units used to quantify the denominator and numerator. There is no division, only continuity between the more "technical" ratios, such as that of *returns*, and the more "economic," such as that of *profitability*, via the very ambiguous category of *productivity*. What this means, but which will not be demonstrated here, is that the technical *ratios* like *mechanical return* cannot be understood in a pure physical positivity. They can't be constructed without undertaking a division of the world incorporating norms of valuation into that which "costs" and that which "gains."

This perspective demands the redefinition of even the notion of *economics,* to free the universes of the market and monetary measurement from the limited space usually allotted to them in order to allow consideration of the many economic aspects of social actions, especially in the productive sphere. To this end, I proposed redefining economics as *an act of management*, that is, as a practice that, in an explicit or implicit calculation, takes consideration of the relationship between a product and an expenditure. Of course, it's in the work of technicians and managers, explicitly charged with elaborating norms, that one will first see such a conception of the economic at work. Many examples are found in the chapters of our book (Vatin 2009): engineer-normalizers designing the safety of pressure cookers; a telephony engineer developing a new economic good, "telephone communication"; hospital managers making economic measures of medical acts; editorial secretaries of daily newspapers inscribing journalists' work into normalized layouts; public health managers building the norm of generic medications; petrochemical managers and the AFPA normalizing the information processed by their companies' agents in order to depersonalize it; consultants elaborating evaluation criteria of social quality; food industry engineers developing evaluation criteria for lamb carcasses, and so on.

In so doing, we rejoin work carried out on the work of organizers and on the rationalization of management practices (Moisdon 1997). We focus on the metrological instruments put into use: lists, grills, measurements, ratios, calculatory devices. We concentrate particularly on the terms of their emergence, with the idea that in tracing them back to the conditions of their construction we can bring to light the valuation systems hidden in their "black box," once it has been institutionalized and operates as a "machine," according to the apt expression that Pauline Barraud de Lagerie takes up from Alain Desrosières (1998). Our attention to the genesis of norms distinguishes us from certain works critical of managerial domination that approach the question mainly through the ways these procedures are put in place, always considered destructive to social connections and to attentiveness to people and things—in short, like abstract mechanical processes devoid of all humanity (Maugeri 2001). It's not a matter of saying the management devices don't act sometimes as dehumanized machines, but to show that, in fact, like ordinary machines, they are indeed social productions full of valuations. Although doubtlessly their effects can never be reduced to their intentions, they still can't be reduced to blind natural forces, as they are sometimes represented.

Moreover, as far as activity is concerned, normative power is not the exclusive prerogative of organizers and managers. Here two steps should be distinguished: first, that of the genesis of instituted norms, then, that of the conditions of application of these norms. The genesis of norms requires technicity (that of an engineer, a lawyer, a manager, an accountant, etc.) and expresses social power, according to the two faces (knowledge and power) of all professionalisms. These norms incorporate the social order in the context of a hierarchized society where power rests largely on monetary might, a quick and convenient way to define what we commonly understand as "capitalism." It would, however, be an error to think that technical, administrative, or managerial norms are decreed without any form of social debate or concern about the general interest and extra-economic values.

Let's take a look at some of the studies collected: engineers working on the normalization of the pressure cooker had the ambition of developing its market to the advantage of its manufacturers, but also of providing the population with an economical and reliable instrument (Leymonerie 2009). Hospital managers are certainly charged with reducing costs in favour of the national healthcare system, but in doing so they represent a conception (sometimes debatable) of the general interest that does not ignore public health questions (Belorgey 2009). Managers at the French unemployment insurance organization (UNEDIC) try to reduce the cost of social benefits for performance arts professionals, but in a context of public funds that aim for a "fair" distribution of resources coming from social programme contributions (Grégoire 2009). Editorial staff of daily newspapers develop the paper's layout, or even its editorial line, in relation to the constraints of the advertising market, but they are not devoid of a journalistic ethic aiming to inform readers well (Cabrolié 2009). Consultants who elaborate "social quality" norms work first in the service of large businesses that want to fortify themselves against the risk of scandals linked to the denunciation of disastrous work conditions at their manufacturers in developing countries, but they also have ethical aspirations to improve working conditions worldwide (Barraud de Lagerie 2009).

Another principal developed in the texts is that normative power isn't unilateral, going from high to the low, from conception to execution. Such an idea isn't in and of itself original. It has been developed by many contributions to the sociology of organizations which have shown the valuing and normativizing power of "executants" by highlighting forms of "autonomous" or "conjoint" regulation, in Jean-Daniel Reynaud's terminology (1993). We develop a somewhat similar idea by underlining the managerial dimension of all work. The analysis first applies to "professionals" (doctors, hospital employees, petrochemical researchers, psychologists, etc.), who often "resist" the imposition of management instruments coming "from on high," but who also, through action, build their own axiological frames which are, in fact, management norms: what information to circulate between researchers or between psychologists, which ailments to care for in priority, and so on. These professionals have their own ethical frame, if not professional bodies, which are the foundation of their power to resist norms imposed from above. But such a normative capacity isn't absent among the personnel of execution: local auditors who fill out social quality evaluation forms and must interpret them, and "qualiticians" of the Quercy lamb slaughter chain, seeing over a hundred carcasses per hour, are charged with classifying them in a quality evaluation grid, thus producing, in an assembly line, a classification that will determine the price paid to the farmers (Escala 2009). No work, not even that of white-collar workers and professionals, escapes imposed normative measures; none is reduced to a pure and simple application of these measures without the necessity of making translations which engage, to varying degrees, the worker's own normativity.

This brings us back to the question of valuation. These works have the common objective of trying to grasp the process of value creation, both on the market and upstream from it, via the practical operations by which goods and services are measured, valued, and technically and economically elaborated, not just by the productive organizations that decree management norms, but also by the agents in charge of putting them into action, who can only do so in working around them, in reformulating them, and in combining them with their own valuations. The economic space, then, deploys itself in a singular way. Economic value here is no longer dissociable from other registers of valuation. The issue is to grasp how multiple valuation processes effectively lead to the circulation of economic value in the strictest sense, that is, to the genesis of monetary fluxes. Let's take some examples.

What is a telephonic communication? A verbal exchange over distance between two people, the significant product of this exchange, a quantity of energy which circulates for a given time over the network, an operator's work of putting in contact, a network's quantum of global availability? Asking such questions is to wonder about the material construction of the network and how its use is organized, as well as to consider its economic nature: what "costs" in a telephonic communication? What does a phone call bring in? What correspondence between the costs and the products might one establish so that a telephonic economy would be possible? As Alexandra Bidet shows, telecommunications engineers haven't stopped asking such questions (Bidet 2009). Their answers can't be interpreted as the progressive discovery of a hidden reality, according to a Platonic conception of the market. They are in the continuous production of their object itself, which is simultaneously a good of usage (which has changed with time), a technical device (which has known several revolutions), and an economic good susceptible to receiving a price, the very nature of which has not ceased to vary, either (billing by distance, by time, etc.).

Let's leave the obscure terrain of telephony for the sensible reality of lamb. Here we easily grasp the actors, well identified in their successive technical functions: farmers, a slaughterhouse, distributors (butchers and supermarkets), and lastly, the consumer. This linear technical chain can *a priori* be easily put in correlation to the economic chain (monetary flux) which follows it step by step, tracing a succession of exchanges that track the value back from consumer to farmer, following the reversed trajectory of the product's course. Thierry Escala's analysis of the case of red-label lamb singularly complicates the question (Escala 2009). It shows that the process of economic valorization is concentrated in two work stations on the slaughtering chain: that of the "qualitician," who classes carcasses according to a grid of conventions, and that of the "salesperson," who splits them up physically into lots destined for the slaughterhouse's customers (butchers and supermarket chains). At these two moments, values are "redistributed," like in a card game, toward the upstream in the case of the qualitician's station, and toward the downstream for the salesperson's. The market isn't as simple and linear as economic theory would have it. It's double-faced: there is no homogeneity between upstream value fluxes (towards farmers) and downstream value fluxes (towards consumers). Accounting equilibrium is maintained by a complex system of equalization. What is interesting here is that this complex economy of labelled lamb can't be revealed and understood without the concrete observation of the work practices of the qualitician and salesperson, which are intrinsically "technical" and "economic" at the same time.

A similar demonstration can be made based on the case of the manufacture of the daily newspaper (Cabrolié 2009). Here too, is a complex economic organization, since the newspaper's economic stability relies on two dissociated markets: that of the readership and that of the advertisers. But as Stéphane Cabrolié shows us, these two markets are closely connected in the paper's practical construction, since the economic stability (the balance between incomes from paper sales and advertising) ultimately manifests itself in a technical balance in the newspaper's material composition between editorial pages and promotional inserts. As with slaughterhouses, the complex economy of the newspaper can only be understood by correctly studying the division of work among journalists, editorial secretaries, editor-in-chief, and printing service. The economy is not, as it's often represented, a tutelary—or malevolent—power which weighs on the work of professionals and employees, who in turn possess a rationality of an entirely other order: the journalist's ethics, the aesthetics of layout, etc. It is instead an organic component of work, made of arrangements and compromise between diverse normative registers, hierarchically imposed or indigenously constructed. As with slaughterhouses, only by focusing on the material management tools (the carcass qualification grid, the outline of the newspaper's composition) can we bring to light the complex system of valorization that is distributed in the ensemble of productive acts.

In light of these examples, *evaluation* no longer appears as a simple preliminary to *valorization*, as the economics of conventions would have it. All along the chain of production, *valorization* is present in acts of *evaluation,* in that they are provisional modalities for establishing a value that is under construction. As Thierry Escala says so well, we must get past the problematic of the static analysis of product qualification, as developed by the economics of conventions, in order to consider the *work of qualification* in a dynamic way. More generally speaking, acts of production can't be understood without thinking about how they insert themselves into the economic realm: the work of journalists and editorial secretaries incorporates the distinctive economic frame of their sector; emergency room doctors also integrate, in their own way and in an albeit conflictual way, hospital management staff; and pressure cooker engineer-designers, like those in telephony, think about the market for the goods they are also developing. Management is not only reserved for official managers, it permeates the entirety of productive activity. Economic conditions in the strict sense of the term (the space in which prices are formed) condition productive activity, not only in the mode of hierarchical constraint and imposed norms, elaborated by managers based on economic analysis of the organization and of its integration in the market or public accounts, but also through the normativity that is indigenous to workers, who, in their own way, also think about economic constraints. Inversely, when goods arrive on the market they are already equipped with all the pre-market valuations that had been incorporated into management devices (those explicitly imposed by the hierarchy), as well as some informal valuations resulting from the economic reflexivity of the workers at any level of the firm.

We need to open a new chapter of thought at the crossroads of sociology, economics, and management: to think about value and valuation in the activity of work itself, in the double register of the genesis of norms taking place simultaneously with the practice of professional activity, from top to bottom of the professional hierarchy, and the ever-relative effectiveness of the imposed norm. Moreover, these two registers are not unrelated, because it's often in reaction to the imposed norm that the actors' own normativity expands. We find diverse examples in the texts cited above, from very diverse professions: hospital doctors, AFPA psychologists, petrochemical researchers, and even performing artists through their activist organizations. After all is said and done, actual practices come under what we might call "joint normativity," in the way that Jean-Daniel Reynaud (1989) spoke of "joint regulation." As Jean Saglio (2007) has highlighted, such practical agreements don't remotely require that participants agree on the foundational questions, on the ideological level. To the contrary, it's often because each may interpret the norm according to his or her own valuations that practical agreements are possible. This stance is especially reminiscent of Dewey's "practical agreement" (1939); it also pertains to the well-known concept of "boundary objects" (Star and Griesemer 1989). Mathieu Grégoire gives a powerful illustration of this configuration concerning the formula for calculating the unemployment compensation for performance art professionals (Grégoire 2009). He shows that the two parties actually did come to an agreement following a long conflict over a new compensation formula, but with each attributing radically different meanings to the formula, and what's more, without ever actually arriving at an explicit agreement.

The studies we collected in Vatin (2009) illustrate the construction of norms through action, showing how a universe of practical norms is created to deal with the technical naturalness of the treated objects: the expansion of steam in the pressure cooker, the waves that circulate in wires, and the social framework in which these objects in practice get their meanings and can consequentially be the object of work and of an economy. We also deal with the supervision of work through measurement devices. How to measure, to control, to guide, to finance? The "how" here doesn't refer back to the authors' normativity, but to the close examination of a measurement, an accounting formula, a management instrument, a model for business creation, and so on. We analyse work by the norm imposed on it, even if we show both the workers' resistance to this norm and their own normative capacities. Ultimately, exploring work as an activity producing measurements is to explore its producing value and valuations.

Conclusion

To provisionally conclude this essay, I suggest that valuation has two faces. It is a vital process that comes with and within any productive undertaking, in the most general sense that one can give to the expression; it is thereby also a system of social regulation to be dealt with. This echoes a classic pattern in neoclassical economic theory, which considers market actors as both "price makers" and "price takers." This theory grants the "market," as an abstract and universal calculative instance, a magical power to solve this contradiction. To this end, Léon Walras imagined the figure of the "auctioneer," a sort of "Maxwell's demon" of the market, who embodies the calculative device. I approach things differently. In a more descriptive and pragmatist-inspired stance, I contend that we should identify the confrontation of various norms, which instead of being stacked are temporally articulated with reversionary effects.

At this point, this new approach is still in the early stages of its drafting: a general grammar of valuations has to be developed. But it has the merit of highlighting the dynamics of valuation that, as we have seen above, escapes the neoclassical economic theory focused on the scheme of equilibrium. This theory assumes that the market, by assigning a value to each good, statically balances the account of each agent. This assumption makes the very conception of economic dynamics impossible. On the opposite side, the effort to account for the actor in the dynamics of his own economic actions (that is, in his ability to produce value) reopens the "black box" of value creation, which economists have left to managers and to which economic sociologists have, until now, paid little attention. The French language, which distinguishes between *evaluation* and *valorization*, helps to present the problem more clearly. This distinction reaffirms the importance of the notion of work as a productive activity in the wake of classical economic thinking, Marx's in particular. In this sense, the theory of valuation is at the heart of an approach to economic sociology that, instead of being centred on the figure of the market, is primarily a concrete sociology of productive activity. As such, it is a highly promising research agenda.

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The Economic Valuation and Commensuration of Cultural Resources: Financing and Monitoring the Swedish Culture Sector

Alexander Styhre

Abstract

Economic sociology treats the process of valuation and commensuration of resources as socially-embedded practices determined by historical, cultural, and political conditions. Empirical studies of valuation and commensuration demonstrate that the practices of creating metrics, accounting procedures, and other forms of numerical representations that denote underlying resources are bound up with social interests and instituted beliefs. Recently, cultural resources and culture production have been advocated as key drivers of economic growth in what has been branded the "the creative economy." At the same time, a lot of cultural resources and culture production are, historically, not strictly valued in terms of economic worth, instead being commonly regarded as having an intrinsic social value. Such norms disconnect cultural resources and economic worth, while much culture production is simultaneously being funded by welfare states, making the allocation of public funding a matter of professional expertise. This article reports on a study of how officers of a regional Culture Agency allocate regional culture budgets and monitor culture production via processes of valuation and commensuration. The study contributes to our understanding of how valuation and commensuration play a role in non-market or pseudo-market settings where both political interests and wider social interests are bound up with calculative practices.

Key words: economic sociology; valuation; commensuration; culture resources; culture politics; the creative economy

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Introduction

In order to produce culture, there needs to be a financing of cultural activities. The financing of cultural institutions and cultural production, in the contemporary welfare state, is commonly a matter of allocating the tax revenues in cultural budgets enacted by political bodies. This study demonstrates how the allocation of culture budgets is bound up with professional expertise when valuing and commensurating various cultural activities.

The emerging economic sociology literature on valuation and the economics of worth suggests that terms such as "value" and "market" are not trivial social constructs but the outcome of extensive social practices and institutional work on rendering heterogeneous resources commensurable (Aspers 2009; Beckert 2002; Fligstein 2001; Callon 1998). Here, Carruthers and Babb (1996, 1556), studying the introduction of paper bills—"greenbacks"—during the nineteenth century in the US as a means of lowering the cost of economic transactions, remark that "money works best when it can be taken for granted, when its value, negotiability, and neutrality can simply be assumed." The money economy, as well as a series of other human accomplishments, is thus dependent on common agreement that certain institutions need to be respected in order to function as a collective accomplishment. In other words, the money economy and the circulation of paper money are based on the "naturalization" of such means of payment (Simmel 1978). Such naturalization always presupposes a certain amount of "forgetfulness," loss of the memory of the institutional work underlying the instituting of particular social orders. "Together, naturalization and forgetfulness provide a foundation for institutions," Carruthers and Babb conclude (1996, 1558). Historical studies of processes of *valuation*; the inscription of economic value, preferably in the form of a metric such as a market price; and *commensuration*; "the valuation or measuring of different objects with a common metric" (Espeland and Stevens 2008, 408), that is, the comparing of, for example, market prices; show that the naturalization of prices and value is by no means an uncomplicated social process but one that is embedded in institutional settings and professional norms. For instance, in the British and German textile industries, the notion of labour as a commodity only came about following substantial struggles between social actors and the work of articulating economic theories that rendered labor as a commodity among others (Biernacki 1995). In reproductive medicine, human reproductive material such as oöcyte (unfertilized eggs) and sperm is subject to international trade, and the pricing of such material remains contested (Almeling 2007). Also, in the case of the pricing of relatively easily-commodified resources such as electricity, there is historical evidence of competing procedures and policies with regard to how to determine prices (Yakubovich, Granovetter, and McGuire 2005).

Especially when valuing and pricing what Fourcade (2011) calls "peculiar goods," i.e. goods that do not easily lend themselves to economic valuation and commensuration without violating social norms (see, for example, Zelizer [2005; 1985] on the pricing of "intimacy" and children's lives), the process of valuation and commensuration becomes complicated and riddled by controversy.

Culture production and consumption is one field where "peculiar goods" are priced and paid for. In many welfare states, the culture sector is financed by tax revenues, thus positioning culture production in a pseudo-market where culture goods (in the widest sense of the term, including all sorts of performances and events) generate income through the box-office while being subsidized by the state, region, or municipality. In this view, a qualitative "cultural infrastructure" (including cultural institutions, culture festivals and events, education programs, and other relevant activities) is regarded as a vital part of the welfare state. In addition, over the last decade, culture has been re-enacted by politicians and social commentators as an economic resource that can play a key role in propelling the economy during the coming decades. Terms such as "the creative economy" (e.g., Howkins 2002; Adler 2011) and "aesthetic knowledge" (Ewenstein and Whyte 2007) have been widely endorsed in political and cultural circles alike. Regardless of such new perspectives, the process whereby political decisions regarding the size of culture budgets and the actual allocation of financial resources within the culture sector is a bureaucratic procedure determined by political interests and agendas, professional norms, administrative routines, and legal frameworks. That is, the tax revenues allocated to culture production do not trickle down effortlessly to the producers of culture; instead, the very allocation of financial resources is in itself a professional and administrative procedure that involves professional skills such as the valuation and commensuration of culture production.

This article demonstrates how officers of a regional Culture Agency in Sweden institute routines for the valuation and commensuration of culture production. The study suggests that the professional skill of balancing political interests and an intimate understanding of the actual day-to-day culture production *in situ* constitute a domain of expertise which, on the one hand, avoids a "politicization" of the culture sector while maintaining, on the other, control of how culture budgets are allocated and translated into activities. In other words, the economic sociology literature by no means solely provides an abstract analytical vocabulary separated from everyday work; concepts such as valuation and commensuration instead denote activities that take place on a daily basis at, for example, the regional Culture Agency as part of the culture politics being put into practice. The study therefore contributes to the literature on valuation and commensuration by demonstrating that culture budgets and production; (1) are co-aligned through the use of specific professional and administrative procedures and routines enabling the valuation and commensuration of culture production and, (2) that such "co-alignment" is based on the experience and political-administrative *savoir-faire* acquired by the culture officers after doing years of practical work.

The remainder of the paper is structured into four sections of which the first outlines the theoretical framework guiding the empirical study, including the key terms valuation and commensuration. Then, the methodology of the study is addressed. Thirdly, the empirical material is reported on and, finally, some theoretical and practical implications raised by the study are discussed.

Valuation and Commensuration as Social Practices

The economic sociology literature avoids assumptions regarding "human nature" and human dispositions and preferences for forms of rationality, instead treating economic life and economic transactions as being contingent on social, cultural, and historical conditions (Guillén et al. 2002; Bourdieu 2005). That is, rather than adhering to strictly calculative and instrumental rationalities, humans engage in economic activities and transactions on the basis of a variety of concerns and considerations. In the work of allocating financial resources to actors in the culture sector, as examined in this article, officers engage in two principal activities, i.e. the totality of activities defining the *value* of a certain form of culture production (e.g., performing arts, visuals arts, specific education programs) and the totality of activities aimed at comparing these culture offerings, i.e. the *commensuration* of alternative forms of culture production. In order to allocate culture budgets, culture officers need to determine the social worth of a specific culture activity, but they also need to decide how to balance various forms of culture production and how to promote professional, "elite" culture production while also fulfilling the political goal of supporting "amateur" or "youth" culture. In the following sections, the analytical terms valuation and commensuration are examined.

Valuation

While there are many resources and events that have not been translated into economic figures without violating social norms—e.g., the calculation of the worth of human life and economic compensation for injuries occurring in health care (Samuel, Dirsmith, and McElroy 2005), the insurance industry (Ericson, Barry, and Doyle 2000), or during clinical trials in the pharmaceutical industry (Fischer 2009; Petryna 2009)—such work is silently conducted on an everyday basis (Fourcade 2011, 1723). Since monetary terms are used to measure the allocation of resources in late-modern, capitalist society, Fourcade (2011, 1725) writes, "[m]onetary commensuration (or economic valuation) techniques are numerous and varied." She continues: "The production, selection, and application of these techniques is thus extraordinarily contingent and deeply political, raising questions about 'scientific trials of strength' and the processes of 'translation' and 'allies of enrollment' (Latour 1987) that stand behind them." While, for instance, accounting techniques and procedures are taking on an air of "objectivity" and "procedural transparency" (Robson 1992), they too are the outcome of historically-contingent processes whereby merchants needed to establish themselves as credible and trustworthy economic agents (Carruthers and Espeland 1991; Poovey 1991). Similar to Beckert (2009), Fourcade emphasizes the fact that economic valuation and commensuration are "social processes":

> Economic valuation is so revealing precisely because it is so much more than a process of monetary commensuration: it is, much more powerfully, a process of 'definition' or social construction in a substantive sense (Smith 2007) which incorporates all kinds of assumptions about social order and socially constructed imaginaries about worth. Economic valuation, in other words, does not stand outside of society: it incorporates in its very making evaluative frames and judgments that can all be traced back to specific politico-institutional configurations and conflicts. (Fourcade 2011, 1769)

Karpik (2010, 36) speaks of the valuation of "singularities," non-standardized goods and services, and suggests that the valuation of singularities is based on "knowledge" and "judgment" rather than "information" and "decision": "Judgment is . . . primarily a qualitative choice, whereas decision is based on logic and calculation," proposes Karpik (2010, 41). As a consequence, certain markets trading singularities such as in the modern art, judgment and knowledge are operationalized as *expertise* (Gourevitch 2011; Velthuis 2011; 2003). Such expertise is acquired through years of training and experience but is ultimately granted when one is recognized by other actors in one's field. As Luhmann (2000), for instance, has argued, the art market is to some extent *autopoetic*, self-referential; only experts already recognized by the social system of the art market can recognize the work of newcomers. "The assessment of the value of a work of art is only based on the reputation of the expert, verified by the reputation of others," writes Gourevitch (2011, 88).

Muniesa, Millo, and Callon (2007) introduce the term "market devices" in order to denote the totality of instruments, technologies, standards, and infrastructures that constitute the market (see, for example, Preda 2006; Buenza and Stark 2004). More specifically, Karpik (2011) speaks of the use of "judgment devices" that help an actor determine the value of a resource. As "guides for action," judgment devices help the actor to overcome "radical uncertainty" and to "instill confidence" (Karpik 2011, 71). Judgment devices consist of heterogeneous resources that include expert guides and reviews, statements by rating agencies, and professional rules of thumb (e.g., "don't buy stocks with a price/earnings ratio over 15" in financial trading). For instance, in the modern art market, previous art prices, the credentials of the artist (including what galleries or art museums have displayed his/her work), and expert reviews may all serve as judgment devices for the buyer of modern art. The greater the uncertainty involved in making the valuation, the greater the need for widely-used and credible judgment devices: "Judgment devices are used to dissipate the opacity of the market," Karpik summarizes (2010, 44).

In addition to determining the value and, eventually, the price of a resource, agents need to be able to commensurate resources, to compare and rank them in order to be able to make a selection. Valuation and commensuration are two complementary processes not fully separated in time and space; however, for analytical reasons, they can be kept apart.

Commensuration

In many cases, economic valuation is not the goal per se, rather the determining of economic value is used in commensuration, the translation of different qualities into a common metric (Espeland and Stevens 1998, 314) that can support, for instance, decision-making. In health care organizations, the economic valuation of, for instance, human organs (say, a kidney or a retina) can help to decide what form of surgery to conduct and what priorities to make (Sharp 2003; Cherry 2005). "Commensuration can be understood as a system for discarding information and organizing what remains into new forms. In abstracting and reducing information, the link between what is represented and the empirical world is obscured and uncertainty is absorbed," Espeland and Stevens write (1998, 317). As a consequence, commensuration is a process whereby objects must be classified in ways that "make them comparable"—"liquid," in Carruthers and Stinchcombe's (1999) terms—and it thus requires "considerable social and intellectual investments" (Espeland and Stevens 2008, 408). Commensuration is thus the process whereby heterogeneous resources or assets (e.g., products or services) are given economic values which are to be compared regardless of their differences, or, using Wilson's (2001, 1) case: "how many light bulbs should be proffered for a ton of coal?" As Espeland and Stevens (2008, 432) remark, commensuration is a form of quantification whereby all resources are subject to economic valuation and, consequently, the risk always exists that "the real easily becomes coextensive with what is measureable." Since the publication of Simmel's (1978) *Philosophy of Money*, which speaks of money-worth as the ultimate "measure of value" (Wilson 2000, 1) in modern society, social theorists have paid attention to how monetary terms serve to commensurate heterogeneous resources (e.g., Baker and Jimerson 1992; Crump 1992). "A market price appears more 'objective' than other measures of value," Carruthers emphasizes (2005, 358). However, Carruthers suggests, such images of "objectivity" are often a chimera:

> The connection between monetary valuation and quantitative measurement gives the former an image of an objective, neutral, and precise mode of valuation . . . . Ideally, valuation resembles . . . disinterested mechanical objectivity . . . but in fact the rules are often too vague, incomplete, and numerous to prevent interest-driven creative interpretations. (Carruthers 2005, 359)

In order to serve their social role, "economic numbers" (i.e., the monetary worth of a resource) need to comply with at least one of four conditions outlined by Espeland and Stevens (2008, 417):

> The authority of numbers may be vested in (1) our sense of their accuracy or validity as representations of some part of the world . . . (2) in their usefulness in solving problems . . . (3) in how they accumulate and link users who have investments in the numbers . . . or (4) in their long and evolving associations with rationality and objectivity . . . It often is some combination of these phenomenon that makes particular numbers compelling. (Espeland and Stevens 2008, 417)

While the paradox of economic valuation and commensuration lies in economic numbers, on the one hand, being respected and serving the role of inscribing a resource with economic worth, the uses and interpretations of the same numbers are, of necessity, embedded in social and cultural beliefs (Mackenzie 2004). Economic numbers thus have to be examined as such and need to be understood as representing underlying "non-economic" conditions (Zaloom 2003, 258).

Studies of processes of valuation and commensuration suggest that there is a need for joint agreement regarding classifications and routines for determining economic worth. Studies of the uses of classification in, for example, the film industry (Waguespack and Sorenson 2011) and the finance industry (Fleischer 2009; Mizruchi and Stearns 2001; Zuckerman 1999; Hayward and Boeker 1998) suggest that powerful actors may influence classification work in ways that benefit their interests. In the case of the film industry, independent film producers have received less favorable ratings for their movies and in the case of the finance industry, rating agencies use "overlapping categories" that help to support future claims regarding the accuracy of classifications (e.g., high, moderate and low risk) of financial assets. These studies suggest that valuation and commensuration are not separated from politics and power; on the contrary, being processes that commonly take on objectivist images while reflecting certain interests and accommodating sources of uncertainty. Prices, the outcome of processes of valuation and commensuration, are thus socially-embedded, suggests Velthuis (2011):

> Prices . . . are not established by means of neutral market devices that economic agents select in order to serve their own interests, or which emerge because of their efficiency in equilibrating markets, as neoclassical economists have either implicitly or explicitly assumed. Prices are themselves embedded in the meaning structures of markets, in the preexisting institutional framework of these markets, and in the shared values of the agents who populate these markets. (Velthuis 2011, 178)

In other words, *status* plays a key role in valuation and commensuration (Benjamin and Podolny 1999; Rao 1994; Podolny 1993). "The greater one's status, the more profitable it is to produce a good of a given quality," Podolny writes (1993). Here, Podolny is speaking of a "Matthew effect" (after Merton 1973) on markets, i.e. the effect whereby already prestigious and powerful actors are capable of maintaining their position by exploiting first-mover advantages. In the case of cultural institutions, status is undoubtedly a major factor to consider.

In summary, economic and social life are based on the capacity of actors to value and commensurate heterogeneous resources. In some cases, certain resources (e.g., the price of gold) have been subject to such processes for centuries while in other cases (e.g., natural resources such as "clean air" or human organs used in transplant surgery), such work is largely still in the making. As suggested by economic sociologists, the work of transforming resources into commodities is embedded in calculative procedures as well as in social and cultural norms and beliefs. Thus, the price of a commodity not only reflects its strict economic worth but also the social norms regulating the production of such resources. For instance, the price of sperm, used in reproductive medicine research and in clinical practice for assisted fertilization (Almeling 2007; Tober 2001), not only reflects the supply and demand situation of such human reproductive material, but also embodies the "social" and "emotional" costs to the donor for participating in this specific form of "clinical labour" (Waldby and Cooper 2007, 59). Seen in this way, valuation and commensuration constitute a professional domain of expertise wherein calculative practices and wider social, cultural, and political concerns are taken into account.

The Methodology of the Study

Research Setting

The Västra Götaland region of Western Sweden has 1.7 million inhabitants spread over forty-eight municipalities and Sweden's largest culture budget, both in nominal and per capita terms. In Sweden's tradition of culture politics, cultural institutions and culture itself are partly financed by the state (primarily in the case of major cultural institutions); however, it is primarily the regions, the regional parliaments, and the individual municipalities that finance culture production. The Swedish regions can decide for themselves how they want to allocate their culture budgets and, in the Västra Götaland region, a Culture Agency was set up in 2000 when four smaller regions merged into the Västra Götaland region during a reform aimed at creating larger administrative units. For actors in culture, there are three sources of public funding: the government, the regional parliaments, and the municipalities. However, in practice, it is mostly regional and municipal funding that is targeted. Swedish culture politics are often described as a political field characterized by shared political interests across party lines with few controversies. In this domain, the Culture Agency officers who were interviewed played the role of bureaucrats allocating culture budgets and monitoring the actual usage of financial resources; a role demanding both political skills and the capacity to value and commensurate culture production.

The Swedish regional culture agencies are of interest to valuation and commensuration studies, economic sociology, and other economic disciplines because they (1) represent a non-market based, bureaucratic–political budgeting process whereby various culture activities are assessed in terms of their social, cultural, and economic value, that is, there are no widely agreed upon methodologies regarding how to make these assessments, implying that there is a significant degree of professional expertise and tacit knowledge involved in reconciling all the various interests and expectations at play in the cultural sector, and because they (2) value and commensurate culture production, a field of production which, in most developed countries, is treated by decision-making bodies as being subject to market failure, that is, market actors tend to undervalue culture production as it fails to effectively price the intrinsic and wider socio-economic value of such culture production. In practice, such perceived market failures lead to a situation whereby culture production is subsidized and publicly-funded. In other words, culture agencies play an active role as market makers, creating opportunities for a lively and dynamic cultural scene by allocating tax revenues to culture production.

Research Design

Processes of valuation (and, in the case of markets, price-setting) can be studied empirically in a variety of settings. For instance, in markets with "posted," fixed prices (Velthuis 2011) or in spot-markets where prices serve as a "market device" for closing deals (Çaliskan 2007); in legal processes whereby the worth of, for example, human life (Zelizer 1985) or natural resources (Fourcade 2011) are determined; in bureaucratic-political budgeting processes whereby negotiation and political considerations play an important role. In addition, there are also processes of valuation within professional communities, for instance, when academic researchers assess research proposals submitted to research funds (Lamont 2009). In the bureaucratic-political valuation, the judgment of the actors is embedded in what Fourcade (2011) speaks of as "politico–institutional configurations and conflicts," that is, valuation and commensuration are based on political agendas and agreements.

The present study is based on a case study methodology (Eisenhardt and Graebner 2007; David 2006; Gillham 2000). Case study research is commonly prescribed in cases where there is a lack of research or where it is complicated to formulate precise research questions. Such a framework suggests that it is a shortage of adequate theories that justifies case study methodology. An alternative perspective is that case study methodology provides in-depth insight into the everyday life and work of actors and that detailed accounts of day-to-day practices provided in, for example, interviews provide more details than, for instance, survey methodologies primarily examining opinions and practices in broader populations or groups of actors (Gephart 2004). The present study seeks to explore how cultural endeavors and competence are evaluated and priced in a political and economic context, i.e. that of the regional economy. A qualitative methodology such as a case study methodology is justified on the basis of the intricate balancing of economic, social and politico-cultural considerations managed by the officers of the Regional Culture Office. In addition, case study methodologies have been used by previous research into the valuation of resources (see, for example, Fourcade 2011; Velthuis 2003; Zelizer 1985).

Data Collection

The data collection process included three sources of empirical material. First, the study is based on interviews with officers of the Culture Agency. At an early stage of the process, the researcher was invited to the Culture Agency to present the research project and its objectives during a weekly start-up meeting held on a Monday morning. The Culture Agency has 20 co-workers, including the Managing Director, the administrative staff, and the officers, of whom nine have so-called specific domains of expertise and responsibility. In the present study, eight of these officers (one was not available at the time of the study) and the Managing Director were interviewed. This is a small sample of interviewees and includes only interlocutors from the Culture Agency. In addition to the Culture Agency officers, representatives of the contracted cultural institutions or members of the Regional Parliament could have been included in the sample in order to bring a wider perspective on the allocation of financial resources. However, as the present study examines the actual process of conducting the valuation and commensuration of the available culture activities, this sample included the relevant actors. An extended sample of interviewees would arguably have shed some light on further concerns pertaining to the allocation of budget resources but these interviewees might not have added any substantial insights into the actual bureaucratic–political budgeting processes as such. Therefore, the sample, albeit of limited extent, has validity since all but one of the officers working with the allocation of culture budgets are included in the study.

All the interviews were conducted at the Culture Agency's head office in Gothenburg, Sweden, and lasted for about one hour. The interviews were based on a semi-structured interview guide, tape-recorded, and then transcribed verbatim by a senior researcher. Second, the study included the use of internal documents provided by the Culture Agency. These documents included policy documents and documents prescribing the negotiated goals and objectives for the coming period, known as the *assignment*. The assignment is based on the needs, demands, and aspirations of the focal cultural institution or actor, as well as the culture policies enacted by the regional parliament of the Västra Götaland region. The assignment is thus a form of "hybrid object" wherein cultural, political, and economic objectives are included and balanced. In addition to these goals and objectives, the assignment includes more specified goals accompanied by so-called "indicators" that enable evaluation if the cultural institutions or actors have been able to meet their goals during the period. Thirdly and finally, Internet websites were used which report on regional policies and political objectives, and the role of the Culture Agency. Under the Swedish political system, all political decisions are in the public domain; consequently, political decisions regarding cultural policies are posted on the respective region's website. This Internet-based service provides research work with valuable information.

Data Analysis

The Internet website was used to collect basic information about the role of the Culture Agency. The internal documents specifying the assignments were examined as a kind of combination of policy documents and contracts; on the one hand, articulating the objectives of the cultural institutions while on the other, making reference to the general political objectives and long-term goals of the Regional Parliament. The interviews were transcribed and different passages of the transcript were given codes. These codes were drawn both from the theoretical framework and from the vocabulary used by the officers. At times, the *etic* (the outsider's analytical categories) and *emic* (the insider's practical categories, see Boje 2001) categories were the same. Interview excerpts from different interviews with the same code were located in a new document under a shared heading. The different categories of quotes were finally organized into a sequence enabling the emplotment of the empirical material.

Valuing and Pricing Culture

In this section, the empirical material will be examined as constituted by two basic procedures of valuation and commensuration. The formal procedure prescribes that the valuation and commensuration of the cultural institutions' activities and performance should be kept apart; however, in practice, the Culture Agency officers are aware of the status of certain cultural institutions—partly due to their historical "track record," and partly due to their legitimacy in the political system—making commensuration something which is always implicitly present during the valuation process. The ability to analytically and practically separate valuation and commensuration is one of the key professional skills of the Culture Agency officers.

Valuation

In their professional work, the officers of the Culture Agency make use of two *judgment devices*: i.e. the so-called *assignment*, written together with the cultural institutions specifying what activities and objectives institutions should work with during the upcoming three-year period, and the *indicators*, the parameters for measuring the degree of goal fulfillment. The assignment and the indicators are part of the formal contract that the Culture Agency co-signs with institutions that have long-term financing agreements with the Regional Parliament. One of the officers explained the general design of the assignment, emphasizing that it prescribes both general and specific objectives and conditions:

> Certain descriptions are the same for all assignments. In all the assignments, there is this section 'general conditions,' which includes the vision and the Regional Parliament's prioritized goals and which everyone needs to relate to. In addition, the Culture Committee [a political body] has decided that all the assignments need to include goals and indicators in order to increase equality and diversity, as well as accessibility to all disabled persons. That, too, is general. Besides that, there is quite a lot of variation, depending on the activities. (Officer 3)

Generally speaking, the larger the institution and the financing, the more specific the assignments. Still, many of the goals for developing artistic work over the coming years were quite general, e.g. "to contribute to the artistic development of the field' (Officer 3, the Culture Agency). This use of relatively vague formulations testifies to the delicate balancing of political objectives and artistic freedom. Production of the arts must never become politicized; however, at the same time, public funding of the arts has called for some monitoring of activities. Culture Agency officers thus play a subtle role in navigating between acting as a support function for culture and acting as a political body regulating it. One officer addressed this role of the agency thus:

> It is always complicated to be stuck between the political system, which wants to accomplish something, and the [cultural] activities, which also want to accomplish something, so it's a balancing act. You need to understand the activities, their problems and challenges, while also recognizing the political system. (Officer 6)

Practically speaking, the principal approach to handling assignments was to engage in dialogs with representatives of the cultural institutions and to jointly define adequate objectives with the institutions:

> The principle behind writing an assignment [document] is to have a conversation with the actors and their board of directors . . . . That happens on the officers' level. We're supposed to think in terms of 'what's happened during these last three years?' and, based on that, you formulate something. (Officer 4)

Valuation work included the use of indicators specifying what quantitative and qualitative information needed to be collected and reported to the financiers, the Regional Parliament. Defining adequate, relevant, and easy-to-measure indicators of the quality of the underlying cultural production was a source of constant debate and controversy at the Culture Agency. While some of the officers thought it would be of interest to develop more sophisticated metrics for evaluating culture, they also thought such a project would be beset by conflict, both due to such metrics demanding a significant level of expertise and an understanding of culture production and on the basis of professional ideologies regarding culture—in contrast to other forms of production—as having "intrinsic values." One of the officers said:

> It would be very interesting to do [more advanced statistical analyses] in culture, but I think that will never be done . . . I think there's a general reluctance to measure . . . [culture] is supposed to have a substantial 'intrinsic value.' (Officer 3)

Interestingly, in a period characterized by a mania for measuring everything quantitatively, the politicians—the officers frequently used the short-hand term "the political system"—were reluctant to make use of too many of these quantitative performance metrics: "The political system keeps that at arm's length: 'You're supposed to develop the culture sector, not evaluate it!' [say politicians]" (Officer 7). Just as with formulating the assignments, the officers had some leeway regarding how they selected the indicators. One of the officers said that ecological field research could serve as a role model in terms of identifying adequate measures that capture some of the qualities of the entire social system:

> I try to use indicators that are based on what they're counting anyway: How many visitors are there? Are they young? I want to identify smart indicators like when the biologists count a certain beetle, saying something about the entire system . . . . There are so many poor indicators. (Officer 8)

While the officers were able to elaborate on what indicators to make use of, the political system actually does prescribe certain political objectives for the upcoming three-year period. For instance, diversity issues and the participation of different social strata (e.g., the working class) in culture production and consumption were two political goals set by the Regional Parliament. One of the officers, with the responsibility for dance and stage art, addressed how two of the performing arts schools were assessed in terms of their ability to broaden their recruitment basis:

> In cases like these, we look at the recruitment basis and discuss things like: Who gets accepted? How do you find your students? How do you market yourself? On these programs, it's clear that the youngsters are recruited from middle-class strata. When taking a diversity perspective, the recruitment basis is slightly narrow. So we talk quite a bit about that . . . how to have a broader recruitment basis. (Officer 2)

At the time of the interviews, in the fall of 2011, the three-year assignments for the 2009–2011 period were being assessed and the new assignments for the 2012–2014 period were being designed at the agency. Just as with the design of the assignments, the assessment of the work done over the last three years balanced the artistic ambitions of the institutions and the political objectives. That is, there were relatively few hard-end data points being reported and assessed, but more qualitative evaluations were being made. "We conduct this review, asking things like 'What does it looks like?' 'How did things turn out?' 'Do the indicators work as intended?' 'Is there anything that needs to be corrected?' We have those kinds of discussions," said Officer 6. Officer 8 added: "It's hard to do reasonable evaluations. And this is where the indicators come in. Unless you measure with a yardstick, how do you measure? That's difficult!" "Making the assessment is always complicated: We need to see how much resources they deal with; how much [money] did they get from us? How many people are involved? You need to have reasonable expectations," argued Officer 4. Goal fulfillment is thus a matter of qualitative evaluation (e.g., did the Opera House get good reviews in the local and national press during the year?), of quantitative measures (e.g., have numbers of paying visitors increased since last year, or over the period?), and of the amount of funding from the region. This assessment was a domain of professional expertise and political *savoir-faire* that demanded experience and an understanding of both culture and the political system. In cases where the cultural institution, or the actor, has apparently failed to accomplish what has been promised, the officers could advise the Regional Parliament to cut down on, or even withdraw, funding. However, such a scenario was a failure for all parties and the officers regarded it as the last resort:

> We need to be very well informed before saying to the political system: 'based on my assessment, I propose that you cut the budget for this activity by this much' . . . I have a great deal of responsibility when making my assessment. It is not simply a matter of saying 'they need more money.' I have just as much responsibility to ensure that these activities use their money in the best way, that they do what is expected of them, and that tax revenues are not squandered. If that is the case, then I tell them: 'I don't think this is what we asked you to do.' (Officer 4)

Taken together, the valuation of culture production was organized as a professional domain of expertise wherein the judgment devices of the assignment and the indicators were defined on the basis of both the demands and the needs of the cultural institutions and actors, and the need for political oversight and control. While the assignments were formally regarded as contracts between the Regional Parliament and the cultural institutions and actors, based on the possibility of assessing goal fulfillment on the basis of quantitative and qualitative indicators, there were, in practice, ongoing discussions and exchanges of information between the Culture Agency officers and the cultural institutions and actors. The valuation of cultural endeavors was thus embedded in social relations and political traditions. At times, the officers stressed the difficulties of reforming a system with its roots in the eighteenth century, when the culture sector was financed by the state and the wealthy bourgeoisie. Path-dependencies and history matter, and it was only slowly that culture could be transformed into a more socially-relevant and economically value-adding activity capable of carrying its own costs. At the same time, the officers saw their own role in terms of being "administrators in the service of democracy," stressing the need to enact a wide and comprehensive image of culture, not only in the form of high-brow elite culture and stage-art but also as something that includes public education and various forms of folklore art. The specific and general assignments of three major culture institutions are summarized in Tables 1 and 2 below.

Table 1. Budget, assignment formulation, and shared interests of three major cultural institutions.

	Film Studio	*The Opera House*	*The Symphony Orchestra*
Budget and funding from the Culture Agency (2010)	Of a budget of SEK 48.7 million, SEK 41 million (84%) was financed by the Culture Agency.	Of a budget of SEK 288.1 million, SEK 180 million (62%) was financed by the Culture Agency.	Of a budget of SEK 117.4 million, SEK 85.5 million (72.8%) was financed by the Culture Agency.
Assignment formulation	"The Film Studio is the region's principal actor for maintaining and developing qualitative film and television production in Västra Götaland. As a knowledge-based organization, The Film Studio is a critical resource in strengthening and developing the creativity of the audiovisual sector, a sector contributing to the region's economic growth and attractiveness." (Internal document [KN 080916 §104], Västra Götaland Culture Agency)	"The opera house has an integrated responsibility for musical stage art in Västra Götaland. National and international contacts bring new creative thinking into the region, further developing the three principal art forms of opera, musicals, and operettas. The opera house contributes to the attractiveness of the region nationally and internationally and serves as a motor for regional development by collaborating with municipal, regional, and national actors, not least in terms of promoting cultural tourism. The substantial expertise and competence that the Opera House accommodates in the domain of music, drama, and dance is a key resource for regional actors. The opera house's stage in Skövde [a small town located in the eastern part of the region], in addition to other stages, further develops collaborative work between regional actors. New technology enhances dialog between the region's inhabitants." (Internal document [KN 080916 §104], Västra Götaland Culture Agency)	"The Symphony Orchestra is the region's leading musical institution, responsible for further developing forms whereby classical music plays a more important role for the region's inhabitants. The Symphony Orchestra has access to unique facilities [the concert hall] providing many opportunities for new encounters and experiences. The Symphony Orchestra initiates and develops new partnerships and joint ventures in music. The Symphony Orchestra—The National Orchestra of Sweden—reinforces the region's attractiveness by serving as an ambassador on the national and international stage. The Symphony Orchestra also plays an important role in regional development by supporting municipalities, promoters, and organizations on the basis of its expertise and resources. (Internal document [KN 080916 §104], Västra Götaland Culture Agency)
Shared interests (General formulation for all cultural activities)	1. "The Region's vision, The Good Life, and the regional cultural vision, Culture in Västra Götaland, are policy documents for activities financially supported by the region. [Film Studio's, The Opera House, the Symphony Orchestra] action plan must . . . take the vision into account as regards gender equality, diversity, internationalization, regional value added, and accessibility. [The Film Studio's, The Opera House, the Symphony Orchestra] are expected to recognize ongoing programs during the contract period (for the time being, Children and Young People, Passionate Learning, Industry and Maritime Culture Heritage, Nature and Culture Tourism, and the Action Plan for Industry Development in the Culture Sector)." 2. "[The Film Studio's, The Opera House, the Symphony Orchestra] are expected to continue to collaborate with local and regional actors, but also with international actors, in order to be able to complete the assignment . . . The Film Studio is expected to report on cultural policy and equal opportunities statistics for the period 2008–2010."		

Table 2. Goals specified for three prestigious regional cultural institutions.

Specified goals for the contracting period/ cultural institution	*Film Studio*	*The Opera House*	*The Symphony Orchestra*
Goal 1	"To maintain and further develop the artistic quality of The Film Studio's productions."	"To contribute to artistic development and quality in the region."	"To contribute to artistic development and quality in the region."
Goal 2	"To contribute to audience growth for the Film Studio's productions regionally, nationally, and internationally."	"To enhance access to ongoing activities."	"To enhance access to ongoing activities."
Goal 3	"To contribute to the maintenance and development of satisfactory levels of the expertise, competence and infrastructure needed for the production of qualitative film and television productions in the region."	"To further strengthen the attractiveness of the Opera House."	"To enhance the region's attractiveness."
Goal 4	"To contribute to the development of the region's creative potential within the audiovisual sector."	"To enable a higher degree of participation by children and young people."	"To develop collaborative efforts with other actors in the region."
Goal 5	"To contribute to gender equality and diversity."	"To contribute to gender equality and diversity."	"To contribute to gender equality and diversity in the domain of artistic work."
Goal 6	"To provide employment in the region's film industry."		

Commensuration

The entire culture budget of the region included three basic forms of culture funding: (1) Regular long-term contracts with major institutions; (2) Short-term project funding for new and innovative culture activities; (3) "Strategic culture projects" aimed at creating new "infrastructures" in culture or connecting culture with, for example, industry or education. The first category of funding consumed the largest share of the budget while the second category was dependent on the quality of incoming applications during the year. Around three hundred short-term project applications were reviewed annually, with roughly eighty receiving money from the budget of seventeen million Swedish crowns. The third category of funding included a variety of projects that the Culture Agency initiated in order to further strengthen culture and its connections with other domains of society. When allocating financial resources to different activities, officers needed to be able to compare and commensurate these activities. While much of the allocating was expected to continue as previously—the major cultural institutions expected to receive their share of the pie; there was no political agenda to shift the focus—for example, project applications were competing over limited resources. Officers made reference to at least three objectives when making their assessments: (1) the democratic objectives enacted by the political system; (2) the contribution to economic growth; and—more controversially and not fully recognized—(3) the status of the cultural institution or actor. Perhaps counter-intuitively, artistic quality was not one of the principal assessment criteria as the officers regarded that as lying outside their domain of jurisdiction.

In terms of democratic objectives, all the cultural institutions and actors receiving regional funding needed to demonstrate at least a minimum amount of understanding of their regional role and their connections with their socio-economic and cultural settings:

> If you're a regional company, you'll be socialized into the regional role. They can identify everything that the Västra Götaland region stands for, so that isn't a problem . . . . If you receive seventy million crowns annually from the region, you'll need to be able to say something about what the Västra Götaland region is all about! (Officer 7)

For more small-scale projects, such "political awareness" was not expected, but the officers required each project funded to be "regionally relevant," that is, to comply with the objectives of the Regional Parliament. Officer 7 continued: "If we recommend financial support to eighty projects, then we want *all* of the political goals to be met across the *entire* batch, but that doesn't suggest that *every* [single] project needs to do that." In fact, one of the major reasons for refusing to provide project-funding was the lack of an explanation as to why this particular project would contribute to the development of the region—culturally, socially, or economically. One of the consequences of the emphasis on regional relevance was the officers needing to keep the actors in the field at arm's length: "We mustn't become buddies with people. I have been reluctant to that. For a long period of time, I was yelled at [for proposing the withdrawal of funding for an institution] . . . . You need to be able to live with that" (Officer 8); "There are some people who think I'm an idiot but they're very much the exception," she contended. According to the officers at the Culture Agency, the regional administration could make a substantial contribution to culture because of the vital combination of local know-how and the capacity to oversee territories larger than the individual municipality: "After all, the regional level is the ultimate level for dialog with the citizenry: the state is too far away, the municipalities are myopic . . . [the region] has know-how regarding local conditions but it still has some oversight," claimed Officer 7. In Sweden's new national cultural policy, the regions also receive a stronger role as they are given the responsibility of also allocating national funding of culture, further emphasizing the focus on regional relevance.

Secondly, the relationship between regional economic growth and culture was emphasized in the commensuration of culture resources. While culture has, in many quarters, been treated as a sacred, high-brow activity to be carefully separated from everyday life, it is increasingly being connected with the question of economic growth and the role of creativity and aesthetic knowledge during the contemporary period. Officer 2 stressed this view of culture:

> We [the Culture Agency] are part of an economic growth organization . . . . A growth-based cultural activity needs to have the incentives to endorse some kind of industry perspective. It's really a bit of a challenge to encourage such a view . . . . I think I'm doing my best to bring that perspective into discussions with the major institutions. (Officer 2)

According to Officer 2, representatives of culture are much more receptive today to the concept of enacting a broader view of culture: "[in 1990s] things became really infected when you talked about the 'intangible value of culture.' It was like swearing in church" (Officer 2). Today, culture actors are, claimed the officers, less inclined to get on their high horse. Also, the political system seems to be more attracted to the notion of a creative economy driven by artistic and aesthetic know-how:

> I think our Regional Parliament has been thinking quite a lot in such terms and at times, we've even been accused of taking an 'instrumental view.' I don't see anything wrong with that . . . . If there's no money available in society, then there won't be any resources available for culture—at least not publically-funded culture . . . I'm not one of those who think that culture has an 'intrinsic value'. (Officer 4)

Officer 4 continued:

> Culture cannot exist in isolation, it needs to be a co-producer of society in a much more visible manner. Those working with culture view themselves with pride because they have competence, something to contribute, and they don't need to be too concerned if they paint one day and inspire a group of school children the next. (Officer 4)

Tourism and the entrepreneurial spirit, nourished in the art schools financed by the Regional Parliament, were two examples of economic growth deriving from culture. "The art schools, for instance," said Officer 3, "create entrepreneurs . . . they [the students] learn to think outside the little box constituting most people's thinking." "Tourism is one of the activities that extracts value from the [cultural] institutions . . . it's like an indicator per se of what is relevant and what has worth," said Officer 5. Some of the officers made reference to a recent study suggesting that each Swedish crown invested in culture brings three and a half in return; consequently, some of the officers spoke of the financing of culture not so much in terms of "public funding" but in terms of "socio-economic investment." Some of the officers expressed rather extensive lines of reasoning as regards what their regional role and assignment were, stressing that economic growth is the ultimate goal of their activities: "We organize the production of natural resources, we are at the core of the cultural and creative industries. . . . Unless there is some production of natural resources, there will be nothing to refine further," said Officer 8. She continued: "Those at the core . . . organizations and so forth, unless they understand that they need to be at least slightly concerned with [adding value to the economy], they will be mistaken! It's our duty to be at least reasonably informed and to try and maintain a dialog [regarding such matters]." One of the officers argued that there was a lack of adequate vocabulary to address the economic potential of culture. The entire discourse regarding the role of culture in society is stuck in manufacturing vocabulary, emphasizing terms such as production and consumption, and with clearly-bounded and separated organizations serving their specialized roles. Today, he argued, culture is being valued on the basis of narrow and instrumental, and at times even techno-scientific, evaluations:

> It's a matter of defining values. It's a matter of defining values different to measuring the transmitter substances emitted when someone plays Mozart, or how many people passed a turnstile . . . Based on such discussions, you build a new set of activities and products that were previously undefined. At that point, you may be able to have a reasonable conversation . . . To date, such scenarios and activities remain unarticulated. (Officer 5)

For instance, evaluating the success of a cultural institution by "looking at how many pass the turnstiles" already assumes that culture is located in specific sites, particular buildings wherein culture is both produced and consumed, argued Officer 5. In the future, a more subtle and evocative vocabulary and analytical framework will be needed to be able to fulfill the economic potential of cultural competence. For most of the Culture Agency officers, national cultural policy, developed in Stockholm, was too bound up with such antiquated ideas about culture, rendering national cultural policy basically irrelevant. Speaking of the difference between "art policies," defined as the "high-brow professional art" produced by institutions and advocated, for example, by the Swedish Arts Council (*Kulturrådet*), and "cultural policies" as a wider and more socially-relevant political agenda, including both the arts and other forms of culture and public education supported by the Culture Agency, national cultural policy was side-lined through being outmoded and introverted: "I've never ever heard the Arts Council speaking about the creative industries, or actually showing any interest in them . . . . That's important to us, but not to the Arts Council," said Officer 7. Trying to think of culture in new and innovative terms, as well as trying to connect issues of economic growth, demands new vocabularies and a new analytical framework, but these were not to be found in national cultural policies.

Regardless of ambitions to institute new perspectives on culture, a third aspect of the commensuration of culture resources pertains to the question of status. The largest share of the culture budget was allocated to the major institutions, e.g. the symphony orchestra, the Opera House, a number of theatre companies, and a film studio. Of a budget of SEK 905 million (2011), only SEK 17 million was allocated to new culture projects. This emphasis on supporting the major cultural institutions enjoyed strong political support in the Regional Parliament, but many of the officers of the Culture Agency expressed their concerns regarding the distribution of tax revenues. Said one of the officers:

> When I started here, I was fascinated by the Opera House, for instance. They receive an incredible amount of money . . . [the Opera house] is primarily patronized by the grey-haired middle-class. They get these amounts of financial resources because it's been decided that their social worth is so high, a high social value . . . The income [from ticket sales] is in no way on a par with costs . . . How should we evaluate culture within political systems? (Officer 3)

Many of the officers made reference to a recent study suggesting that around 95 percent of the population never visited the major cultural institutions, pointing to the relatively weak correlation between the use of tax revenues and the actual benefit to the tax payer. One of the officers claimed, in a rather straightforward manner, that all the talk about the "creative economy" and so forth, emphasizing the economic consequences of the creative industries, was only a form of rhetoric thinly veiling the fact that most major institutions were primarily concerned about doing what they have always done—producing performing arts:

> People say one thing but want something else . . . I believe people think economic growth is the same as prostituting yourself. The culture sector is 'way too sophisticated' to participate in discussions like that. Its 'higher value' is so comprehensive and sacred that it 'evades all such measurement' . . . You mustn't get your hands dirty dealing with money: at best, they can accept sponsoring. (Officer 5)

In general, the higher the status of the cultural institution—especially if it had acquired international status—the more complicated it would be to deal with, the officers argued; "The bigger the dragon, the harder to handle, no doubt about it!", Officer 7 exclaimed. Functionally speaking, status and prestige are past accomplishments translated into credibility, a stock of social capital that is also translated into an inflow of economic capital. While the officers were highly aware of both the path-dependencies and the lock-in effects deriving from the influence of status, claiming that the political system tended to overlook the fact that only a smallish proportion of the voters actually took advantage of the major cultural institutions, they had few possibilities of re-allocating economic resources. Status thus served to cement culture into a few large-scale activities, with many small projects and activities.

In summary, the valuation and commensuration of cultural resources is organized in practical terms into two individual sets of activities. Valuation is based on the use of judgment devices such as the assignment and use of indicators that help Culture Agency officers to create an agreement between the political system, which they serve, and the actors working in culture. The commensuration of cultural resources was based on an analysis of the culture activity's ability to comply with the long-term objectives of the political system and the contribution made to economic growth. In addition, status played a role as to what from the outset determined where the economic resources would be allocated. While valuation and commensuration are not fully separated in time and space, there were mechanisms and tools, such as the assignments and indicators, that emphasized the distinction between the two processes. Valuation served to determine the social and economic benefits of a cultural resource, examining the value *per se*, while commensuration served to rank the various cultural resources in order to be able to draw a line of demarcation between cultural resources financed by tax revenues and those that were not.

Discussion

Sweden's culture policy has for decades been emphasizing culture as a benefit to the public; consequently, it has primarily been financed by tax revenues. As culture budgets are limited, there is a need for mechanisms and procedures that both warrant the long-term stability of major cultural institutions and encourage the development of new and creative activities. Studying the work of the officers of the Culture Agency reveals that processes of valuation and commensuration in bureaucratic-political budgeting processes—central to the transparent and efficient allocation of tax revenues—occur at the intersection between the political system (i.e. the Regional Parliament and its Culture Committee) and the largely heterogeneous cultural sphere. While the officers regard themselves primarily as servants of the political systems and the citizens of the region, they have a significant degree of professional autonomy in how they monitor and oversee how tax revenues are translated into actual culture production. As suggested by Fourcade (2011, 1769), economic valuation "does not stand outside of society;" rather, "evaluative frames and judgments" are embedded in various social, historical, and cultural conditions. More specifically, in the case of the Culture Agency, what Fourcade (2011, 1769) refers to as the "specific politico-institutional configurations and conflicts" play a key role in shaping how budgets are allocated. Major cultural institutions and representatives of the political system are in many ways in direct communication, thus sidelining the Culture Agency officers and negotiating a shared view of how the culture budget should be allocated. At the same time, what Beckert (2009) speaks of as the "value problem," e.g., how cultural resources are inscribed with an economic value, demands specific expertise. The officers of the Culture Agency serve a vital role in the specific politico-institutional configuration of Sweden's culture sector. They are, in their own view, the de facto "administrators of democracy" and "the culture bureaucrats"—the term "bureaucrat" here being used in a non-pejorative manner—inasmuch as they make use of judgment devices such as the assignment to value and commensurate cultural activities. The political system itself cannot accommodate such expertise because that would entail a politicization of culture, and the actors of the culture sector are not in any position to fully overview that sector. Only experts with an intimate understanding of the two social systems, the political system and the culture sector, are in a position to make informed judgments based on their entrenched know-how and experience. Similar to the modern art market experts examined by Gourevitch (2011) and Velthuis (2011; 2003), not only passively responding to market requests and changes but also actively *creating* the modern art market by instituting certain standards and routines enabling the economic valuation of the singularity of the modern art object, the officers of the Culture Agency do not merely operate as a neutral and disinterested mechanism in their domain of expertise but instead actively influence both the political system that they serve and the culture sphere that they monitor.

Such an expert role is not, the study shows, devoid of ambiguities and difficulties. For instance, what Espeland and Stevens (2008) speak of as "the authority of numbers" and what Porter (1995) addresses as the "trust in numbers"—and especially numbers in the form of "market prices" (Carruthers 2005)—i.e. the belief in certain quarters that indicators should be able to unproblematically represent underlying activities, resources, or accomplishments, is a source of debate and discussion. For some officers, the lack of reliable and valid indicators is a major concern demanding further attention, while for other officers, the very idea of such metrics derives from images of culture modeled on an industrial production model that is either irrelevant to culture production or more generally outmoded in the emerging creative economy. Many forms of commensuration examined in the literature are based on the joint enactment of relatively stable figures and metrics, e.g., market prices that signal the perceived economic worth of an asset; however, in the case of the Culture Agency officers' commensuration of culture activities, the formal reporting of performance data, e.g., the number of tickets sold and the degree of self-financing, such data played only a supplementary role as long as the performance data was satisfactory. Instead, the commensuration of culture activities was compared on the basis of a variety of considerations deriving from the political decision-making procedures that prescribe the role of the regional cultural sector. That is, metrics mattered, but only to the extent that they were used to monitor ongoing activities, rarely being used in separation from other, more qualitative assessments when advising the political system. In comparison to, for example, Espeland and Sauder's (2007) and Sauder and Espeland's (2008) study of the ranking of law schools, or Kornberger and Carter's (2010) study of the uses of league tables when ranking cities, the commensuration conducted by the Culture Agency officers treated quantitative measures not so much as the final and comprehensive output of their analytical work but as its starting point. In the case of ranking—arguably one of the commensuration tools most strongly stressing the discrimination that exists between competing actors—the Culture Agency officers were reluctant to create these kinds of lists and rankings as they would ignore or overlook important differences between different cultural institutions. As the officers frequently pointed out, their assignment, as a politically-regulated agency, was not to "assess the performance of the cultural institutions" but to "further develop culture."

The study contributes to the economic sociology literature portraying valuation and commensuration as central economic practices in the contemporary economy (Fourcade 2011; Aspers 2009; Fleischer 2009; Espeland and Stevens 2008; Yakubovich, Granovetter, and McGuire 2005; Zaloom 2003; Zelizer 1985). Many studies of valuation and commensuration have emphasized the constitution of markets and market mechanisms for goods and commodities, e.g. art (Gourevitch 2011; Velthuis 2011; 2003), strawberries (Garcia-Parpet 2007), cotton (Çaliskan 2007), electricity (Yakubovich, Granovetter, and McGuire 2005), but also resources more complicated to value, e.g. labor (Biernacki 1995), natural resources (Fourcade 2011), and "special goods" more generally (Karpik 2010). In contrast, the study reported on in this article examines valuation and commensuration practices in culture production within the politico-institutional framework of Swedish regional culture policies. While there are apparent differences between the trading of strawberries and cotton on a spot-market, and the allocating of tax revenues in a regio-political setting, there are, arguably, shared underlying domains of expertise in these diverse economic practices. All sorts of valuation and commensuration practices make use of judgment devices and other tools and heuristics—e.g., Beunza and Stark (2004) speak of the "instrumentation" of financial traders' work—being mobilized. In addition, all processes of valuation and commensuration are riddled with ambiguities, uncertainty, and political interests, putting pressure on, for example, the Culture Agency officers to develop and make use of assignment documents and indicators providing them with a set of resources designed to help them negotiate with representatives of the cultural institutions.

In summary, the study demonstrates that the skill of valuing and commensurating in the domain of bureaucratic-political resource allocation is based on professional expertise and experience acquired during years of practice at the intersection between the political sphere and the cultural sector, as well as through the application of the routines and standard operation procedures gradually being stabilized in the face of controversies, discussions, and perceived problems. Moreover, the study shifts the focus away from markets and market devices, examining the specific forms of valuation and commensuration, within political systems and public sector activities, which are financed by tax revenues. That is, the study examines how culture is inscribed with social and economic worth in bureaucratic-political settings and how a "market for culture" is produced on the basis of such professional activities.

The study has some limitations that need to be addressed. It includes a limited sample of interviewees, but it also includes all but one of the officers monitoring culture production at the Culture Agency. A larger set of interviewees could have been collected from other regions, preferably in Sweden's other two metropolitan areas, i.e. Stockholm and Skåne Region. Since the case of the Swedish culture sector is an idiosyncratic one, it would be complicated to speak of the work of the Culture Agency officers in terms of a *general* case of economic valuation and commensuration. Instead, this specific case, regardless of all regional/national historical and cultural traits, can be regarded as an example of how professional skills and administrative routines, ultimately embedded in democratically-elected political bodies, recursively structure as well as inform processes of valuation and commensuration while simultaneously being constituted by such economic procedures.

Conclusion

Economic sociology has contributed to liberating the study of economic behavior from one-sided instrumental rationalities such as rational choice theories. Such new theoretical frameworks have paved the way for more situated and localized views of economic action and thick descriptions of how, for instance, economic resources are allocated. The present study of how culture production is valued and commensurated within Swedish culture policy, i.e., in the case of tax revenues allocated to cultural institutions and actors, demonstrates that such processes aim to strike a balance between various interests—political, economic, and cultural. In fact, one of the key skills of the Culture Agency officers lies precisely in integrating such heterogeneous concerns into the analysis while keeping them apart, practically and politically (see, for example, Berglund and Werr 2000); the processes of valuing and commensurating culture resources are thus part of a professional domain of expertise in its own right, which helps officers to navigate between the risks of politicizing the culture sector, on the one hand, and establishing too lax and *laissez-faire* a politico-cultural regime with no functional political oversight, on the other. The study thus contributes to the literature on economic sociology and studies of the practices of valuation and commensuration, procedures that have primarily been examined in market settings, by underlining the fact that such practices also play a key role in both the public sector and in fields where calculative rationalities cannot strictly be applied without violating other professional norms and beliefs.

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The Power of Market Intermediaries: From Information to Valuation Processes

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Abstract

Sociology and economics tend to focus more and more on the *intermediaries* involved in economic and social relations, in the shape of distributors, matchmakers, consultants, and evaluators. Once they are distinguished according to their forms, their types of intervention and their effects, the intermediaries are a helpful category in order to study the social organization of markets as well as the changes that operate on them, especially regarding the social and economic values of goods, individuals and organizations. We discuss in the first section the link between intermediaries and information, through an analysis of the functions they fulfill that may explain their emergence, as well as the opportunistic behavior of intermediaries in relation to information flows. In the second section, we adopt a more pragmatist perspective on issues of valuation mainly based on "economics of convention", which emphasizes the collective dynamics of valuation. We show how intermediaries contribute to define valuation through their different activities and foster valuation frames that can improve the coordination of actors, but also reorganize the markets in different ways. We suggest an analytical distinction between the distribution, the temporality and the generality of the frames, and raise the issue of the valuation power of market intermediaries, their legitimation and the eventual regulation of their activities.

Key words: intermediaries; market; valuation; evaluation; convention; regulation

Sociology, economics and political sciences are becoming more and more interested in the "intermediaries" involved in economic, political, and social relations; these may take the form of organizations, service providers, experts, prescribers, and appraisers, as well as technical and

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administrative mechanisms. This trend is a response to the changes impacting a reality that is more and more structurally complex, and in which the heuristic value of traditional categories and distinctions (state/market, individual/society, producer/consumer, etc.) is declining. This takes place within a configuration characterized by the increasing international circulation of goods, the liberalization of many activities and the encouragement of competition, as well as by the development of forms of organization by project (Boltanski and Chiapello 1999). These are all developments that currently offer multiple opportunities for intermediation. Remaining at this level of generality could lead to describing contemporary society as an "age of intermediaries." However, this general term covers entities with heterogeneous identities, roles, and impacts, which we differentiate here by analyzing and comparing research that has been devoted to them.

The economic activities of the intermediaries examined here consist in services relating to their participation in the construction, maintenance, or expansion of a market. We set focus on professional intermediaries considered as "third parties", which intervene between the so called "supply" and "demand", and whose actions have some effects on the economic or symbolic value of a product or an organization. Beyond the figure of the "auctioneer" traditionally acknowledged by the standard economic theory, we can identify four main types of intermediaries which are more or less linked to the supply or the demand side: the *distributors* that buy and resell products, the *matchmakers* that put into contact partners of exchange, the *consultants* that produce advice to their clients (generally from the "supply" side) and the *evaluators* that evaluate products, individuals or organizations. Each type of intermediary can potentially be involved in the activity of *valuation* (Dewey 1918), as well as being mixed in the "real" economic life. Following Dewey, we consider value as a rich empirical and observable fact that can take many forms (price, aesthetic value, reputation, status), and generally be defined as a "quality" attributed to an event, a situation, an object, an organization or a person, under some specific circumstances and with certain consequences. This pragmatist approach will lead us to focus more on the *activity* of valuation than on value itself and to observe which actors are decisive in the *construction* of economic and symbolic values on markets. Our main hypothesis is that intermediaries are the actors who, beyond their apparent specific function (providing services of buying and selling, matching, advising and evaluating), are all engaged in activities of valuation that shape the market.

It is an empirical question to know to what extent each particular intermediary carries out each kind of activity (selling, advising, matching, and evaluating) and to what extent its activities involves valuation. In other words, the so called "evaluators" (the fourth category in our typology) are not the only actors that produce valuations on markets, and the open definition of intermediary will help us show how (and what kind) of valuations are produced by these different types of intermediaries. If valuation can analytically be divided into the activities of evaluation (producing a judgment by assessing the value of something) and valorization (adding value to something), these two activities are often mixed in social processes of valuation (Beckert and Aspers 2011; Muniesa 2011; Vatin 2009).

This paper aims at discussing research belonging to two traditionally separated disciplines: economics and sociology. Aside from the development of interdisciplinary research, namely in the field of the so-called new economic sociology (Granovetter 1985; Swedberg 2003), few works simultaneously take both disciplines into account, while tackling the question of intermediaries. This cross-fertilization will allow us to highlight their active role in the dynamics of markets, through networks, cognitive frames, and valuation processes, traditionally studied by sociology, without neglecting the issues of coordination, calculus, and information, which are more analyzed by economics. This cross-approach has recently been adopted by the "actor-network theory" and the French school of "economics of convention" ("Economie des conventions") which both raised the question of how to create calculative devices which are competed in a "market for evaluations". This is in line with a widely shared statement saying that the market is not only the aggregation of a large number of singular transactions but also the frame defining the rules and the format of those transactions (Beckert 2009; Fligstein 2001; François 2010).

In pursuing these considerations, we seek to develop in this article the argument that intermediaries are not only platforms for putting economic partners into contact, but also active entities involved in the construction of markets and the dynamics of valuation that drive them.[1] Hence, our preoccupation is not only the role of intermediaries in making goods calculable and in matching supply and demand, but also their impact on the cognitive categories and the values that order goods, people and organizations on markets.

To address these questions, we need to start by reviewing the emergence of intermediaries in economic research, a phenomenon that reflects a new understanding of information flows in markets. Thus, in the first section we discuss the link between intermediaries and information, through an analysis of the functions they fulfill that may explain their emergence, as well as the opportunistic behavior of intermediaries in relation to information flows.

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[1] This argument is also present in some recent works in political science, such as Nay and Smith (2002), who highlight the active role of political intermediaries in matching and formatting "institutional worlds" (instead of "markets" in the economic sociological approach).

In the second section, we adopt a more pragmatist perspective on issues of valuation, mainly based on economics of convention, which emphasizes the collective dynamics of valuation and, in particular, the collective construction of criteria or principles of evaluation. Following this approach, valuations are not reduced to the resolution of information asymmetry problems, but raise the question of the definition of the relevant criteria used to judge or estimate. In the neoclassical approach of information search, these criteria are predetermined and remain unquestioned. Hence, the process of collective learning that leads to the relevant criteria is not taken into account.

Our position is that the two approaches are complementary in the study of the role of market intermediaries, even though the methods and the behavior hypotheses are different. Indeed, most economic approaches try to explain why intermediaries exist (by contrast with a purely individual information search in an anonymous market), why they differentiate themselves ("marketmakers" *versus* "match-makers"), and why they can have a social efficiency. The move operated by economics of convention consists in a focus on the social relationships and dynamics that underlie the shared definition of valuation criteria, but also on the tools, devices and moral values that support the way economic actors and objects are valuated and qualified. As other pragmatist approaches, economics of convention leads to an extension of the list of (human and non-human) actors that participate in the construction of markets or "commercial channels". Our argument is that among these actors, intermediaries play a key role in the construction and/or the destabilization of these markets, due to their valuation power, and through their power of mediation between different logics, principles or worlds.

Intermediaries and Information: Strategic Functions and Coordination

How is the concept of *intermediary* situated with respect to traditional economic theory? Standard economic theory is based on the figure of the "auctioneer" whose primary function is to determine a fair price in the market. This fiction relies on the strict assumptions of the model of "pure and perfect competition." Questioning the assumption of complete and symmetric information has led to a renewed analysis of the role of market intermediaries and their emergence when opportunities for productive exchanges have not been exhausted. Through these configurations we can explain the appearance of new players aiming to take advantage of market features for personal gain and to engage in strategic activities, in the way Adam Smith pointed out in *The Wealth of Nations*.

After Smith's prefiguration, the elaboration of the role of intermediaries constitutes the starting point of the gradual development of marketing as a discipline distinct from economics in the early twentieth century. We can refer to the seminal work of Arch W. Shaw (1912), which analyzed the emergence and rise of middlemen by focusing on the organization of market distribution. Shaw identifies the general functions performed by the middleman: sharing the risk, transporting the goods, financing the operations, selling, assembling and assorting. As a result of the development of functional middlemen (insurance companies, direct transportation companies, banks), the author pays more attention to the function of selling (the communication of ideas about the goods) and the function of assembling and assorting, by analyzing the advantages to recourse (or not) to a middleman.

At the same time, marketing research has focused on the behavior of the consumer and, after the fifties, on how firms may seek to regulate demand by defining the target market or defining the optimal channel of distribution (Laufer and Paradeise 1982). Nevertheless, an author like Philip McVey (1960) criticizes the notion of "channel of distribution" in which manufacturers can easily choose between middlemen of many types and control them. Conversely, he analyzes channel-building from the standpoint of the middleman's relative capability of choice, while serving as purchasing agent for his customers rather than as selling agent for the manufacturer. From this more active approach to the role played by middlemen attached to their current customers group, McVey emphasizes the way they build some unusual product combinations or packaged assortments well-fitted to individual customers. In certain cases, the strength of the middleman is so great that it becomes impossible for a manufacturer to tap the market.

The emergence of intermediaries in the contemporary landscape of economic theory was first seen in research on labor markets, with the recognition of imperfect information (Stigler 1962). The presence of market intermediaries reduces the costs of the acquisition of information and, from a more institutionalist perspective, the transaction costs of negotiating and enforcing contracts (Williamson 1985). In the early 1960s, Stigler (1962) renewed the neoclassical economics tradition by emphasizing the costs of searching for information on the labor market. Searching is costly for both workers and employers, and in his view the *raison d'être* of employment agencies arises from the imperfect character of the information that both sides can gather. More specifically, the concept of "asymmetrical information" was subsequently introduced into the study of other markets (Rubinstein and Wolinsky 1987, discussing financial intermediation). In particular, mention may be made of the second-hand goods markets, and Akerlof's famous article on the market for "lemons" (1970), in which product certification (which can be conducted by market intermediaries, among others) makes it possible to solve the problems of so-called "adverse selection" and therefore to avoid the gradual decline in the "quality" of goods offered for sale.

Thus, information imperfections are at the basis of economic models of intermediation that argue for the cost-effectiveness of an intermediary in a market.[2] According to these models, the existence of intermediaries is a response to deficiencies in the market, or possibly an attempt to exploit these deficiencies. In the latter case, we can highlight their strategic intent. But empirical observation shows that a variety of intermediaries exists, which need to be differentiated in terms of the characteristics of the transactions concerned, and in particular by the level of uncertainty that surrounds them and that may call for the establishment of strong mutual trust between exchange partners.

Responses to the Under-Investment in Information by Economic Agents

The most common and simple idea present in the economic literature states that intermediaries, by setting prices and clearing market, providing liquidity and immediacy, matching and searching, guaranteeing and monitoring transactions, provide the underlying microstructure of most markets (Spulber 1996). We focus here on the two last functions assumed by intermediaries.

Matching and Searching

According to Autor (2008), discussing the labor market), if one believes that the proper functioning of a market is a public good that provides utility to both buyers and sellers, an outcome to be expected in a decentralized economy is one of under-investment on the part of economic agents in the production of this good. Individual agents cannot (or choose not to) bear the costs necessary for the production of perfect information, the result being substantial periods of search in the market (with the uncertainty that the search efforts of the agents may not result in a match) and problems of "adverse selection." Another source of inefficiency is the positive externalities that exist in the matching process. Indeed, an increase in the search intensity of one agent increases the probability of a match, hence the payoffs to the other agent who does not bear such information search costs. These

[2] Another function of an intermediary is to coordinate the actions of members of a congested market. A current of economic literature has developed around the work of A. Roth (1994) who is interested in different labor markets in which a problem of coordination arises between employers and graduates of the university system (physicians, law clerks). Drawing upon the studies of Roth (2007) on kidney exchange clearinghouses, the work of P. Steiner (2008) on organ gifts shows all the complexity of such singular matches and the importance of social relationships in the working of such kind of an "arena".

different inefficiencies could give rise to at least two kinds of intermediaries (Yavas 1992): "marketmaker" and "matchmaker", although there is considerable overlap in terms of the functions assumed by both.[3] In different markets (stock, real estate, technology, used-car, and in a certain extent the labor market), the middleman can use "sell and buy" orders (as a matchmaker) to extract information about the demand and supply in the market and can use this information in choosing ask and bid prices (as a marketmaker).

Guaranteeing and Monitoring Transactions

As Stigler (1962) has focused on, information search does not only concern prices (distribution of wages) but also information on quality. Heterogeneity of quality leads to a consideration middlemen as *experts or guarantors of quality*. In his model, Biglaiser (1993) draws on the situation analyzed by Akerlof (1970), but restricts it to used durable goods, for which the buyer bears very high valuation costs. This justifies the use of a middleman who has invested in the relevant expertise and whose investment can be amortized by frequent transactions. The expertise gained by these intermediaries makes it possible to reduce valuation costs and can thus lead buyers to employ them in a cumulative process. We may note that in this model the expert has an incentive not to cheat by offering poor-quality goods, since the assumption is made that the expert's reputation is at stake. Biglaiser extends his model to retail and wholesale intermediaries which can offer many different products for sale. Consumers can also rely on the reputation of the intermediary without having to investigate the many product suppliers.

Specialized intermediaries can also reduce the problem of "moral hazards" in markets. As shown by Spulber (1996), when the actions of buyers and sellers are costly to observe, intermediaries provide monitoring and contracting services. For example, wine brokers intermediate wine exchanges between wine growers and merchants, or between merchants and merchants. They can earn returns through delegated monitoring by supervising suppliers for their customer. They also intervene as mediators who can help parties to adjust and solve conflicts (Baritaux et al. 2007).

Even though we focus on human intermediaries, one may notice that technological changes create *new opportunities* for intermediaries to exploit imperfect environments in which buyers and sellers meet,

[3] This hybridity among marketing firms has early been underlined by McVey (1960). That raises the issue of their classification and statistical representativity.

match, and negotiate.[4] From this point of view, the development of information and communication technologies (ICTs) promotes the emergence of intermediaries that enable market actors to reduce the costs of information search, including the costs of identifying potential partners. For example, the main function of job boards consists in posting job advertisements and building curriculum databases. Thus, internet-based labor market intermediaries allow multiplying job seeker/employer interactions (Marchal, Mellet, and Rieucau 2007).

Distinguishing between Intermediaries in terms of Transaction Characteristics

With a more institutionalist perspective, transaction cost economics (Williamson 1985) focuses on contractual problems arising from the management of the relationship between intermediaries and those who make use of their services. This approach leads to a distinction between intermediaries in terms of characteristics of transactions (such as the level of specificity, uncertainty, etc.) that have implications for the costs of measurement (the identification and evaluation of characteristics, and negotiation) and respect for "property rights" (compensation, resolution of disputes, and penalties). We only present here the functions of matching and valuation assumed by intermediaries, reminding that this approach has developed a wide literature on channels of distribution and in particular on franchising.

Following this perspective, Bessy and de Larquier (2001) have sought to model two types of matching, using the case of the labor market: *standard matching*, where the expectation of its *ex post* quality is highly reliable, based on knowledge of standard criteria shared by all participants in the market, and *specific matching*, which is more exposed to the hazards of the subsequent discovery of the level of quality which is subject to unique characteristics. If the matching is standard, an extensive search for information guarantees its quality, but if the matching is specific (or risky), intensive search is needed because a look at standard criteria of two potential partners may make them appear equivalent. One can thus distinguish between intermediaries who link together the standard supply and demand of qualities (or skills), and those who offer their clients the cost-effectiveness of their ability to assess the "potential" of products (or individuals). These two reasons for the intervention of intermediaries (the facilitation of encounters and the assessment of quality) are linked

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[4] By studying prominent digital intermediaries, a current of economic literature show how 'two-sided platforms' provide a technology for solving externality issue in a way that minimizes transaction costs. In these businesses (for example software platforms), pricing and other strategies are strongly affected by indirect network effects between the two sides of the platform. Indeed the pricing structure rebalances costs between the two sides by internalizing the indirect externalities (Hagiu 2007; Evans and Schmalensee 2005).

to the degree of specificity and thus of risk in the matching process. This result implies that the market of intermediation is a segmented one, with some intermediaries seeking to differentiate themselves from the rest by means of a specific niche area of activity in which they will acquire a potentially significant expertise.

A similar analysis can be applied to "technology markets" and especially to the market for patents and licenses, which is characterized by high uncertainty about the value (or the 'strength') of intellectual property rights (IPRs) (Bessy 2006). In the case of "strong IPRs," where private actors envision increased possibilities for exchange between buyers and sellers of patents, they can position themselves as "license agents," participating in the development of the technology market by reducing transaction costs. Conversely, weaker IPRs increase the contractual risks and make it unlikely that a real technology licensing agent will become involved. Businesses will instead resort to alliances in the form of joint ventures. This can lead to the involvement of other intermediaries who facilitate alliances based on technological cooperation, by reducing the risk of opportunistic behavior.

The transaction costs approach allows distinguishing the activity of intermediaries according to the degree of specificity of the assets underlying the transaction. But its under-socialized vision of economic exchange leads to study the activity of intermediaries as a succession of calculation processes. This approach overlooks the way this activity is oriented by rules of interaction defined in reference to groups or relies on personal networks providing actors with credible information.

The Go-Betweens: Trusted Resources for Innovative Activities

The intermediaries analyzed in these various studies may be specialized agencies whose primary activity is bringing business partners together and evaluating quality, or other organizations carrying out mediating activities secondary to some other primary activity. In these situations, the activities are generally combined to benefit from economies of scope. In the case of technology markets, those involved may be banks or venture capital companies, consulting and technology transfer agencies, professional organizations, law firms specializing in corporate law,[5] or firms in some other sector.

With respect to the labor market, professional organizations can also play a role as recruitment and training intermediaries (Bessy and Marchal 2009). But actors further removed from the workings of the labor market may also be involved in hiring, within the frame of their innovating activity. Research by Chauvin (2010b) on Bordeaux wines has shown, for example, how consultants in the wine trade who initially intervene with the goal of improving the quality of the wines may also be asked to do some recruiting for the wine producers. One can also quote the example of software engineering companies, who may approach talented young people with very specific expertise on behalf of their clients (Bessy and de Larquier 2001). Beyond the immediate reduction in the costs of recruitment, they guarantee the ability of these candidates to develop innovations in areas with a high degree of uncertainty, because of their own reputation as experts in the field. These temporary intermediaries are trusted resources, and it is important to examine more generally how this trust is built up.

The work of Nooteboom (2000) shows how important the go-between is in creating innovation-oriented alliances. This analysis can be extended to the search for partners in any business project, where each party needs to be sure of the "quality" of all the others. Beyond the claims of transaction cost economics about the role of arbitration by a third party in resolving disputes, Nooteboom presents a series of additional arguments. The intermediary can assess the relevance of the information transmitted by each party to the transaction and then inform each one separately in such a way that none of them reveals what they know to any of the others. This makes it possible to control the dissemination of information. Moreover, the intermediary can help build mutual confidence early in the cooperation process, due to the transitive character of trust relations. It may also help to end the alliance by making it more progressive.

These temporary intermediaries are hardly taken into account by the "search approach" in which economic agents make a rational calculus of information search, in particular in order to assess the option of trading through a middleman. Now it happens that a large

[5] Suchman (2000) has shown how the corporate law firms in Silicon Valley have substantially contributed to its development, not only through innovations in contract matters (funding of software companies by venture capitalists), but also by providing guarantees of the quality of the parties concerned, and even by putting them into contact. These "local intermediaries" are consultants, disseminators of contractual and informal standards, gatekeepers, and matchmakers. This type of actor is on the fringe of the category of market intermediary, because it is not lawyers' primary function to create matches; however, they contribute largely to the construction of the venture capital market that finances high-tech companies, and to the related law market, building on their reputation within networks of social relations.

share of exchange opportunities are the by-products of other economic activities or result from people being embedded in on-going networks of interaction oriented towards economic and non-economic goals (Granovetter 1995).[6] Such an intermediary can put different networks in touch with each other, thus counteracting excessive narrowness, which can make networks rigid and too closed. Beyond innovative activities, personal networks provide actors with credible and trustworthy information in markets in which there is no obvious device to judge quality (Karpik 2010).

The Strategic Behavior of Intermediaries

With a more strategic perspective, one may find the argument for the strength of "weak ties" (Granovetter 1973) in the theory developed by Burt (2000) concerning the "network entrepreneur". He shows how, in a world where information plays a vital role in the accumulation of wealth, informational advantage can be obtained by connecting entities that were previously separated (the "structural holes"). Burt adopts Simmel's concept of the *tertius gaudens* or "third who benefits," to describe the role that gives one player the opportunity to intervene between two others or to play each of them off against the other. According to Burt, the power of the intermediary consists in the possibility to control the interactions or the networks of separated social actors. This control derived from "structural holes" is uncertain and the power of the intermediary only gives him "chances of success" depending on the tensions between non-redundant relationships. Burt's analysis also explains that "network entrepreneurs" seek to accumulate reputation advantage through multiplying the number of links, but only to the extent of being suspected to act strategically.

The lack of powerful reputation mechanisms can give rise to more "opportunistic" behavior on the part of intermediaries that are officially recognized in the market. Based on a model developed by Hart and Kreps (1986) for speculative activity, Lesourne (1991) distinguishes between intermediaries involved in the proper functioning of the market (convergence towards a "stable" market in which all the possibilities for making good matches have been exhausted) and those whose more strategic behavior is intended to "destabilize" the market.

Gautié, Godechot, and Sorignet (2005), who have observed the highly competitive and specialized activity of headhunters in the executive job market, also emphasize the role of strategic behavior. To be sure of completing the desired task quickly, the headhunter preselects one or two "clones" and surrounds them with two or three

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[6] We may also note that Rees (1966) has particularly emphasized the importance of networks of interpersonal relationships for guaranteeing the quality of candidates recruited in the labor market.

atypical profiles; the clients, convinced by this grouping of the scarcity of the kind of professionals they are looking for, make a decision more quickly than when faced with five identical individuals—and in favor of the "clone". In the same way, in a very competitive context, headhunting agencies help to partition and segment the market by creating sets of employment categories, as well as contributing to salary inflation. Here we see that beyond matchmaking, headhunters are in a position to fix prices in the market and can act as salary consultants, helped in this by new information technologies.

We find the same kind of strategic opportunities in marketing methods. It does seem true that contemporary modes of representation in advertising create an illusion of exclusivity or of scarcity (Appadurai 1986), but other methods such as merchandising and building assortment, in which the process of sorting is fundamental, entertain a more subtle game with categories of products. As Azimont and Araujo (2007) show from their analysis of category review meetings between manufacturers of fast-moving consumer goods and retailers, these actors permanently negotiate the definition of categories of products. They can also play strategically with these categories by relying on conventions about consumers' representations of categories. Misleading advertising and the sale of counterfeit products represent the extreme cases (and legally reprehensible) of strategic use of these conventions and in particular of those on which brands work (Bessy and Chateauraynaud 1995).

Towards a Pragmatist Approach of the Valuation Power of Intermediaries

As the transaction costs economic approach shows, the existence of quality standards is conducive to the development of the activity of intermediaries that operate on wide markets. In their absence, matching rely on more specific forms of intermediation or on the intervention of experts who bring trust pledges, or on networks of personal relationships. As we have seen with Burt's analysis, these networks of relationships can be instrumentalized by "intermediaries". These strategic opportunities not only show the more active role of intermediaries in market shaping, but also their strategic behavior relying on conventions about the quality of products (or individuals) that they have themselves contributed to build.

The purpose of this section is, precisely, to provide a better understanding of these conventions, the evaluation frames they underpin, and the role played by the different market intermediaries in their genesis, diffusion and stabilization. That raises the issue of their valuation power and their legitimation. Once these conventions (setting common computing spaces) are stabilized, intermediaries can play their traditional role highlighted by the economic theory based on information search, or arbitrate between becoming a marketmaker or a matchmaker. Hence, this section moves from a view of intermediaries as informational platforms to a conception of actors whose effects go beyond mere intermediation in the narrow sense, covering not only information but also the dynamics of valuation in the relevant markets.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, "economics of convention" has demonstrated the crucial role of intermediaries in the functioning of markets (Bessy and Chateauraynaud 1995; Bessy and Eymard-Duvernay 1997). Through their activities of search and selection, and the nature of the relationships they sustain with sellers and buyers, they contribute to the social construction of markets and to the dissemination of the conventions or standards of quality that underpin them. The analysis in terms of "quality convention" allows formalizing the different processes by which product (or organization) characteristics can be defined, and as a result limit uncertainty about the agents' behavior (Eymard-Duvernay 1989)[7]. Thus, the market is not given *a priori*, but is constructed by means of "third parties" who can be more or less stable and institutionalized, and who can structure various modes of activity or introduce mediation between general conventions of quality and more local conventions. From an empirical standpoint, this approach investigates the entire available body of instruments and mechanisms, and in particular cognitive artifacts such as the classifications and nomenclatures, advertisements, and assessment tests used by intermediaries in their daily work, which play a role that is both cognitive and normative in directing their activity.

This idea is in line with one of the key arguments of the approaches in terms of "distributed cognition" (Hutchins 1995)[8] and "sociology of translation" or "actor-network theory" (Callon 1986; Cochoy and Dubuisson-Quellier 2000; Mallard 2000; Cochoy 2002; Callon and Muniesa 2005). According to Callon (1986, 185), intermediaries take on diverse forms, generating an activity of *intéressement*, defined as "the group of actions through which one entity . . . strives to create and stabilize the identity of the other actors that it defines through the way it defines the problem". In a later paper, Callon (1991, 134) defines an intermediary as "anything passing between actors which defines the relationship between them". They include literary

[7] In particular, Eymard-Duvernay (1989) refers to the "orders of worth" distinguished by Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) in their model of justification of actions in the public arena. In this perspective, the decision to conform to a given convention is not reduced only to calculation, but may also consider the legitimacy of the actions prescribed by this convention, by making value judgments about them.

[8] The aim of these investigations is to put forward the distribution of knowledge among individuals and between them and their socio-physical environment. The unit of analysis is thus no longer the individual or the social group, but a physical and cognitive system composed of individuals and the artifacts they employ.

inscriptions, technical artifacts, human beings and money in all its forms. His general thesis is that intermediaries both order (by describing) and form (by being involved in relationships) the "medium of the networks they describe" (Callon 1991, 135)[9]. Callon and Muniesa (2005) especially highlight the effects of such actors on goods and the way people produce, manipulate and choose them: these activities imply a series of operations resulting in the "calculability of the good". This idea is also developed by Beunza and Garud (2004) in a stimulating paper focusing on the role of Wall Street securities analysts as "frame-makers". These works show that intermediaries are not only go-betweens or even transformers of knowledge, but are themselves entrepreneurs in action. They move back and forth between different social worlds. Far from only transferring knowledge in one direction, they are engaged in an exchange of knowledge through moving between places (Meyer 2010). Hence, the word transfer does not do justice to the practices of knowledge brokers, that can be better understood with the concept of "translation"[10] which implicates an actual transformation of arrangements of human and non-human actors.

We want first to highlight how frames of valuation are both used and *created* or *modified* by intermediaries by developing more precisely the point of view of "economics of convention" on valuation and intermediaries. Unlike actor-network theorists,[11] we will keep the term "intermediaries" while highlighting the active role they play in markets, but we will distinguish different types of intermediaries regarding the type of role they play in such worlds. Then, we propose a characterization of their power of valuation according to the nature of the *valuation frame* they produce, which can be more or less general/particular, more or less distributed/concentrated, and more or less durable/ephemeral.

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[9] He then introduces a "purely practical" (Callon 1991, 141) distinction between *intermediaries* and *actors* by providing different definitions of what an actor is. An actor is "an intermediary that puts other intermediaries into circulation" (Callon 1991, 141), actors are "those who conceive, elaborate, circulate, emit, or pension off intermediaries". In other words, *intermediaries* are simple links between entities whereas *actors* transform the world through the expected and unexpected consequences of their actions.

[10] The notion of "translation" has been introduced by Callon (1984), who identified four "moments" of translation: "problematisation", "interessement", "enrolment" and "mobilisation".

[11] The word "intermediary" itself is criticized by proponents of this theory. Intermediaries do not add anything new or different to the existing state of affairs; they merely transfer information or knowledge. By contrast, mediators make a difference via translation processes whose outcome cannot be predicted from the original conditions.

The Four Types of Intermediaries and Their (Creative) Use of Frames of Valuation

Every activity of valuation is based upon some “frames”, which are the (more or less) shared cognitive scheme that organize the valuation experience. Beyond the empirical and local statements made by some scholars about the framing role of specific types of intermediaries (such as Beunza and Garud [2004] about securities analysts as “frame-makers”), we will show that the four types of intermediaries identified in the introduction are implied in valuation frame-making and frame-using activities.

Distributors

Trade intermediaries, traditionally considered as buying and selling platforms, can be analyzed as entrepreneurs of new models of distribution that have some consequences on frames of valuation, which consist more precisely here in the ways products are valorized in commercial channels. New modes of valorization are often linked to a material and immaterial framing of the market situation (Kjellberg and Helgesson 2007; Cochoy 2010) that goes beyond the traditional marketing activity of targeting customers.

For example, Antoine Bernard de Raymond (2007) shows how French mass-market retailing is the product of different evolutions that create opportunities for new intermediaries: the transformations of traditional retail selling and deep changes in supplying facilities, the appearance of a global rationality of the circulation of products based on the optimization of transport flows and a strict packaging chain with strict sanitary conditions. Frames of evaluation can here be thought of with the help of Boltanski and Thévenot’s theory of “cités” (2006), these cognitive worlds in which actors use some principles of action and justification. In the case of mass-market retailing, the “industrial logic” is at the heart of the transformation of traditional production and distribution of goods (based on “domestic logic”) as shows the passage from “camenbert normand” to “camembert normé” (Boisard and Letablier 1987) which follows its mass-distribution by reorganizing thoroughly the logistics (in particular the way milk is collected) and by redefining the links with farmers.

The mass-distribution case also shows the proliferation of different service providers that do not buy or sells the goods (as retailers and wholesalers do), but various services performed like warehousing, transports, merchandising, and different kinds of consultancy, which play a role in the down-stream valuation process of products.

A second example of this active role of trade intermediaries in the determination of frames of evaluation can be found on the art market. Art dealers not only assess the value of artists by using existing and predetermined valuation frames (made by museums or critics for example), they participate in constructing these frames through their engagement in the birth of artistic movements, aesthetic conventions but also "price conventions" that circulate on markets. Velthuis (2005) shows, for example, that in a social configuration characterized by radical uncertainty on the quality of goods, intermediaries such as art dealers are likely to create convention-based prices. These conventions are linked to specific commercial channels of the contemporary art market in which dealers share the same conception of artistic work, and can then coordinate their activities with other agents of the commercial channel: artists, collectors… Velthuis identifies three main prices "narratives" or conventions that have been created and used in the art market since the 1950s: "honorable prices" stand for the postwar gallery circuit which was confined to a limited art connoisseurs circle; "superstar prices" are characteristic of the 1980s New York boom in which prices were rising tremendously high; "prudent prices" account for the more cautious commercial scene in the late 1990s in which galleries became real "companies". These types of prices are cognitive tools that shape the meaning of the historical development of the art market, but they are also normative devices that allow art dealers to justify their practices and to compare with competitors. "Distinguishing different prices is a means for art dealers to express the values they endorse in their business life" (Velthuis 2005, 141).

This research highlights the plurality of valuation conventions within a single market and the fact that some specific frames of valuation are linked to some specific commercial channels. If intermediaries are the actors that make this link between commercial channels and valuation conventions possible, they may combine these various conventions in some different ways, and foster through their "friction" or their "dissonance" new valuation forms or principles (Stark 2009).

Matchmakers

A second category of intermediaries includes the actors that are paid to put two (or more) different parties into contact. This fundamentally "relational" activity is not only a question of relationship and flows of information, it is also an issue of cognitive frames and valuation. A good example of empirical research is to be found in the work of Bielby and Bielby (1999) on talent agencies in the American television market. They show how, in this labor market, "matchmakers" do not simply bring together television channels and program directors and producers. Their activities go further by creating "packages" of teams which include producers, scriptwriters, directors, and actors, in order to offer turnkey projects to the TV channels.[12] Thus, they construct a singular product by combining resources in an innovative way and

[12] This argument is in line with the prior analysis of McVey (1960).

participating in the segmentation of the professional world in which they operate. Hence, intermediaries' activities produce categorizations that contribute to the *cognitive segmentation* of markets. As we showed in the first section, intermediaries can play a role in *expanding* the equivalencies employed in this categorization and, conversely, by *reducing* them so as to create "artificial scarcity" (Gautié, Godechot, and Sorignet 2005). This strategic way of playing with conventions of quality is all the more likely to occur if the market is increasing in scale and the demand-side clients have little expertise in this sphere.

Such an analysis is indeed useful to understand the activity of labor market intermediaries. Their intense activity of putting partners in touch leads them to develop valuation frames and categorizations of jobs and skills, which are all the more used by these intermediaries than they become stable conventions that allow a plurality of actors to coordinate with one another. Besides, the reflection about intermediaries proposed by the "economics of convention" started with a focus on how conventions of skills are embedded in the different devices used by the recruiters on the labor market: want advertisements, tests, graphology analysis, nomenclatures and classifications of profession (Bessy and Eymard-Duvernay 1997; Bessy et al. 2001). The studies of the long-term evolution of such devices in France show that the private employment agencies participated in valorizing the logics of "skills" and "employability". This leads to a valuation of the most general aptitudes of individuals to the detriment of the collectively negotiated employment classifications in specific sectors which are considered unsuitable to the new flexible organization forms (Boltanski and Chiapello 1999).

The search for skill transferability is in line with the possibilities generalist agencies have of presenting a "very competent" individual to a wider scope of potential recruiters. The creation and the diffusion of a new form of categorization or valorization can rely on a critical work of traditional valuation frames, but also on a more progressive and incremental process linked to an entrepreneurial, innovative and lucrative activity. In terms of convention dynamics, job agencies carry the representations of employers and workers that claim for a recognition of their individual skills, but they also create and spread their own valuation tools that contribute to the individualization of employment relationships. Hence, frames of valuation can be fostered by different kinds of economic actors on the job market, including groups of workers, employers, and professional intermediaries. This case raises two main questions: the question of the imputation of a new valuation frame to an actor (or a group of actors) and the question of the collective acceptance by a majority of actors. According to "economics of convention", the intermediary is generally considered as the actor that gives the initial impulse to the valuation convention, and its collective acceptance may be linked to the social legitimacy of the convention (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006) or different kinds of mimetic processes (Orléan 2011). The case of fashion is a good illustration of these different processes by which valuation conventions are collectively accepted.

The ethnographic research of Ashley Mears (2011) on fashion models helps to understand how an "original look" appears and is valued through a mimetic process. This process is engaged by most reputed model agents that support some specific types of models. However, they cannot act only on their own: to avoid a too big price difference between models, agents often consult each other to set up "fair" prices, and conventions of prices and looks emerge from their interactions. This is in line with the argument raised by Velthuis (2005) concerning the art dealers trying to keep up their legitimacy by dealing with different commercial and aesthetic conventions. Moreover, these strategic interactions whether in fashion or in art spheres, are likely to take place during trade shows.

Consultants

Even when they do not participate directly in some economic transactions, consultants may contribute to the definition of some valuation frames for products or job candidates. We can give the example of the style bureaus of the fashion trend such as it is reported by Rinallo and Golfetto (2006). These authors show how the material, cognitive and interactive dimensions of some trade shows (like "Première Vision") help conventions (on future styles) to be spread and valued within the clothing fabric industry, and more generally within creative industries. At the beginning, these conventions are issued from a process of discussion between French and Italian manufacturers considered to be the most innovative. They answer to a very fragmented textile industry and to the need to reduce the uncertainty about the qualities of textile products (color, structure, aspect, touch, decoration, and treatment). This reduction of uncertainty may improve the coordination between the different actors. Nevertheless, if the identification of the future trends is proposed by the internal experts of producers (members of "Première vision"), the authors point out the crucial role played by style bureaus in this process. These companies are specialized in trend forecasting and they operate in different creative industries. They can be considered as "brokers of language" as they connect material properties of clothes and symbolic meanings about products. This connecting activity contributes to the "bodily anchorage" of conventions (Bessy and Chateauraynaud 1995).

Generally speaking, once they have invested in the design of a valuation frame, consultants try to spread it within an economic sector or in different economic fields. A good illustration could be the consultant agencies in employment and salaries, which set up definitions of positions that stand for a whole range of companies, at the least for the biggest ones, in order to establish a salary hierarchy.

Reynaud (1992) showed that this kind of consultant agencies had to carry out surveys in order to gather information about the salaries in each company. In order to do so, they have to transform the information they have gathered into comparable items: the value of surveys depends on equivalence decisions between positions for which names differ. Moreover, their clients do not receive passively the results of the surveys, they adapt their strategies to these results and to the norms they have contributed to build. By this mechanism, the activity of consultant agencies has some consequences on the work organization and the salary practices of their clients, and they participate in building the economic value attributed to their employees. Reynaud interprets the role of the consultant agencies as a kind of "Walrasian auctioneer" that organizes the "tâtonnement" and that serves as intermediaries between the companies and the market considered as a set of socially constructed information. We may add that they contribute to the cognitive segmentation of the market by creating some new valuations conventions of workers and positions. These conventions are all the more powerful as they are followed by the companies that were not in the panel of the survey.

This power of valuation can also be attached to a "signature" that the consultant uses as a more or less explicit strategic tool. The wine consultants can for example be valued through their "oenological signature" (Chauvin 2010b), which recently entered the repertoire of valuation frames for wines. This signature consists in the type of intervention in the wine estates (regular/occasional), the type of public presentation of the consultant (discrete/visible) and the way it is associated with products (strongly/weakly), and the qualitative style of the wines he or she contributes to produce. Even though a signature is a source of reputation that can be transferred to products, it is an asset that consultants have difficulty assuming because of the importance of the soil and vintage in the making of reputations in the French wine industry.

The main question raised by these examples is the imputation of the responsibility of a particular consultant (or consultant agency) in the emergence of a new valuation frame or a new category of goods, in contrast to the case of a distributed building among a plurality of consultants and other intermediaries.

Evaluators

If the three previous types of intermediaries carry out activities that have some consequences in terms of valuations, their core activity does not explicitly consist in producing evaluations, rankings or ratings. However, we can now identify and analyze a fourth type of intermediaries whose main activities precisely rely on producing such devices. There is a growing amount of works focusing on such actors and their effects, as western contemporary societies can be thought as *audit societies* (Power 1999), in which financial, medical, technological, environmental, quality, and many other types of evaluations are produced by a set of professionalized actors. Espeland and Sauder (2007) proposed to conceptualize such actors as "third parties" that foster some social "reactivities" in the worlds they evaluate. They especially focus on the third parties in the education sector, that is to say actors that are neither suppliers nor demanders of education goods, for example education media. Such actors produce some rankings that create or reinforce some criteria of valuations (number of students, number of international scientific prizes, students' professional careers etc.) that can become "conventional" in the field. These conventions of valuation are interiorized by the majority of evaluated actors, who may modify their organizational and communication strategy to conform as well as possible to the criteria fostered by the rankings. This case accounts for the possible instrumentalization of the valuation criteria by the evaluated actors, but also for the difficulty to escape from the "discipline" of rankings. These effects raise the social issue of the negative or "bad" conventions that are created or spread within the academic world but also in the financial world (Orléan 2011) and many others.

"Bad" as well as "good" effects of valuations are not necessarily the product of an explicit strategy and can emerge progressively through unexpected social mechanisms. The activity of the wine critic Robert Parker is a good case for understanding how a powerful evaluator may foster "despite himself" some new conventions and categorizations on the wine market. If he deliberately created and spread an innovative format of wines valuation (a 50-100 point quality scale), he also fostered some more informal and unintended categories of valuations within this economic world. While arguing for his "prescriptive" recommendations in terms of the information he provided to consumers, he assigned points and made judgments that, once adopted and "interpreted" in the oenophile community, gave rise to new categorizations, of which he himself may have been a target (Chauvin 2010a).

The controversial category of "Parkerized wines" is a good illustration of this, and shows how an intermediary can become the source of retroactive implementation of the strategies of some wine producers. The unanticipated effect of the intermediary's activity in this case is the producers' introduction of new production methods with the goal of improving their standing in the Parker ratings. On a meso-level, this can contribute to a new configuration of the conventions of quality in the considered market. This case shows that the strategic valuation activities of intermediaries are themselves subject to new interpretations and unforeseen categorizations made by other market players.

Despite their professional heterogeneity, these four types of intermediaries share a common characteristic, which is not a substance or a fixed identity but is based on the dynamics they foster: the power of valuation of an intermediary can be measured through the *effects* of the valuations it produces, whatever their forms or their logics may be.

Intermediaries' Power of Valuation: Definition, Generality and Temporality

As long as their role as prescribers is recognized (Benghosi and Paris 2003), market intermediaries can have a prominent part in the *creation* and the *dissemination* of conventions and the resulting *categorization* of goods, people and organizations. All intermediaries do not have a strong valuation power. Generally speaking, power is an unequally distributed resource, and it is an empirical question to assess to what extent each intermediary enjoy this specific kind of power. However, we can suggest some distinctions and analytical tools in order to identify some important factors that lead to these asymmetrical situations. At the end of this sub-section, we will also propose a picture synthesizing the three main characteristics of the valuation frames and the way they can help to categorize the different examples of intermediaries referred to in our paper.

The Definition of the Valuation Frame: Distributed versus Concentrated

As we have already mentioned (concerning the consultants), one may distinguish two polar cases of the definition of the valuation frame. First, valuation frames may come from a plurality of intermediaries that share the same conception of what constitutes the value of a product. Second, they may result from the activity of a single and dominant intermediary (a high standard consulting job agency, a famous flying winemaker, or a reputed model agent) that succeeds in spreading to his or her clients what is worth or what is valued in a specific field. So, the definition of the valuation frame is more or less *distributed* between different intermediaries.

We can note that in the former case, the power of valuation is often attached to a professional status that confers a symbolic authority. In the latter case, the legitimacy of the intermediary may be less stabilized and protected than the one attached to a professional group, and leads him or her to make a permanent "reputational work" (Zafirau 2008). Thus, according to Rinallo and Golfetto (2006), the ability of the producers in the textile and clothing industry (members of "Premiere Vision") to represent the market and to make it real is attributed, in line with a Bourdieusian argument, to the differences of "symbolic capital". This specific kind of capital depends on the particular characteristics of each market, and is often linked to the temporality of the "entry" on the market. The first intermediaries who can be identified and collectively recognized as innovators, can progressively acquire the legitimacy and the status of "pioneers" and can impose new trends to the "followers" of the markets.

The Generality of the Valuation Frame: Standard versus Singular
The valuation power of intermediaries can also be analyzed through the degree of generality of the frames they contribute to elaborate.

First, it seems important to distinguish the intermediaries who build the market by centralizing and reallocating the information through *standardized* categories of quality, and those who generally act at a local level, every matching being different from the other ones, according to a negotiation process of the quality that occurs during the evaluation. This latter case is more interesting to analyze with a pragmatist approach, as standardized and centralized valuation processes are by definition less interactional and uncertain in their progress.

Recruitment processes in the field of highly innovative jobs give a good illustration of the situations in which the skills of the candidates or the relevant qualities of the product emerge from an interactive process of information exchange (Bessy 1997). The client firm and the intermediary learn from the CV of the candidates the ins and outs of the job searched and the required skills. The candidates try, from their part, to profile their experience and their skill according to the specificity of the potential employer. In this case, intermediaries are involved in a highly distributed and negotiated valuation process, in which every actor influences the other one. Commenting the works of Kreiner (2007) on architecture competitions, Stark (2011) identifies the same kind of interactive process of redefinition of the principles of evaluation during the competition process. The projects of the competitors also serve to better define the real problems that have to be solved, as well as the operational principles for a successful performance.

Stark notices that this implies a shift from the resolution of an analytical problem (for example through the analysis of standard matching in transaction costs approach) to questions of interpretations (which could be developed in a conventionalist and pragmatist approach of specific matching), which can be thought of with the help of Dewey's pragmatist approach, according to which the relevant valuation principles are generally built during the evaluation process. This more interactional and uncertain evaluation process is likely to be present in the beginning of the development of a new activity or a new technology.

The Temporality of the Valuation Frame: Short-Term versus Long-Term

The distinction between standardized and singular matches can be completed by a close look at the "temporal" dimension of the valuation power.

Markets distinguish themselves by combining, differently, various kinds of temporal valuation frames. In a first perspective, one may link some particular markets with some specific temporal frames: for example, the financial market has become a short-term valuation sphere, according to a vast literature on financial evaluators. Work by Montagne (2009) shows, for example, how the increased delegating of investment funds management has contributed to creating a professional services market (consultants, managers, appraisers, and rating agencies) and standards methods of scoring and pricing (Beunza and Garud 2004). Parallel with this standardization, their activity is likely to entrench the short-term as the dominant economic time-frame. The increased importance of consultants and various other intermediaries with the job of measuring performance has created two kinds of constraint for financial management companies—quantitative (performance markers) and qualitative (organizational audit)—as well as systematizing competition. As Montagne states (2009, 8), "the creation of a market in valuation, affecting both managers and appraisers, is thus directly responsible for the standardization of methods of valuation and for their alignment with short-term investment methods." Intermediaries are thus not external actors, but impact directly on the dynamics of valuation by shortening its time-frame.

A second approach may try to identify how different types of temporal valuation frames are articulated in the same market and what role intermediaries play in these temporal "frictions". For example, if fashion trends are short-term valuation frames that are supposed to be renewed each year, one may try to identify how they are linked with more stabilized valuation frames. On the fashion market, these frames could be the "names" of the fashion houses which give a kind of "status depth" to this market, by transferring their longer, more stable worth to the other "names" or "products" of the market. On the French wine market, if official classifications represent long-term valuation frames (in the both sense of stable frames and frames whose legitimacy is linked to their longevity), they are challenged by other types of frames, especially the annually renewed rates given by critics. Intermediaries such as wine critics not only convey new short-term temporal frames, but they have to deal with long-term frames (by respecting them and showing they just produce marginal newness), and they can paradoxically reinforce them by their work (Chauvin 2010a). Our distinction between short-term and long-term valuation frames is a schematic way of analyzing the plurality of temporalities involved in economic worlds. Further work may take advantage of the important sociological literature which deconstructs the idea of “time” or “temporality” by identifying the various forms of temporalities that structure social life (Fine 1990; Flaherty 2003).

In order to sum up our results, table 1 (below) is an attempt to classify the different examples quoted until now, according to the criteria we have used to characterize valuation frames.

Table 1. The classification of examples according to the type of intermediaries and the characteristics of the valuation frames.

Characteristics of the valuation frame / Type of intermediary	Distributor	Matchmaker	Consultant	Evaluator
Definition: **Highly distributed**	Retail industries, Producers of textile	Recruitment agencies, Talent agencies	Consultants in salaries	Financial raters
Concentrated	Specific art dealers	Model agents	Consultants in winemaking	Influent wine critics
Temporality: **Long-term**	Mass-distribution	Skills logic	Salary classifications	Wine official classifications
Short-term	Textile and fashion trends	Original look	Trendy products	Short-term conventions, Internet bubble
Generality: **Standard**	Mass-distribution	Skills logic	Salary classifications	Financial market
Singular	Art dealers	Headhunters in fields	Consultant in technologies	Architecture competition

The first criteria, based upon the type of definition of the valuation frames, concerns *actors*, whereas the two others (the temporality and the generality) concern more the *valuation frames* and their "social forms". When we combine the three criteria (distribution, temporality, generality), we can distinguish between two stylized configurations.

The first configuration involves powerful intermediaries, stable and standard frames. In this case, intermediaries have a strong power of valuation because they are at the origin of the definition of the valuation frames, which are not negotiated in situations and are persistent over time.

The second configuration consists in less powerful intermediaries, negotiated and singular frames. In this case, intermediaries have less power because the valuation frame is defined among many actors, constantly negotiated and relevant only during the time of the valuation process. Intermediaries adopt local conventions which emerge from the valuation process, and none of the intermediaries has a dominant role. Obviously, there is a continuum between these extreme cases, along which the various empirical cases could be distributed. Beyond the examples quoted in this paper, our hypothesis is that all intermediaries can be located in this kind of table. One may think of empirical cases such as matchmakers on the "online dating" market. The websites analyzed by Cornwell and Lundgren (2001), Bergström (2011) or Kessous (2011) are intermediaries which participate in constructing the "value" of the potential partners, through the selection criteria of the partner (age, sex, location, but also social, cultural and economic characteristics), the type of access to the different areas of the website, the type of evaluation of previous partners that can display the members of the website, and the visibility offered to some particular members who appear on the main page of the website. If we follow our typology, this kind of intermediary could be analyzed as a "distributed" case (Bergström studies for example more than one thousand websites). The two other characteristics of the intermediaries (the temporality and the generality of the frames they produce) would probably be "short-term" (because of the frequent change of the selection criteria displayed by the websites and the rapidity of the production and publication of an evaluation by members) and "singular" (because of the specific criteria displayed by the websites according to ethnic or religious parameters for example). The analytic fecundity of this typology could be illustrated by many other examples from different markets.

Explaining and Regulating the Valuation Power of Intermediaries: Two Challenging Tasks

The characterization of the valuation frames fostered and used by intermediaries is helpful to understand their activity and how they shape value dynamics on market. However, it may not be enough to explain their unequal valuation power, as they do not all have such effects on their economic world. A few sociological theories can be useful to solve this problem by focusing on different legitimatizing sources: the "symbolic capital" (Bourdieu 1993) of the intermediary, the legitimacy of the convention used by the actors (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006), or a network of aligned actors that is produced by different operations of mediation (Latour 2005). These different approaches of legitimacy can be considered as alternatives (Lamont 2012), but a clear-cut distinction of this kind may be difficult to make in empirical markets, as the case of the fashion trends analyzed by Rinallo and Golfetto (2006) shows it. The question of explanation of the diffusion of conventions represents a problem that goes beyond the scope of this paper, and that would need to be developed in further research.

The second question is the corollary of the power of intermediaries: if their actions have some effects on the social worlds they are involved in, one may study the nature of the transformations they foster, and what kind of control or regulation one may organize to limit their "negative" or "pernicious" effects. The conventionalist approach can give some analytical tools to answer some sociopolitical questions such as the "financial crisis" by highlighting the role of the intermediaries in the creation, the diffusion and the transformation of conventions in crisis' dynamics. In fact, intermediaries' interventions can weaken the financial system because of the difficulty to attribute some responsibilities to the multiple concerned actors. The proliferation of financial intermediaries and products has made it much more difficult to determine liability during the recent financial crisis (Montagne 2009). Cervone's work on credit rating agencies shows for example how difficult it is to assign liability for errors or fraud to valuation intermediaries. She points out that, especially in the American context, investors who filed lawsuits for damages involving erroneous assessments made by credit rating agencies had their suits dismissed. In a recent article (Cervone 2010), she advocates the adoption of a strict liability regime, rather than yet more regulation of the activity of these agencies. Krebs (2009) and Tuch (2010) also underlined the power and the role of credit rating agencies during the current economic crisis by showing that their judgments and evaluations are far from neutral and that their impact as "reputational intermediaries" needs some kind of regulation.

In contrast, Orléan (2009) shows that these rating agencies are only the bearers of valuation conventions (the interpretation of underlying market trends) in place at a given point in the financial markets, which all stakeholders (both issuers and investors) agree to adopt. It is thus the market itself that constrains the rating agencies. Orléan concludes: "In my opinion there is no evidence that anything like a rating agency independent of the market could exist. For that to happen, it would have to derive its income from a source that was itself independent, yet without seeming to be a foreign body with no legitimacy in the eyes of the investors. Is this not trying to square the circle?" (Orléan 2009, 68). Liability, then, is spread across all the players in the financial system, making it problematic to attempt to impute liability to any individual.

There are many other domains in which the regulation of the evaluators' activities could play an important role. The research led by Demailly and Maroy (2004) about the regulation of the educative system in Europe shows, for example, how some new types of intermediaries both evaluate and control educative organizations and institutions. The rise of "post–bureaucratic" institutional settings, such as the *ex post* control exerted by evaluators, or the *ex ante* socializing action on the professionals (teachers and administrative staff), implies new types of cross-regulation between states, educative institutions, and the new "transnational" intermediaries. These intermediaries, who generally come from teaching, become either "experts in rationalization", "agents of proximity", or "political executives". According to our typology, they can be classified as "evaluators", but the diversity of their status should not be overlooked, because it can explain why organizations aimed at regulating these intermediaries only exist in an embryonic form.

Concerning matchmakers and consultants, as they defend the interest of the parties they represent as well as their self-interest, this issue of the regulation of their activities is at stake.[13] That raises also the question of the drawing up professional-ethics rules to guarantee that experts in the concerned fields will be reasonably disinterested and will avoid conflicts of interests. Besides, these intermediation activities can be a source of "boundary struggles" (Lamont and Molnar 2002) between different professions or professional territories which are arbitrated by public authorities (Abbott 1989). Whereas Economic theory designs regulation of professions mainly in reference to the concepts of "asymmetrical information" (between the professional and its client) and "externality", our notion of "power of valuation" proposes another way to cope with this issue that would need further development.

Conclusion

New developments in economic theory justify the emergence of intermediaries by their role in reducing the costs of information search, or more generally the transaction costs. In this perspective, intermediaries generally improve the functioning of markets. More

[13] Lizé, Naudier and Roueff (2011) emphasize the problem of the legal qualification of "intermediary" which cannot be, in the case of the French Law, both "third party" and "party" to a contractual relationship.

precisely, intermediaries often add value to products by supplying information and guaranties or by increasing their availability (Spulber 1996). This analysis of the market microstructures offers a better understanding of the real workings of markets by highlighting the different roles played by intermediaries which are not limited to the sole function of pricing. But this added value is reduced to a potential increase in the utility of goods for consumers, the definition of individual preferences remaining exogenous. There are few economists who take into account the endogeneity of preferences or even the collective construction of valuation (such as graduates in the Spence signal theory, Spence 1973), so leaving a large part of collective valuation processes unexplored.

The pragmatist approach presented in our paper completes the perspectives in which intermediaries are rather a passive role of information platform. In particular, economics of convention shows how intermediaries contribute to define valuation frames through their different activities and instigate conventions that can improve the coordination of actors in markets, but also reorganize the markets in different ways. The analysis of valuation conventions may provide a better understanding of the strategic behavior of market intermediaries which is intended to "destabilize" the market. This approach is consistent with previous studies highlighting how market intermediaries could be more than passive classifiers, especially through the concept of "frame-makers" suggested by Beunza and Garud (2004).

The four types of intermediaries identified in this article allow us to underline that the dynamics of valuation frames constitute an important dimension of the activity of so-called "evaluators", but also of the activity of "distributors", "matchmakers" and "consultants". Moreover, we propose a characterization of these valuation frames according to the nature of their definition (more or less distributed), their generality and their temporality.

Once they have been differentiated in terms of their effects, intermediaries can be a good empirical entry to study the social organization of markets as well as the changes occurring in them, including changes in the social and economic value of goods, individuals, and organizations. Besides, these changes raise the issue of the valuation power of market intermediaries and the eventual regulation of their activities.

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