

# Economic Exchanges

17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> September 2015  
Lecture Theatre, Ben Pimlott Building, Goldsmiths, London

Organised by Daniel Neyland, Sveta Milyaeva, Véra Ehrenstein  
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## Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> September

12.00 – 13.00 Registration and lunch

13.00 – 13.15 Introduction to MISTS (*Daniel Neyland*, Goldsmiths)

13.15 – 15.15 **Session 1** (Chair – *Will Davies*, Goldsmiths)

- *Noortje Marres* (Warwick)  
**‘Brand or Issue? On the mutability of formations and the contribution of STS’**

Work in STS has historically stressed the importance of boundary work and boundary crossings between domains like ‘science’ and ‘politics.’ Against this background, recent work in economic sociology can be said to return to more familiar sociological differentiations, most notably that between ‘the market’ (or economy) and its others (the state, society). But how necessary and plausible is it – empirically and analytically - to assume a boundary separating the market from politics (and social life)?

This discussion paper addresses this question by considering two distinct but related modes of articulation – the ‘issue’ and the ‘brand’ – the first primarily associated with politics and the second with the market. ‘Brand’ and ‘issue’ can be distinguished in terms of the concepts, methods and measures deployed in their articulation, but it is equally possible to detect exchanges and fuzziness between them. In view of this, I first want to ask a general question: whether and what do we gain by focusing on such dynamic formations (brand, issue), rather than on domains or institutions (the market, politics)?

I then want to consider different standpoints from which to analyse the relation between ‘issue’ and ‘brand’: a) the standpoint of empirical measures used across brand and issue formations, such as the “willingness to pay”; b) the standpoint of the setting, such as a digital platform or a designated environment, say a powerplant; c) the standpoint of the object itself, as when brands become issues or the other way around. In considering these standpoints, I will focus on the empirical case of social media platforms. Finally, I would like to ask the following. While ‘brand’ and ‘issue’ are clearly marked by mutability, there are nevertheless moments where it becomes

important to insist on their mutual irreducibility. What are these moments, and how can STS help us to appreciate them?

- *Céline Cholez, Pascale Trompette* (Université de Grenoble)  
**‘Trading Routes of Goods: An Ethnography of Market Infrastructure in Exchange Networks in Africa’**

Questioning the mediation of technical and material infrastructure in the enactment of practice is an area of research whose cross-fertilization of STS studies and the sociology of markets has been particularly fruitful. With the development of the science of markets, scholars have endeavoured to describe the growing complexity of knowledge, instruments, sites, and technologies involved in the design of markets, thereby highlighting the vast enterprise of formatting and framing the ‘process of ‘economization’ (Caliskan & Callon, 2010). Nevertheless, even if situated and distributed in sociotechnical agencement, most attention has shifted to the process of classifying and qualifying goods according to the economic as a matter preference orderings, instead of the creative agencing of circulation and flows.

This paper thus aims to address the challenge by suggesting that analysing the ‘trading routes of goods opens the way to the exploration of market infrastructure, as a contribution to STS studies. In line with Kopytoff (1986), Apparadurai (1986), Thomas (2009) and from there, Callon’s model of marketization (1998), the methodological line of the study remains true to the approach of developing a biography of goods according to their circulation and value regime changes. When mapping and analysing the trajectory of objects, people, and information, research focuses on coordination, exchange fluidity, and the articulation or interlocking of widely dispersed, disjoint spaces. The approach thereby investigates the means of ‘positioning’ and ‘juxtapositioning’ entities (Thrift, 2004), scaling devices (Slater, 2013), and relational arrangements that make objects and their flows governable.

This study traces the complex, interconnected chains of large (transnational) and small-scale (local) economic circuits that sustain the supply of energy products in African countries. It proposes an ethnography of the technical and relational infrastructure supporting the supply of these goods, connecting long- and short-distance trading routes, and integrating various material environments, technical devices, and trading links. These assemblages of heterogeneous agencies cross boundaries between traditional categories of in- and off-grid devices, formal and informal economies, and transnational and localized trading networks, the study of which prompts discussion in the context of globalization and market expansion.

- *Sveta Milyaeva* (Goldsmiths)  
**‘Assembling a Market Intervention: The Problem of Data Protection and Growth’**

Recent efforts to revise European Data Protection provision have renewed the position of data and privacy as matters of prominent public concern. The need to offer citizen protection and enhance business has become particularly prominent with the rise of what is termed ‘the data-driven economy’ as a driver of economic growth. Within this ‘economy’, the online personal data market, with vast amounts of personal data collection and processing, has been central for growth. In particular, the

online advertising industry has pushed along this growth with ever more varied ways of scraping, mining, and utilizing data. Those responsible for developing the new General Data Protection Regulation thus have to engage with new concepts of what counts as data, new practices of data ownership, movement and use, and work through what privacy might mean in this emerging, business-led, data landscape.

Our paper is thus focused on the development and negotiation of the General Data Protection Regulation viewing it as a market intervention; an attempt to regulate, without unnecessarily restricting, the emerging data driven economy. In so doing we explore the role of action in markets by drawing on (1) an understanding of the actor as ‘any thing that does modify a state of affairs by making a difference’ (Latour 2005: 71, emphasis in original), (2) regarding economic action as located in ‘hybrid collective[s] comprising human beings as well as material and technical devices, texts, etc.’ (Callon 2005:4). In this approach an economic actor becomes an agencement – a specific ‘arrangement (in the broadest sense) of people, technical systems, and so on that constitutes it’ (MacKenzie and Hardie 2007: 59). In our analysis, the Data Protection Regulation could thus be treated as an agencement; a constituency of people, things, processes, relations, resources, and so on, that brings about an economic affect and establishes some conditions of possibility for economic action.

- *Daniel Neyland* (Goldsmiths)  
**‘An international experiment in mundane economic exchanges: Coming up with prices in different places’**

This paper begins with the contention that, although we each regularly participate in purchasing goods, our everyday practices of valuing often remain silent and hidden from view. We see a price attached to an object or a service and decide whether or not to buy something without having to clearly articulate our decision making practices. As a result, various attempts to make sense of value from sociologists, economists and psychologists tend to rely on second order accounts, simulations or assumptions regarding the nature of valuing.

This paper explores a different approach. In place of interviewing, simulating or gathering aggregate statistical data on those buying goods, we instead ran a series of breach experiments (drawing inspiration from Garfinkel, 1963; 1967) that treated pricing as a central feature of valuing. Our experiments included a Danish flea market, a UK car boot sale and Beijing street traders. Our experiments sought to bring to the surface taken for granted features of these settings, by taking advantage of their noted flexibility in order to encourage participants to account for the prices they assigned to goods.

The overall result as we will report was a complex and unfolding grammar of pricing that shifted between locations, but also between individual buyers and sellers. A central finding of the experiments was that price maintained a radically contingent character in different locations around the world. An unexpected outcome was the importance of methodological experimentation; that preceding the study we suffered from a failure of methodological nerve in conceiving of how to study price.

15.15 – 15.30 Coffee

15.30 – 17.30 **Exchange 1: Sheila Jasanoff & Fabian Muniesa**

- *Sheila Jasanoff* (Harvard University)  
**‘Between Nature and Markets: The Invisible Hand of Law’**

STS scholarship has done much to illuminate the role of commensuration and valuation in creating markets in natural objects such as water, greenhouse gases, and ecosystems. Much of this work focuses on the secular processes of classification and measurement through which objects not normally exchanged in commerce are turned into commodities that can be valued, compared, bought, and sold. This paper adopts a somewhat different angle by looking at the background role of law in forming the subjects and objects that act, and are acted upon, in such markets. Using two examples—one from environmental and one from family law—the paper argues that there is a process of de-naturalization, or possibly de-sacralization, that precedes the formation of new natural markets. The law plays a foundational role in determining which ontologies remain within nature and which ones can be made available for exchange, thereby creating the conditions of possibility for marketizing nature. These decisions, as the paper also shows, are profoundly normative, as the ethics of market transactions diverge from the ethics of preserving the natural order.

The first example concerns gaseous carbon in the atmosphere. In US law, a market in air pollution was initially created to permit industrial development in areas that did not meet the minimum standards established by the 1970 Clean Air Act. Subsequently, those principles were extended to construct a global market in greenhouse gases. Ethical objections accompanied the creation of these markets from the start, ranging from early objections that “offsets” offer a “license to pollute” to Pope Francis’ recent encyclical rejecting carbon trading as a legitimate tool for mitigating climate change. But legal debates around greenhouse gas regulation also raise more subtle normative, indeed constitutional, questions about the right relations between expert consensus and national sovereignty that this paper will explore.

The second example concerns pregnancy and childbirth. Since the birth of the first “test-tube baby” in 1978, new markets have sprung up around assisted reproduction. Commercial activities in this area include surrogacy, egg and sperm donation, and embryo freezing. Controversies centering on parental rights and the status of IVF embryos, cutting across contract, property, and family law, again illustrate the foundational boundary work that law performs in determining what should and should not be marketed. Court rulings on assisted reproduction have divided up this most basic of human biological functions into tranches of nature and commerce, with significant implications for our understanding of the morality of human procreation and the rights and obligations of parents and children.

- *Fabian Muniesa* (CSI, Paris)  
**‘Finance as Science, or Rather the Other Way Around’**

It has become obvious in recent years that the set of disparate approaches that fall under the rubric of Science and Technology Studies have a great deal to say about economic processes, market formations, financial techniques and such kinds of distinctively economic realities. This has been particularly the case for the scholarly

movement roughly referred to as Social Studies of Finance, through which the idea of focusing on, say, the laboratory-like features of trading rooms has been aptly popularized. In focusing on issues of financial science (e.g. through attention to performative processes) or on financial technology (e.g. with an emphasis on market devices) this movement has undeniably contributed to a more realistic appraisal of finance. It could be claimed, however, that the exact opposite would have been in order. The promising direction for the Social Studies of Finance would then not consist in looking at finance as science and technology but, to put it bluntly, to look at science and technology as finance – that is, to look at the financial facet, if not the financial determination, of science and technology. In order to stretch out this claim, a focus on one particular notion that is central to the processes of finance – namely, capital – but that is virtually absent, or almost, from the repertoire of the Social Studies of Finance can be of use. True, research on scientific and technological capitalism already counts on notable and valuable contributions. But the bulk of the Social Studies of Finance that has followed a Science and Technology Studies inspiration seems to have been controlled by problematics of information (e.g. data, knowledge, cognition, decision), considering finance through the angle of markets (e.g. trading, prices, electronics), rather than through the properly distinctive angle of financing (e.g. the establishment of financial valuation, the provision of money and the constitution of capital). So then, how does a Science and Technology Studies approach to capital look like? What can be said from that perspective on processes of capitalization through which the fate of scientific endeavours and technological projects is gauged in accordance to their capacity to become assets?

17.30 – 18.30 Drink Reception

### **Friday 18<sup>th</sup> September**

8.30 – 9.00 Coffee

9.00 – 11.00 **Session 2** (Chair – *Evelyn Ruppert*, Goldsmiths)

- *Christian Frankel, José Ossandón, Trine Pallesen* (Copenhagen Business School)  
**‘Studying the failure and repair of markets for collective concerns’**

In this paper we pay attention to markets created not only to ensure economic exchange, but to deal also with specific collective concerns – i.e. global warming, pollution, security of supply of energy, quality of education, poverty and health care. We are not interested in merely confirming the neoliberal trend of markets challenging bureaucracy as the favourite mechanism chosen by policy makers around the world, but to study what happens after these “markets for collective concerns” do not work as expected. We claim that the failure and repair of markets for collective concerns should be considered as a new empirical object for social studies of science on its own.

The article is composed of three parts. In part I, by inspecting the key notions of “collective concerns”, “markets” and “market failure”, we conceptually delimit our problem. In part II we review STS inspired empirical work that is starting to pay

attention to the failures and repair of markets for collective concerns. We include some of our empirical work, but also of some colleagues around the world recently gathered in an international workshop held in Copenhagen. Finally, in part III, we discuss the ways in which the study of the failure and repair of markets for collective concerns relates to previous STS-inspired market research developed mostly in the sub-field known as Social Studies of Finance. We argue that concepts fruitfully developed in SSF cannot be simply transposed, but they need to be transformed. We discuss two main steps: (i) from studying techno-scientific descriptions produced by financial economists inscribed in 'market devices' to studying markets as 'policy devices' repaired with the help of economists turned market designers; and (ii) from the study of sites of knowledge production involved in valuing goods and firms to study the production of knowledge used to evaluate and repair markets for public concerns.

- *Lilliana Doganova, Brice Laurent, Julien Merlin (CSI, Paris)*  
**‘Resisting capitalisation: nickel mining, state control and multinational investment in New Caledonia’**

New Caledonia is a French territory in a transition status, on a path to increased autonomy, and possibly independence. Nickel mining is the main economic resource of the territory and a major stake in local politics. Historically controlled by the French company Société Le Nickel (SLN) and concentrated in the South of the territory, mining has become in the last few decades the key vehicle for the development of the North Province, controlled by a pro-independence majority and acting through an investment company called Société Minière du Sud Pacifique (SMSP). The project to build “the factory of the North” has progressively taken shape through a series of exchanges: the exchange of massifs containing nickel deposits between SLN and SMSP, and the exchange of resources and capital between the local government and a multinational mining corporation in charge of building the industrial installations and exploiting the nickel deposit.

A crucial issue in organising the exchange between the North Province and the multinational corporation was to maintain the government’s control over the joint venture through the acquisition of 51% of its shares. This “ownership” model was put forward in contrast to the dominant “royalties” model, seen as epitomizing the situation of many “rent economies” in which the state sacrifices the property of its resources in exchange of a flow of future payments. It has also been harshly criticized, for engaging the government in a debt spiral and creating the illusion of control.

This contribution proposes to analyse these two models (capital ownership and royalties) as peculiar forms of building state sovereignty, intervening in the economy, and valuing natural resources. Using empirical materials based on fieldwork conducted in Caledonian private companies and public administrations, and a review of the academic and practitioner literature on licensing in the mining sector, we trace the history of the royalties model and the controversies surrounding the implementation of the ownership model in New Caledonia. We show how they recompose what it means for the state to "own" and for a resource to be "valuable". This analysis allows us to discuss the ways in which STS can contribute to a joint exploration of economic exchanges and state-making operations.

- *Véra Ehrenstein* (Goldsmiths)  
**‘Creating consistency in global vaccine markets: Contracts, incentives, and public aid’**

This paper is about the GAVI Alliance and its Advance Market Commitment (AMC) for pneumococcal vaccines. GAVI is a multilateral financing vehicle that uses development assistance from a dozen governments and private funds, particularly from the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation, to purchase vaccines for developing countries. The AMC is an attempt initiated in the mid 2000s by the Alliance to “shape” global vaccine markets, which means to intervene on the conception, production, pricing, or delivery of a certain vaccine (here against the bacteria pneumococcus), so that a certain health problem (here pneumonia and meningitis) affecting low-income regions is addressed despite its apparent economic unattractiveness. Legal tools and practices are essential in that respect. Indeed, the AMC is a legally binding forward commitment from a group of donors – including the UK – to purchase, on behalf of developing countries, substantial volumes of vaccine doses from pharmaceutical firms according to predetermined conditions that include a long-term price and subsidy structure.

The paper takes the AMC as an entry point for exploring the role of law in market relationships. When the question of legal tools and practices is raised in relation to the pharmaceutical industry, the focus is primarily on R&D and intellectual property rights. We look at a different moment in the market, the production and pricing of vaccines, and a different type of legal instrument, contracts that support these operations. Originating within academic economics, the AMC was implemented to incentivize companies to invest in large scale manufacturing of pneumococcal vaccines. The rationale is as follows: if a firm commercializes the vaccine and if developing country governments demand it from the GAVI Alliance, purchase contracts are established according to terms set (far) in advance, in particular the vaccine price associated to a subsidy paid by the legally bound donors. But to act as an incentive, the promise of a subsidy that compensates for an increase in production capacity had to be associated with a complex legal construct. The paper will examine how the different elements of such contractual nexus had been designed and articulated with each other in order to produce the envisioned incentivizing effect. It argues that these interconnected legal agreements created more consistency in market relationships. The AMC made commitments reciprocal by entangling the prospects of public (donor and beneficiary governments, the buyers) and private (the firms, the sellers) entities. It assigned promises to these actors, who became responsible for realizing them, and made, for a certain (relatively long) time, their courses of action hold together and move in the same direction: toward delivering pneumococcal vaccines to developing countries’ population according to its needs.

- *Joe Deville* (Lancaster)  
**‘Nudging nudge. Or, what might behavioural economists and economists learn from STS?’**

As an analytical and academic endeavour, behavioural economics has changed the way in which many economists come to understand the drivers of economic action. It has also created a range of ‘behavioural economists’ – a mixed group of academics and practitioners, drawn to the promise of behavioural economics as an interventionist science. What might be the stakes of a dialogue between behavioural economics and an STS-informed economic sociology? Despite the manifest differences between the two in terms of theory and method, the political assumptions being made and contested, their disciplinary genealogies, and their hold over the imagination of those working within public policy, there are nonetheless areas of apparent crossover. Notably, both sets of approaches have observed that a route towards understanding, and potentially modifying, the behaviour of people in markets lies in the subtle adjustment of the socio-material settings through which they pass. Of course, the ease with which some of the insights of behavioural economics has been adopted by behavioural economists working within government (here, in the UK, most famously by the ‘nudge unit’) is in part due to the former’s claim to be able to (actively) make an active difference: to be able to transform social and economic terrains in order to achieve a desired policy outcome. STS, by contrast, has been more or less content to (passively) analyse the ways in which differences are made by others – to economic life, certainly, but of course also to a range of other modes of existence – without necessarily invoking normative claims. In examining these two approaches, this paper argues that, on the one hand, it is important to understand the ways in which behavioural economics draws on affordances provided by a range of practices that existed well before its popularisation. On the other, it also argues STS could contribute more actively to understanding the minutiae of how people behave in market situations. However, in order to do so it needs to achieve something that neither it nor behavioural economics has yet to adequately do: to account for the interaction between material things and the materiality of embodied action and cognition. In making this argument, the paper draws on examples from a variety of fields, ranging from the world of debt collection, to gambling, the data-driven management of online consumer behavior.

11.00 – 11.15 Coffee

11.15 – 13.15 **Exchange 2: Franck Cochoy & Vincent Lépinay**

- *Franck Cochoy* (Université de Toulouse II)  
**‘Aluminium skis as skis of competition, or how to slit the fresh snow of economic sociology by riding old style STS boards’**

In the past twenty years, a large number of scholars who began their career as key contributors in Science and Technology Studies ended up in becoming economic sociologists. This conversion started in the late 1990s and flourished with a series of outstanding contributions, particularly in the field of the sociology of finance. Of course, the legacy of STS serves as the main ground for the development of these new topics. But given their new attention for the performative, ethical and political dimensions of contemporary markets, these approaches do not focus as closely as before on the inner workings of technologies. In this presentation, I want to show that it may also be possible to contribute to economic sociology by moving in the opposite direction, by turning back to the hardcore STS tradition, and I suggest doing so by focusing on the case of aluminium skis. Aluminium skis, despite their apparent exotic

and insignificant character, belong both to the economic sphere (as a marketed good) and to the sport sphere (as a racing device), and thus unveils some interesting connection between sport and economic competition... or cooptation.

Indeed, my intent is to show that the market for aluminium skis rests on cooptation rather than competition processes. Cooptation appears as an interesting concept for economic sociology: instead of opposing the economic to the social, it shows that one cannot compete without “socializing” with one’s competitors at the same time (Brandenburger and Nalebuff, 1996; Bruno, 2012). Aluminium skis are one of the best cases to investigate the dynamics of cooptation. Firstly, I will show that cooptation works at the very heart of ski construction: as we will see, the promoters of aluminium skis failed when trying to compete against wood skis by promoting pure aluminium skis, but succeeded once they understood they had better to associate their material with wood, for instance by starting using it as a bottom for wooden ski. Secondly, I will show that cooptation animates the sport and economic competition, through the development of many alliances between the brands, champions and experts who are supposed to just compete. Thirdly, through a content and network analysis of ski patents, I will explore the several linkages between economic and technical configurations that hide behind the apparent competition between varied technical solutions.

- *Vincent Lépinay* (Sciences Po Paris)  
**‘Our Economy’**

During 2 years (2013-2014), a group of scholars from STS or friends to STS have discussed a proposal to overhaul the ways we have been thinking about the economy. This proposal was laid out in Bruno Latour’s latest book (*An Inquiry Into Modes of Existence*). We are presenting here the result of this two-year collective experiment, formulated as a “diplomatic manifesto”.

13.15 – Lunch