Elena Bogdanova,
Stockholm University

A Market for Memories: The Cognitive Organization of the Antiques Trade

> An antique is a primarily handcrafted object of rarity and beauty that, by means of its associated provenance and its agedness as recognized by means of its style and material endurance, has the capacity to generate and preserve for us the image of a world now past (Rosenstein 2009: 14).

> Every antique dealer – to some degree and at some point – and maybe for the reason of improving interaction with the client, invents a legend. There is no flat out cheating in it. But knowing about the families, their interests, interiors they lived in … and then an object appears, and it has no history. There can only be a guess that this object could have belonged to the collection of NN … and it is important to people, because it is a kind of belonging. You need a story, because it brings mystery, it is like a process opposite to providing technological expertise. (Interview with an antique dealer and an art expert, Moscow 2008, author's own translation)

In this paper I discuss the cognitive organization of the market for antiques. I argue that this market is socially constructed by stories – true or imagined – used by market actors in the process of antiques valuation. This is rooted in the intrinsic ability of stories to employ personal and collective memories about real or fictional events or cultural phenomena that add to the materiality of antiques. Stories also help to align contradictory phenomena of the real world that are difficult to be sorted or classified. As an empirical reference I use the market for antiques in Russia, which has a strong appeal to the problems of cultural heritage, collective memory, as well as organization of markets in transformative contexts. In this version of the paper I do not use empirical examples extensively, though many assumptions about the market functioning in Russia are based on the interviews collected in Saint Petersburg and Moscow in 2008-2009. I chose to pay more attention to the theoretical understanding of storytelling as a market mechanism. The question I ask is – What social and cognitive phenomena that stand behind storytelling make it an important mechanism of antiques market coordination?

In the early European history many antiques were already highly valued at the time of their production. They could serve as sacral (icons), functional (furniture), or status (art) objects. In many cases they simultaneously served as all of the above. Originally belonging to representatives of the leisure class as items of luxury, these objects were indicative of high social positions. Due to such associations they not only became status objects, but also the objects with the status. Being produced and handled in certain historical arrangements, they became the witnesses to important historical events, or of a specific historical atmosphere. Since a long time antiques are desired objects for the purposes of interior decoration and for collecting: antiquarianism and collecting were an important step in raising the value of the artifacts and in creating demand for such objects.

Processes, of a similar nature to those observed in Europe, occurred in Russia and influenced the formation of the antiques market. Yet, at the same time, Russia is a specific historical case with significant differences when compared to other European countries. In the Russian case these processes took place over a relatively short period of time in the form of direct institutional borrowing. Furthermore, several periods of significant social and political transformations influenced supply and demand as well as the valuation of antiques, and aligned valuation with dominant state ideology. The evolution of the Russian market for antiques can be described as a process of increasing discontinuity in personal and national histories, ideologies and social values. As a result, extreme ambiguity in the valuation of antiques is characteristic of the market up to the present day.

Following Appadurai (1986), I consider antiques to be rhetorical and social goods, objects with “life history” and “biographies” (Kopytoff 1986). This could give us a simple answer to the question posed above – stories are important in the market, because they tell us about biographies of the objects. However, despite having rhetorical nature, antiques are material objects, and therefore their uncertain quality is in question. Despite existing technological and art historical expertise, the authenticity of the majority of objects has never been proved, and even if tested, they can always turn out to be misattributions, fraud, or just mistakes in the future. Just an exciting biography, therefore,

cannot give an answer to the question of objects quality, leaving a customer in a state of uncertainty. There should be a deeper connection with the cognitive organization of buyers that allow stories to have a persuasive power.

The plurality of different types of value that antiques can associated with (sacral, functional, status, historical, cultural etc.) create often conflicting judgments about the value of a particular piece. Following Boltanski and Thèvenot, I take their notion of orders of worth (Boltanski/Thèvenot 2006) to start a discussion about the cognitive dimension of the process of valuation. These orders of worth emerged in the antiques market as a result of a historical development of interest in the past in Western European countries and in Russia. The development of the market followed the formulation of complex systems of classification in the fields of art history and cabinetmaking that determined the appreciation of objects. As a consequence, art expertise became institutionalized. Experts became intermediaries whose main assets were knowledge and skills of recognition.

This interest grew (as in the Renaissance) in the periods of intensified trade, especially among the newly enriched groups of the population. By contrast, in Revolutionary Russia this process was reversed. At odds with its recent cultural past, Soviet society officially rejected all symbols of the bourgeoisie and upper classes on ideological grounds. Such processes of disavowing the past are explained by Terdiman (1993) as a “memory crisis” where “people experienced the insecurity of their culture's involvement with its past, the perturbation of the link to their own inheritance” (Terdiman 1993: 3). In fact, antiques were not only witnesses, but also victims of social transformations, which in a particular case of Russia created a significant asymmetry of information concerning supply, demand, quality, and finally, value of antiques. Some of the objects were kept by the owners, but under the fear of being depicted as an ideological enemy: “few objects were saved by her family in order to protect her from knowledge of their past, which would have thwarted her rise in the Komsomol” (Buchli 1999: 174).

1. Antiques as a Representation of Social Order

As I discussed above, antiques serve as representations of historical events or ideologies. In other words, they tell us about ideas that dominated certain epochs. They are not only

physical objects but also a form of narrative, and thus are a part of our cognitive organization. This also means that market transactions that presuppose dealing with antiques, buying and appraising them are not only socially, but also cognitively embedded.

First references in regard to the link between cognition and social reality are traditionally made to Durkheim and Mauss (1973). They argue that logical categories are social categories and thus cognitive structure is in essence social:

> The first logical categories were social categories; the first classes of things were classes of men, into which these things were integrated. It was because men were grouped and thought of themselves in terms of groups, that in their ideas they grouped other things, and in the beginning the two modes of grouping were merged to the point of being indistinct.… Things were though to be integral part of the society, and it was their place in the society which determined their place in nature. (Durkheim/Mauss 1973: 33)

Following the ideas of Durkheim and Mauss, cultural and social anthropologists studied how structures of social relations in primitive societies are reflected in the structure of language. For them, language serves as a code that transforms signs into symbols and thus gives grounds for cognition. In *Structural Anthropology*, Lèvi-Strauss (1963) underlines the similarities between kinship structure and the structure of language, and discussed the concept of myth and its importance for the understanding of social reality.

Memory and remembering become important concepts for the social scientists, who scrutinized the questions of temporality and historical development of societies. Halbwachs, one of the intellectual followers of Durkheim, published in 1925 his work titled *Social Frameworks of Memory*. His main argument is that people acquire their memories in society, and thus he develops the concept of "collective memory" as opposed to individual memory (Halbwachs 1992 [1925]):

> As soon as each person and each historical fact has permeated this memory, it is transposed into a teaching, a notion, or a symbol and takes on a meaning. It becomes and element of the society's system of ideas.…This explains why traditions and present-day ideas can exist side by side. In reality present-day ideas are also traditions, and both refer at the same time and with the same right to an ancient or recent social life from which they in some way took the point of departure. (Halbwachs 1992: 188)

From this he concludes that "social thought is essentially a memory and that its entire content consists only of collective recollections or remembrances" (Halbwachs 1992: 189). For him, the operations of minds are structured by social arrangements: "He

[Halbwachs – E.B.] argues that it is impossible for individuals to remember in any coherent and persistent fashion outside of their group contexts" (Olick/Robbins 1998). Gedi and Elam indicate that the real meaning of Halbwach's concept for the social sciences is "the idea that conceptualization is basically a social function, hence the power of manipulation that society is able to exercise over individuals' minds or memories" (Gedi/Elam 1996: 38). In his later work, Halbwachs also underlined the influence of physical surroundings, in particular, the interior appearance of the home and its permanence as giving the group an image of its own continuity (Halbwachs 1950).

Some authors were troubled by the concept of "collective memory" because of its disconnection with the thought processes of particular persons. In response, they offered alternative terms (Olick/Robbins 1998): "cultural memory" (Assman 1995; Sturkin 1997), "social memory" (Fentress/Wickham 1992), and "images of the past" (Olick/Levy 1997). Therefore, a field of "social memory studies" was proposed to be "a general rubric of inquiry into the varieties of forms through which we are shaped by the past, conscious and unconscious, public and private, material and communicative, consensual and challenged" (Olick/Robbins 1998: 112).

In post-modernism, memory is further problematized: as already mentioned in the discussion on Halbwachs' ideas, an important function of memory is to provide individuals with an image of continuity of a groups' existence. "Fear of rapid and final disappearance combines with anxiety about the meaning of the present and uncertainty about the future to give even the most humble testimony, the most modest vestige, the potential dignity of the memorable" (Nora 1989: 13). He gives as an example the rise of the archival genealogical research as a massive new phenomenon: in 1982, 43 percent of those who did archival research were working on genealogical history, compared to 38 percent of university researchers (Nora 1989: 15). The central concept of his approach is *lieux de mèmoire* (place and spaces of shared memory), which are created by a play between memory and history: "[e]ven an apparently purely material site, like an archive, becomes a *lieu de mèmoire* only if the imagination invests it with a symbolic aura" (Nora 1989: 19).

Antiques possessed by the rich and noble were integrated in their social worlds, and for a

long time they were thought of as representative of these groups. The knowledge and skills of maintaining these objects were also characteristic of certain classes and their everyday routines (Goffman 1951). Hence, antiques are not only a part of certain historical arrangements, they are a part of social memory; thus they are *contemporary pictures of the world characteristic of certain social groups*. They portray the world of the past for a larger number of individuals. "History has become our replaceable imagination – hence the last stand of faltering fiction in the renaissance of the historical novel, the vogue for personalized documents, the literary revitalization of historical drama, the success of the oral historical tale. […] Memory has been promoted to the center of history […]" (Nora 1989: 24). Huyssen (1995) argues that the "obsession with memory" is one of the signs of crisis in the structure of temporality, which characterized the concept of modernity.

On the one hand the world of antiques is a social fact that has a certain cognitive power on individuals; on the other, they are a part of everyday routines and are exposed to manipulations by different market actors. Therefore, interest in and value of antiques can be explained as belonging to everyday cognition and common sense knowledge, shaping and being shaped by the realities of the social world according to the Marxist tradition. But this interest and value can also be explained as personal preferences and habits that condition social action through routinization and tradition in the Weberian sense.

Bourdieu (1998), while analyzing the power of the state, argues that acts of obedience and submission are cognitive acts "which as such involve cognitive structures, forms and categories of perception, principles of vision and division. Social agents construct the social world through cognitive structures that may be applied to all things of the world and in particular to social structures" (Bourdieu 1998: 53). These are the cognitive structures enforced by French kings as well as by Soviet ideology; in the latter case they considered antiques as hostile objects inappropriate, e.g. for workers. This association led to the rejection of such objects.

In the socialist system of preferences the value of these objects was reduced to historical importance when displayed in museums. Public perception was structured in such a way that there was no space for these objects, neither symbolic nor physical: there were just a

few sectors of that world where antiques were valued, namely in museums. Although all Soviet people had an opportunity to view the objects (in museum exhibits) they were excluded from everyday practices (Certeau 1984) connected with the objects: restoring, attributing, and polishing. Habitus (Bourdieu 1984), however, is not easy to change, nor are the corresponding practices. In the Soviet Union this was possible because of the physical loss of objects and representatives of the society who had internalized the value of antiques in their picture of the world. People as well as objects were either destroyed; they emigrated; or were even sent abroad by the new government.[1] Therefore, in the beginning of the 1990s new groups of consumers could not routinely use the necessary skills of appreciation, as it took people some time to acquire them.

In his daily life, man, according to Schütz (1970), anticipates things with the help of a scheme for interpreting his past and present experiences. This scheme is based on the "stock of knowledge" available at any given moment. "This stock of knowledge has its particular history. It has been constituted in and by previous experiencing activities of our consciousness, the outcome of which has now become our habitual possession" (Schütz 1970: 74). Language is essential for the understanding of the reality of everyday life (Berger/Luckmann 1967). Linguistic signification, as the authors argue, allows for common objectivations of everyday life. Besides, language has the capacity to transcend the "here and now" in spatial, temporal and social dimensions bridging different zones in the reality of everyday life:

> Through language I can transcend the gap between my manipulatory zone and that of the other; I can synchronize my biographical time sequence with this; and I can converse with him about individuals and collectivities with whom we are not at present face-to-face interaction. As a result of these transcendences language is capable of "making present" a variety of objects that are spatially, temporally and socially absent from "here and now." (Berger/Luckmann 1967: 39)

Apart from a narrow circle of antiques connoisseurs, intelligentsia, and party nomenklatura the majority of potential customers in Russia were only acquainted with antiques through literature and the arts: these objects were mentioned in books, in paintings, and exhibited in museums. Therefore, everything that resembled the images

[1] The Russian emigration that spread around the world after the Revolution of 1917 consisted, to a large extent, of those who escaped from the country at the beginning of the revolution. But an interesting example of an ideological rejection was the so-called *Philosophers' ships* that in 1922 carried more than 160 expelled Russian intellectuals to Germany.

from these sources was considered to be valuable:

> Any member born or reared within the group accepts the ready-made standardized scheme of the cultural pattern handed down to him by ancestors, teachers, and authorities as an unquestioned guide in all the situations, which normally occur within the social world.…It is a knowledge of trustworthy recipes for interpreting the social world and for handling things and men in order to obtain the best results in every situation with a minimum of effort by avoiding considerable consequences. (Schütz 1970: 80)

As far as these schemas, which originated in previous situations, withstood the test, they become a part of an actual situation. For many new consumers experiment with this amid their social surroundings: if friends and neighbors approve of this attitude towards antiques, they keep the schema. However, with time a new testing situation arose – consumers started to compare their preferences with the "European". The world could not be taken for granted anymore, something had changed, and buying *Baroque* was not treated in the same way as before. Theoretical knowledge, based on judgments from books and museum displays, was gradually substituted with the practical knowledge and skills of handling the objects. "In order to master a situation we have to possess the know-how – the technique and the skill – and also the precise understanding of why, when, and where to use them" (Schütz 1970: 111).

Taking a step further, Zerubavel (1999) supposes that the whole cognitive organization is operated as a social system. He introduces mental values, norms, different forms of socio-mental control and even sanctions. Cognitive cultures and subcultures denote our membership in thought communities: churches, professions, political movements, generations and nations. Thus he presupposes the isomorphism between social and cognitive structures, which makes the proposition of high predictability of cognitive outcomes stronger. Even the way we mentally process what we perceive, according to Zerubavel (1999) is to a large extent socially mediated:

> Even when I encounter something for the very first time, my mind is hardly a tabula rasa. Indeed, I often have some prior expectations, which accounts for such common experiences as disappointment and surprise. Such expectations are based on the schematic mental structures that exist in my mind prior to the actual act of perception and which strongly affect the way I process my sensory experience. (Zerubavel 1999: 25)

Once we have classified the objects, we try to fit everything that we encounter into these classifications. An important point here is that when actors in the market are the representatives of different thought communities committed to different mental

structures, they operate in different systems of classifications that emerge from their social experiences. Hence, while art experts were for a long time at least partly trained in museums and galleries, where they acquired knowledge and skills relevant to the developments in art history and theory; consumers and dealers consider the objects in the context of their life experience. Communities give us "optical lenses" through optical socialization, and thus we acquire an "optical style" of perceiving things (Zerubavel 1999: 33). Different mental structures lead to conflicts in the process of valuation.

In my field study I encountered an interesting example given by one of the dealers, who told a story about an antiques fair, where she was selling two sculptures: a bronze one, and one of marble. As she insisted, the marble one was "real" art, which a museum wanted to buy, but it was too expensive; the bronze one was just a sculpture of a nude woman. A customer came and said that he wanted to buy the bronze one; based on his appearance my informant assumed he was from the "new rich" who were often also associated with criminals. She also advised him to buy the marble sculpture, because it was more valuable. However, the customer rejected her proposition, claiming the sculpture reminded him of a cemetery. One can see a basic mismatch in the classificatory principles of the two. The expert used an art historical approach, and considered a sculpture of pink marble as an early or late antiquity; the customer approached the question by judging the situations in which he was confronted by bronze nude sculptures and marble ones.[2]

As Berger and Luckmann argue, actions that are repeated once tend to be habitualized (Berger/Luckmann 1967). Habitualization leads to the emergence of institutions that comprise social order. To trace the emergence of institutions one has to pay attention to knowledge on the "pre-theoretical level" as the authors call it, which can provide a key to understanding the social order:

> It is the sum of total "what everybody knows" about a social world, an assemblage of maxims, morals, proverbial nuggets of wisdom, values and beliefs, myths and so forth, the theoretical integration of which requires considerable intellectual fortitude in itself, as the

[2] It should be noted that in the 1990s when violent entrepreneurship was flourishing in Russia, many rich criminals who were killed were buried according to their newly achieved social positions: often with huge marble monuments, gardens, and springs. Therefore, it was not surprising that a customer who looked like a criminal had an associative link to a cemetery culture rather than to Greek or Roman antiquity.

> long line of heroic integrators from Homer to the latest sociological system-builders testifies. (Berger/Luckmann 1967: 65)

This sum of knowledge that circulates among dealers, experts, and clients comprises the pre-theoretical level: the process of institutionalization of the market can be traced from this starting point. Meanings, which constitute myths and other narratives in the market, tell us about rules, norms and values around which market operation is based.

The meanings acquired by individuals are closely related with the rules provided by institutions: these mutually influence each other. In the field of institutional analysis cognitive dimensions appear in the form of shared mental models (Denzau /North 1994) that provide the framework of a common interpretation of reality. Mental models are "the internal representations that individual cognitive systems create to interpret the environment" (Denzau/North 1994: 4). Institutions fulfill the task of structuring and ordering the environment. Denzau and North show that people need shared explanations of the environment, and cultural learning can provide them with the categories and concepts to organize this experience. "The cultural heritage provides a means of reducing the divergence in the mental models that people in a society have and also constitutes a means for the intergenerational transfer of unifying perceptions" (Denzau/North 1994: 15).

According to Fligstein, social action takes place in "arenas, what may be called *fields, domains, sectors*, or *organized social space*" (Fligstein 2001: 15). Collective actors try to produce a system of domination in this space and this, according to the author, requires the production of a local culture that defines the local social relations between actors. Abolafia (1998) explores this by studying the set of decision tools available for market makers. These decision tools are "scripts created by decision makers for coping with the uncertainty and ambiguity in their environment" (Abolafia 1998: 74). After these tools are institutionalized they become available to all participants of a market context, or, using the notion mentioned above, they become shared mental models.

In the context of the early 1990s, actors in the Russian antiques market had controversial mental models. Available cultural heritage enabled them to make judgments about the cultural or historical value of antiques, but they were unable to coordinate, or share other types of valuation. Existing "pre-theoretical" knowledge about market order was not

institutionalized, and what is more, the norms and values that existed informally were not legitimized. The task of a dealer or an expert in such a situation was to align contradictory mental models of value with some understandings that were shared at least by experts who followed the norms of a legitimate institution of expertise. First, some basic rules and norms were "borrowed" from informal institutions and the international market for antiques. Classes of things and events were gradually constructed, and many of them became models of the market shared by the majority of the players. However, the process of institutionalization is still not over. Therefore, actors still "interpret" rules and norms in the process of valuation. This is possible, because social and individual cognition is not exclusively schematic. Apart from having some models of social reality, actors in this market are actively involved in the process of (re)interpretation.

2. Schemata and Interpretation: How an Antique's Value Becomes Imaginative

Recognizing an undervalued asset – an original, rare, not well-known, and valuable object – is one of the main skills of all market actors in the process of authentication of an antique object. Traditionally it is connected with internalized, preexisting categories and classifications that were created by previous generations of art historians, and craftsmen:

> Stimuli to which one is exposed are, at least partly, semantically analyzed, i.e. linked to preexisting cognitive categories, before they possibly rise to consciousness.…Those stimuli which, during the automatic semantic analysis, are linked to cognitive categories with high pertinence, i.e. cognitive categories which are currently relevant because they are associated with goals actually pursued, a problem in the process of being solved etc., will have the highest chance of being consciously perceived and stored. (Grunert 1994: 94)

Therefore, experts in the antiques market have in mind quite clear patterns of value sequences: the list of categories by which an object is attributed as antique arranged according to the importance of each. But recognition is applicable only to the well-known stimuli. Otherwise, to make sense of what we perceive, we need *interpretation*.

> Interpretation can be viewed as a process of categorization: It is attempted to sort objects or events perceived in the environment into the cognitive categories which organize previous experience. The less familiar the object or event, the more ambiguity is there with respect to the categorization. (Grunert 1994: 96)

This experience is later *integrated* into memory structures, where it is *stored* in schemata, or scripts of frames, which represent a model of cognitive processing. They represent "declarative knowledge" about facts, events, and objects, as well as "procedural

knowledge" – the storage of perceptual skills. But the problem with the antiques market is that the objects are singular, and thus we can say that experiences with these objects are also singular. Therefore, it is almost impossible to create a schema that will be efficient in all situations, and as a consequence, the process of interpretation becomes as important as the recognition of patterns.

Social science researches tend to emphasize the description of those perceptions, beliefs and thoughts, which are conventional in a society and have a standardized, repetitive character. DiMaggio (1997) refers to schemata in his work on cognition and culture while distinguishing between automatic and deliberative cognition.

> This routine [automatic], everyday cognition relies heavily and uncritically upon culturally available schemata – knowledge structures that represent objects or events and provide default assumptions about their characteristics, relationships, and entailments under conditions of incomplete information. (DiMaggio 1997: 269)

In the process of automatic cognition schemas appear as representations, they entail images of objects and the relations among them. Therefore a schematic method of attributing antiques is the basis for the process of authentication, and it helps to facilitate the process in instances of unequally distributed knowledge. But the Russian market for antiques is a good example of what can happen when actors rely on schemata "heavily and uncritically." Because experts have a great deal of power over dealers and buyers, they enforce their schemata of valuation, educate buyers, and try to persuade them to use better schemes of perception.

When schema failure occurs, individuals are using deliberative cognition that also includes attention and motivation (DiMaggio 1997). These are situations in which people are able to override programmed modes of cognition. The market for antiques is an example of alteration between automatic and deliberate cognition: experts can 'see' automatically authentic or fake objects until they make a mistake (for example, they discover that a certain pattern of wood carving does not necessarily attribute a piece to a certain epoch). They then start deliberately reinterpreting other characteristics that can help to authenticate a piece:

> [S]chemata can also be activated through conversation, media use, or observation of the physical environment. Understanding the interaction between two distributions – of the schemata that constitute people's cultural toolkits, and of external cultural primers that act

> as frames to evoke (and, in evoking, exerting selection pressures upon) these schemata – is a central challenge for sociologists of culture. (DiMaggio 1997: 273)

Schemata in this situation are connected with practical action: a good expert is supposed to have experience not only in learning about antiques but also in repairing them. But when schemata are different (for instance, those of dealers and buyers), actors adjust them to make transactions possible. Through justifications and conventions they come to a judgment of value that is legitimate for all participants in the exchange.

3. Justifications and Conventions

Boltanski and Thèvenot (2006) offer an extensive analysis of a cognitive tool that helps to solve the general problem of coordination in human behavior. They introduce the notion of modes of justification, institutionally linked discourses embodying specific orientations toward actions and evaluation. To justify their positions successfully, agents need to ground their stances on a legitimate definition of worth (Boltanski/Thèvenot 1999: 364). Legitimation is achieved when they appeal to the universal orders of worth that emerged in the course of the historical development of the societies.

Orders of worth in the market for antiques arose as a result of socio-economic and political developments and through the "participation" of the objects in the historical process. Their indicators can be identified in the publications on art history about periods, styles, and schools of decorative art. They can also be found in the catalogues of the famous auction houses and provenance research reports of big museums, where rarity, and cultural and historical importance are considered. This knowledge is distributed across networks of experts, and its purpose is to create universal models of valuation of art objects. In his recent papers, Thèvenot (2007) explores the plurality of cognitive formats that characterize actor's access to reality, and "the way she grasps it so as to coordinate her behavior within a certain apprehension frame" (Thèvenot 2007: 415). These formats are thus the integral part of a person's relation to their environment, in engagements between them, which are not equally ready to be "commonized":

> The *regime of familiar engagement* maintains a personalized, localized good: feeling at ease. [...] This type of engagement is linked to local, personal clues in the immediate surroundings. [...] Familiar attachments to material surroundings are inseparable from the person at her most deeply personal; they affect whether that person is well- or ill-disposed and ensure (or fail to ensure) that he or she has "a good seat" in the saddle, as it were.

(Thèvenot 2007: 416)

He argues that the relevant reality is grasped according to a cognitive format, which is grounded on the conventional qualifications of persons and things. As suggested, information differs from one level of worth to another by qualification: market value, statistical measuring of performance, fame, etc. The qualification of objects as antiques is one of the core activities in the market under investigation, and was analyzed as a part of the valuation process.

In standard markets, valuation is often viewed as calculation, a part of rational decision-making. However, the value of antiques as singular goods cannot be calculated according to the postulates of rational choice. One step was taken towards uniting the concepts of calculation and judgment: Callon et al. (2002) propose qualifying and positioning socio-technical devices that help to distribute cognitive competence. According to the authors, agents define characteristics of a product: "a good can be defined by a combination of characteristics that establish its singularity" (Callon et al. 2002: 198). Therefore the central activity of agents is the qualification of products. For Callon (2002) a process of qualification is more important than its result – a certain value based on the characteristics of an object. There are "market professionals" who are involved in coproduction of singular and objectified properties, and who, with the help of classification, clustering, and sorting make products comparable and different (Callon/Munieza 2005). Market transactions are thus based on the processes of qualifications and requalifications of things, and include an open list of qualities that can be taken into consideration. Conversely, in the framework developed by Karpik (2010), the main focus of attention is on certain configurations, in which the quality of products is important, rather than on the process of (re)qualification (Callon et al. 2002: 215).

Karpik develops a concept of "calculative judgment devices" that are cognitive supports in the process of valuation; they are "practices that combine [...] teaching, persuading, and seduction" (Karpik 2010: 44). These devices reduce the cognitive deficit that market agents experience under uncertainty of product quality. He distinguishes between five categories of judgment devices: networks (personal, trade, or practitioner), appellations (brands and labels), cicerones (critics and guides), rankings (expert and buyers), and confluences (techniques to channel buyers).

> Judgment devices offer *oriented knowledge*, and implicitly or explicitly they set the conditions the consumer must respect in order for an adjustment between the product and the consumer to be satisfying. They qualify simultaneously both product and client – which means that the third party literally constructs the exchange relationship. (Karpik 2010: 51)

These judgment devices facilitate the process of valuation in the antiques market as well: networks, appellations, and cicerones help to create judgments of value in the form of narratives of value.

The role of personal *networks* is to circulate the information about success of exchange and thus about reputations. The most important implication of a personal network is protection from opportunism. The trade network consists of dealers and their representatives (shop-floor sellers) and buyers. Trust is important for the situation of exchange, and normally actors within the network spontaneously produce trust when confronted with uncertainty. But the Russian context is characterized by a very low degree of trust, and thus personal networks play a more important role in the market. Finally, networks of practitioners that should ensure the circulation of knowledge are also fragmented and endangered by the opportunistic behavior of some of their members. Of course some forums, where experts share their achievements and discuss market problems, exist, but they do no influence the market directly. As a result, the networks that are judgment devices in the market are heterogeneous: experts, dealers, and buyers are protected from opportunism, they produce trust, which is often enforced, and they circulate the knowledge.

Appellations are the second judgment device that works in this market. On the one hand appellations are styles, names of authors, producers, and epochs when objects were made. They structure "the designations that populate the shared imaginary space" (Karpik 2010: 46). *Cicerones* are represented by magazines on antiques, museum exhibitions, guides for antiques collectors, catalogues of auction houses, and Internet services that help to trace prices and the value of objects. There are no critics as such who make judgments of taste in the market, but there is a growing group of designers who use antiques as home decoration. All of these offer evaluations of singularities.

Confluences are quite rare in this market, but exist in the high-end segment. As one of the dealers acknowledged, they intentionally tried to avoid the feeling of a second-hand shop in their gallery, and reproduced the atmosphere of a comfortable apartment. This helps to

place objects in the lifeworld of a customer. Sometimes sellers hide price tags or things that allow buyers to participate in the game of discovery and recognition.

In the Russian market for antiques, where asset specificity is contextualized by lacking institutions and formal rules, these devices are not yet well developed and legitimized. Therefore, in the following section I will argue that stories support appellations and confluences as well as providing networks with the tools of trade.

4. Stories and Discourses: Combining Classifications and Interpretations

In his book *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau portrays the narrativization of practices as a “textual ‘way of operating’ having its own procedures and tactics” (Certeau 1984: 78). With the references to Foucault and Bourdieu, who make stories an important part of their scientific inquiry, he claims that a theory of narration is indissociable from a theory of practices:

> One can then understand the alterations and complicities, the procedural homologies and social imbrications that link the ‘arts of speaking’ to the ‘arts of operating’: the same practices appear now in a verbal field, now in a field of non-linguistic actions; they move from one field to the other, being equally tactical and subtle in both; they keep the ball moving between them – from the workday to evening, from cooking to legends and gossip, from the devices of lived history to those of history retold. (Certeau 1984: 78)

In this section I will discuss procedures and tactics of antique dealers in the form of storytelling. Stories (what is narrated) and discourses (how it is narrated) are the elements of narrative as a general concept (Chatman 1978).

In sociological analysis of collective action, especially in the studies of social movements storytelling is analyzed as one of the devices used by actors, in particular to recruit new members (Polletta 1998). In organizational studies stories are considered as one of managerial tools, and a mean of brand communication (Fog et al 2005; Hanappi-Egger 2011). The central role of stories in these and other studies is that they are vital for identity building, especially in networks and organizations. Harrison White and Charles Tilly (Tilly 2002; White 2008 [1992]) underline that stories reinforce identities and help to implement control over network actors. Godart and White (2010) explain how culture and structure fit together: they introduce semiotic domains, which, being a part of “netdoms”, provide interpretative texture for socio-cultural life. Stories “combine

networks of meanings to be invoked in different contexts" (Godart and White 2010: 572). Recently stories attracted attention in social studies of different markets: Muetzel (2009) analyzes stories as market signals, in particular in emerging markets. In the study of investment behavior, Harrington (2008) shows them as "persuasive narratives of value". Beckert (2011) analyzes the role stories built around imaginative value of goods play in market coordination.

Stories are created and circulated in the market, they are always a generalization that helps to cope with cognitive deficit and personalization that attaches a product to a buyer: thus, they also serve as cognitive supports. The nature of the value of antiques created the possibility for stories to influence the market: to address a lack of information about objects and their relation with the past (which is now imagined, but it was real). Like antiques, stories have their origins in early societies. They often travel with the objects from one owner to another, sometimes being transformed in the process of personalization. With the help of stories, individuals can share the culture of the past, which is to share schemata about social life (MacIntyre 2006). Social life is ambiguous and thus schemata make reasonable action possible. They are "prescriptions for interpretation" as opposed to empirical generalizations (MacIntyre 2006: 4).

In the market for antiques schemata relate to assessing and judging styles and schools as well as to valuation of different historical epochs. Thanks to schemata *Art Deco* style is considered today more appropriate than that of *Baroque*. Another example is epistemological interest in the past that was characteristic of the Renaissance and led to the extensive studies of Roman history and its artifacts. This helped to create the "atmosphere" of a glorious epoch, a perception, which is shared by contemporaries. According to Certeau (1984), "narrated history creates a fictional space. It moves away from the 'real' – or rather it pretends to escape present circumstances" (Certeau 1984: 79). This fictional space, an imitation of the past was created through studying the texts of ancestors and the objects that surrounded them.

Therefore, a narrative is not a description of the state of the world or an event – it is an event or a state of the world that happens in the fictional reality.

> What is communicated is *story*, the formal content element of narrative; and it is

> communicated by *discourse*, the formal expression element. The discourse is said to ‘state’ the story, and these statements are of two kinds – *process* and *stasis* – according to whether someone did something or” something happened, or whether something simply existed in the story. (Chatman 1978: 31)

Stories are considered to consist of two groups of elements: kernel events and satellite events, the “skeleton” and the “flesh” of the story (Chatman 1978: 54). From this structural point of view the concept “skeleton” refers to the main plot of the story, and has to remain unchanged, while satellite events can vary. In the market, the skeletal frame of a story usually consists of “true” elements: dealers tell a story in the form of provenance, and this constitutes the authenticity of an object. The varying element refers to different cultural and historical facts, and can be changed depending on the recipient of a story (see Table 1.).

Table 1. Stories as Cognitive Supports

General Structure of a Story		**Stories in the Market for Antiques**	
"Skeleton" – kernel events	Main plot of the story, normally remains unchanged	"True elements" – provenance	Authentication
"Flesh" – satellite events	Varying elements	"Armchair nostalgia"	Personalization Civilizing

In other words, the core events are conventional and they are based on shared understandings of authenticity and originality (e.g. this is a wonderful piece representing the best years of *Boulle* manufacture produced by a well-know master N), while satellite events are used to personalize an object, to create an attachment to a future owner, and can thus be varied in different situations (e.g. he was the same age as you when he produced this masterpiece). This opportunity to alter a part of a story allows the storyteller and the recipient to move objects and themselves within and between fictional realities as described by Certeau (1984). The imaginative value of goods (Beckert 2010) is created in these realities, which in the case of the antiques market is connected to the past.

> For example, here is a table. It is interesting for it is made in Russia. This mosaic technique is Florentine, and the uniqueness of this table is that, amazingly, Russian craftsmen employed this technique. And we also have a legend, which is neither historically proven nor it is falsified: a famous Russian manufacturer had bet an Italian manufacturer a box of champagne that Russian craftsmen would make this mosaic. And he won the bet.[3]

Appadurai (1996) discusses imagined histories in his critical consideration of the phenomenon of "armchair nostalgia": nostalgia without lived experience or collective cultural memory (Appadurai 1996: 78). He considers repetitions in consumption and

[3] Interview with an antiques dealer and art expert (Moscow, 2008, author's own translation)

fashion as an artifact of this nostalgia.

> Insofar as consumption is increasingly driven by rummaging through imagined histories, repetition is not simply based on functioning of simulacra *in* time, but also on the force of the simulacra *of* time. That is, consumption not only creates time, through its periodocities, but the workings of ersatz nostalgia create the simulacra of periods that constitute the flow of time, conceived as lost, absent, or distant. (Appadurai 1996: 78)

Thus stories not only create fictional reality, within which objects and people move: an object's relocation in reality is often a result of the circulation of these stories in the market. As Akerlof and Shiller (2009) argue, stories are relevant to economics as a whole: "the stories no longer merely *explain* the facts; they *are* the facts" (Akerlof/Shiller 2009: 54). Focusing in particular on stories of a new era, the authors illustrate the role of stories in creating confidence in the market:

> Confidence is not just an emotional state of an individual. It is a view of other people's confidence, and of other people's perceptions of other people's confidence. It is also a view of the world – a popular model of current events, a public understanding of the mechanism of economic change as informed by the news media and by popular discussions. High confidence tends to be associated with inspirational stories, stories about new business initiatives, tales of how others are getting rich. (Akerlof /Shiller 2009: 55)

As an example, they mention the stock market boom of the recent decades that was accompanied around the world by such inspirational stories. That such stories can both motivate and encourage confidence was visible not only in Akerlof and Shiller's example, this can also be identified in the case of the Russian antiques market.

5. Concluding Discussion: Uncertainty, Ambiguity, and Confidence.

Following Akerlof and Shiller (2009) I argue that in the antiques market, which operates under high quality uncertainty, stories also create confidence among clients: inspirational narratives about real (or analogous to real) events of the past are collectively used by dealers, and experts as "judgment devices" (Karpik 2010). By compensating for cognitive deficit they do not reduce quality uncertainty, but they increase buyers' confidence *despite* high quality uncertainty. Creating a link between an object and its new owner through personalization, they shift the focus of attention from concerns about authenticity to amplifying the object's personal or social meaning for an individual.

I started this paper by questioning the process of valuation of goods under high quality uncertainty. Quality uncertainty was treated as a special case in the market of antiques

due to the market's embeddedness in the past. It is influenced by three main factors: first by the existence of multiple orders of worth. Second, memory, in particular social, is fragmented, and thus the necessary data about quality is often lacking. And, third, new discoveries and disappointments are always possible. These characteristics make the market a space of ambiguity, where everything is subjected to conflicting (re)interpretations. On the one hand, ambiguity poses the opportunity for higher returns, and makes disorganized market segments attractive for those who search for bargains. On the other hand, too much ambiguity in the market makes buyers reluctant to reach decisions: for historical reasons and partly because of general cognitive restrictions, they need support in the process of decision-making. This support is provided by networks of experts and dealers who are trying to "educate" their clients, to bring their mental models of the market and valuation of antiques in line with some conventions. These efforts are organized as narratives, which teach buyers the basic rules of appreciation of art and antiques, but leave space for the personalization of the objects. Personalization is possible because of the "inspirational part" of the stories that gives the recipient confidence in the high value of an object.

It could be much harder for the actors in the Russian antiques market to exploit uncertainty and enhance ambiguity, but the period of transformation of the socialist system created the grounds that make this possible. From a sociological point of view, the environment was no longer a habitual one nor institutionalized. As Stark argued in the debate on transition and transformation in the middle of 1990s, East-European economies lacked the diversity of new capitalist institutions for entrepreneurship. Therefore, they logically recombined the institutions from the old socialist economy with the Western ones (Stark 1996). As a result of this recombination nothing was *taken-for-granted* anymore. Similar processes occurred in the market for antiques: old informal rules and institutions were combined with new ideas from the highly profitable international market for antiques. With the help of judgment devices (Karpik 2010), actors in the market achieved some conventional understanding of the basic value of products and of the different orders of worth that need to be taken into account (Boltanski/Thevenot 2006). Stories played an important role in this process.

Stories relay some of the essential principles on which the market is built. Yet, they are

also mutable and can play with the imagination, and thus value, often significantly increasing it. Stories embed the market in social memory, shared mental models, and their creative interpretations. But because stories are subjected to change in the process of market transactions, and they are often changed collectively, they transform our ideas about the market. They are not only tools of the trade. Storytelling is the mechanism of market institutionalization as Berger and Luckmann (1967) fundamentally described it in relation to the whole society. The market for antiques is socially constructed by stories.

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