

# **Multiple versions of markets Multiplicity and performativity in marketing practice**

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## **Abstract**

Under the label of performativity recent research efforts in sociology has attended to the import of theories on economic reality. Hitherto, these efforts have been limited to strong but idiosyncratic market situations such as financial and auction markets. This paper broadens the discussion concerning the import of ideas to more mundane market situations and proposes a framework that deals with the multiple theoretical influences that can be expected in such situations.

**Keywords:** market practice, performativity, multiplicity

## Introduction

Recent work in economic sociology has addressed the issue of how market exchange and markets are shaped (Callon 1998; Callon, Méadel, and Rabeharisoa 2002; Barry and Slater 2002). By reformulating Granovetter's (1985) notion of embeddedness to encompass also the material realm, this emerging literature has sensitised us to the import of technology, not only in the traditional IMP-sense, i.e. on the production of goods and services (see e.g., Håkansson 1987, 1989; Håkansson and Eriksson 1993), but also on the very configuration of market agents (Callon and Law 1997). Secondly, it has directed attention to the issue of performativity, i.e. the import of ideas and theories on the realisation of markets (Callon 1998; MacKenzie 2003).<sup>1</sup> These efforts raise important questions concerning the role of marketing in market-making, and are starting to spread to the marketing discipline (Helgesson, Kjellberg, and Liljenberg 2004; Araujo 2004).

To date, however, the performativity of marketing theories remains largely unstudied (Kjellberg and Helgesson 2004). Although formulated as a program for studying the performativity of economics broadly defined (to include accounting, marketing, etc. Callon 1998), extant empirical studies of performativity focus on clear-cut cases where a strong relation between a specific theory and a specific market can be claimed, e.g. the role of economic theory in re-regulating markets (Callon 1998) and the role of financial theory in shaping financial markets (MacKenzie 2003). We suspect that such cases remain unusual exceptions. In fact, we suspect that several theories, from, for instance, accounting, marketing as well as economics often in congregate in practices and participate in shaping markets.

This paper addresses the issue of performativity in the presence of multiple theories. How several theories through being embedded in mundane tools concurrently participate to shape markets by for instance regulating exchanges or producing images of markets. In other words, this paper addresses the simultaneous presence of many efforts to shape market practice, a situation we take to be commonplace in many industrial and consumer goods markets.

The purpose of the paper is twofold: 1) to further develop a framework for understanding how theories perform markets, particularly with reference to multiplicity; 2) to discuss issues guiding future empirical research into how markets are shaped.

In the first section, we present our approach to market practice and introduce the notion of performativity. In the subsequent section, we discuss three possible instances of performativity related to our model of market practice: Austinian performativity, strong partial performativity, and performative controversies. In the third section, we present a view on multiplicity that allows us to inquire into how different versions of a market may co-exist in practice.

## Market practice and performativity

In this section we first introduce a basic model of markets focusing on market practices. Second, we discuss the link between ideas and reality and introduce the notion of performativity.

### *A conceptualisation of markets as constituted by market practices*

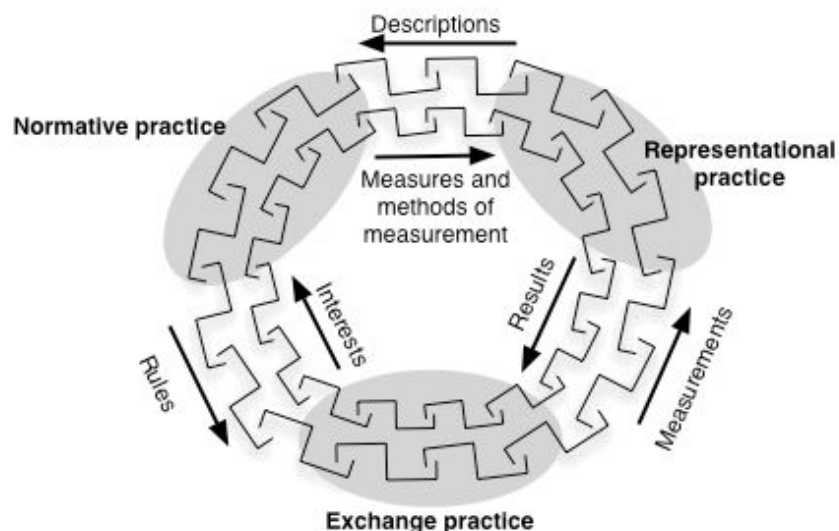
We approach the issue of how markets are shaped by attending to the practices that constitute markets. This allows us to move away from polarised discussions about how certain theories provide unrealistic characterisations of markets (e.g. in academic discussions) or how certain markets are not real markets (e.g. in regulatory settings). A well-conceived approach to market practice may be used to address two important general issues. First, it may offer a richer characterisation of *what* it is that is being shaped through market practice; i.e. what possible shapes may economic exchanges and

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<sup>1</sup> The notion of 'performativity of economics' was introduced by Callon (1998) and refers back to the notion of 'performative utterance' as discussed by Austin in his book "How to do things with words" (Austin 1962). On discussing the genealogy of the notion of performativity of economics, see (MacKenzie 2003; MacKenzie and Millo 2003).

markets assume? Second, it may provide us with a better understanding of the processes that led to these outcomes; i.e. *how* was a certain market shaped?

We define market practice as *all activities that contribute to shape markets* (Kjellberg and Helgesson 2004). For practical purposes, we recognise three broad categories of market practices: i) *exchange practices*, activities involved in exchanging goods and services; ii) *normative practices*, activities involved in forming normative expectations for actors, and iii) *representational practices*, activities that produce images of markets (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1. Market practices and chains of translations (Helgesson, Kjellberg, and Liljenberg 2004).**

The practical association of entities is a central feature of our model. For instance, some of the more important outcomes of exchange practices are the constitution of buyers, sellers and products. Market actors are seen as outcomes of associating practices and are characterised as networks – *actor-networks* (Latour 1987), which among other things means that the ability to act is in itself an achievement. Such networks have variable geometry; they are fluid and precarious entities that are awarded characteristics by those who interact with them (confer Håkansson and Snehota 1995). The process through which market actors are configured is one of inter-definition (Law 1994; Latour 1996).

Our conceptualisation of market practice further draws on the notion of *translation* (Callon 1986; Latour 1986). Translation denotes a basic process by which something – a token, an idea, a rule, a text, a product, a technique, a truth – spreads across time and space (Latour 1986, 1999). The basic assumption is that if no one “picks it up”, nothing happens. No initial or inherent force is ascribed to entities themselves. Those who pick them up, contribute in a non-trivial way to their existence and future development. Each transportation implies a transformation of that which is being moved. If an entity remains the same despite being spread, then this requires explanation. We use the notion of translation to characterise the interrelation of various market practices. Be it practices within the same broad category or indeed spanning the broad categories. Indeed, translations are themselves brought about and maintained by practices. As an example, the process of crafting a market strategy – which we consider to be a normative practice – may produce intentions that become translated into prescriptions for future exchange practices and into new methods for measuring and describing the market. As a whole, we conceive of individual market practices as linked through chains of translations (Latour 1999) that produce the market.

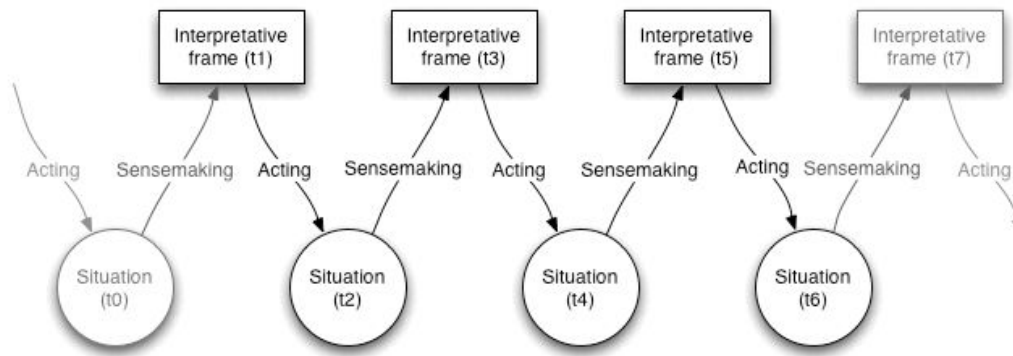
The notion of different practices being interlinked through translations has a powerful consequence regarding how we understand micro and macro. It may be conceived how normative and representational practices are of a more ‘macro’ kind than are exchange practices. Yet, one benefit from focusing on the interlinking of practices through translations is precisely that it avoids assuming that there is an *essential* distinction between macro and micro. What the notion of translation

highlights is that any *perceived* larger scale is the outcome of translations rendered invisible (Callon and Latour 1981; Helgesson and Kjellberg 2005). With our focus on practices, the notion of translation allows us to study how the shaping of markets involves practices that traverse and interlink entities of different perceived scale.

*Performativity, linking ideas to practice*

How then, are ideas about markets linked to our conceptualisation of market practice? The issue at stake here, is one which social science extensively has dealt with, namely the relation between the world of ideas – *res cogitans* – and the world out there – *res extensa* – to use the classic Cartesian expressions. How can ideas affect reality, or more specifically, how can ideas about markets affect the practices that constitute them?

The modernist settlement of this issue is to conceive of the two worlds as separated by a radical gap (Latour 1999). This solution, well rooted in western philosophy of science, is a foundation for discussing to what extent ideas about the world are congruent with the ‘actual’ world. In this framework, the issue of performativity, that is, how the world of ideas might participate in shaping the world out there, becomes one of a circular causal relation between the two worlds over time. The processes at work in linking the two worlds are reflected in concepts such as *making sense* and *taking action* (see Figure 2).

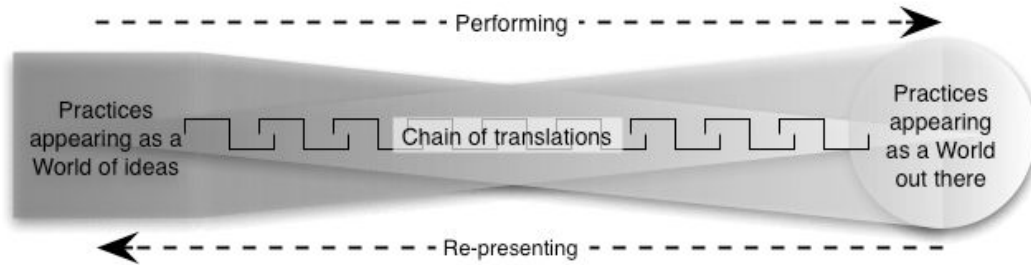


**Figure 2. Linking ideas to reality over time by making sense and taking action.**

Robert Merton’s discussion of unanticipated consequences and self-fulfilling prophecies is one example of this stance. “[W]e respond not only to the objective features of a situation, but also, and at times primarily, to the meaning this situation has for us” (Merton 1996). Our responses, which are based on our interpretation of the situation, will then have real consequences for the unfolding situation. This opens for a circular relation between making sense of and acting in situations and for phenomena such as self-fulfilling and self-destructing prophecies. By rendering prophecies public, expectations about situations may spread and become part of several actors’ interpretative frameworks. As Merton points out, however, the spread of a prophecy does not necessarily result in its realisation, but may just as well lead to its de-realisation, i.e. a self-defeating prophecy.

In stressing market practice – the concrete activities that constitute markets – we depart from this stance. Following a framework embraced by empirical studies of science (rather than philosophy of science), our starting point is that there is no radical gap between the world of ideas and the world out there. What many empirical studies of natural (and social) sciences convincingly have shown is the many tangible links, translations, that constantly are forged between what in stable situations appear as a world of ideas on one side and a world out there on the other (cf. Latour 1993). Indeed, we consider both to be *outcomes* of practice and conceive them as representing the imaginary end-points in a succession of practical translations, each infused with ideas but also located in the world (see Figure 3). Moves from the world of ideas towards the world out there *perform* the world, whereas moves in the opposite direction, *re-present* the world. (These translations can be thought of as located orthogonally in relation to our model of market practice, providing a third dimension to Figure 1.)

We term the infusion of ideas into the world, which results from moving from left to right in Figure 3 (from the “world of ideas” towards the “world out there”), *performativity*. Following MacKenzie (MacKenzie 2004) we distinguish between two categories of performativity: Austinian and Generic performativity.

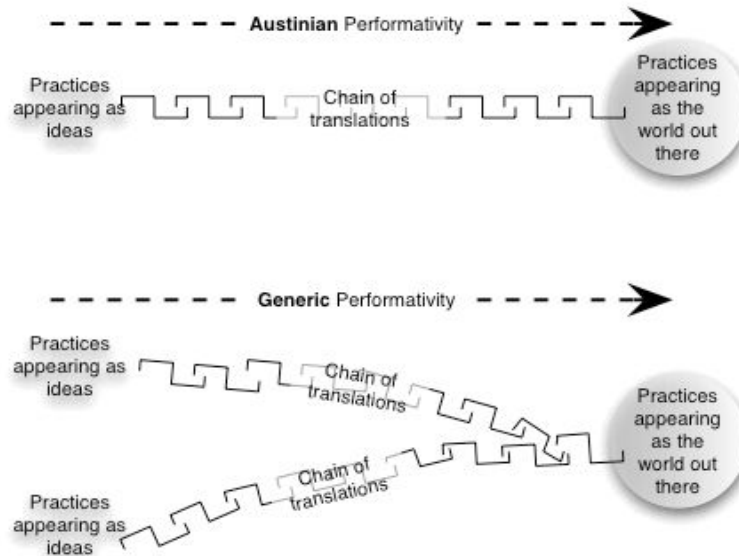


**Figure 3. Outcomes of practice. The “world of ideas” and the “world out there” as imaginary end-points in a chain of translations (adapted from Latour 1999).**

*Austinian performativity* (MacKenzie 2004) denotes situations where there is an exclusive and exceptionally strong link between a theory (in the world of ideas) and the world out there.<sup>2</sup> The extreme case concerns *performative utterances* or speech acts, sentences that alter reality simply by being pronounced under the right conditions (Austin 1962). A well known example is: “I hereby declare this annual meeting opened” (see Fauconnier 1981). MacKenzie’s (2003) work on the intimate link between the Black & Scholes stock option pricing formula and real stock option markets could be placed in this category. In these cases, the very use of a certain theory so profoundly affects the workings of the market that the theory becomes inseparable from the subject matter it once was devised to describe.

*Generic performativity* denotes a wide variety of cases where ideas (theories, social categories, etc.) in some non-exclusive way partake in shaping reality (MacKenzie 2004). This would include attempts to organise markets based on received IO-theory (Callon 1998), e.g., in connection to the regulation or de-regulation of industries such as telecommunications (Helgesson 1999), electricity (Olsen 2000) or postal services (Mattsson 2004). The inscription of theoretical concepts borrowed from economics into anti-trust legislation, and the organisation of customer loyalty clubs based on relationship marketing models are other examples of generic performativity. The links forged between ideas and other elements range from their impact on the cognitive frameworks employed by market actors to inscriptions into goods, calculative devices and physical marketplaces (e.g. supermarket shelves).

<sup>2</sup> The word “Austinian” was chosen with reference to John Langshaw Austin and his notion of ‘performative utterance’, see footnote 1.



**Figure 4. The principal difference between Austinian and Generic performativity.**

Having presented our basic model of market practice, and our view of the link between ideas and reality, we are ready to discuss how market practice may be infused with ideas.

### **Exploring cases of performativity in practice**

In this section, we discuss three cases of performativity in relation to our conceptualisation of market practice. The question here is how performativity might be conceptualised given our basic model of markets as constituted by the three broad and interlinked categories of exchange, normative and representational practices (cf. Figure 1 on page 3). As stated in the previous section, we view the translations between ‘practices appearing as ideas’ and ‘practices appearing as the world out there’ as located orthogonally in relation to our model of market practice. This implies that we anticipate the possibility of performativity in any of the three broad categories of market practices.

We start this discussion with the strong case of Austinian performativity. Then, we address the issue of strong performativity in connection to exchange, normative and representational practices, respectively. Finally, we look at controversies emerging from rival efforts to shape market practice. Since the two latter cases does not fully exhibit the characteristics of Austinian performativity, they can both be said to belong to the broad category of generic performativity.

#### *Austinian performativity in practice*

How can we understand the notion of Austinian performativity in the context of our market practice model? As we argued above, Austinian performativity denotes a situation where a clean link has been forged between a clearly explicated theory and a resulting reality. This means that every aspect of the market, down to the very last detail of the exchange situation, has been shaped by the same theory.

In our conceptualisation of market practices, the manifestation of Austinian performativity in a given market would thus imply that all market practices are shaped by the same theory. We would then expect the following: 1) a strong theoretical influence over *normative practices* producing clear and consistent rules of conduct; 2) *representational practices* that reflect important theoretical concepts and assumptions, producing unambiguous images of the market; and 3) the practical realisation of an *exchange* situation including actors equipped with the programs of action posited by the theory (e.g. rationality), objects of exchange that exhibit the characteristics required by the theory (e.g.

homogeneity), and a configuration of buyer-seller interaction that accords with the theory (e.g. one-off, arms-length exchanges).

Detailed empirical studies of market practice suggest that such situations are uncommon. In relation to market practice, then, Austinian performativity represents a special case that, in its ideal form, is positioned somewhat like the perfectly competitive market in economics. It denotes an ideal limiting case, to use Weber's (1949 (1922)) formulation, against which we may compare empirical observations of market practice. The fact that the manifestation of Austinian performativity is rare for markets, should not be taken to imply that we should not be prepared to see slivers of Austinian performativity in certain market practices. Below we will discuss two important phenomena that contain something similar to Austinian performativity in relation to certain market practices, but where the performativity for the full assembly of market practices becomes of the more broad generic kind.

*Strong but partial performativity: Lost in translation or true market failures*

What would be the expected consequences of a strong link between a theory and only a specific subset of market practices? As one example, this would include cases where a theory strongly shapes normative market practices, while having negligible sway in shaping representational and exchange practices. In this example, then, a sliver of Austinian-like performativity would be 'contained' in normative practice. Table 1, below, summarises some possible cases of such strong but partial Austinian performativities and lists possible consequences as well as empirical examples.

Largely, the empirical examples suggest that these situations will result in considerable tension (and calls for revision). One reason for this being that certain (groups of) actors are likely to consider these markets, or one facet of them, to function poorly or not at all. It should be stressed, that these tensions are not tensions between different *interpretations*, but rather tensions between different practices of realisation.

<b>Performativity contained in</b>	<b>Possible consequences</b>	<b>Empirical examples</b>
Normative practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulties of enforcing the norms due to lack of images able to reflect the envisioned market.</li> <li>• Difficulties of realising exchanges according to the norms, since actors lack practical ability to perform in accordance with them.</li> </ul>	De-regulation of the Swedish electricity market where buyers remain inactive, bewildered by the diversity of offers.
Representational practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Images of the market lack credibility as they are at odds with established norms.</li> <li>• Market images are not useful to actors engaging in exchange.</li> </ul>	National industry statistics based on SIC-codes are of little use to market actors whose sale or purchase of goods are connected to significant sunk costs, loyalty-effects or technological lock-ins.
Exchange practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Problems of legitimacy since exchange practices are at odds with established norms.</li> <li>• Difficulties of evaluating performance since exchange practices are not reflected in market images.</li> </ul>	Seller co-operation in the presence of strict anti-trust laws and images of high seller concentration.

**Table 1. Possible consequences of strong partial performativity on market practice.**

As previously noted, cases involving strong *but partial* performativity must be regarded, from the point of view of all market practices, as representing cases of generic performativity. What makes the above discussed cases special is that a link has become stabilised between a specific theory and some facet of market practice. We expect such stabilisations to be the extreme outcome of some form of

controversy between rival efforts to shape the market. Moreover, the possible tensions that we identified suggest that these situations are highly unstable and that controversies will keep cropping up. This, however, is not necessarily negative since such situations may very well produce functioning markets. Next, we look at how such controversies might play out in market practice.

#### *Controversies – competing market practices*

How do situations unfold where there are competing efforts to shape markets? Below, we discuss controversies between efforts to shape each of the three broad categories of market practice suggested in our conceptual model.

*Normative practice.* Competing efforts to shape normative practice could be expected to result in considerable political struggles. Various interest groups would engage in the process, promoting norms conducive to their respective situations. The prolonged debate over the future fate of the Swedish monopoly on retail sales of alcoholic beverages is a good example. There, arguments concerning the merits of competition have repeatedly clashed against other values, such as public health, the cost of alcohol-related illnesses and physical abuse of women. During such struggles the respective sides are likely to support their arguments with representations of the market and to enrol various groups of relevant actors. Actors may also attempt to settle the controversy by invoking either the legislative or judicial systems.

However, these struggles may also result in the establishment of parallel systems of norms. As an example of this, consider a situation where several actors attempt to enforce a particular set of norms by issuing standards, codes of conduct, certification criteria, etc. Such efforts could have reverberating effects on both representational and exchange practices, subsequently producing parallel (versions of) markets.

*Representational practice.* Rival representational practices will produce dramatically different images of the market. One possible consequence is the emergence of scientific controversies over the true nature of markets. During such controversies the respective sides are likely to work hard on associating their representational practices with established norms and on-going exchanges. Links to established norms are important to claiming relevance of measures and methods of measurement. Links to exchange practice are important to claiming correspondence between measures and what is being measured.

Another setting in which controversies concerning representational practices are common is in the Courts. The successful spread of (American) antitrust-rules has increased the number of court cases concerning abuse of dominance as well as cases trying the potential effects of mergers and acquisitions (confer Djelic 2002). Every such case requires that a relevant market is established, and this, in turn, requires representations. During the past decade or so, the SSNIP-test<sup>3</sup> (see Willig, Salop, and Scherer 1991) have gained relatively wide acceptance among antitrust-authorities, in competition with, e.g., the test devised by Elzinga and Hogarty (1973). Still, many court cases revolve around the issue of how to delimit the relevant market. There are also some cases in which the SSNIP-test has proved difficult to apply, e.g. on markets characterised by “double demand”, that is, where both users and buyers are attributed some import over the choice of supplier (Liljenberg 2004).

*Exchange practice.* Competing efforts to shape exchange practice may take on a variety of forms and concern many aspects of economic exchange. One example is the struggle between different ways of configuring buyer-seller interaction. This is similar to Palamountain’s (1955) *intertype competition*, i.e. competition between different types of middlemen such as traditional retail stores and mail-order houses. Such efforts may involve attempts to equip market actors to handle the envisaged exchange situation. Two important categories of equipment are those related to the processes of qualifying and calculating (Callon, Méadel, and Rabeharisoa 2002).

First, buyers may be equipped with tools that allow them to evaluate specific dimensions of a certain type of product and then rank alternative offers in terms of their benefits, e.g. a checklist for assessing used cars. The introduction of new dimensions for evaluating products and services seem to be a common strategy among competing sellers. New offers are often accompanied by efforts to change

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<sup>3</sup> The acronym SSNIP stands for “small but significant and non-transitory increase in price”.

the way in which the offer should be evaluated. A well-known example is the introduction of new features on automobiles. Second, buyers can be equipped with calculative tools affording them the ability to rank alternative offers in terms of their cost consequences. Such tools may be more or less neutral towards the form of exchange. Providing a buyer with a tool that allows certain transaction costs to enter into the evaluation of offers could for instance affect a buyer's choice between different forms of exchange.

As should be fairly evident, efforts to equip buyers are often closely connected to the generation of new representations of the market, for instance by compiling and comparing offers in "market overviews". Furthermore, competing efforts to equip actors may result in buyers that are equipped to participate in several markets. Rather than thinking of market practices as associating an exclusive set of entities, it is probably better to think of them as associating elements for given situations. Thus, an individual owning a retail store can be a prominent part of both an actor-network performing the role of an *independent retailer*, buying from competing wholesalers, and an actor-network performing the part of a *member of a retail-chain*, buying chiefly through the central purchasing function. The notion of multi-valent agencies (Law and Akrich 1994) is useful here, since it points precisely to how agency is dependent on situation and how the agency is differentially constituted in different situations. Hence, rival efforts to shape exchange practice could result in considerable overlaps between different actor-networks that have been equipped to perform in different market situations.

It is not very difficult to identify concrete situations where controversies of the kinds discussed above are unfolding. We suspect that they are considerably more common than situations characterised by either Austinian performativity or strong partial performativity. Still, they need not be characteristic of market practice in general. In the next section, we discuss the possibility of co-existing multiple versions in market practice.

## Multiplicity and coexistence in market practice

In the previous section performativity was discussed from a starting point in what has been termed Austinian performativity. As we argued there, it is presumably rare to empirically find markets that manifest Austinian performativity. The other two kinds of cases of performativity discussed above were variations departing from the strict requirements for Austinian performativity. Although containing slivers of Austinian performativity these kinds of cases are more akin to the notion of generic performativity from a market point of view. Yet, there is much more to be explored as regards to performativity of a generic kind. To do this, we have to leave the discussion related to Austinian performativity and instead take on the issue of multiplicity.

The issue of multiplicity have been suppressed in our discussion in the previous two sections. Implicitly, the tensions and controversies discussed arose as a consequence of multiple and at times incompatible practices. In this part, we address this issue in three steps. First, we give an introduction to multiplicity with respect to markets. Second, drawing on the works of Mol (1999; 2002), we discuss how we can appreciate performativity given the presence of multiplicity. Finally, we discuss the possibility of multiple coexisting market practices.

### *Multiplicity in market practice*

"Our sales force provides broad market coverage and our consultants provide content knowledge and deep working relationships. We need both, but we don't yet have a way to sort out the two of them."<sup>4</sup>

Informed narratives of both firms and markets regularly depict on-going activities as multifaceted and to some extent incoherent. In fact, when it comes to firms, we tend to be relatively sceptical towards stories that portray business practice as fully coherent and integrated. Somehow, narratives that tell us how different departments operate according to different local logics and maintaining differing views

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<sup>4</sup> Quote from the fictional character Anna Tucker in the HBR Case study "Cross selling or Cross Purposes?" (Harding 2004).

on the firm's offering and position in the market, seem more truthful. This is so regardless of whether they are found in the business press, in educational business cases (as the quote above), or in reports from detailed empirical research. We expect business practice to be multiplex and to contain some degree of incoherence.

Turning to markets, the issue of multiplicity to some extent changes character. Of course, markets have been strongly associated with the idea of collective and coherent outcomes of individual actions ever since the classic economists (e.g. Smith's invisible hand and Mandeville's bees). Austrian economists have argued emphatically that the economic problem facing society is one of utilizing knowledge not given to anyone in its totality (Hayek 1945; Mises 1966 (1949)). For the Austrians, the market is the primary means by which it is possible – by bringing together and coordinating the plans of individual actors – to *handle* the multiplicity that is characteristic of society.

However, in order for markets to perform this function, a necessary market infrastructure needs to be in place. Empirical studies of markets suggest that market actors may spend considerable efforts and resources on creating this infrastructure (Johanson and Mattsson 1985). Moreover, as stressed in the market strategy literature, perspective matters for firm activities, i.e. market actors will perform differently depending on how they define their market (see, e.g. Brooks 1995; Day 1981). Since market actors are assumed to make a difference by acting strategically, we should expect multiple market definitions among actors who, through their initiatives, may affect future market conditions. As a consequence, the usefulness of different market definitions is subject to change not only with the purpose at hand, but also over time. Firms do not act in (exactly) the same market twice (confer Alderson and Cox 1948).

To summarise, there are many reasons to entertain the assumption that market practice is characterised by multiplicity. First, an individual market actor does not necessarily act in accordance with a single market perspective, but may engage in local, diverging and at times inconsistent market practices. Second, market practice brings together many such actors, whose actions are based on varying definitions of their relevant environment. Third, there are also many market actors that engage in more or less overt market-making activities, all of which affect the market to some extent. Consequently, the realisation of a single market vision becomes very difficult (although maybe not quite impossible).

#### *Multiple perspectives or multiple realities?*

How, then, can we appreciate the realisation of multiple ideas in market practice? The traditional way to appreciate this is to focus on multiplicity as a multiplicity of meanings. This route emphasises epistemological issues such as differences in interpretative frameworks. The reasoning constitutes, for instance, the basis for the cognitive turn in organization studies (see, e.g., Daft and Weick 1984; Spender 1989; Weick 1995) and for writings about network theories (Johanson and Mattsson 1992) and network pictures (Ford et al. 2003). The problem with this approach for appreciating multiplicity is that it maintains a distinct gap between ideas and reality (see p.4). Maintaining this distinction makes, as we argued above, it more difficult to appreciate the existence of performativities. In fact, this approach reduces the concept of performativity to the hardly surprising claim that theories shape interpretative frames. It is therefore, in our view, more fruitful to follow a route that appreciates the realisation of multiple ideas in market practice while not restricting multiplicity to being an epistemological phenomenon.

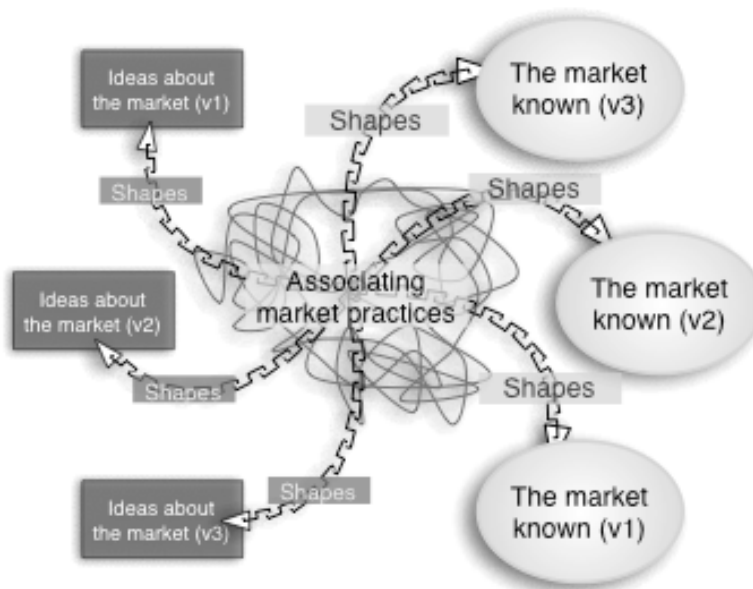
This alternative way to appreciate multiplicity draws on the conception of the “world of ideas” and the “world out there” as representing the imaginary end-points in a succession of practical translations that link ideas and reality in very concrete ways (see Figure 3, p.5). The basic argument for understanding multiplicity here is that reality can *be* different things, that different versions of the same objects are enacted through different practices (Mol 2002).<sup>5</sup> This route, which emphasises ontological issues such as the fluidity of the social world, is perhaps not as familiar in business administration. As an illustration, this approach would suggest that the combined activities of Procter and Gamble, its intermediaries and its customers, including market surveillance and segmentation practices, goods distribution and advertising activities, media consumption and coupon handling, etc. perform a multi-

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<sup>5</sup> Mol's work has health care as its empirical setting, but her approach to appreciate multiplicity is much more general.

segment market for shampoo. This, however, does not preclude that some other group of actors may perform an undifferentiated mass-market for shampoo. Further, these two versions need not be at odds with each other in practice.

There are several reasons why this approach is preferable for addressing the issues at hand here. First, allowing for the presence of multiplicity in the “world out there” preserves the notion of performativity to be about how reality is being shaped. Second, it acknowledges that any actor not only may maintain multiple (even conflicting) ideas but also may participate in shaping multiple versions of the same entities. (Think, for instance, how a company’s sales office and customer complaints office in customer interaction might differently shape a customer.) Third, it makes the consequences of simultaneous presence of multiple efforts of realisations available for analysis.



**Figure 5. Market practices produce multiple ideas about the market and multiple versions of the market.**

Above, we discussed situations where there are competing efforts to shape markets. What remains, is to look at how, when and under what circumstances it is possible for multiple versions to co-exist.

#### *Multiple, co-existing market practices*

How, then, are we to understand markets when they are constituted by practices involving multiple, even contradicting, performativities? This is clearly a core question for getting a grasp on generic performativity. What Annemarie Mol’s work on multiplicity (Mol 1999, 2002) clearly have demonstrated is that it is not necessary to assume that all and every performed inconsistency implies conflict or breakdown. As also our shampoo-example suggested, inconsistencies does not necessarily mean that the practices result in open conflict.

The co-existence of multiple and conflicting versions of the same object does not imply conflict or indeed any kind of coordination unless two or more of them encounter one another in the same practice. There are, furthermore, several possible techniques for coordinating different versions in such instances of encounter. These include *addition* (when different versions coincide), *privileging* one over the other(s), *calibration* (translating one into compatibility with the other), *negotiation* versions to align, and *suppression* that postpones resolution of inconsistencies (based on Mol 2002; Sjögren and Helgesson 2005). What this incomplete list indicates is that multiplicity might be managed in many ways. It moreover shows that open conflict ending in privileging one version over all others is but one possible outcome of multiple versions encountering one another in the same practice. Implied in this, is furthermore, that far from all such encounters will lead to the reduction of multiplicity.

Leaving this confessedly abstract discussion, let us briefly exemplify with two kinds of situations where we can observe multiplicity in market practice and techniques for managing them.

A commonly observed situation of multiplicity is when normative practice produces rules for exchange practice that are not subsequently fully adhered to. For instance, the public procurement act in Sweden is clearly a particular translation of IO-ideas, whereas empirical studies suggest that buyers and sellers rely just as heavily on ideas about exchange relationships in their exchange practice. This situation may create versions of what constitutes appropriate procedures for procurement. The result might be efforts to negotiate procurement procedures and tools to (somewhat) align these differing versions. Such a technique would, for instance, be when a procuring actor have a preferred supplier design the call for tenders. Such move would ensure a good fit between the capacities of the supplier or the characteristics of the suppliers products with what is to be procured. In this way the overall procedure caters both to the demand of having a public call for tenders and the demand for working through established exchange relationships.

A second situation that is easily recognised is when there are multiple versions of customers performed by the same actor in different exchange practices. One example of this is when a selling firm draws heavily on parameter-based thinking (4 P etc) in designing and implementing its marketing programs while at the same time working closely with and investing in the relations to selected customers. This hints at one practical way of handling multiplicity, namely, that actors themselves may appear in multiple versions or configurations. Each version of the actor associated with a specific practice. A complementary solution would be to seek to separate in time and space the situations in which the multiple versions of the customers are performed.

These but two kinds of situations hints that there are much interesting empirical work to be done on performativity producing multiplicity and how these multiplicities subsequently are managed.

Before ending this discussion on performativity and multiplicity we would like to emphasise a significant aspect of this ontological approach to performativity. From standard academic discussions, we know that inconsistent theories do not mix well. Yet, the fact that two theories are incompatible or inconsistent with each other in practices located towards the far-left of Figure 3 (above, p.5), i.e. towards the “world of ideas”, need not imply that the practices informed by these theories in situations located towards the “world out there”, share this feature. Indeed, markets will, we have argued, regularly contain several inconsistent performativities. In other words, inconsistencies that seem to be difficult to sustain *in principle* might very well be sustained in practice. The reasons for this to be possible is first that different performativities might co-exist isolated from one another and second that they might be managed in those instances where they encounter one another in the same market practices. That is precisely why we take multiplicity (and its consequences) to be such an important part in any venture that wants to understand what has become known as generic performativity (for a similar argument see also Sjögren and Helgesson 2005).

### **A few last words and some questions**

Being very much a work-in-progress, we feel that it is too early to make any definitive claims. Rather, we feel that our discussion has raised additional questions. The twofold purpose of this paper was to further develop our understanding of how theories perform markets, particularly with reference to multiplicity, and to discuss issues guiding future empirical research into how markets are shaped.

We have argued for the importance of studying instances of generic performativity, and most notably the role of marketing and other theories in shaping markets. To this end, we have explored how performativity relates to market practice, gradually moving from the strong case of Austinian performativity via those of partiality and conflict, towards situations characterised by complexity and messiness. To guide us, we have proposed a framework that does not rely on a radical separation between an ethereal world of ideas and a concrete world out there. Instead we have argued for a framework that appreciates how ideas and reality are maintained and interrelated through chains of practical translations. Finally, in addressing the issue of multiplicity, we have argued for the need to take seriously the simultaneous presence of many, and at times diverging, market practices.

Our ambition has been to broaden the current interest in markets within sociology to make it more relevant for marketing scholars. Primarily, we have sought to address issues connected to more mundane markets. Markets that we believe to be decidedly more common than the strong, but idiosyncratic cases of financial markets and re-regulation. By doing so, we will also put focus on the multitude of practices involving market professionals of different flavours and training, including those versed in marketing.

As a final note we should stress that this paper, at best, is an abstract prologue to the detailed empirical work necessary for furthering our understanding of generic performativity in mundane markets. Three questions seem particularly important to address in empirical inquiries:

What coordination techniques can be observed for managing multiple performativities despite being principally in conflict with one another?

Under what circumstances will the existence of multiple market-making efforts lead to the *creolization* of a market rather than the establishment of parallel versions?

How can actors simultaneously sustain different agential properties while still achieve coordination?

It is by being able to pose such questions that we perhaps will be able to understand how markets are shaped and how marketing assists in such endeavours.

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