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The Pragmatics of Value and Commodity Structures

Different sociological approaches claiming a close relation to pragmatism have developed over recent decades, emphasizing situated action, the interpretive and reflexive capacities of actors, and their social capabilities. These so-called pragmatic conceptions have often been presented as an alternative to the structuralism that dominated previous decades. Without ignoring the differences between the two approaches, this article seeks to show not only that they can both be usefully applied to the same object, but also that they can be integrated into a unified theoretical framework. The argument is based on recent empirical work devoted to the study of commercial exchange, in particular the relation between price and value. The pragmatic study of exchange situations makes it possible to identify different forms of valuation that are both embedded into the cognitive resources of actors and objectified in arrangements around commodities. From a structural point of view, these forms of valuation can be considered a “transformation group,” in the sense described by Claude Lévi-Strauss. However, this cognitive structuralism cannot help us to understand the changes undergone by these forms over historical time. For this, we must call on another type of structuralism, which might be labeled “systemic” structuralism. This proposes narratives that aim to establish chains of causality between local processes of commodification and the evolutions of capitalism at a global level.

Alexandre Vincent

A History of Silences

This paper, grounded in a critical reading of Alain Corbin’s recent *History of Silence*, proposes a twofold development. The first part is methodological, arguing for the necessity of studying the acoustic phenomena of the past in a way that is distinct from emotion and does not focus solely on conveying experience. The historiography of the notion of “soundscapes,” invented by musicologist Raymond Murray Schafer, is used to assess the contribution of “sound studies,” “sensory history,” and the anthropology of the senses. The heuristic capacities of this notion are emphasized, as is the need to locate it within a coherent topographical and chronological framework. The second section of the article develops a case study based on these methodological prescriptions, focusing on silence in the religious rites of ancient Rome. The acoustic frame of ritual perfection, *silentium* was also a category of Roman religious law and very far from the quest for interiority and

spiritual life that Corbin considers a natural part of silence. An analysis of the nature and function of silence in two different rites, taking the auspices and sacrifice, confirms the need for a thorough and contextualized historical approach to acoustic phenomena: behind a unified terminology lie two radically different acoustic realities.

Nira Pancer

The Silencing of the World: Early Medieval Soundscapes and a New Aural Culture

While ancient texts contain many descriptions of soundscapes, early medieval literature remains largely silent. How can we explain the dwindling references to sound following the passage from antiquity to the early Middle Ages? Does this “silencing of the world” point to an alteration of the “objective” soundscape induced by changes in the material and physical environment, or does it indicate a deeper shift in the aural culture of the period? If there is reason to suppose that the decline in noise can be partly explained by an overall change in infrastructures, this transformation cannot account for the growing scarcity of sound references in the literature of the time. In order to understand this phenomenon, one must focus on the didactic character of hagiographic literature and on the theological motivations of its authors, whose goal was to sensitize their flock to a “sacred sonography.”

Étienne Anheim

An Italian Workshop at the Avignon Court: Matteo Giovannetti, Painter to Pope Clement VI (1342–1352)

The artist Matteo Giovannetti, originally from Viterbo, arrived at the papal court of Avignon in the early 1340s. During the reign of pope Clement VI (1342–1352), he succeeded in organizing a court-based workshop of an unprecedented size, which has left numerous traces in the papal administrative archives. This exceptional documentation makes it possible to reconstruct the administrative, financial, material, and technical phases of this workshop’s development, corresponding to the increasing affirmation of Matteo’s artistic position. As well as his mastery of the new Italian visual culture, Matteo drew on innovative techniques in fresco production, project management, and bookkeeping. Studying his workshop thus shines a light on the figure of the artist, at once craftsman, courtier, and entrepreneur. It also reveals the collective and material dimension of creative labor in fourteenth-century Europe.

Franck Mercier

Salvation in Perspective: A New Interpretation of Piero della Francesca’s *Flagellation of Christ*

An absolute masterpiece of linear perspective as well as a true icon of the Renaissance, Piero della Francesca’s *Flagellation of Christ* (conserved at the Galleria Nazionale delle Marche in Urbino) is one of the greatest enigmas of the Italian Quattrocento. Uncertainty surrounds not only the date and the original intended location of the painting, but also the subject matter itself. Despite long-running disputes about the overall significance of the

picture, and in particular about the identification of the three figures in the right foreground, the *Flagellation* remains an unsolved puzzle. Continuing in a rich and varied hermeneutic tradition, this article proposes a new interpretation of this famous painting, diverging both from a political reading (based on the supposed links with the Byzantine Empire) and from the other traditional solution which argues for the ordinary nature of Piero's iconography. The analysis of the geometrical pictorial space and its potential theological significance leads to a reconsideration of the painting as a visual meditation on temporality inspired by Saint Augustine, as well as a singular spiritual exercise.

Esteban Buch and Anaïs Fléchet

Music in Prison: The Campaign for the Release of Miguel Angel Estrella (1977–1980)

The Argentinean pianist Miguel Angel Estrella was arrested in Montevideo during Operation Condor in December 1977. Accused of being a member of the Montoneros, a Peronist guerilla movement, he was tortured and held incommunicado before being transferred to Libertad, where political prisoners from Uruguay were assembled. Thanks to an intensive and international solidarity campaign, launched by his friends in Paris and led by classical music celebrities as well as diplomats, human rights activists, and a myriad of anonymous music-lovers, Estrella was released and expelled to France in February 1980. Drawing on archival materials from the Estrella support committee, diplomatic files, interviews, and recently declassified documents from the Uruguayan military court, this article retraces the construction of an exceptional “cause,” shedding new light on the relations between music and diplomacy during the Cold War. It examines the musician's experience in prison, where he painfully managed to play Beethoven sonatas on a silent piano, as if mirroring the media's portrayal of him as a Beethovenian hero, a sort of modern Florestan. It also analyzes the connections between ethics and aesthetics, and the role of emotions in international political mobilizations.