

**Market system dynamics, “sociology
of texts”, and materiality of the book:
Venice and the Renaissance
printing industry**

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Anonymous
sixteenth-century
Venetian medal
maker, *Medal
Portrait of Aldus
Manutius*,
bronze casting, c.
1515

credits: *British Museum,
Collection online,
Creative Commons
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NonCommercial-
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Agenda

- Research Object (**artifacts** redefine collective practices, triggering processes of social ordering in terms of **institutional dynamics in markets**)
- Theoretical Context: “institutional dynamics in markets” in a “posthumanist practice theory orientation” (**markets as social systems; institutional work; focus on change and market creation**)
- Empirical Context: Aldus Manutius and the Renaissance publishing venture in Venice (1494-1515) (**historical institutionalism**)
- Methods: “**modern book**” as *cultural artifact* and “**publishing**” as *cultural entrepreneurship* (**ANT as research strategy**: “translation of a socio-technical system” & “**sociology of text**” as method)
- Findings: “**material elements**” and “forms of **institutional work**” performed **institutional logics, competitive dynamics** and **markets creation/evolution**
- Discussion/Conclusion: (i) “how **markets** are constituted **as complex social systems** and (ii) how **actors and institutions actively shaped (and are shaped by) them**

Research Object: materiality of consumption/ market creation (a “problematization”) (*)

- artifacts in the relationship between production and consumption: (i) introducing the analogy of “material culture as text” (**relational materiality**); (ii) considering the **practices of institutional work** that connect “human and non-human actors”; (iii) in terms of “institutional dynamics of markets” (**performativity**)
- **N.B. (1) - unit of analysis**, between **agency & structure**: (i) no “organizational field”; (ii) no “structure”; but “action-net” or (iii) **practice-based approach (**)**
- **N.B. (2) - critical perspective in Management & Organization Studies**: (i) “**the role of actors in changing/maintaining institutions**” (Lawrence *et al.* 2009), (ii) “**social action as a situated affair**” in terms of practice-theory (Orlikowski 2007; Gherardi 2012), (iii) “**the critical role of the body and material things** in all social affairs” (Nicolini 2012)

(*) Alvesson, Sköldbberg 2009; Alvesson, Bridgman, Willmott 2009; Alvesson, Sandberg 2013

(**) Schatzki *et al.* 2001, Schatzki 2002, 2010; Gherardi 2012; Orlikowski 2007; Orlikowski, Scott 2008; Monteiro, Nicolini 2014; Nicolini *et al.* 2012; Nicolini 2012

Theoretical Context (1): Markets as Institutions & “market system dynamics”

- “[a market] as an **organizational field** encompassing a set of **institutions and actors**, governed by **institutional logics**, supported by **institutional work**, and characterized by **institutional boundaries**” (Dolbec, Fischer 2015, p. 1449):
- “**practice approach**” in marketing theory (Araujo, Kjellberg 2009; Araujo *et al.* 2010), and “**institutional dynamics in markets**” (Dolbec, Fischer 2015; Scaraboto 2015; Scaraboto, Fischer 2013);
- **artifacts work as agents**” (“**from objects to things**”) (Carlile *et al.* 2012):
 - (i) “materials are part of the way in which social processes and organizations are enacted and stabilized; (ii) “institutional agency is better conceived as both emergent and distributed” (Monteiro, Nicolini 2015, p. 61);
 - “**boundary objects**”; “**epistemic objects**”; “cultural historical **activity theory**”; “objects as **infrastructure**” (Nicolini *et al.* 2012; Star, Griesemer 1989; Knorr-Cetina 1997; Barad 2003; Orlikowski 2008; Suchman 2005)

Theoretical Context (2): Markets as Institutions & key concepts

- **Organizational Fields** (OFs): «the totality of actors and organizations involved in an arena of social or cultural production and the dynamic relationships among them» (DiMaggio 1979, p. 1463)
- **Institutional logics** (ILs): «the major institutions of society (e.g., market, state, family, professions, religion) each prescribe unique organizing principles, practices, and symbols that set societal logics and influence behaviors of people and organizations. Logics also operate at the field level, creating rules, meanings, and “valuation orders that structure the decision making and the practices of the players in a product market” (Thornton, Ocasio 1999).
- **Institutional Work** (IW): «the notion stems from [...] (i) the role of actors in changing/maintaining institutions - relating to discussions of agency (Lawrence, Suddaby 2006), [and sees] (ii) the social actions as a situated affair, in the line with practice theory (Nicolini 2012; Schatzki et al. 2000)» (Monteiro, Nicolini 2014).

Empirical Context: Aldus Manutius, printer & publisher

- **1449/1450**: Aldus was born in Bassiano (near Rome, in the papal states);
- **1467-1475**: Aldus pursued a course of classical studies in Rome (maybe) attending the lessons of Domino Calderini (who was close to Cardinal Bessarione);
- **1475**: he moved to Ferrara (being a pupil of Battista Guarino)
- **1480**: in Carpi, Aldus obtained the post of tutor to the princes Alberto and Lionello Pio, probably on the recommendation of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, the princes' uncle;
- **1489-1490**: Aldus moved to Venice. He probably continued his work as a teacher (as humanist, grammar, and educator)
- **1494**: the founding of the Aldine Press

[...] his publishing and cultural project:

«the **publication of Greek texts that had never been printed in the original language** before, published carefully but without the medieval commentaries that littered the margins of Latin translations in fifteenth-century editions. However, **keeping the readability and clarity of the texts** a priority was an essential **precondition for securing the favour of students and scholars**, as well as the need **to present it in an elegant and refined version** so that it also appealed **to the richer and more sophisticated cultural elite** at the time» (p. 82).

Methods (1): *data collection & research process*

- a **“grounded”** (Glaser, Strauss 1967)/**interpretative approach** (Garfinkel 1967; Marcus, Fischer 1999; Van Maanen 1988; Agar 1996), between *historical institutionalism* (Suddaby et al 2014) & *sociology of translation* (Latour 2005);
 - a **critical perspective** (Alvesson et al. 2009; Tadjewski 2010; Bajde 2013) based on **“translation of a socio-technical system” (*)**
- **data collection** (Belk 2006; Goulding 2005; Charmaz 2006):
 - **“Aldo Manuzio il rinascimento di Venezia”** (catalogue, a Gallerie dell’Accademia’s project) as **“revelatory incident”** (Belk 1988, 2006): the **“list of objects”** in the catalogue of the exhibition
 - **Aldus Manutius as printer and publisher** (Dionisotti 1995; Lowry 1979/2000; Fulin 1882; Brown 1891; Castellani 1888; Davies 1995; Infelise 2016; Plebani 2016)
 - **primary and secondary materials** (history of the book and book trade, bibliography and library studies, Italian and European Renaissance, art history, philology, textual criticism)

(*) ANT as research strategy: Law 1986, 2009; Callon 1986, 1998; Latour 1987, 2005; MacKenzie et al. 2007; Muniesa 2014; in consumer research: Bajde 2013
critical perspective in marketing theory and consumer research: Tadjewski 2010 (Tadjewski 2010a, 2012; Peñaloza et al. 2011; Parsons, MacLaran 2009; Peñaloza et al. 2011)

Methods (2): “history of the book” and “bibliography” as sociology of texts (*)

Bibliography and the sociology of texts: «it is the only discipline which has consistently studied the composition, formal design, and transmission of texts by writers, printers, and publishers; their distribution through different communities by wholesalers, retailers, and teachers; their collection and classification by librarians; their meaning for, and – I must add – their creative regeneration by, readers. However we define it, *no part of that series of human and institutional interactions is alien to bibliography as we have, traditionally, practised it*» (**McKenzie 1986/1998**, p. 12).

- (i) considering the “**modern book**” as a “**cultural artefact**” (Knorr-Cetina 1997; Barad 2003; Orlikowski 2007; Olsen 2013) and as a “change agent” (Eisenstein, 1982);
- (ii) the **printing revolution**, the emergence of **publishing as** a form of **cultural entrepreneurship**, and the evolution of the **book trade** during the **Renaissance** were explored **in terms of “institutional dynamics in markets”** (Scaraboto, Fischer 2013; Dolbec, Fischer, 2015; Figueiredo, Scaraboto 2016)

(*) McKenzie 1986, 1993; Tanselle 1998/2004 (it. trans., Harris 2004, Introduzione), 2009; Howsam 2006; Walter W. Greg, Collected Papers, 1966.

Findings (1): modern book as “cultural artifact”[...]

What Aldus really did:

1. Was Aldus the first printer to employ:

a. the modernly-shaped comma	<i>yes, with a slight qualification</i>
b. the semi-colon?	<i>yes, officially in De Asta</i>
c. a paragraph indent?	<i>yes, with some hedging</i>
d. a moderne Roman type?	<i>no, but nevertheless</i>

2. Was Aldus the first printer to use:

a. quotation marks?	<i>yes (with qualification)</i>
b. an apostrophe in a modern language?	<i>yes</i>
c. accented characters?	<i>yes, excluding Greek</i>
d. a differently-shaped sheet?	<i>yes, mostly</i>

3. Was Aldus the first to print:

a. books in octavo format?	<i>no, but with a tiny bit of yes</i>
b. in Greek?	<i>no</i>
c. in an Italic?	<i>yes, totally so</i>
d. an errata slip?	<i>yes, seemingly</i>
e. an instruction to the blinder?	<i>yes, maybe</i>
f. the Bible in Greek?	<i>no</i>
g. an indecent picture?	<i>yes</i>

4. Was Aldus the first to publish:

a. a work in multiple volume?	<i>yes, plausibly</i>
b. a series?	<i>yes</i>
c. a book with printed pagination?	<i>yes</i>
d. a paged index?	<i>yes</i>
e. a catalogue?	<i>in a sense, yes</i>

5. Was Aldus the first [printer]:

a. to arrange the text in a page in cul-de-lamp and other shapes?	<i>yes</i>
b. to have a separate run on large paper?	<i>yes</i>
c. to have a separate run on blue paper?	<i>yes</i>
d. to produce a bilingual o polyglot text?	<i>no, not really</i>
e. to compare manuscripts and provide a critical apparatus	<i>yes (embryonic fashion)</i>
f. to have his own binder, which introduce innovation in style and structure?	<i>probably not, possibly yes</i>

6. Did Aldus pioneer a proto-paperback revolution:

a. by publishing Latin, Greek and Italian classics in a cheap, pocket-size format?	<i>no, quite the opposite</i>
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elaboration from: **Harris N., “Aldus and the making of the myth (or what did Aldus really do?)**, in Plebani 2016 10

Findings (2): [...] and publishing as “market creation”

elaboration from
Monteiro, Nicolini 2014,
Nicolini et al 2012

functions of the objects

materiality: examples from Aldus’ books and Renaissance publishing

A. infra- structure theory

- the work oriented infrastructure
- the service infrastructure

- the book privilege systems
- **expanding market for education/
scholarship and academic systems
(Italian humanism/lay intellectual in
medieval western Europe)**
- paper manufacture

B. boundary objects

- “containing and fostering
learning across boundaries”
- “sensemaking around and
interpretatively flexible artifacts”

- printing office
- inventories/catalogues/bookshops
- commercial networks
- marks and branches

C. epistemic/ activity objects

- “how working in something that
may never exist acts as source of
motivation”
- “how the nature of the objects
induces different ways of
working
- “the emergent nature of the
object of work”
- “community without unity”

- “public/private” libraries
- Greek and Latin grammaries/school
texts
- “editio princeps”/elchiridion
- manuscripts
- collections/collecting

Findings (2a): a revolution as part of a “cultural movement”

- [1] «which defines Aldus achievement is **design, or what he did to books**, or indeed to communication, since it is only a mild exaggeration to say that every time one turns on a computer, Aldus is starting out at us. But the Aldine revolution in **design again has to be placed in the context of an Italian Renaissance** that was a huge visual metamorphosis [a cultural and intellectual history]» (Harris, in Infelise 2016, p. 355).
- [2] «what Aldus therefore did, more than anyone else in the Renaissance, was **to place the Classical canon, in particular the study of ancient Greek from an early age, at the centre of Western educational practice**, where it remained for nigh on five centuries» (Harris, in Infelise 2016, p. 353)

[3] «[Aldus] **certainly did not create the mass-market**, as was once believed [...]. **But he understood the mass-market and its methods** thoroughly, and applied them to making the ordinary buyer feel something more than ordinary. What mattered was **the state of mind that his books produced, that drive to ‘liberate information’ and ‘satisfy any hunger for knowledge’** which makes software companies invoke the name of Aldus to this very day. **The number, cheapness or quality of the books matters less than the enthusiasm they provoked**, and that enthusiasm could only be reproduced by the next stage in the dissolution of the walls, and **the liberation of the knowledge they contain**» (Lowry, in Zeidberg 1998, p. 46).

Findings (2b): Aldus as “modern publisher”

[4] «The creation and dissemination of **sales catalogues**, the creation of **book series** and the development of the publishing insignia led to **the emergence of a truly recognisable brand, and** above all, **a high socio-cultural profile**. Relations with the humanist community, in the validation and approval of the philological work of the workshop, as well as in the publication of its work with illustrious and potential patrons, represented the cornerstone in the construction of the Aldo Romano publishing house. We can say that, **thanks to the intuition that he gathered in this invisible network of people and ideas, Aldus Manutius began the concept of modern publishing**» (Graheli, in Plebani 2016, p. 172)

[5] «So welcome this booklet: but not free of charge. Give me some money too, so that I can arrange all the best texts of the Greek world; and truly, if you give to me, I will give to you too, because without much money I cannot print. Believe anyone who is put to the test, and thus risking himself [...]; but certainly, **without money you cannot get any of what you ardently desire and for which we, relentlessly and with much affection and expense, afflict ourselves**» (quoted in Harris, Plebani 2016, p. 80).

Findings (2c): the emerging figure of “merchant-entrepreneur”

[6] «**the system of privileges** drew no distinctions between the various categories of petitioners (printers, publishers, authors, curators, owners of manuscripts, etc.), because its purpose was not to recognise individual rights but to regulate commerce, **to construct an ideal environment for the development of printing, with consequent advantages for the state**”. [...] **Bookmen were among the most creative and innovative of merchants.** The very idea of novelty, which involved, for example, an emphasis on bringing new works onto the market, soon became part of their productive strategy. **Their working tools included the gathering of information on production and cultural consumption in various locations, evaluation of the stability of a text** (a process that might lead to the commissioning of a new work), **and various accounting practices**» (Nuovo 2013, p. 5)

[7] «in the disquisition in his book on the **proverb *Festina lente* (hasten slowly)** [Erasmus] tells the story of how Aldus found his famous printer’s device, an emblem which illustrates the proverb by **showing a dolphin, representing speed, twisted round an anchor, representing slowness or stability**, after Pietro Bembo, one of Aldus’ most assiduous collaborators in the first decade of his activity, presented him in the 1490s with an antique Roman coin displaying the image. It clearly caught Aldus’ attention, so much so that he proceeded to adapt it as a printer’s device for his firm, to display in their edition» (Catalogue, p. 181)

Discussion/Conclusions: “Key Takeaways” and Implications

- **two institutional logics** from “**materiality of the historical narrative**” (Olsen 2013 (and from a “**sociology of texts**”: MacKenzie 1986, 1993):
 - Italian lay humanism (“**cultural logic**”) (e.g., Witt 2010, 2012; Suarez, Wouldhuysen 2013)
 - and publishing as new organizational form and business model (“**market/entrepreneurial logic**”) (e.g., Lowry 1979/2000; Dionisotti 1995; Davies 1995; Nuovo 2013; Infelise 2016; Plebani 2016)
- theoretical implication (Callon 1998): a combination of **institutional theories** and the **sociology of markets** to investigate the “**translation**” phenomena of **innovation**, the **cultural dimension** of business processes and the **change of markets** within a single theoretical and epistemological framework (based on overcoming the “**agency vs. structure**” paradigm)
- empirical implications for **market system analysis** (for example: *Marketing Theory*, 2017, special issue; Giesler, Fischer 2017):
 - markets as complex social systems
 - co-constitution of marketplace reality
 - focus on change and development

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