

# **The World of Aldus Manutius (1494-1515), a Renaissance Publishing Venture: Materiality, Cultural Entrepreneurship, and Institutional Dynamics in Markets**

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

credits: *British Museum,  
Collection online,  
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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 may be defined 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 (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; Orlikowski 2007): (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)

# Theoretical Context (2): Markets as Institutions & “market system dynamics”

- **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*

- **an ethnographic case study** (Van Maanen 1988; Agar 1996; Kozinets 2010/2015), between *historical institutionalism* (Suddaby et al 2014) & *sociology of translation* (Latour 2005);
  - an interpretative/critical perspective (Garfinkel 1967; Marcus, Fischer 1999; Alvesson et al. 2009; Tadajewski 2010; Bajde 2013) based on “**translation of a socio-technical system**” (\*)
- **data collection** (Belk 2006; Kozinets 2015):
  - “**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*: Tadajewski 2010 (Tadajewski 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; 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 (1a): modern book as “cultural artifacts”, and publishing as “cultural entrepreneurship”

## 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 or 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

# Findings (2A): “political work in which actors reconstruct rules, property of rights, and boundaries that define access to material resources”

## illustrative quotes

**A1.** «[...] It is the portrait of the greatest Venetian humanist, the most important philologist of the time (on par with Poliziano), epitome of a new culture that based full possession of civilisation and ancient knowledge on the systematic recovery and restoration of classical texts, being aware of the absolute value of words and form. A culture of profound spiritual congruity with Aldus Manutius, who grew up in the Roman humanist environment, but only in Venice (with the philology of Barbaro and his circle) found the foundations and nourishment for his publishing activities» (p. 169)

**A2.** «[...] it is fascinating to think that while a new textual philology and Aldus Manutius as publisher were committed to reconstructing the original lesson of texts by classical authors, a Venetian sculptor belonging to the circle of the Lombardo family offered a sample of integration (and reinterpretation) of an ancient statue in a fragmentary state» (p. 170)

## materials

**Object no. 1,**  
Vittore Carpaccio, *St. Ursula and the Pilgrims Meet Pope Cyriacus outside Rome*, c. 1490-1491)

**Object no. 2,**  
Hellenistic sculptor and the workshop of Tullio Lombardo, *Muse, called Cleopatra Grimani*, second century B.C., and c. 1500)

## types of IW

- **vesting**
- **definiting**
- **advocacy**

# Findings (2B): “actions in which actors’ belief systems are reconfigured” [continued]

## illustrative quotes

**B1.** «The little book or pamphlet, probably composed in 1484, contains short poems in simple Latin – a kind of pedagogical exercise – addressed to his young pupil Alberto Pio of Carpi, who would go on to become one of Aldus’ most important patrons and supporters, together with a letter to the boy’s mother Caterina Pio on the value and advantages of the classical education Aldus was, as their tutor, imparting to her sons»

**B2.** «[...] the letter is notable for its references to contemporary scholars – Pico della Mirandola (Caterina’s brother, who had recommended Aldus to her as her sons’ tutor), Zaccaria and Ermolao Barbaro, and Federigo, Duke of Urbino – as well as Aldus’ sense of a collaborative scholarly community: both these elements found in the letter – the pedagogical purpose and the awareness of the value of scholarly collaboration – were to play a fundamental role in Aldus’ publishing enterprise» (p. 171)

## materials

**Object no. 3,**  
Aldus Manutius,  
*Musarum Pangyris*,  
Venice, Baptista de  
Tortis, c. 1489)

## types of IW

- **connecting identities**
- **changing norms**
- **constructing networks**

# Findings (2B): “actions in which actors’ belief systems are reconfigured” [continued]

## illustrative quotes

**B3.** «[...] Whereas the back of the medal illustrates his famous trademark (an anchor and a dolphin), bearing the motto [...], that is the translation into Greek of the Latin “FESTINALENTE” [...]. Aldus mentioned his “hieroglyphic” of the dolphin and anchor for the first time in the dedicatory letter to Alberto Pio dated 14 october 1499. [...] The reason for choosing this emblem, that was destined to become renowned and nearly a symbol of publishing itself, was narrated by Erasmus of Rotterdam in one of his *Adagia*; it was dedicated to the *Festina lente*, so dear to Emperors Augustus and Vespasian, where the contrast between the stability of the anchor and speed of the dolphin acquired the meaning of a quest for the right balance between opposites in the art of government, between swiftness in deeds and firmness in decisions» (p. 180-181).

## materials

**Object no. 7,**  
Anonymous  
sixteenth-century  
Venetian medal  
maker, *Medal  
Portrait of Aldus  
Manutius*,  
bronze casting, c.  
1515

## types of IW

- **connecting identities**
- **changing norms**
- **constructing networks**

# Findings (2C): “actions designed to alter abstract categorizations in which the boundaries of meaning systems are altered”

## illustrative quotes

## materials

## types of IW

**C1.** «[...] Written in a sophisticated Italian prose leavened with Greek expressions and not always easy to understand, the story of *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* consists of elaborate descriptions of Poliphilo’s love for Polia and the decidedly initiatory ordeals he undergoes in a dreamland while searching for his loved one. In spite of the author’s name, Francesco Colonna, being readily deducible from the acrostic formed by the first letters of the work’s thirty-eight chapters [...], doubts still remain as to the actual identity of the person who bore it, although he is very likely to have been a Dominican monk living in the monastery of Santi Giovanni e Paolo in Venice» **(p. 220)**

**Object no. 28,**  
Francesco Colonna,  
*Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, Venezia,  
Aldo Manuzio per  
Leonardo Crasso,  
1499

**C2.** «[...] Aldus Manutius took the initiative of printing his famous books in a small format so as to provide texts by classical and modern poets in a pleasant reading form for his more sophisticated and erudite readers during their leisure time [...]. Petrarch [...] and Dante, the most important Italian poets, were included in this publishing programme thanks to the financial support of Pietro Bembo and that of his brother Carlo» **(p. 300)**

**Object no. 70,**  
Dante Alighieri, *Terze rime [Commedia]*,  
Venezia, Aldo  
Manuzio. 1502)

- **mimicry**
- **theorizing**
- **educating**

# Discussion (1): modern book as “cultural artifacts”, and publishing as “cultural entrepreneurship”

## functions of the objects

- the work oriented infrastructure
- the service infrastructure
- “containing and fostering learning across boundaries”
- “sensemaking around and interpretatively flexible artifacts”
- “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”

## materiality: examples from Aldus’ books and Renaissance publishing

- the book privilege systems
- **expanding market for education/scholarship and academic systems (Italian humanism/lay intellectual in medieval western Europe)**
- paper manufacture
- inventories/catalogues/bookshops
- commercial networks
- marks and branches
- “public/private” libraries
- Greek and Latin grammaries/school texts
- “editio princeps”/elchiridion
- manuscripts
- collections/collecting

# Discussion/Conclusions (2): “Key Takeaways” and Implications

- **two institutional logics** from “**materiality of the historical narrative**” (an “**archaeology of matter**”: Olsen *et al.* 2012; Olsen 2013):
  - 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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