



Faulty devices and reluctant institutions: a French pragmatist approach to Down Beat's critics' poll

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“No institution can measure up to itself. And this is fortunate. (...) [I]nstitutions are nothing but arrangements, always more or less lousy, between impermanent beings to slow the pace of change and try to give it a form. But this would in no way prevent them from playing the role, at once necessary and weak, expected of them.” (Boltanski, 2011, p 157-158)

Introduction

Within neo-institutional tradition, organizational fields were conceived as hegemonic and fairly homogeneous social spaces, whereas individual organizations understood as conformist to existing cognitive structures (Hirsch, 1997). While alternative “institutionalisms” were more inclusive of agency and reflexivity (e.g. DiMaggio, 1988; Oliver, 1991; Stinchcombe, 1997), the inclusion of agency within the neo-institutional tradition appeared as overextending as well breaking its core assumptions (Aldrich, 2010).

Later developments have tried to bridge this gap, envisioning fields as crisscrossed by conflicting institutional logics (Friedland & Alford, 1991). Thus, extant literature attempted to establish how coping with conflicting logics leads to a break with conformism, leading to second-order reasoning (e.g. Lounsbury, 2007; Kraatz and Block, 2008). While this approach has been successful in explaining how social actors attain higher levels of reflexivity, it anchors reflexivity as reactive to contextual contradictions. This pattern of explanation is akin to the Merton's approach to autonomy and change. If a social actor is embedded in multiple social roles, it is likely that these roles will impose conflicting expectations. While these conflicts might be unpleasant, they might trigger attempts to change the assumed expectations (Merton, 1968). The challenge is to understand agency and reflexivity that is not dependent on exogenous contextual contingencies. The pragmatic approach might be an alternative approach to the relationship between agency and institution (Weber & Glynn, 2006, p. 1647).

Throughout this paper, I explore the French-Pragmatist proposition in explaining the relationship between agency and institutions (Boltanski, 2011). I will also suggest a

connection between tests and devices (Karpik, 2010). The empirical example that I chose in order to illustrate these connections is the establishment of the critics' poll by the jazz magazine *Down Beat*, during the fifties and sixties. Because jazz was going through a migration between low-brow to high-brow positioning, it is relevant what devices and tests were mobilized by critics in order to establish purified ranking. For that purpose, I collected quotes and articles by critics, published on *Down Beat*, besides interviewing Dan Morgenstern, contemporary editor of the magazine. The justification and disagreement patterns identified suggest that reflexivity occurs both embedded within devices, and in the interstices between devices. This finding suggests that devices are better thought as relational arrangements able to generate meaning as partial orders (Aspers, 2005).

Why “Pragmatism”?

“Pragmatism” comprises a wide range of theories and authors, not always easily reconcilable (see Joas, 1993 for a review). Among all themes covered and discussed in the pragmatism realm, I want to focus on the relationship between social action and uncertainty. A remarkable innovation in William James's philosophy is the proposition that individuals are able to suspend doubt in order to act. The human capacity to foster proviso certainties in order to keep action attains a central position for pragmatists and, later, for ethnomethodologists and other social scientists¹.

These statements are frequently taken as indicative that, under the Pragmatist rubric, social actors require and accomplish the elimination of uncertainty as a precondition for action. In contrast, other interpreters focus on the reflexive and creative capacities individuals hold in order to cope with unseen situations (Joas, 1996; Boltanski, 2011). In the same vein, political philosophers have insisted on social actors' capacity to consciously displace certainties and engage in inquiry (Putnam, 1995). In the same way, French pragmatists have focused on how actors shape the situation they are confronted.

Inspired by the conventional school, French pragmatists propose that justification of action is linked to ordered worth worlds (Boltanski & Thevenot, 1991). Different types of worlds entail different assumptions of humanity and whether asymmetries are to be created and sustained. Hence, the proper justification of action is

¹ I don't want to defend the thesis that ethnomethodology is a direct heir of Pragmatism (see Rawls, 2010). Nonetheless, it is possible to identify similarities and approximations.

possible only when coherent to a conventional order. In order to make sure that procedures are proper, individuals perform tests that attempt to assess their purity. For instance, if in a public agency there is blatant favoritism to hire officials' relatives, the procedure might not pass a test of neutrality (proper to the “civic” world). While it is acceptable to favor relatives in the “family” world, mixing these criteria in a public agency introduces impurity (Boltanski & Thevenot, 1991).

Rather than claiming that human beings will attempt to compartmentalize social action in starkly separated social spheres, French pragmatists claim that situations are rarely (if ever) neatly coupled to a single world. Adopting a “situation-based” approach, followers of this school propose that individuals are led to strike compromises among incommensurable legitimate claims, while bearing high levels of uncertainty (Boltanski, 2011).

Recently, a number of articles have drawn on French pragmatists' idea of “orders of worth” as an alternative source for ideal type institutional logics (Patriotta et al, 2011; Jagd, 2011 for a review). The aim of this article is not to expand this budding body of research, but to explore the connection between tests, institutions and reflexivity (proposed by French Pragmatists) and devices.

Markets, Devices and Tests

Rather than being based on individual calculations, markets depend on devices to support calculation (Callon & Muniesa, 2005). Calculative devices have the feature of authorizing comparison across objects, although not necessarily establishing commensuration (Karpik, 2010).

Calculative devices (for instance, product catalogues, rankings, arrangement of products in a shelf, sophisticated derivatives formulae) are highly associated with power asymmetries, usually the seller exerting his power over the buyer. To be sure, competing sellers might propose different calculative devices, which might yield incoherent outcomes. While the motivation for proposing different devices might be grounded on distinct social values (akin to “institutional logics” or “worlds” in the discussion above), the decision of what device to use in a given situation is usually conceived as kept at higher systemic levels (Stinchcombe, 1990) or market forces (Karpik, 2010). French pragmatists may turn these processes upside-down, in order to

maintain assured the “meaning-cum-uncertainty” principle. They suggest that calculative devices’ outcome, as a mirror of reality, should be scrutinized under tests.

Boltanski (2011) suggests the existence of three types of tests: “truth-tests”, “reality tests” and “existential tests”. Truth tests are based on stable semantic relations, where outcomes gain a strong tautological feature. They are conservative in nature, as they tend to reproduce the existing relations among social objects:

“[I]f by chance some new beings come along, they are either not acknowledged as such and are integrated into the already established set at the cost of a series of reinterpretations, or they are rejected.” (Boltanski, 2011, p.104).

Due to truth tests’ low reflexivity potential, it is hard for social actors to engage in productive conflict that may generate change. In contrast, “reality tests” are richly argumentative devices that attempt to uncouple valuation from value materialization in reality. For that purpose, it may suggest new value dimensions, leading to revision of truth tests, and compromises among existing truth-tests. Finally, “existential tests” are intrinsically subjective and affective. In contrast with the previous tests, they enable a bridge to the lived world, escape the “iron cage” of consistency and legitimate tests that are meaningful only to self.

When confronted with “reality tests” and “existential tests”, “truth tests” are weakened and the reality they generate is no longer acceptable. While these dynamics might impose strain on existing institutions, for Boltanski this uncertainty by design confers true meaning to action, as human beings are able to gain consciousness of the choices they make, among the available tests. In the next section, I will establish bridges between tests and specific devices, identified by Karpik (2010).

Types of Impersonal Devices

Karpik (2010) suggests a taxonomy of judgment devices that support market calculation and enable comparability among social objects. My intention in this section is to borrow this taxonomy from Karpik and apply it to the music market, while discussing it critically, under the French Pragmatist orientation discussed above. My focus will be on impersonal, rather personal devices, as the former set includes devices that are closely connected the critics’ activity.

Karpik suggests classifying impersonal devices within two dimensions: “size of market” and “Degree of knowledge specificity”. Markets might be small or large (compare classic music and pop music markets). Conversely, the kind of information used in order to perform calculations might emphasize the art object’s singularity (substantial devices) or emphasize its relative position vis-à-vis other objects. Figure 1 encompasses four regimes along these two dimensions.

The “Authentic Regime” (small market/substantial) enables participants to evaluate art objects under a plurality of dimensions. While this plurality brings higher richness to art worlds (Danto, 1964), it potentially leads to proliferation of codes, and infinite diversity of singularities. In the limit, discourse producers in the authentic regime would produce evaluations that would be impossible to reconcile. The extent that a critic is expected to review an art work following the shared canon is subject to dispute at the field level. An alternative source of authority relies on the critic’s aura, which confers room for more impressionistic essays (Greenfeld, 1989). To be sure, one’s freedom to describe an art work in her own code might be aligned with a strong value of incommensurability (Espeland and Stevens, 1998). However, it opens the flank for the common criticism that this regime leads to exacerbated subjectivity. Moreover, too much inter-personal inconsistency leads to cognitive pauperization². Within this regime, album reviews are rich descriptions of released albums, where a critic is able to compare it to other albums directly or indirectly via usage of common qualifiers. Reviews allow critics to mobilize novel criteria and subjective emotions when evaluating albums, thus providing opportunity to perform “reality tests” and “existential tests”.

In contrast, the “Mega Regime” (large market/substantial) is dominated by firms able to spend vast amounts of funds in order to sustain the commercial success of new releases. As a consequence, there is an explicit attempt to shape consumers’ tastes. To be sure, such investments make sense only when the projected returns are feasible in large consumer markets. Because these efforts attempt to generate clear winners and stars, in order to improve likelihood of larger revenues, firms will also exert effort to simplify and consolidate the existing codes (i.e. language employed) and symbolic

² This idea parallels Pettit’s interpretation on Hobbes. Because individuals will provide idiosyncratic interpretations to words, no common world would be possible, requiring a sovereign power in order to establish the required common codes for inter-subjective understanding (Pettit, 2009).

universe (e.g. awards). As a consequence, firms will be constantly in search for collective beliefs. In contrast with the “Authentic Regime”, the “Mega Regime” exerts centripetal forces. Yet, it protects singularity as it presents every new art work as a singular combination of the existing (rather fewer) evaluative dimensions. Further, while in the authentic regime critics enjoy great liberty in expressing their evaluation, under the mega regime their discourse is placed, desirably or not, in dialogue with firms’ advertising. To use Bourdieu’s language, it is here that we might observe a higher probability of emergence of heteronymous parts of the field of critics, as the later are coopted by recording firms to produce reviews that praise their artists and embrace their language (see Baumann, 2007, on how this process led to a devaluation of critics in Hollywood). Liner notes and album ads are probably the most common examples of how recording companies attempt to establish each new release as singular by asking critics to write empathetic liner notes and promoting them through ads.

The “Common Opinion Regime” (large market/formal device) is composed by charts and rankings, summarizing top sales and audience, or best voted by the audience. Its inherent attractivity as a market making device is its closeness to the economics’ idealized view of markets. Information is centrally aggregated. Further, its outcome is neutral to critics’ opinion due to the mechanical counting procedure that regulates this device. As a consequence, this regime promises to yield the most objective and reliable data³. It is worth noting that in the extent that this regime promotes the “common opinion”, it also borrows the discursive appeal to democracy, as consumers (as citizens) would be empowered to voice their opinion through voting or buying. Yet, this sense of objectivity and democracy opens up the kind of criticism traditionally directed to formal democracies, i.e., the sheer aggregation of votes is deprived of discursive meaning (Stinchcombe, 1990). This regime assumes conformity to charts and rankings, though aggregation-based consensus might present a considerable loss of meaning, and ultimately, a threat to singularities. While in the Authentic regime there is cognitive deprivation due to an excess of codes, here cognitive loss is due to loss of meaning.

In sharp contrast to album reviews, we may find polls promoted among readers of magazines as an example of device within this regime. These are popularity contests where readers are asked to send their ballots through mail and the winner is simply the

³ Although Anand and Peterson (2000) showed bias on supposedly objective sales data, due to partial point-of-sales monitoring.

musicians who gather more votes by category. In a certain extent, it mirrors a sheer sales comparison among items.

In the “Expert Opinion Regime” (small market/formal device), valuation is based on agreement among authorized experts (akin to Hsu and Podolny, 2005). This agreement might be embodied in a poll or award. In comparison with the Authenticity Regime, devices in this regime release consumers’ cognitive burden by guiding what should be consumed, by producing a consensus. However, it potentially increases opacity, as both the experts’ eligibility criteria to participate and their deliberation criteria within closed committees might be hidden to the general public (English, 2005). Further, while within the Authenticity Regime there is no commitment towards agreement, in the Expert Regime the authorization for agreement generates tension throughout the field, for its respective devices attain an authority that might be countered by experts themselves. While this feature attracts enduring criticism towards the devices’ outcomes, most attacks are rarely against the existence of these devices themselves. In spite of the complaints, expert opinion devices appear to be resilient to criticism (Karpik, 2010). Further, explicit mockery and ridicule seem to gear audience’s attention towards the expert opinion devices rather than bringing concrete threats to their acceptance (English, 2005). The Mega Regime devices might place considerable threats to the Expert Opinion devices, in the extent that the very eligibility of jury members, deliberation rules, and eligibility of art works might be established by the award’s sponsor, who might be under strong influence of powerful firms.

This regime assumes enough inter-subjectivity among critics in order to produce valid agreed outcomes. Further, it requires higher commitment to comparability. In the extent that these two constraints are accepted, critics reinforce the validity of “truth tests”. Conversely, controversy among critics might generate ambivalent effects. On one hand, it might generate interest among consumers. On the other hand, it could generate confusion among consumers, in the extent that multiple dimensions are applied, eroding the comparability feature, and ultimately leading to a decreased confidence on criticism. As a result, consumers might eventually preferably follow charts (Common Opinion Regime), and critics give up sharing codes and criteria (Authenticity Regime), and sustaining collective action.

Critics' Polls illustrate the typical devices within this regime. These are polls where critics are asked to send ballots indicating their best picks for each category. While it provides less expressive capacity in comparison to album reviews, it may enable critics to express their opinions in a fashion comparable to the readership poll, enabling mobilizing common symbolic authority.

In the jazz world during the fifties and sixties, all these devices were deployed, and we may envision the clash and compromises among their underlying logics. Our analytical focus will be on the inception of the critics' poll, as it attempted to carve out a symbolic space among the pre-existing devices.

Context: jazz in the fifties and sixties

Within the fifties and sixties, the jazz world was experiencing a thrust towards high-brow idioms (Peterson, 1972; DeVeaux, 1997; Lopes, 2002). Reasons for that shift are usually associated to structural changes in the music industry that led to internal changes in the jazz field.

During the forties, cheaper recording technologies and the breakdown of radio monopolies allowed the emergence of small labels that could serve local tastes. As a result, new pop styles (R&B and Rock) emerged, challenging Swing as the hegemonic commercial style. These styles eventually established a strong foothold as a new youth generation embraced Rock instead of Jazz.

While several jazz musicians migrated to Rock or R&B, in order to secure wider audiences, remaining jazz musicians frequently embraced more avant-garde jazz idioms (e.g. Bop, Free Jazz). As a consequence, several jazz listeners felt alienated, as the new jazz styles were harder to listen, let alone for dancing.

In a parallel movement, younger critics, with strong musicological training, attempted to displace older critics who had scarce musical training. These critics were housed in jazz magazines, like *Down Beat*, or even in more specialized magazines. As these new critics achieved prominence at jazz magazines, they attempted to establish common standards for judging musicians and albums. They engaged in open discussion on what was jazz, and what was the critics' role. We may interpret these efforts as an attempt to establish the role of jazz criticism at the same level of classic music criticism, at the same time further reinforcing the institutions, identities and interaction

frameworks in this field (Weber & Glynn, 2006). This movement entailed resisting the influence of large recording firms through liner notes and ads, and avoiding fads driven by consumers' popularity contests.

It is worth noting, nonetheless, that Jazz (as well as film and photography) has not attained a full high-brow status, being better located as a “middlebrow” art (Baumann, 2007). There are two reasons for that. First, among several musicians and critics there is the idea that jazz's elements cannot be as rationalized and coupled to restricted codes as in classic music. Second, a genre's position in a cultural hierarchy is correlated with its critics' status (Baumann, 2007; Aspers, 2009). As a result, in spite of the diffusion of high education in jazz (Lopes, 2002), there has never been an authority that could impose how jazz should be experienced, as we may observe in the arts (Baumann, 2009, p. 164). Yet, during the fifties and sixties we may have observed critics attempted to purify jazz in order to fulfill the migration to a high-brow position.

Down Beat

During the period under analysis, Down Beat was probably the most important magazine in the jazz world⁴, and led the way in embracing modern jazz idioms. It has been probably the most cited source by jazz historians until today. Also, Down Beat occupied an intermediary position between non-specialized media (e.g. New York Times), and venues dedicated to musicology. While the former newspapers and magazines covered a wide range of categories, the later would be less prone to contests and direct comparisons, favoring lengthy musical analysis.

Being in the middle ground made Down Beat a favorable place for creating a “critic award” (device under the Expert Regime). The critics' award was introduced in 1953, as clear attempt to offer a counterpart to the readers' poll that existed since 1935 (Common Opinion Regime). From Morgenstern's point of view⁵, a group of critics saw in the readers' poll a threat to jazz, in the extent that the audience was being led to follow fads, rather than valuing the musicians that they felt were the most worth listening. From 1953, until 1972, Down Beat was able to show every critic's vote, as a consequence, their voting was transparent to readers and other fellow critics. In 1972,

⁴ An evidence of this fact: I examined several contemporary European jazz magazines and non-local news were usually articles translated or summarized from Down Beat.

⁵ See Morgenstern's interview motivation and procedures on the Material and Methods section below

due to lack of room, Morgenstern decided not to disclose anymore how each critic voted⁶.

We may see the inception of the critics' poll as an attempt to increase the ratio of critical devices in relation to commercial devices (i.e. critics' poll versus liner notes and readers' poll; Karpik, 2010). Focusing on this process might illuminate an important how several jazz critics strived to participate and shape the transition from low-brow to high-brow, given that this changed provided a window of opportunity to reposition oneself in a status ranking (Glynn & Weber, 2006, p. 1653).

Materials and Methods

The sources of data were mostly archival and an interview conducted with Dan Morgenstern, one of the editors of *Down Beat* in the sixties. My analysis focused on the period from 1953, when poll was introduced, until 1972, when critics' votes were not disclosed anymore. The right censoring choice has three reasons. First, as votes were not disclosed anymore, nor were the critics' justification for their votes. Hence, that led to a dramatic decrease in discursive material. Second, most intestine struggles within jazz happened during the sixties, as several new styles and influences were often interpreted by jazz critics as threats to the established cannon (Elworth, 1995). Third, it is possible to observe in the very material under analysis, and confirmed in an interview with Dan Morgenstern, a decreasing resistance to the poll, which suggests that by the end of the period under analysis this device had been successfully institutionalized.

Archival sources

My perusal of *Down Beat*'s editions from 1953 to 1972 revealed three sources of discourse production that is relevant to explain the reception and institutionalization of the critics' poll. The first source is the editor's letters. In each August issue, *Down Beat* editors published editorial letters that accompanied the poll's results. Frequently, most of these letters consisted on trivial commentary that reproduced the poll's summary tables. However, these letters frequently involved commentaries that included deeper interpretation of what the numbers meant vis-à-vis the jazz world's perceived reality. Editors also reflected whether they felt the poll's rules were adequate. Finally, these letters were used as an opportunity to defend the poll against pundits.

⁶ Since its inception, the poll has been annual, and published in August. While the "readers' poll" takes place in December.

The second source of archival material was articles published by Down Beat's columnists. These columnists could be editors or just invited writers. The articles varied widely in themes, ranging from a discussion on the critic's role, to a commentary on the revival of Dixieland Jazz, to racism, drug use or gender issues in jazz. Among this vast amount of articles, I selected and transcribed only those articles that discussed the role of critics, for they could provide further context to understand the institutionalization of the critics' poll vis-à-vis how critics enacted their social identity.

Finally, I collected the critics' comments on their own criteria and thought process, the poll's procedures, its results and nature, or how the jazz world's status. These comments were not always present, as it was a right, not a duty to comment upon one's ballot results. I transcribed all comments identified.

Interview

In order to triangulate my findings and improve interpretation, I also interviewed Dan Morgenstern, one of the editors of Down Beat in the sixties. This one hour interview took place in the beginning of 2011 at Rutgers Jazz Institute in New Jersey.

Coding Approach

I coded the relevant statements in open codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). After several iterations, codes were aggregated in twenty-five common themes (shaded boxes in Figure 2). Next, I further grouped these themes in broader groups: *normative assumptions*, *critics' social identity*, *ontological assessment*, *process-criticism* and *devices' results assessment*. Normative assumptions (N1 to N4) refer to ideas that are expressed as ideal or unquestionable axioms that guide one's analyses. Critics' social identity/alter assessment (C1 to C7) refer to statements that comment on what critics should or actually do, what is the practice of jazz criticism, and respective constraints not related to device's design⁷. Ontological assessment (O1 and O2) refers to enactment of jazz world's boundaries, overall achievement, and its constitutive conventions. Process-criticism (P1 to P7) refers to one's enactment of own experience in answering the poll. Finally, Device's Results Assessment (D1 to D6) refers to how individuals made and gave sense to the poll's results.

⁷ These themes could be grouped following a different logic. However, by lumping together all themes related to the role of criticism, it is possible to grasp the full range of positioning statements related to the identity of critics.

Following, I reviewed all selected quotes in order to establish connections among themes. Two kinds of connections were recorded, *causation/justification* and *disagreement*. The former type was plotted in solid arrows. The later type was plotted in thicker and traced line. At Figure 2, these connections are labeled from A1 to A27.

Analysis

The following two sections portray a chronology of major changes performed in the poll's rules, and the relationship among codes, described above. Throughout the analysis, I have also reproduced illustrative quotes that illustrate the critics' positioning.

Major Changes in the Poll design performed by Down Beat's editors

Boundary setting. A core feature of a device is the set of objects that it handles. Boundary setting has the dual feature of including to tests only those objects that the current device is able to interpret as valid, and defining the collective body linked through common objects (Callon & Latour, 1981). In 1953 voters included both critics and industry executives. By 1954, only jazz critics would be included. Increasingly, Down Beat was able to increase the number of critics worldwide, yet most of these voters were also affiliated to Down Beat as overseas correspondents.

Category Management. In 1953, Down Beat introduced the “new star” category, in order to fulfill the award's goal of recognizing new talent, overlooked by readership polls. In 1954, overlooked talent “for too long” could be eligible to this category, which attempted at rescuing musicians who fell from audience's attention. In 1959 this category is split in “new” and “old” talent.

Convergence Formation. The critics' poll's goal was not to establish unanimous consensus (as it could be assumed if the prize was decided by a committee). Nevertheless, it was expected to announce winners given a minimum convergence of opinions. In 1957, DB editors established that musicians needed at least five votes to win in a category. If no musician achieved this threshold, the category would have no winner.

Voicing Justification. While it was assumed that critics would cancel each other's prejudices through the voting device, it was also accepted that this device lacked the semantic richness of reviews. As a consequence, in 1959 DB established a column where critics could justify their votes. This argumentative device provided an

opportunity for critics to perform “reality tests”, which could inform other critics of overlooked criteria.

Truth and Reality tests. Down Beat’s editors compared the poll’s results with their perception on the jazz field. If the poll generated reasonable results, the device was perceived as a true mirror of jazz. If results obtained were not reasonable, two possible scenarios had to be considered. First, the device had to be adjusted (see above “convergence formation”). Second, editors could attribute to the jazz field the problems observed in the polls’ results. For instance, in 1959 DB editors admitted that it was hard to pick winners. That state of confusion was attributed to the “post-Parker dilemma” and the solution could not be achieved at the device level, but should be discussed in an overarching forum.

Critics’ Demographics. There is a steady increase in the number of critics (Chart 1). Increasingly, critics who were invited were affiliated to other jazz magazines or affiliated to Down Beat (Table 1). Throughout the period under analysis, there was a decreasing participation of producers, DJs e other individuals whose roles were closer to the commercial pole. Further, it is worth noting an increase in the participation of critics from Europe and other continents, which points to an effort to promote the poll beyond U.S. boundaries.

Discursive Interaction among Critics

In order to present and interpret the results obtained, it is useful to start with the range of themes included in the larger category Device’s Results Assessment (see Figure 2, in the bottom). In the extreme right end, we find statements that position critics’ polls as irrelevant. As we shift to the center of this group, the poll’s results are taken to be relevant, but either not valid or hard to interpret. As we arrive to the left end, poll’s results should be used to improve the poll, exactly because they are relevant though not valid. Finally, results are taken as relevant and valid, and if they frustrate the collective body of critics, this is not to be interpreted as a problem in the poll itself, but should be taken to a different and wider forum.

Within this group, internal oppositions are evident. Against a view that the poll’s results were irrelevant or should not be taken seriously, defenders would reply that either the poll’s results were valid, or they referred to a larger crisis in the field (A1 and A2/D1). Yet, the themes located in the center point to an weaker form of conflict. While

some critics locate difficulties in interpreting the results given that individual answers are aggregated into numbers, some statements establish as a solution the change of devices. Specifically, whenever a critic feels that she/he is voting in a unexpected way, opportunity should be given to justify this voting (D4/A3/D3).

When following the thread to justification towards radical denial (D6), we find two immediate antecedents: a normative one (A4), and an ontological one (A5). The normative assumption is that there should be no comparison or ‘best’ in art (N4), advocating for incommensurability in the jazz world.

About polls I could repeat what I said two years ago: there is no such thing as the best in art. (Carlos De Raditzky, 1960)

Conversely, the ontological assumption states that even if comparison was desirable, the community of critics would not be able to attain common objective conventions in order to assess and compare art works (O2).

I don't see the point of voting about art. These are simply some of the newer names that have appealed a lot to me. (Wilder Hobson, 1954)

Polls' defenders are led to defend the device on multiple grounds. On the normative level (A6), defenders state that it is the comparison that yields the possibility of honoring those who are valued in the jazz world (N1).

In the end, though, the reason for this poll and all others would seem to be a simple one: it is an expression of our indefatigable human yearning to honor those we admire. (...) Down Beat is proud to be the medium through which the jazz critics of the western nations pay tribute to the great jazz artists who are among us today. (Gene Lees, 1960)

While this normative conflict might be disruptive, a more insidious obstacle comes from objections to the poll's inherent validity (O2). To be sure, this statement is supported by normative assumptions (N3/A7), where one defends that no agreement or boundaries are expected or needed in any art world.

The question of what jazz is and what jazz isn't is different to many people. I have my ideas, and I'm certain that you have yours. What you believe to be jazz and at the same time good music may be noise and not good music at all as far as I am concerned. (Fred Reynolds, 1953)

But this statement is also supported by the assessment of inherent critics' activity and practice (C6/A8; C7/A9).

Many years of participation in polls, from both the voting and tabulating ends, have made me cynical. Neither my own votes nor anyone else's can fail to be colored by the extent to which we have been exposed to this or that artist. (Leonard Feather, 1954)

If critics are consciously idiosyncratic and their judgments are all but objective, it means that they are released from any public justification of their choices and any agreement observed through the poll is due to sheer coincidence. Countering these statements require presenting facts that go beyond normative opposition. If the poll's results are taken as valid (D2), poll's defenders are authorized that the device is able to purify individuals' biases and errors and sustain collective validity (C1/A10).

What it does claim to do is this: achieve a median of critical viewpoints on jazz creation in the past year. We are all human. And every human being has viewpoints, credos, theories, preferences. Call them prejudices, if you like. When a musician gets a good review, he usually attributes that to the critic's good judgment and taste. But let's say, for the moment, that all critics, being human, have certain prejudices. The value of the poll is that in a broad survey like this, critical prejudices tend to cancel each other out. The result is a fairly impersonal look at jazz in the past year. That is the intent of the poll, and that is its value. (Gene Lees, 1960)

It is worth focusing on how the statement that sustains the device's validity implies in the critics' collective validity, which reveals the duality between the device and critics' identity. If the device that authorizes comparison achieves a valid picture of reality, it means that critics are able to assume that it is possible to belong to a meaningful collective body. At once, by establishing the collective social identity of critics as collectively able to reach agreements, one is able to oppose both the more radical statements that disrupt intersubjective agreement (C1/A12 towards C6 and C7), and the statement that doubts the poll's validity given everybody's unintentional bias (C1/A11 versus C5/A13/D5).

"[W]hereas the system may cause agonies of soul to the critic filling out his individual ballot, the results indicate that the system as a whole works." (Morgenstern, 1967)

"[I]nsofar as the poll, which is a consensus of informed opinion, nothing more and nothing less, can be taken as a valid reflection of the state of jazz." (Morgenstern, 1969)

While the radical denial to the poll is opposed on the normative grounds, it might be eventually resolved by self-exclusion. In comparison, the criticism towards the poll's validity (D5) is more dangerous, for it is based on "friendly fire", those who are

supposedly willing to embrace the poll, but present doubts on its feasibility. When we follow the thread of antecedents, we find antecedents in statements assessing how critics (alters), in general, are able to judge neutrally (C4/A14 and C5/A13), and how oneself experiences judging (P7/A15 and P2/A16).

Every time I fill out one of these forms I am frustrated again. So why vote? You ask. I didn't last year as a protest against the anonymous reviews Beat was then running. I do this year for two reasons: (1) to pay tribute to musicians whom I respect and admire and (2) to try, if possible, to draw some attention to other talents too young yet to make a major work but who need encouragement at this most crucial point in their careers. At the same time, I want to say that this poll – any poll – is inadequate. For instance, I cannot find a spot in which to put Bill Evans; because he was a new star last year, he is ineligible this year. There are many inequities in this setup. But at its worst, this is still the only poll that has any meaning. (Ralph J. Gleason, 1960)

Since no one can hear everybody everywhere, all polls – definitely including this one-should be regarded as fragmentary, let alone subjective. (Nat Hentoff, 1964)

As seen above, enactment of poll's validity is assumed to be sufficient to neutralize criticism towards alters' biases. Analogously, one should gain confidence in participating in the poll, even if individually fraught with errors and biases, if collectively the aggregate product is valid. As a consequence, self-doubt perceived to be caused by bias and personal criteria (P1/A17, P3/A18 towards P2) is perceived as counterproductive when the collective needs and achievements are taken in account.

A peculiar breed indeed are the jazz critics [sic] – the only critical fraternity in the world who run around undermining their own reputation and casting doubt upon their own judgments! (Gene Lees, 1960)

By demonstrating that the collective body of critics is able to achieve valid agreement, it is possible then to explicitly sustain the critics' reputation (C1/A20 towards C2, and C2/A19 versus P2). To be sure, this renewed support for critics' collective achievement has a duality that might be pernicious – if in order to eliminate one's bias (especially self-acknowledge bias) depends on the device to be purified, one's identity is sustainable only when it contributes to the collective achievement. In contrast, the assumption that critics follow fads and commercial interests (C4) is especially problematic, for any agreement achieved through the poll would be a spurious outcome of music industry influence on critics (C4/A14/D5). Here the problem

is not that the poll is not able to yield meaningful agreements, but the source of meaning should be found elsewhere, and critics are just heteronymous (Bourdieu, 1993; Baumann, 2007). If that is true, the assessment that the poll represents reality (C1) is not sufficient in itself to sustain that this agreement was generated by pure tests: impurity might be present. Again, if agreement is not generated by critics, but they constitute only the media, it is possible to undermine the establishment of the critics' identity as dual to the poll's success (C1/A20/C2). Countering this threat, poll's defenders appeal to the normative assumption that critics should keep both musicians and audience under criticism (C3/A25).

“[T]he artists' concern (...) pointed up the significance of jazz criticism, its importance to the artist. To be of value, the critic is sure to stimulate controversy, although some would have him write only glowingly and in positive terms – in other words, be a tool of press agentry (DeMichael, 1962)

We may observe how grievances towards the poll's rules (P6) are associated to the feeling that voting is difficult (P4) and justice is being harmed (P5). This set of statements should not be seen as a threat to the poll, for they ultimately point to need of changes in the poll's rules (P4/A24 and P5/A23 towards D3). In comparison to an uneventful confirmation of the poll's validity as a valid true test (D2), awareness of change is possible due to the legitimacy of reality tests (especially P5), which conversely, confer legitimacy to the device itself.

The annual compilation of how each jazz critic voted has made interesting reading, while, for the most part, his reasons for so voting have been vague and sometimes meaningless. Why not assign an explanatory article to the critic who casts a surprising or startling vote (including new discoveries)? Maybe the readers of the poll results would like to participate in the selection of the critics who should expand their evaluations. No jazz authority can validate a nonobvious vote in 75 words or fewer. (George Hoeffler, 1961)

Finally, we may observe what happens when defenders are not able to make sense of the poll's results (D1).

If Down Beat's International Critics Poll had achieved nothing else this year, it would have been successful in that it demonstrated the problem of getting an accurate picture of the state-of-affairs from a poll. But it did do something else, something much more important: it reflected problems of

jazz today, particularly its indecision, the marking time, the hesitation, the Post-Parker dilemma. A high level panel at Newport, including audience should take place to probe the miasma slowly enveloping jazz.” (Mehegan, 1959)

One is led to assert that the poll’s failure to yield meaningful results is either an internal crisis in the field (A26/O1) or a generalized lack of shared conventions (A27/O2). In both cases, there is a call for a meeting on the field level, where the whole jazz community should discuss what is jazz, what its boundaries are and how music should be evaluated⁸. While these statements explicitly point to a crisis in the jazz field, the crisis is itself declared by those who are authorized to enact the jazz world’s status. While a crisis is enacted and that is a threat to the jazz world, what is not questioned is the legitimacy of the poll itself.

Discussion and Conclusion

It might be worth returning to the broad Pragmatist statement at this closing. As shown above, Pragmatists place inquiry at the center of social life. The French pragmatist approach adds to this statement the idea that the probing of reality is based on different kinds of tests that permit varying degrees of criticism and reflexivity. In this paper, I suggested that these tests are embedded in concrete calculative devices in order to perform the probing of reality. Rather than conceiving a perspective that couples agency and device calculative capacity, I attempted to show that social actors keep, in varying degrees, their critical disattachment in order to assess whether the devices were yielding valid results. To be sure, acceptance of a device is not grounded on its accuracy. In contrast, as far as it is valid (i.e. modal results point to the right direction), social actors are able to tolerate its errors. It is only when the generated reality is intolerable that social actors engage in reality tests and alternative devices. But still, reality tests are important to reestablish tolerance (as true tests are adapted) and confer legitimacy to the device⁹. The main point here is that social actors do accept new institutional arrangements, in spite of their lack of fit with perceived reality. Although the correlate for gains in reflexivity is the acceptance of higher degrees of uncertainty, akin to what Aspers (2005) labeled “reflexive identity”. Having laid out this

⁸ In line with Hoffman’s idea that a field is a forum for collective deliberation.

⁹ I have shown that extreme discomfort with the poll’s results is not a sufficient condition for disqualifying it. In the extent that crisis is enacted at the ontological level (i.e. “what is going on with jazz”), intolerance is channeled to a superior systemic level (Stinchcombe, 1990). Hence, even ontological crisis is acceptable and might even reinforce the device’s legitimacy, if crisis is collectively enacted and the device was instrumental in its detection. What seems to be silenced, though, are existential tests, which rebel against the poll’s authority.

overarching proposition, I conclude by discussing three contributions to the market institutions research.

The first contribution is to show how distinct calculative devices might be arranged in order to capture multiple demands. While the critics' poll was instrumental in counterbalancing the readers' poll, the former device did not permit establishing verbal distinctions as album reviews did. On the other hand, the sole usage of albums reviews was not enough to secure a common language mobilized to judge albums and make them comparable¹⁰. Borrowing Aspers' idea of "partial orders", each device is limited by itself, but in conjunction they are able to complement each other (Aspers, 2005). Critics' comments on poll results (in the format of reviews) assured that ballots were interpreted and gained meaning. In the same way, critics now felt compelled to justify their choices vis-à-vis each other. This turn is critical to the process of institutionalization of criticism, as it authorizes and requires externalization of meanings beyond local compromises, a condition for interaction-base subjectivity and reflexivity (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Thevenot, 2001; Weber and Glynn, 2006; Boltanski, 2011). Conversely, if no justification is required, truth tests become relatively impoverished in their capacity to trigger reflexivity (Boltanski, 2011). Thus, the relational aspect of devices permits us to identify the critical junctures that will lead social actors to provide fresh meaning (Mische & White, 1998; Beunza & Stark, 2004).

A second contribution is related to the process that a new device is established. Akin to the current rhetorical approach to institutionalism, justification was used as way to establish and defend new institutional arrangements, but also led social actors to commitments and action at different modalities (Green Jr. & Li, 2011). Specifically, I tried to show how pundits' and defenders' discourses shifted from normative, to ontological enactment and reflexive assessment of device's results, and reflection to critics' role in order to make sense of what was occurring in the jazz world, but also to position themselves vis-à-vis their counterparts. In this account, devices are not justifiable solely on market functional requirements¹¹, but their establishment is co-constitutive with jazz's relative shift from low-brow to high-brow. Further, the

¹⁰ There is a productive contradiction here. While album reviews are instrumental for reality and existential tests, for providing meaning where only truth tests (mostly based on polls' results, the proliferation of local codes and qualifiers lead to cognitive pauperization. It seems that the combination of devices enable the balance between ossified truth tests and the existence of reality tests, avoiding the centrifugal forces observed in the Authenticity regime.

¹¹ As Karpik seems to imply in his exposition.

discursive web portrayed in this study was well grounded on how the various parties made sense of the device's results. In that sense, discourse becomes indexical not only to other discourses, but also to devices¹².

In complement to the last point, the third contribution is related with the co-constitution of institutionalized identities and institutionalized devices. Weber and Glynn (2006) suggest that identities, expectations and frames are co-constituted in the process of institutionalization and sense-making. In this paper, I am suggesting that devices are critical in this process, for the following reasons. First, devices authorize comparability among objects. Through the commitment to compare objects, critics engage in relationship with each other, reinforcing a common world and collective understandings. Second, the device's results are presented as true tests, hence constitutive of social reality and purifier of rather biased personal and subjective opinions. Now this is the catch: if critics accept the device as a required way of *agencement* (Callon, 2008), they become increasingly dependent on it in order to position their choices (and corresponding justification), and ultimately establish their social identities (see also Aspers, 2005).

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¹² Future research might engage in a full processual approach, benefiting from the temporal sequence underlying the quotes recorded.

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Table 1

Evolution of Critics' Profile, Percentage of Total

	1953	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959	1960	1961
Jazz Periodical	42%	45%	42%	59%	50%	50%	50%	62%	81%
North American	100%	82%	74%	67%	75%	63%	67%	62%	61%
Down Beat	29%	23%	26%	30%	29%	21%	28%	35%	44%

(cont.)

	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970
Jazz Periodical	78%	67%	85%	91%	82%	88%	83%	76%	78%
North American	67%	67%	54%	57%	53%	44%	56%	46%	40%
Down Beat	53%	39%	43%	57%	47%	49%	56%	38%	40%

Data extracted from each year's ballots' details

Chart 1

Evolution of Respondents

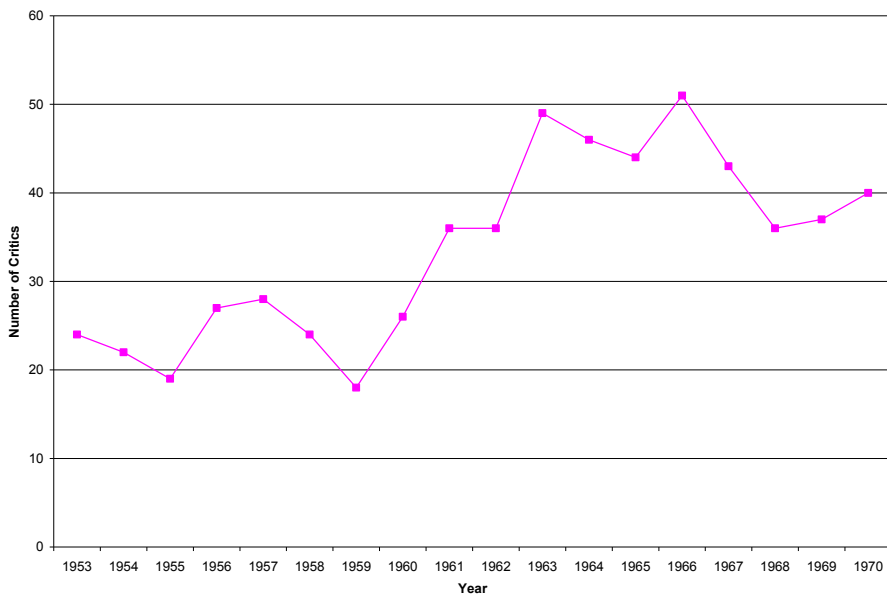


Figure 1 – Types of Regimes

<i>Size of Market</i>		
Small	Expert Opinion Regime	Authentic Regime
Large	Common Opinion Regime	Mega Regime
	Formal	Substantial

Figure 2 – Code Analysis of Quotes

