

Bodies and embodiment in practices of valuation: Challenging the sociology of valuation with the sociology of the body

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For more than a decade now, a sociology of valuation has come to be established at an international level (Lamont 2012). In the wider sense, it comprises a multitude of family-like research directions that deal, for example, with comparison (Heintz 2016), quantification (Espeland and Stevens 2008; Diaz-Bone and Didier 2016) or accounting (Vormbusch 2004; Mennicken 2011). The diverse empirical and theoretical studies from this field have provided fundamental insights into valuation practices and cultures (Berli et al. 2021). At the same time, sociology has undergone a “body turn” (Gugutzer 2015; see also Meyer et al. 2017; Turner 2008 [1984]; Featherstone et al. 2001 [1991]). Taking off with the second generation of classics (Bourdieu, Elias, Goffman, etc.), this turn has gained particular momentum since the 1990s. Even though the reference to its object does not provide a sociology of the body with any really sharp contours as a distinctive sub-area sociology, a plethora

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of works, mainly micro-sociological, on various bodily practices (and on the corporeality of the social) have accumulated since then. These works have significantly promoted a theorisation of the social as an inherently corporeal, material and practical phenomenon (e.g., Alkemeyer et al. 2017; Laube 2017; Schmidt 2012). Thus, there are close connections between such works and a theoretical and methodical turn to practices in the social and cultural sciences (Schatzki et al. 2001; Schäfer 2016). From a practice theoretical perspective, evaluation procedures can be seen as bundles of practices in which bodies and embodiment always play a role.

To start with, a wide variety of evaluation practices require the use of the body on the part of the evaluator. To give an obvious example: A special physical skill is expected from and used by gourmets. Their abilities to appraise food just as to distinguish themselves from non-gourmets are based on a socialisation of the palate (Hennion 2015). But even highly formalised or technically mediated evaluation procedures that might seem “disembodied” at first glance inevitably require the mobilisation of the body in one way or another (see Laube 2019 for the case of observing and evaluating prices in financial trading). In the end, even the creation of highly abstract scores and ratings involves bodily labour (Krey 2020): Someone has to input data, read and write reports, etc.

But there is even more to the entanglement of bodies and evaluation. In many cases, it is also the body of the evaluated actor that is mobilised for and by evaluation procedures. Various “valuation moments” (Antal et al. 2015) require the physical presence of the person being evaluated vis-à-vis the evaluators. Think of exams or job interviews, for instance. In a sense, different degrees of embodying performance can be distinguished. In professional selection interviews (e.g. of a research assistant) physical performance can come to be framed as a “side aspect” of the expected range of performance of a person being evaluated, but it is cognitive aspects that are usually the main object of valuation. This is not to say, however, that physical signs of performance must remain irrelevant. Was the candidates’ observable nervousness perhaps an indication that they have something to hide? Or that they are generally uncomfortable under pressure?

In addition, there are some evaluation practices that explicitly target the body of evaluated actors as the central object of reference. To stay with occupations, think of modelling, for example (Mears 2011). When bodies are the objects of evaluation practices, the persons attached to these bodies often come into view as well, which may lead to particular ritualistic complications (Meier and Peetz 2021). In the case of modelling, to stay with the example, the necessity to market the superficial aspects of oneself requires a high degree of compensational emotional labour (Mears and Finlay 2005). Still, the corporeality of evaluation practices does not end there either. The situation of assessment is often followed by an external or public representation of the assessment result (Krüger and Hesselmann 2020). And as a ritual, an award ceremony will always remain an incomplete event without the physical presence of the evaluators and the evaluated. This brief sketch alone points towards three different respects in which bodies are involved in valuation practices: the body of the evaluated, the evaluator’s body and the embodiment of the evaluation process.

With regards to different cases of valuations (such as eating, assessing one another’s attractiveness in everyday life, etc.) further complications arise: To date, most

approaches in the sociology of valuation have focused primarily on evaluation processes as part of linguistically highly explicit practices (ratings, rankings, etc.) that are usually connected to processes of formal organisation (see, e.g., the spectrum of cases in Lamont 2012). More mundane and less formalised or explicit evaluative practices have as yet attracted much less attention. This empirical imbalance results in a conceptual challenge: Do involuntary evaluative ephemeral perceptions (e.g., glancing at a person while taking a walk), calculated deliberations (which yoghurt shall I buy?) and organised, formalised rule-based evaluations (like ratings) fit under a single concept of evaluation? From a practice theoretical view, one could conceptually differentiate practices in which evaluations play a part from more specific evaluation practices in which a set of practices are integrated via an evaluation project (e.g., evaluation procedures).

In the previous paragraph, we have touched on the fundamental corporeality of all evaluative practices several times, claiming that bodies are always involved in the production of evaluations to a higher or lesser extent. Yet another relevant topic to be addressed at the intersection of the sociology of valuation and the sociology of the body are the precise ways in which evaluation practices produce specific kinds or forms of bodies.

In this respect, sport, a classic area of interest for the sociology of the body, could be addressed as an instructive field of systematic body evaluations and be re-described in fruitful ways through the lens of the sociology of valuation (see Janetzko 2021 for an instructive analysis of how talented athletes and their bodies are evaluated and thus constituted). The constitution of evaluated bodies (such as athletes) should then be taken into view just as much as the constitution of evaluating bodies (such as referees, coaches or scouts). In spite of this instructiveness, sport has not yet been systematically discovered as an area of research by the sociology of valuation. Given (modern) sport's constitutive reliance on explicit quantitative evaluations, this seems particularly surprising. Accounting, values and evaluation in sport are not as much an expression of this "cultural sphere" being colonised by an evaluation regime that has emerged and been perfected elsewhere as they are an expression of sport's own logic. Efforts to historicise evaluation regimes would therefore do well in taking the case of sport seriously (Ringel and Werron 2020). Taking this claim one step further, one could even speculate that sport acts as a cultural role model and pioneer for shaping and implementing modern evaluation regimes related to the body and bodily movements (in the form of records, charts, etc.). Have the particular ways of reporting and evaluating bodily movements and bodily performances in the field of sport perhaps even colonised and "sportified" other social, organisational and functional fields? Similar research questions are central to the DFG project "Accounting and Transformational Aspects in Professional Football", based at KU-Eichstätt.

Even such a first superficial review of the intersections of the sociology of valuation and the sociology of the body reveals numerous points of contact. Moreover, we believe that both discourses hold profound social theoretical irritation potentials for each other. Even though we cannot deal with the associated questions systematically and exhaustively here, we understand this special issue as an initiative for advancing the identification and tackling of this research potential. To this end, the present

issue brings together three main articles and three research notes, each exploring a particular aspect of the intersection of the sociology of valuation and the sociology of the body.

Max Weigelin's main article deals with the whistling practices of football referees. Drawing on extensive interview material, he identifies specific obligations of engagement (Goffman) in referee performance and explores typical sequential links between evaluation and decision-making practices in the game. In doing so, he attends to the referee's whistling as a case of a situational evaluation practice which provides a sharp contrast to the procedural and *connaissanceurial* evaluations mainly thematised in the sociology of valuation (see also Lambrix 2022). Moreover, he suggests that the sociology of valuation should empirically relativise its focus on obvious evaluation practices and also consider the range of other practices linked to evaluations, in this case: making decisions. Using Schatzki's conceptual differentiation between integrative and dispersed practices, Weigelin's analysis shows how evaluations in practices of whistling mobilise decisions and vice versa.

While the analysis of football referees is primarily concerned with the corporeality of evaluations, *Hannah Bennani* uses the case of the WHO's *International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health* (ICF) to deal with the construction of bodies through evaluations. Via an in-depth content and sequence analysis of the ICF-catalogue and a Web-Browser released by the WHO in order to better search the catalogue, her main article considers the ICF as a medium that (co-)produces disability as a social fact. Although the classification is explicitly situated in a contemporary field of discourse that addresses disability not as an individual but as a social phenomenon, her analysis reveals the contingency and normativity of the ICF. Furthermore, the article sheds light on the exact way in which the evaluation operations within the ICF make bodies readable as disabled.

The main article of *Frank Meier* and *Thorsten Peetz* also addresses the issue of a (supposedly) extraordinary body. The authors analyse how a cult of saints emerged around Therese Neumann in Konnersreuth in the 1930s. Purported blood gushing from the eye sockets, constant lack of food (except for the consumption of hosts) and visions were regarded by Neumann's followers as proof of her holiness. Whether or not the church should regard this a miracle, however, is negotiated in a complicated evaluation procedure regulated by church law. Beginning with a medical accounting of substance intake and excretion by Neumann, through various visits by pilgrims, journalists and emissaries of the Curia, to theologically demanding canonical attempts to classify the documented bodily appearances, numerous evaluations took place. The authors use their heuristic of evaluation constellations to analyse the case (Waibel et al. 2021). On the basis of a wide variety of textual sources, the authors reconstruct a rhetoric of canonisation with a view to evaluation situations. With regard to the constellation of evaluation in the case, they show how the Catholic Church deals with conflicting public expectations. By means of an incredibly complicated and agonisingly long procedure, they have kept the question of Therese Neumann's sainthood in a state of indecision (until today).

Drawing on the empirical case of the cultural valorisation of coffee consumption, also described as "third wave" of coffee consumption, *Lars Alberth* and *Oliver Berli* deal with the socialisation of an evaluator's body. They argue that the world of

beans, coffee machines and roasting plants has been permeated by a new hierarchy of quality and potentials for marketisation of expensive premium coffee varieties. Alongside this argument, they explore the thesis that the actors marketing such new premium coffees need to communicate an evaluative knowledge to potential customers. Using an online ethnography of coffee tastings for a broad audience, they analyse in detail how the “disciplining of bodies capable of enjoyment and distinction” takes place.

On a rather surprising terrain, *Lisa Knoll* seeks a conceptual bridge between the sociology of the body and the sociology of valuation. Her research note is situated in the context of financial market regulatory transformations of risk assessment procedures after the 2008 financial crisis. It exploits the analytical potential of Michel Callon’s metaphor of the prosthesis to address the redistribution of sensory agency between human actors and technical apparatus. Exploring both, the specific bodily resources which have been excluded from risk assessment regimes ever since as well as those resources which have come to be explicitly called upon in turn, Knoll draws attention to the paradoxes that the market transformations imply for actors supervising and evaluating financial risks.

On a completely different empirical field, *Stefan Laser* is also interested in how valuation practices shift in relation to a technical reconfiguration. In his autoethnographic research note, he compares the experience and evaluation of physical energy during sophisticated amateur road cycling with different sensors (heart rate monitor, pedalling force measurement) and in networking with the cycling app “Strava”. Following energy sociological considerations, he elaborates on different modes of socio-technical forms of exhaustion.

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