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A Re-encounter with economic value

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David Stark, *The Sense of Dissonance: Accounts of Worth in Economic Life*, Princeton and Woodstock, Princeton University Press, 2009, 264 pp., £30.95 (hardback), ISBN: 9780691132808264, £16.95 (paperback), ISBN: 9780691152486

A fierce controversy has been sparked in various fields of economic sociology around the term 'innovation'. The many variations in definitions of innovation make it an often disputed term that has been subject to pointed questions among various fields. Is innovation the discovery of something entirely new or is it the translation of existing opportunities? Is it sensible, critics have asked, to believe that new things are produced as a result of a mystical creative force, especially given that the model of the creative-artistic 'genius' as the source of creativity has been widely contested? Further heated debate has also turned around whether innovation is to be considered a cultural phenomenon or an economic necessity. David Stark advances the controversy in his book *The Sense of Dissonance* by centring the debate on the search for or creation of value. The question asked in his study is not 'what is value?' but how to account for what is valuable and how that reflexivity might foster innovation.

'Fix not thy mind on one place only'. This opening epigraph from Dante's 'The Divine Comedy' expresses the core argument of the book, namely, that a crucial challenge for those seeking innovation is not to become trapped by previous successes, what Stark defines as 'cognitive lock-in'. Investigating the logics used for evaluating worth in three ethnographic settings – a socialist tool-making factory in Hungary, a new-media start-up in Silicon Alley and a financial trading room in Wall Street – Stark shows how the co-existence of multiple logics of worth creates dissonance or friction that leads to organizational reflexivity, thus promoting innovation.

How might one move from studying innovation as a source of economic growth to a study of the production of value as an instrumentally controlled activity that intervenes in the world? This paper addresses this question with a critical review of *The Sense of Dissonance*. My overall assessment is that Stark's ideas about the value of search, ambiguity and uncertainty to organizational practice have a number of important implications for debates on innovation, while providing an important contribution to both economic sociology and organizational sociology.

Different Orders of Worth

The prevalent way to think of value has been in terms of economic exchange. Chris Gregory states this very clearly, saying that 'the Market has emerged as the most politically significant institution of valuation in the world today' (1997, p. 16). More recently, scholars

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