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## **CULTURE, VALUE AND COMMENSURATION: THE KNOWLEDGE POLITICS OF INDICATORS**

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The recent growth in quantitative calculation and its increased application to the social have been widely noted by theorists. Nigel Thrift (2008, 92) coins the term ‘qualculation’ to describe the ways that qualities of diverse phenomena are now routinely quantified and enrolled into calculative processes. For Alain Badiou (2008, 2-3), the ideology of modern parliamentary societies is not humanism, or law, but rather ‘number, the countable, countability’. Governmentality theorists also stress the numericisation of public discourse, in particular through the rise of economics. This has ostensibly occurred to the extent that ‘there is a constitutive interrelationship between quantification and democratic government’ (Rose 1991, 675). In short, numeric solutions to political and social affairs seem to be everywhere, and they cannot but have some influence on the conduct of public life. Nikolas Rose argues that participation in such a democracy comes on certain, problematic terms, because:

Paradoxically, in the same process in which numbers achieve a privileged status in political decisions, they simultaneously promise a ‘de-politicization’ of politics, redrawing the boundaries between politics and objectivity by purporting to act as automatic technical mechanisms for making judgments, prioritizing problems and allocating scarce resources. (Rose 1991, 673)

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Cultural indicators may be seen as one particular technique of calculation that raise both general questions about the role of quantification in society, and, simultaneously, issues for those in the cultural sector. Above all, they promise that what is good about culture can be known in direct ways by quantifying its key characteristics.

Echoing Rose above, Eleonora Belfiore and Oliver Bennett (2008, 130) question the legitimacy of such 'evidence-based' approaches, arguing that their seeming neutrality artificially depoliticises the cultural policy process. Is it possible that numbers as apparent vehicles of transparency may somehow obscure the drivers and consequences of policy formation under the patina of objectivity? Recent writing in the field links the trend towards quantitative measurement less with a desire to know 'the truth of culture' than with programmatic strains of instrumentalism. Discussing a range of possible approaches, Kevin Mulcahy (2006, 326) defines 'cultural utilitarianism' as one that seeks to establish the benefits of the arts by using data to demonstrate a return to the taxpayer on the basis of various definitions of utility. The latter are often economic in character but extend to other domains such as social inclusion, community development and social cohesion (Belfiore 2004, 184). In this vein, metrics are often thought to enact a neoliberal logic in which funding of cultural activity is seen as an investment with possible kinds of quantifiable yield, rather than as a subsidy of something inherently worthwhile (Gray 2007; Böhm and Land 2009). They exist in a climate where public expenditure qua investment has 'to show measurable outputs against pre-defined targets' (Garnham 2005, 16). In this sense, instrumental cultural policy articulates a broader economic concern with achieving 'good numbers' in the manner of financial accounts. It also signals a managerial

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corporate approach structured around strategic planning towards maximal fulfilment of specified goals, which, in public sector form, is often labelled the New Public Management (Belfiore 2004, 2). Thus the arts have become ‘full of indicators’, cultural indicators at the sector level that portray the supply and demand of cultural goods, but also performance indicators ‘that focus on the micro-aspects of the management and functioning of cultural institutions’ (Schuster 1996, 253).

In an attempt to inform debates about cultural indicators, this chapter theorises their knowledge politics. Its starting point is the very problem of finding a critical language to think about numeric techniques that ‘seem to be free of interpretation and to be neutral and descriptive’ (Merry 2011, 89). Numbers can appear to be beyond social construction and automatically warrant a realist epistemology even when the best approximation of objectivity is actually expert consensus achieved through specific social processes (Porter 1996). Quantitative techniques allow advocates of knowledge to claim that it is based upon disinterested fact. My aim is not to dispute that indicators can provide knowledge about the state of culture, but to stress that they always do so as elements of specific socio-technical processes that are themselves contestable. Drawing upon recent work in ethnostatistics, science and technology studies and the sociology of quantification, I argue that indicators, like all statistics, are particular textual forms that are borne of generative contexts and that promote specific kinds of intervention into social life. The critical issues they raise go beyond the realist ones of accuracy and methodology. Not the least of them is their potential to present matters of value as matters of fact.

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## THE CONSTITUTIVITY OF INDICATORS

In her theorisation of the political significance of indicators in a human rights context, Sally Merry (2011, S84-5) proposes that they have two principal kinds of effect. The first is their knowledge effect in shaping how the world may be known. The second is a governance effect that lies in how those forms of knowledge frame decision making, consolidating certain forms of power to act on and in the world while potentially displacing others. One corollary of the ostensible neutrality of numbers is that, contrary to such an understanding, techniques of quantification appear to be mere tools that may be used towards any end, but without constitutive effects 'of their own'. Yet, as Merry and others suggest, different technologies can exert different kinds of governmental influence that very much shape how power operates (Davis et al. 2011, 14).

Along these lines, work on the history of statistics has emphasised how numbers shape, even create, historically specific categories of knowledge. As populations become objects of statistical inquiry, sets of noticed and counted properties build up. Enumeration helps to fit new kinds of items into the categories that emerge reciprocally. So it was, for instance, that through 'the avalanche of printed numbers that occurred after 1820' (Hacking 1990, 18) deviant subpopulations such as criminals, the sick and the poor were constituted as governable groups. They became bearers of concepts such as poverty that were fashioned partly through statistical ways of knowing, and governmental intervention was guided by their terms (Hacking 1990).

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To echo Merry's two effects, this is about the power of numbers to construct understanding of the world, and also to shape relations through concordant forms of governance - but in potentially variable ways that deserve scrutiny. It is to recognise the possible 'constitutivity' of indicators. As Tord Larsen (2012) argues, they should not be merely considered ways of organising pre-existing entities, but as performative technologies that can generate institutional objects and forms of control. Indeed, when applied to abstract domains such as culture, the objects exist only as a model determined by the choice to measure certain dimensions of a construct. They cannot simply 'describe' cultural life in the way often claimed by advocates (Madden 2005, 223). Accordingly, a discourse analytic approach should not be concerned with accuracy of representation. Rather, it is necessary to think of indicators as inscription devices that are both assembled, not natural, and capable of what John Law has called 'ordering effects' - the creation of entities, including collective social orders such as organisations, through specific material-semiotic relations (Alcadipani and Hassard 2010).

Of course their constitutivity does not mean indicators fully determine the fields in which they are used or that responses to them on the ground are monological. Considering the latter would require empirical research into the articulations between indicators and localised actors that is beyond the scope of this chapter. Rather, this is a matter of understanding the framing that effects particular modes of administration. In an actor-network approach, power is relational, seen to consist in the configuration of assemblages. The interrelations between actants shape the conditions of each

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other's being. In other words, even nonhuman socio-technical devices have a social force. In the remainder of the chapter, my argument is that indicators effect comparative calculative relations of value that can be considered to entrench associated possibilities for being. They allow a certain kind of 'power at a distance' in which representational devices render distant objects and activities manageable on the terms of those who control the processes of calculation through which they are known (Latour 1987). I do not present this as conclusive evidence of a thoroughgoing situational politics of indicators. However, if what is at stake is how quantification affects the form of democracy, we should at least ask whether indicators can come in democratised forms.

## MEASURING THE INTANGIBLE

Any measurement framework depends upon potentially contestable conceptions of what matters, how it can be defined, and methods for quantifying it. Yet indicators are also a particular kind of statistics that engender calculation specifically along the lines expressed by Evelyn Ruppert's ([forthcoming](#), 1) statement that they 'in general make phenomena visible so that they can be assessed, compared, and ranked.' Indicators are not descriptive statistics as such, but metrics that are continually involved in interpretive schemas from their inception, through their deployment, into subsequent use of data in further processes of deliberation (Madden 2005, 220). In the words of Marnie Badham (2009, 69), 'Typical indicators are quantitative evaluative data linked to policy goals and frameworks, intending to measure progress over time, or to compare geographical locations, constituencies, or even nations.' As with

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performance measurement of human activity in general, they are used to ask the question ‘how well’ something or another is going with regard to particular conceptions of what a good performance is. In the answering of the question, the value of items measured gets broken down into characteristics expressed against a spread of quantities offered by the chosen metric. This means that indicators are already involved in modelling of the social through defining what is important.

As a minimum any technique for quantifying the goodness of attributes of collective life is open to question, in terms of how it conceives of *the good*, breaks it down into elements and measures them. It is also the case that indicators have a history tied up with economic discourses in which *the good* is largely understood as financial values. The first and still most famous examples are economic measures such as Gross Domestic Product or GDP, which, after the Great Depression, became formalised as government tools to help track the performance of the economy and plan monetary or fiscal intervention. Combinations of leading and lagging economic indicators depict the trends and correlations that inform financial market transactions, business investment and macroeconomic government policies. They provide data that is used to inform the calculations of those who seek to intervene in the domain in certain ways.

However, by the 1960s, the social indicators movement had encouraged governments to also move beyond economics to measure progress in social welfare and facilitate its planning, leading to the rise of ‘social performance indicators’ (Carter et al. 1992, 15).

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According to Robert Horn (1983, 26), who was referring to developments in the 1970s:

Firstly, some attempts have been made to extend the economic framework by including non-material factors oriented to a wider notion of human welfare. And, secondly, the social indicator movement has tried to extend the methodology of economic statistics and systems into a wider range of social phenomena.

This extension was possible because of the success of economic indicators, but it also involved critique of their limitations (Cobb and Rixford 1998; Diener and Suh 1997). This raises the question of whether social and cultural indicators should be thought of as a move beyond economic logic, or as its extension to other domains. If indicators are designed to highlight the values of things that matter for those who have a stake in managing them, and they were developed for economic management, does their use make economic management a model for administration in other fields? Are they a conduit for the social to be subject to an acquisitive, investment logic, always looking for a best return from assets, as is often argued about instrumental cultural policy?

I return to these questions after examining the ordering effects of indicators. For now though it is important to stress the shift towards 'non-material' factors of human welfare mentioned by Horn above. In fact, the advent of social and cultural indicators was continuous with a wider trend towards organisational performance measurement in both business and the public sector. The core development here was to move



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beyond financial accountancy to use indicators to measure non-pecuniary aspects of enterprises, especially the range of intangible assets and outcomes seen to shape success in knowledge economies. In the private sector, advocates of performance measurement saw financial data as mainly a representation of the past that managers needed to supplement with indicators about drivers of future performance. That could include factors such as knowledge assets, customer satisfaction and innovation levels (Eccles 1990). In the public sector they argued that, in the absence of a profit motive, the effectiveness of government programmes should be determined through measures of non-financial outcomes (Wholey and Hatry 1992).

This turn towards valuing intangibles poses particular problems of method however. As Horn (1983, 28) notes, one issue with social indicators is ‘differing views about what constitutes culture, education, health’ and thus what to measure as a representation of achievement in each domain. When applied to intangibles, indicators must measure observable variables seen to stand for non-observable ones (Frones 2007, 8). Once we attempt to quantify states like wellbeing, happiness or cultural vitality, there is no chance of measuring them directly. Measurable proxies must be chosen - but their selection does not guarantee relevance. For instance, in his work on measurement of public housing outcomes, Peter Marcuse (1971) argues that crude counts of placements and inputs tell us nothing meaningful about the quality of housing or people’s experiences of it, such that, perversely, housing many people in dire conditions can signify as successful policy.

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The measurement of culture involves all these problems of definition and countability. Culture is multidimensional and cultural value has ‘no common unit of account’ (Throsby cited in Caust 2003, 52). The decision to express it through metrics means that qualities that can be understood in other than numeric ways have to be quantified, and this is both a technical challenge about valid quantification and a contestable process in which particular models of culture hold sway. Not only is the concept culture itself hard to define, but it throws up the problem of cultural relativism, such that what is seen as good is itself a cultural variable that differs by situation. The problem of how to value culture is particularly pronounced in a contemporary context where postmodern aesthetic relativism has de-legitimated hierarchies of value in the arts. Old certainties about the public good and the inherent excellence of particular cultural forms are problematic, with policy claims about the good of culture more likely to stress diversity or the benefits cultural activity has for other forms of social and economic wellbeing (Belfiore 2004, 189). In the field of cultural policy, use of indicators enables core problems of how to value culture to be bracketed. Instead, particular instrumental conceptions of *the good* are enacted by measuring the benefits culture has beyond its own domain, whether social or economic.

## **ORDERING EFFECTS**

The ways that indicators quantify intangibles and make them manageable can be understood as creating particular ordering effects, in the sense explained above of having power to effect administration by creating ways of knowing and ordering

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social relations. This section provides a somewhat schematic list of the ordering effects of indicators that deserve further scrutiny regarding their political implications and empirical consequences for cultural institutions.

### **The quantification of quality**

The first ordering effect is the quantification of quality: the knowing of abstract conditions in terms of quantifiable proxies. Regardless of *what* has been selected for measurement, this ensures it will be something that can be broken into countable characteristics that stand for the larger idea metonymically. The real-world availability of data immediately limits what can have value in such a framework. For instance, Michael Barnett (2013, 390) proposes that metrics used to monitor humanitarianism shift attention away from its single most important aspect - the presence of aid workers to deal with ongoing needs and whatever may arise. As presence is essentially a resource input, it is hard to express as targets against which achievement levels can be quantified through counting up appropriate units. Instead humanitarianism is increasingly broken into specific goals assessed against resources deployed (value-for-money) and in line with their instrumental yield for an underlying consequentialist ethics that seeks a return on humanitarianism. That which otherwise might be considered important, but for which data are not selected or available, will necessarily be devalued if quantification is a general mandate of evidence-based governance.

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### **Circumscription**

This is related to another effect: the necessary circumscription of the meaning of concepts measured, above and beyond issues of whether chosen proxies truly measure it. Circumscription must take place because ongoing measurement requires the formalising of a specific set of discrete, stable categories. This results in the reification of a classificatory schema for phenomena that could be known in other terms. In another example, Barnett argues that through indicators, economic growth comes to constitute the larger category of economic wellbeing. GDP and related metrics prioritise production over distributive questions of economic equity or rights to economic security that might be taken as more important criteria in different views of wellbeing. They make production growth-oriented views of economic management into common sense by formalising measurement of indicators selected for their relevance to that paradigm, but standing for economy overall. Thus decisions to focus on particular meanings inevitably 'privilege some kinds of public policies over others' (Barnett 2013, 390). Of course policy is always partial and even without quantification articulates specific views. However, the point is that indicators have greater power to 'lock in' the latter and exclude alternatives because they are reductive by design (Davis et al 2010, 4). This amounts to a significant kind of agenda-setting power. It allows a coherent order to advance one position where otherwise policy discourse might be multi-vocal and more open to diverse kinds of knowledge than the one legitimated by numbers qua evidence - evidence, which, through indicator frameworks, is collected precisely to support specific views of culture and not others.

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### **Standardisation**

Implicit in the quantification that reduces concepts to particular categories of understanding is the standardisation of those categories. Indeed, for any indicator framework to work over more than one period of data collection, the categories and methods used must stay the same. There are good methodological reasons for this, as changing protocols would invalidate measurement reliability. However, the trade-off is lack of flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances. Standardisation of categories over time and space is more than circumscription and reduction to particular categories. It is about the norms created by this. Standards are powerful technologies for governing conduct that can have a range of political effects (Higgins and Larner 2010). One of the most powerful is their capacity to define acceptable and normal practice across contexts (Bowker and Star 2000). This can lead to the operationalising of standard concepts in institutional life at the cost of discretion, diversity or contextual flexibility. For instance, the evaluation of schools through standardised testing has been shown to effect curriculum narrowing and ‘teaching to the test’ in many different jurisdictions (Redden and Low 2010). It is only logical that if test scores in literacy and numeracy are taken to be the main indicators of educational achievement, schools are more likely to spend time on coaching students for tests in those areas than in other activities that might be deeply formative but inimical to standardised testing regimes.

### **Commensuration**

Another reason measurement categories are liable to become standardised is that changing them would lead to the inability to plot trends over time (longitudinal

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analysis). The same principle applies on the synchronic axis (cross-sectional analysis). A basic tenet of performance measurement is that a single data point is pretty much meaningless. Comparison of it with other data collected in the same data unit, but in a different context or jurisdiction, is what helps to provide benchmarks, which in turn help to define achievable or desirable levels for the measured variable. Counting something like museum attendance or numbers of cultural workers, for instance, is pretty meaningless unless indexed to normal, high or low levels for them in given reference populations. Insofar as data can be made comparable, the cultural characteristics of different sites can be compared. Of course different frameworks can be biased towards one plane or the other. Whereas the Australian cultural indicators framework, Vital Signs (Cultural Ministers Council 2010) is nominally more oriented towards the diachronic in aggregating data from Australia to be plotted over time, the Creative City Index from the Centre for Creative Industries at QUT (Hartley et al. 2012), is explicitly synchronic in comparing the cultural dynamism of different cities at a point in time.

Following Wendy Espeland's (1998) pioneering work in the sociology of quantification, I propose that the most important characteristic of indicators from a governmentality viewpoint is that they affect commensuration through such comparison. That is to say they make items that might otherwise not be similarly interrelated in other discourses comparable through adoption of a common metric, and this making comparable means they are amenable to certain kinds of action. Commensuration can take a range of forms from the statistics that make nations comparable through to assessment of water quality, university league tables,

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consumer data and actuarial projects. It signifies a further step on the basis of standardisation, in that it places the entities compared into a field where their identities are constructed relationally through a translocal form of knowledge, which in turn, informs any agent who seeks to intervene in that field. For instance, international indicator frameworks such as the United Nations Educational Scientific Organisation's (UNESCO) framework for cultural statistics apply standard categories to effect understanding of diverse constituencies in particular instrumental terms based on demonstrating the wellbeing effects of culture (Madden 2005, 222). Vital Signs and any other framework that aggregates or presents data from multiple sites have the same logic, whether the highest organising scale is international, national or subnational.

### **Decontextualisation**

Although these ordering effects are separated out for heuristic reasons, they have potential to interact. Translocal indicator frameworks involve circumscription of meaning, standardisation of categories and the extension of those categories to make diverse entities commensurate. In governmental terms, this could be understood as a kind of power at a distance in which experts at the centre of networks set terms that reduce discretion of actors in the networks by controlling the criteria against which they may be judged. Another aspect of this is decontextualisation, which militates against local power to define what matters. If a translocal comparative knowledge derived from indicators with a provenance from a centre elsewhere comes to define the terms in which local activities are known, it not only displaces localised or alternative criteria, it also represents local situations in ways that strip away

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contextual factors that shape practice and outcomes. Insofar as that language also comes to define what is valued, those local factors are liable to be devalued. Christina Garsten and Kerstin Jacobsson (2011, 378) give the example of United Nations (UN) metrics for measuring corporate social responsibility. They argue that the indicators privilege very particular and corporate-friendly concepts of responsibility that foreclose further political debate and conflictual space around the responsibilities of corporations. By being locked into the technical terms of the system, ongoing debate about corporations and their international activities is forestalled and contextual issues about those activities are obfuscated by the focus on 'easy measurables' that can be found in each context and that make them commensurable.

### **Differential evaluation**

Returning full circle to the governmental consequences of quantification, the numbers generated through the frameworks form *orders of calculation* through their relationships with each other. In other words, the power at a distance involved not only makes entities commensurate in a relational field, it enrolls their assigned identities - in the form of numeric values - into further calculations. As mentioned, benchmarking allows indicator values to be meaningfully compared to others, allowing judgements about relative performance. The flow of information produces a particular kind of knowledge about what is good, quantities of good characteristics and how they are distributed. Oversight, as we have seen, is not 'neutral', but predicated on the notion that the monitored variables have value to an agenda about the social that is encoded into system design. Its telos is the maximisation of good values. Against this orientation entities are liable to be compared in terms of *how*



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*much* contribution to this ‘social good’ they make. It is not just that certain views of the world and forms of knowledge are favoured in a field by being measured. The indicator values effectively amount to scores. This is where they act as instruments of executive and managerial strategy in governments and organisations at all levels. Agencies deemed responsible for the values achieved and for improving them in future will be enjoined to act in ways that effect maximisation. Numbers can be manipulated mathematically with regard to each other, facilitating specific forms of maximising calculability such as target-setting.

Yet this is also an order of differential evaluation where multiple indicator scores are *set against each other* in the process of determining how well an agenda is being met. Different values, different levels of achievement, and thus hierarchies of value are inevitable. Indicators result in ordinal ranking in some way or another (Davis et al 2010, 9). At one level they normalise agendas across diverse fields of actors, encouraging conformity to the terms of measurement. However, at another level, the possible spread of values - with the greater value in those valorised being worth more - makes not for a logic of conformity, but one of outperformance. This is in the sense of an imperative to do better than benchmark values. So for example a framework like the Creative City Index enjoins stakeholders to maximise values that contribute to the kind of dynamism associated with successful creative industries. They formalise pursuit of the latter’s social and cultural correlates as established by people like Richard Florida (2002): characteristics like openness, talented young people and their cultural consumption patterns, gay culture, bohemians, and migrant workers are the social and cultural goods seen as instrumental to economic productivity. However, in

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always comparing places and inviting relative maximisation of values, the indicator frameworks are based on the inevitability of inequality, uneven distributions of values, as some cities do better than others in the game of comparison. By design, this embeds competitive relations in striving for benefits associated with high position.

### **CONCLUSION: THE ECONOMISTIC FORCE OF INDICATORS**

There is of course no guarantee that policies informed by indicators (whether cultural or otherwise) necessarily enact the logic of the ordering effects outlined in this chapter. However, in proposing the study of them I am arguing that indicators provide powerful discursive orientations towards the administration of the social. In practice decisions are made on the basis of data and they inevitably include resourcing decisions and corporate strategies. For example, while it is theoretically possible that municipal authorities in cities ranked in various city indexes eschew the language of the creative economy, it is more logical to expect that such rankings engender policy responses directed at doing well in the competition represented through the indexes. At least, to act against the current requires a kind of active refusal of the terms of commensuration, and a decision to strike out on a different path. The way that indicator frameworks lock in very particular definitions of the social, economic or cultural good, and militate against ongoing debate, depoliticises policy processes that we might argue should be more open to contestation. Similarly, their potential to spread such locked in definitions over time and space through commensuration constitutes a shaping of the terms on which the social can be known and acted upon in constituencies that are otherwise diverse.

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By way of conclusion I would like to return to the question of whether the ordering effects of indicators are linked to broader governmental patterns such as neoliberalism, defined as a tendency for governance to promote market relations (McGuigan 2005). Steffem Böhm and Chris Land (2009, 16) argue that instrumental cultural policies in which interventions in culture are aimed at, and measured for, their benefits to other social outcomes, are based on ‘use of culture to form the social in the image of capital’. Capitalism above all requires measures of value for its calculative transactions to take place. This is a bold assertion. However, the discourse analysis here provides some support for the position. Cultural indicator frameworks can apply to a range of ends that are not simply economic, such as social inclusion, and others that are more obviously economic, such as the creative economy. However, as statistical techniques they track and assign value to the social with an accountancy methodology (Frones 2007). The logic behind the orders of calculation they create is one of accumulation, of adding value through performance maximisation in which yields on activity can be demonstrated. In turn, commensuration ensures that maximisation of values takes place in a competitive market-like setting where the achievements of actors in given fields can be judged comparatively. This works to specify values to stakeholders in ways similar to price signals in economics. Indicators set demand and encourage actors situated in fields that they monitor to supply the values demanded.

Of course, this amounts not to capital accumulation itself, but a kind of credit accumulation modelled on it through use of statistics to convey price-like information

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that defines what has value for actors. But in this a specific form of disciplinary power is affected that harnesses market sociality towards governmental ends. Of course, this is not the mythic 'pure market' of neoliberal theory, but a pragmatic managed quasi-market that facilitates governmental direction. Institutional actors are given incentives to make investor-like decisions to achieve the highest returns and recognition in terms of the numeric currency of indicators. However, this recognition is not part of a purely symbolic economy, but a material discursive one which may shape funds distributed, contracts and bonuses awarded (or not) to those whose fields of activity are associated with indicator scores. Through them governmental priorities can cascade through the sphere of cultural production. Ignoring them is, again, a theoretical possibility, as such an economy replaces compulsion with incentive, but addressing their terms in some way, even if short of full conformity, is more feasible when fortunes are tied to measurement. As Merry states, indicators influence resource allocations and political decisions, but not through directive management of the means from a governmental centre. Rather, indicators 'facilitate governance by self-management rather than command. Individuals and countries are made responsible for their own behaviour as they seek to comply with the measures of performance articulated in an indicator' (2011, 84).

To return to the provocations about growing quantification in social life that opened this chapter, I would argue, firstly after Rose, that indicators illustrate one particular way in which other social fields become susceptible to economic logic, and, secondly, that they do help to advance 'investment-like' instrumental approaches to cultural policy in particular. However, although they are consistent with the ascendant and

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dominant political rationalities of their time, this does not mean indicators are simply monological. Dominant rationalities never entirely displace alternatives, or determine practice. The attraction of the actor-network inspired approach to governmentality taken here is that no generic technique is combined with other elements in identical ways and no single technique constitutes all government. Ordering effects do not guarantee a specific configuration. Although the potential for indicators to prioritise instrumentalism, commensuration, market incentivisation and technocratic agenda setting over democratic multivalence is clear, this does not preclude the possibility of deliberative action to *democratise indicators*. Jo Caust (2003, 61) argues that measurement can ‘emphasise community values and involve active participation by all the stakeholders’ instead of government intervention in the arts sector through measures that override values on the ground. Audrey Yue et al. (2011) illustrate how this might work out in practice through a pilot study of ‘community owned’ indicators in a local government area. For Badham (2009, 70) community indicator projects ‘may encourage local democracy and community engagement by asking what is valued’ and allowing for diverse, situational notions of cultural value to be measured.

While still focusing attention on what matters and setting demand for it to be maximised, such uses of indicators place them into assemblages in which commensuration may not override diversity or localised forms of power, and in which technocratic fiat does not smother consultation. Nonetheless some standardisation is likely within a locality and the openness to differences and change requires considerable investment in the face of cost pressures for streamlined manageable systems. In short, some of the less democratic ordering effects of indicators evident in

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many frameworks can be diminished - with the caveats that ongoing commitment to do so is necessary, and that it is legitimate to question how possible this is in settings dominated by instrumental policy imperatives. Such possibilities are an important point of intervention for the construction of alternative democratic approaches in a context where the requirement for quantification is hegemonic. The building of critical languages for expressing how any such approaches must always deploy debatable socio-technical devices involved in the ordering of the social in *some way* is also necessary for alternatives to be imagined. Questioning the political neutrality and objectivity of numbers is the main prerequisite for both strategies.

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