The Novel as Network. Literary Form, Idea, Commodity
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Sensing the Novel/Seeing the Book/Selling the Goods

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Abstract
This chapter examines the gatekeeping orientation, evaluative processes and decision-making role of the publisher's commissioning editor through a conceptual framework of sensing the novel, seeing the book and selling the goods. This framework incorporates the affective, and often bodily processes, of reading novels ('sensing'), alongside the matching of taste to communicative processes and an envisioning of the material book-as-product ('seeing'), culminating in the commercial impetus of books-as-goods ('selling'). Through semi-structured interviews, the chapter examines the sensory and passional ways in editors recount their experiences of commissioning as a lived, felt experience but also as a professional discourse and an economic practice. As such, the chapter argues that sensing-seeing-selling is a networked praxis in which aesthetic objects, individual professionalised readers, emotional labour, publishing processes, company formations, material embodiments and market environments come together.

The gatekeeping orientation, evaluative processes and decision-making role of the commissioning editor are central to traditional publishing practices. How-to guides and publishing studies textbooks articulate the centrality of editors and their intermediary role between author and reader (e.g. Ramdarshan Bold and Smith, 2018; Clark and Phillips 2019), and such jobs are recognised, and prized, by would-be entrants into the industry (e.g. Baverstock et al 2008). Yet there are still few scholarly accounts which go beyond descriptions of organisational processes, or get under the skin of the industry's own capacity for mythmaking, particularly with regards to the publishing of novels. In her series of interviews with editors, Greenberg comments that editing 'happens behind the scenes', is 'not talked about very often' and that her interviews are 'an attempt to fill some of the gaps and silences' (2015, 1).

This chapter seeks to address further these knowledge gaps and silences in understandings of the publisher's editor and their decision-making processes, situated within the networked industry and its market environment. It does so by positing a conceptual framework indicated in the chapter title: 'sensing the novel, seeing the book, and selling the goods'. This framework incorporates the affective, and often bodily processes of reading novels ('sensing'), alongside the matching of taste to communicative processes and an envisioning

of the material book-as-product ('seeing'), culminating in the commercial impetus of books-as-goods ('selling'). In so doing, it seeks to '*zoom in*' to the particularities of cultural judgement, in Stewart's phrase, thereby enabling an understanding of 'the dynamics of the evaluative moment' which is attendant to individual subjectivities, network-based thinking, and sociologically-grounded decisions (2013, 120, 127).

In the development of this framework, the chapter draws substantially on primary data, in the form of a series of nineteen semi-structured interviews with commissioning editors for UK-based publishing houses. The process of editing, and those who carry it out, is a crucial aspect of the network of value creation in the publishing of novels. The houses ranged from conglomerates to mid-sized companies to small and micro businesses, with the interviewed editors commissioning novels across a range of sectors, including literary fiction, crime, and children's books.[1] Through the interviews and the framework generated to examine them, the chapter provides an account of the often sensory and passional ways in which editors recount their experiences of commissioning, both as a lived, felt experience but also as part of a professional discourse and an economic practice. These findings thus respond to Henningsgaard's call for interviews with industry professionals to address their 'reading' and 'narrated experiences' (2019). As such, the chapter also investigates the novel (as the primary focus of the commissioning practices discussed in the interviews) as an aesthetic and commercial good with values derived from a variety of taste and value regimes, stemming from professional networks, and which are constructed by various hierarchies (including the structural and systemic), alongside their own intrinsic, crafted and aesthetic qualities. Additionally, in the chapter's exploration of the sensory ways in which editors narrate their experiences of commissioning, both as a lived, felt experience, but also as part of a professional discourse, it also considers the potential elision of the labour and (demographic) positioning of cultural intermediaries in such a narrative, and also how such narratives interact with conceptualisations of 'objective' qualities of text, and of authorial 'genius'. Such narratives have self-mythologising as well as mystifying tendencies which are

[1] My acknowledgements are due to Rachel Noorda for transcription, funded by the University of Stirling Division of Literature & Languages. Ethics approval for the interviews was granted by the University of Stirling General University Ethics Panel. The interviewees are anonymised.

explored later in the chapter, and which inter-relate with the seeming need to occlude or render invisible aspects of professionalised reading and evaluation practices.

Much of the understanding underpinning this chapter derives from but extends beyond existing accounts of commissioning, decision-making and editorial choices in the book publishing industry (e.g. Thompson 2010, Stewart 2018). It also draws on accounts of taste-making and value construction both of literature in the marketplace, but also from broader cultural sociological spheres (e.g. Radway 1997, Fuller and Rehberg Sedo 2013, Leypoldt 2017, Stewart 2013, Banks 2017). Additionally, it can usefully be read in parallel to – as it builds upon and beyond – my own article 'Taste and/or Big Data?: Post-Digital Editorial Selection' (2017b), which utilizes the same dataset of interviews.[2]This chapter continues that analysis of the 'dynamics of the evaluative moment' in the publishing industry through its investigation of pre-publication, professionalised reading.

This chapter, then, is structured into three parts, reflecting the framework of 'sensing the novel, seeing the book, selling the goods'. Each section draws on primary data from the interview set described above, which are interpreted throughout the chapter via broader analyses of the aesthetic, sensual and commercial nature of cultural properties.

Sensing the Novel

My interviews began by asking editors whether they identified with a prevailing industry discourse about reading for acquisition, which centres on gut instinct (Squires 2017b). My interviewees did identify with, and frequently use, this discourse, as I explored in my previous article: 'it's more a kind of emotional feeling, or something in the pit of your stomach… it's all quite an unconscious thing to be honest […] instinctive, yes, no, yeah, or feeling that something is right'; 'You almost learn to trust how your body is reacting to

[2] Within the frame of publishing's operations in a post-digital age, 'Taste and/or Big Data?' (Squires 2017b) articulates how publishing nonetheless remains a largely traditional process, in which the individual editor's taste, judgement, and gut instinct combines with company behaviour and market environment, rather than via an incorporation of the big data of algorithmic processes.

something because those books that you got super excited about are then going to be a hit, and then you think, "I've got that feeling again."'

The responses detailed are augmented by others from across my interview sample, in which are expressed additional sensory explanations for the moment of reading. One of these is that the encounter between editor and book ideally makes the heart 'rac[e]' or 'fires me up totally'. For another editor, a book has potential to make her 'literally feel kind of electrified […] absolutely utterly […] cattle-prodded by the book' (although this was made in references to a book that the interviewee should perhaps not buy, indicating a degree of textual coercion). Experienced editors 'learn to trust how your body is reacting to something', and tell themselves, as one editor from an independent company put it, '"I've got that feeling again."'[3]

Such sensations, described repeatedly in physical, visceral terms, were also articulated in terms of 'love' or 'passion', in which the individual editor's emotions as well as physical feelings were stirred while reading. A conglomerate-based editor explained that, 'We only buy books really that we love,' and that while reading as an editor 'you want to […] fall in love with it'. This editor reflected on her commissioning decisions, describing them using language similar to love at first sight: 'I think the more you go on, the more you realise that all the books I've bought, are the books I've loved pretty much from the first page, or the first chapter, there's something about it…' (It is notable that in a 70-minute interview, this particular interviewee used the term 'love' or 'loved' 33 times.) An editor at a mid-sized company described the importance of an affective relationship to her potential purchases:

> I read as a reader first and foremost, and I think my taste is aligned with other readers out there, but I personally would feel it very difficult to take on a book that I didn't feel very passionate about, because you've got to live with it for 12 months, the publishing schedules are quite long, 12-18 months; you've got to read it, re-read it, re-read it again at least six times.

[3] The learned aspects of using instincts and gut feelings are investigated further in Squires 2017b.

Such construction of feelings towards the novels which editors have under consideration are also crucial to the ongoing process of commissioning and publishing, as the next section on 'Seeing the Book' examines. However, some editors were keen to assert that their (initial) feelings towards a book were not driven by any sense of the market, or its potential and eventual readers. 'It's the book itself,' as another conglomerate editor put it, referring to their sense of the text's intrinsic, aesthetic qualities.

My interviewees, then, sought to assert the primacy of the text under consideration in front of them, and alongside the sensory effects of these texts, they were also keen to emphasise the affective space of their initial reading. Such emphases referred to their own private reading habits, and how those habits and their sensory and emotive reactions to texts then informed their professionalised reading practices. These accounts are productive in the examination of the 'narrated experience' of reading by editors argued for by Henningsgaard (2019).

These narratives are, I would argue, part of publishing's normative discourse about the 'dynamics of the evaluative moment'. This discourse is also an example of the self-mythologising tendency of these accounts, in which the cultural object – in this case, the novel which is to become the book and eventually the goods – affects the reader bodily, insisting on their attention, and creating a pattern which will, ideally, then be imprinted onto future reading moments, in the company, in the trade, and for future readers. In these accounts, the novel achieves its own valency and capacity to affect readers, rendering these attributes central to the decision-making moment, rather than any external, sociologically-informed attributes.

Despite their insistence on their reading *as* readers first and foremost, however, all my interviewees were nonetheless able to articulate and occasionally understand as problematic their sociodemographic positioning. In a period in which the whiteness, London-centric and middle-class nature of UK publishing is increasingly evidenced and interrogated in industry and scholarly accounts, my interviewees demonstrated some understanding of the potential effects of their identities on their commissioning practice and their (often privileged pathways) to the attainment of the status of commissioning

editor, particularly when I explicitly questioned them about politics, identity and ideology and publishing's 'diversity deficit' (see Saha 2016; Squires 2017a; Brook et al 2018; Ramdarshan Bold 2019). That said, the editors even then frequently restated the primacy of the text and their affective encounters with it. If texts are understood, as argued by Banks, as one of a range of 'cultural objects' – 'complex entities that have aesthetic properties and effects that might be regarded as objective – *as well as* subjectively apprehended and socially made' (2017b, 35-6) – these editors' narrated experiences of their encounters with such objects can be read as prioritising the objective qualities of the text, as well as the subjectivity of their reading experiences, albeit with an awareness of their particularised subject positionings, their organizational contexts, and market environment.

My interviewees' remarks about texts' objective qualities also occasionally referred to their potential *lack* of literary merit, with one experienced independent editor reflecting humorously on her early career reading through unsolicited, non-agented submissions:

> [Interviewee:] When I first did work experience twenty years ago, my job was to go through the slush pile.[4] I could not believe it. I was like, 'Oh my God, they're trusting this with me. Wow, this is crazy.' And then about six manuscripts in, I was like, 'Oh, I get it now.'
>
> [CS:] It's not that hard?
>
> [Interviewee:] It really isn't. Yeah. A cat could do this.

While the image of a feline acquisitions editor comedically undermines the human agency of editorial selection, such exaggeration nonetheless reasserts the qualities of the literary text undergoing editorial consideration. This interviewee states that such qualities – or at least the failure to maintain minimum objective standards – are readily discernible, even to a new entrant to the publishing industry.

[4] The publisher's 'slush pile' is comprised of unagented manuscripts submitted to publishers; frequently also referred to as 'unsolicited'.

Such an intentional over-statement of the ease of separating good from bad submissions might find a computational parallel in the claims of Archer and Jockers in *The Bestseller Code* (2016), to the effect that bestsellers can be identified by (complex and yet non-human) computer modelling. Rowberry (2019) argues that 'Archer and Jockers' approach removes the agency of readers' (240) and, moreover, that 'Big data in publishing cannot rest on the laurels of analyzing sales figures, but must instead triangulate various data points to understand what is read and how. A formula built upon both content and context allows insight into the reading process' (240-1). My previous examination of these claims (2017b) led to an emphasis on the situated practices of professionalised reading by acquisitions editors, an approach that this chapter furthers.

Indeed, several editors expressed to me how their reading instincts – and their sense of market – developed as their career progressed, a process of melding instinct, taste, logic and learning (see Squires 2017b). This process was articulated as, moreover, a negotiation, a process of 'constantly navigating' between instinct and 'your reality of what's possible [in the marketplace]', as one conglomerate editor phrased it. Another conglomerate editor talked about working out her taste on the job, alongside her knowledge of the requirements of the publisher's list into which she was acquiring books.

The conglomerate editor who referred to her constant navigation between instinct and the possibilities of the market also discussed a move from a love-at-first-sight sensation to one invested in the qualities and power of the book itself, or rather two particular books which she deemed her most successful, as an editor:

> in both cases I knew within a page that this was going to be amazing. And there was just something about those books that had a charisma about them and a compulsion, if you like.

The 'charisma' of a book might, for this particular editor, be understood as the affective pull of her first reading, aligning her sensations with publishing's discourse of sensory and passional relationships to texts which are not yet books. They also relate to a theorization of how a book might be received in both cultural and economic terms through what Leypoldt

has termed ‘charismatic trust’ (following Shils’ adaptation of Weberian terminology into that of ‘charismatic value’) (2017, 58). ‘Literary products,’ argues Leypoldt, ‘involve cultural frameworks that make them multi-dimensional and incommensurable, so that choosing between them poses a degree of uncertainty’, making cultural consumers ‘invariably enter what Karpik calls a “judgment-market” embedded within social networks’ (2017, 57). The particular ‘social networks’ in the case of professionalised readers are also, in this case, business networks which are generative of the ‘“judgment-market”’.

As Leypoldt continues, in order to ‘choose and appreciate fiction in today’s extensive field of cultural production’, we ‘fall back on complex evaluation regimes to which we extend a degree of trust’. These might include ‘public and private networks of expertise, including various kinds of rankings, brandings, or product identities’ – the ‘bookshop around the corner, our favourite critic at the *Guardian*, Oprah Winfrey, the Booker Prize committee, or our most reliable aunt’ (2017, 57, 58). These latter are forms of ‘calculative trust’, ‘if we know our desire relatively well’ (2017, 57). But when that desire is not so statable or even quantifiable, Leypoldt argues that a ‘more complex kind of trust’ – ‘charismatic trust’ – comes into play, a trust by which certain ‘products can embody “something larger” in our culture’, a quality that has something of the ‘sacral’ in it (2017, 58, 59). If a book becomes ‘attached to the literary field’s charismatic space’, that space has the potential to ‘turn[…] it into an object of strong value’ (Leypoldt 2017, 65) bringing to it the status of ‘“hypergoods”’ (Leypoldt 2017, 59) or, alternately, ‘“meta-goods”’, which are ‘borne partly from their own objective qualities and partly from our subjective engagements with them’ (Banks 2017, 33).

For the editor who referred to the ‘charisma’ of her career-defining acquisitions, the primary recognition of that attribute came from the ‘page’, a seemingly textual recognition and a subjective ‘compulsion’ that nonetheless swiftly turned into a marketable proposition, which is quickly shared with colleagues:

> the automatic thing you do then is get everyone else reading it, because you know […] that’s its selling point. The selling point is that it will be a total word-of-mouth book and for everyone who reads it, they will press it onto someone else. So all you’re doing is […] what the market will do. And you want, with what that kind of

> book […] is as many people reading it as possible, even if it's just the first few pages […] that's what helps you buy it, because if twenty other people running around the company going, 'Oh my god this book's amazing. Oh my god have you heard about it?'… […] And you're going, there's something about this book it's almost inevitable. That's very rare.

Such a rapid transition might seem to fall into the definition of 'calculative trust': a quantifiable number of people having read and been affected by the book; a pre-emptive, even Baudrillardian precessional simulacrum (1994) of 'just doing what the market will do' through its creation of networked word-of-mouth and – it is to be supposed – an inevitable marketplace success. And yet the explanation for why these particular books, rather than others, remains under-explained as to how the aesthetic attributes of what is presented on the page might align with a 'charismatic space', which is as much external and 'conceptual' as aesthetic. Leypoldt's argues that 'since literature as a medium tends to fall somewhere between relatively somatic and relatively conceptual forms, we need to look at each individual case', meaning that for any individual text a perception based on the sensory effects produced is created alongside intellectual understandings of it and the 'charismatic pull' of wider, 'conceptual frames' which the text might embody (2017, 67, 66). The articulation of this interviewee's charismatic texts is, in fact, very circular: 'everyone else reading it […] that's its selling point. The selling point is that it will be a total word-of-mouth book and for everyone who reads it, they will press it onto someone else. So all you're doing is […] what the market will do.' The networked, charismatic space, then, is one that wants to read, voraciously and hungrily, and share, and read, and share. Such a charismatic space is one into which the book, if it meets the editor's taste and market judgement, the company positioning and market environment, might find its marketplace success, its physical form, and its communicative functions, as the next section explores further.

Seeing the Book

So what happens when the editor considers the continuation of the passional affair with a novel they've read? A conglomerate editor explains:

> a lot of it essentially comes down to, do I just love this book? Am I really excited by it? Is this something, which to me, I feel like I can talk about endlessly for a year, or two years, because publishing is such a long process.

This short excerpt demonstrates a rapid transition from an immediate sense of love to one that can sustain a long-term relationship. The 'long process' of publishing – in which the period from acquisition to publishing an initial edition can easily be up to a year – requires seemingly 'endless' talk about the book, and a concomitant commitment and energy. The editor's comment translates what might seem an overly intense expression of desire for a book ('Would you jump off a bridge for this book?', as one editor said a previous manager had expressed it) to one in which passion engineers marketplace success. Numerous interviewees talked about having sufficient passion to get their titles through acquisitions meetings – 'you have to get the passion going' – with the need for passion to translate into a company process. As another conglomerate editor stated, as an editor, 'You drive the entire publication'. One editor at a mid-sized company explained she needed to get 30 people (effectively the whole company) to work with her on a book. The requirements for such work was made evident by one interviewee:

> You need to have a sort of lightness and energy to want to acquire things and see, to have that hope. Because most publishing fails and so most things fail, so you have to have a sort of endless spring of optimism within you.

The 'hope' required in taking a book to an acquisitions meeting in a mid-sized to larger company can become exhausting, as the 'endless spring of optimism' can get 'sort of bashed out of you'.

These are expressions of emotional labour and its alienating tendenciesmore productively read through subsequent theorisations of Hochschild's concept (1983), which rather than dichotomise notions of 'surface' and 'deep acting', see the incorporation of the seemingly authentic, private self (i.e. reading *as* readers) drawn upon in the emotional, sometimes alienating, often wearying, labour of the commodified, public self (e.g. Brook 2009, and in particular relation to creative labour e.g. Grindstaff 2002; Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2008).

My interviews with editors revealed a normative narrative by industry professionals of the requirement for such forms of labour in the commissioning process.

The same editor who mentioned 'optimism' getting 'bashed out of you' also discussed a phase in her career where her commissioning rate at the high-prestige, mid-sized company that she then worked for was diminished, describing how she ('you') 'can also have a sense that your good taste is somehow confirmed by the fact that you turn lots of stuff down'. In her introduction to her book of interviews with editors, Greenberg writes, 'In the popular imagination, the editor is a passive creature, busy telling people "No"' (Greenberg 2015, 4). And as I previously argued, this 'popular imagination […] casts the editor as the "gatekeeper", with "selection" at the heart of that process' (Squires 2017b, 27). Publishing's gatekeeping function thus has a complex and dynamic relationship with publishing's commercial functions, in which the exhaustion of emotional labour leads to a (temporarily) alienating turn from positive decisions and fulfilling desires to publish, to one in which negative decisions seem to align with regimes of taste.

Another editor, who also discussed her selection in terms of 'love', linked it to a professionalised exploitation of her authentic sensibilities:

> the books that I publish are genuinely books that I love and would read in my spare time, so there is a definite crossover there … I am encouraged, as are my colleagues … to buy books that I really love, like something that is prized and important

This editor demonstrates how her passion for her books is a valued commodity within her company. This 'feeling for books', in Janice Radway's (1997) formulation, sees emotional attachment to books and an ideological belief in their importance, meeting marketplace behaviour. It is also useful to read such statements of the 'passion for reading' through understandings of cultural workers, as Fuller and Rehberg Sedo do in *Reading Beyond the Book* (accompanied as they are by frequent 'narrative of fatigue, overwork, and overtime labor') (2013, 164, 190). Gatekeeping is thus posited as a function that aligns a sense of taste with a weariness derived from emotional labour. This function then simultaneously

constructs that taste somewhat cynically in its assertion of aesthetic values, and repeatedly excludes sociodemographics, as described earlier.

My interviewees went on to describe the challenge of conveying their passion for a particular text, and taking a book forwards via their company processes. Much of this work is done with an understanding, and a sense of 'fit', between the individual's own taste, and that of the company's requirements and market demands (Squires 2017b, 30-31). Across the interviewees, a range of workplace cultures was depicted. One conglomerate editor described heads of department as being 'expected to respond in terms of their job roles (e.g. sales director, marketing director), addressing, for example, whether it might sell through supermarket chains, or how the market for particular genres was moving' (2017b, 32). This decision-making makes use of the knowledge and networks of the industry professionals; 'calculative trust', in other words.

Another interviewee, based at a large but not conglomerate company, described their editorial meeting as 'half book club, half commercial assessment', where various attributes of the text were discussed at the meeting. Another editor, however, talked about her mid-sized company having 'a real reading culture', whereas, she stated, 'in a more commercial place, most people will read very little, people worry about the comparisons, and where it sits in the market'. The same editor talked about needing to get colleagues to 'buy into the vision' [of the book], which could be a commercial decision based on experiential attributes in order 'to sell the book as a reading experience', and steering colleagues to 'seeing, feeling that they can see the opportunity, because they can sometimes not like it, but appreciate how it could work'. Such decision-making hovers between 'calculative' and 'charismatic trust', between intellectual understandings and the text's 'charismatic pull', discussed in the previous section. This configuration of decision-making can intensify the challenge of emotional labour, as the editor seeks to align his or her feelings, taste and market judgement to company positioning and market environment. This process of encouraging colleagues to 'buy into the vision' is a 'seeing' of the book which can take material and communicative forms as well as perceiving its experiential affects.

The editor who talked about her charismatic career texts also spoke of their shareability: a 'word-of-mouth' chain of communication from company to external environment, modelling 'what the market will do'. This pattern is one I analysed with regards to Louis de Bernières' novel *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* (1994), where the idea of 'word-of-mouth' was then used *as* the marketing message for the book (Squires 2007, 107-115). Similarly, one conglomerate editor mentioned her preparation for the acquisitions meeting, thinking about the 'marketing pitch', and 'how would you recommend it' – not just to her colleagues, but for her colleagues to do so through their business networks and the book supply chain. This is an envisaging of the book and its marketplace journey: 'where you would sell it, what you compare it to, interesting things about the author, has it sold internationally, what can we do in terms of marketing, publicity.' Another editor explained this explicitly as articulating 'my vision' for the book; 'how I see it […] How will I publish it?'

This 'vision' is also a material one, particular in terms of the book's cover (one of the industry's key modes of flagging genre and marketplace expectation (see Genette 1997; Squires 2007; Matthews and Moody, 2007). The book becomes, at this point, 'a more solid object in your mind.' For editors, commercial understanding also means a very quick apprehension of the novel as good, of the materiality of the text under consideration under marketable, commodifiable form. Editors sometimes 'see' the book, or rather envision it, and use that vision to articulate where the book will sit on the bookshop shelf, and what kind of messages will be conveyed paratextually to the reader. One conglomerate editor talked about this commercial turn from passion to paratext in the commissioning process:

> first and foremost it is always, I just love this book, but […] often I'm thinking about jackets as well […] the more you do of briefing jackets with the designers, the more […] you're thinking when you're reading, I would do this, for this kind of book, and I think the ones where I can't work out what to put on the cover, are the ones that quite often say to me…you don't quite know what kind of book this is.

Similarly, the editor who talked about her 'vision' of the book elaborated upon this process of envisioning the materiality of the book, derived from her initial reading experience, and

communicated to her company and colleagues, with a communicable 'vision for how you would like it to market':

> I need to have a sense of what I think it should look like […] lots of people feed into it, but unless the editor has got a really clear picture of what they want it to be, it can become a very long and drawn-out process […] the best you can hope for is that it will start to come to you as you're reading. This sort of image will work as the cover, that's the sort of copy you want. And you start to assemble all the bits of the beast quite quickly. And hopefully you'll lead, you'll sort of take everyone with you. If you're clear about what you want it to be.

The immanence of the 'solid object' is – as well as in material paratexts such as the cover, and marketing messages such as its genre placement – related to the editorial process, and the submitted text's transition into finished book. For several editors, the book presented to them was one for which they saw 'potential', rather than a completed, already fixed, text. The editorial process and a capacity to contribute to a novel's development into a successful book (be it commercially or aesthetically), was key to many editors' decisions as they articulated them in interview, as was an author's readiness to engage in an editorial process. Editors appreciate their role as textual intermediaries and assert it behind the scenes as a crucial part of their role, but in public, as one conglomerate editor put it, 'by your nature as an editor, you want your writers to be the one at the front, and you want to always talk about how brilliant our writers are'. Such a tendency effaces the work of the cultural intermediary in public discussions of editing, making the process of structural editing as occluded as the process of evaluation can be mystified. This tendency fits with remarks made by literary agent Carole Blake in interview with Susan Greenberg, in terms of why it might be expedient to keep the editing process invisible:

> The author has to be the central person in the whole business. If the publishing business inserts itself into the imagination of the reader, that would make for a less satisfying read. (Greenberg 2015, 123)

This tendency therefore makes of editorial decision-making a 'black box' similar to that discussed by Moeran (2012) with regards to cultural awards judgement, and unpacked in Marsden and my account of literary prize judging (2019). However, the editor who discussed the wish for their 'writers to be the one at the front' simultaneously perceived there to be a danger in this tendency, in which the occlusion of the editor – and more generally, the publisher's – role undermines the value publishing brings to books in the age of self-publishing, a value that could be expressed as the professionalised transition of novels to books and then goods. Feeling 'protective' of their authors, that they 'might not deliver the most perfect thing first off', can at the same time deny the work of the publisher, when 'we also somehow need to explain what we're doing for our author'. It is also part of Greenberg's scholarly desire to render the act of editing visible (2015; 2018).

Indeed for one small press publisher in my interview sample, perceiving and enacting editorial work on a text was frequently a central part of the attraction of a submitted text, one which fits into the broader narrative of this section of 'seeing the book':

> all of our books have gone through three to four drafts and quite close editorial interaction […] that's partially because when we see something that we think, 'This could be magic' […] I love that. It's like you've got a crumpled shirt and an ironing board and you keep ironing and keep ironing and it's lovely to kind of see it taking shape, that process.

The 'taking shape' of the book is thus a material metaphor, a set of marketing activities and, eventually, an act of material production which all lead to 'selling the goods', as the final section of this chapter outlines.

Selling the Goods

Commissioning editors, then, translate their affective, bodily ('sensing') responses to novels, alongside their market knowledge and capacity for envisioning and editing books ('seeing') into the commercial practice of 'selling' the goods. This latter impetus towards the book as commercial property is often depicted as the central tension of publishing in the creative

economy, with aesthetic goods positioned as the 'culture and commerce' of publishing (Coser et al 1982). This is another normative account of the industry, one which is frequently repeated in scholarly accounts. But this chapter makes a different argument, seeing the process of sensing-seeing-selling articulated here as a networked praxis in which aesthetic objects, individual professionalised readers, publishing processes, company formations, material embodiments and market environments come together.

The communicative process detailed earlier, in which commissioning editors decide upon which texts to take to acquisitions meetings, is enmeshed in the language of markets, buying and selling. As detailed above, this is the process of getting colleagues to 'buy into the vision', and 'sell[ing] the book [to them] as a reading experience'. The process of acquisition – the publishing company 'buying' the book from the author or via the author's agent – then transitions into one of selling to onwards markets: booksellers and readers, but also potentially through rights sales into translation and other publishing territories. Such decisions are frequently couched in terms of what readers might make of the book, both in textual and material forms, as the 'reading experience', the physical book, and the potential commodity.

These decisions require editors and their colleagues to assess the commercial possibilities of a text as well as its eventual appeal to readers. One interviewee, a conglomerate editor, talked about her liking for selling books, an explicitly 'commercial sensibility' as she phrased it. Another editor, in a mid-sized company, described 'the talent of the editor' as residing in 'marrying up a book they can bring value to, that they can buy cheaply, and their company can publish well'. One of the micropublishers in my sample articulated her commissioning decisions around a form of trusting economic exchange, belying normative narratives around the perceived differences of small publishers (further explored in Squires 2020). For this interviewee, the idea of the commerciality of a book resided in its appeal (or lack thereof) to potential readers. Whilst operating with a strongly articulated sense of 'mission' and personal taste, this editor talked about how a subscription model makes the relationship with consumers very direct:

> [We're] catering for a number of people, and not everyone is interested in dark, twisted, female monologues… [her favoured genre]. The subscription model works on trust. The reader trusts [us] to make an informed choice, to make a similar choice, they're giving away their money up front, and you have to earn that trust.

Even if her company might not be considered at the commercial end of the marketplace, the editor nonetheless talked about the economic transaction of selling the goods (or in this particular sense, subscribing to the company's list) and its inter-relationship to her own affective and taste-making processes. It is through this process of the melding of sensing, seeing and selling that the editors carry out their work.

There still remains an unknowability to this process even, seemingly, within the company itself. One conglomerate editor described this hard-to-access conversion process:

> people […] say, do you sit at your desk and read all day, and I'm like, no – I do that all in my spare time, but then people […] say, but how do you know if a book is good or not, and how do you know when you're bidding for a book how much […] I remember […] one of our finance team […] saying, but I don't understand how when […] you say this is going to be a big book […] how you know that's different […] It's quite hard trying to explain […] it just feels like something that's got that appeal […] I suppose it is all that […] knowledge that you've got but to somebody who's sitting there just being asked to put all the figures together, it probably does seem quite strange that last week I […] said, we think we want to offer 20 grand for this, and then I'm saying, I think this is a book that will go for 200 grand.

The editor discussed her commercial sensibility as both a learned experience ('knowledge'), but also as a feeling. This fusion of learned and sensual experience parallels my previous findings, in which gut reactions develop over years as learned skills rather than pure instinct (Squires 2017b). But after this description of the fusion of the passional and the professional, the same editor who went onto explain that there is a tendency of editors to occlude these processes, not because they think they are 'special', or that 'only we can tell', but because of the wish for editors to 'talk about how brilliant our writers are', and,

concomitantly, not to expose some of the intermediary activity undertaken in the editorial process (the 'ironing' and 'taking shape' discussed in 'Seeing the Book'). The explicit linkage by this editor of an economic understanding of the book under consideration with a need – or at least wish – to hide intermediary processes and bolster a sense of 'author genius' discussed earlier creates a degree of 'mystique' around industry processes, as another conglomerate editor put it, which in itself is held to contribute to the process of selling the book. This particular editor's explanation that her reading takes place 'in my spare time' hints at another way in which the process of 'sensing the novel' and various other occluded intermediary processes are constructed and (under-)valued. Another conglomerate editor perceived there to be 'a sort of self-mythologising about the industry about using those words about gut and instinct when actually we're talking about amortising risk'.

In conclusion, then, this chapter's conceptualisations of sensing the novel, seeing the book and selling the goods, work towards a deeper understanding of the gatekeeping orientation, evaluative processes and decision-making role of the commissioning editor. It also flags up some challenges in the discourse and demographic positionings of editors, and the larger cultural-economic environments of the industry in which they operate. Constructing business decisions as affective and individualised responses occludes both the economic *and* cultural work undertaken by the publishing industry, as well as the networked nature of the novel. Publishers have an important role in the creation of literary value, but acknowledging that role – at least in the context of the current UK market – can be problematic. Instead publishers perform discursive negotiations that mystify and mythologise business processes, tend towards eliding their own professionalism and skillsets, and evade difficult conversations around (the lack of) diversity and inclusivity in the publishing workforce.

A retreat into a language of affect, or 'sensing', thus sidesteps conversations about 'the goods' (and publishing's seeming cultural/commercial divide), but also retreats from interrogating cultural taste formation, its ideological operations and identity work. Such interrogations are necessary and important, particularly in an industry which has evident challenges in terms of its homogenous staffing base and the ensuing implications for cultural production and access. These interrogations are also, I would argue, imperative in

order to get beyond the mythologizing tendencies of normative industry discourse, the frequent occlusions of labour, of positioning, and of processes. To understand these tendencies and occlusions should then enable a return to the discussion of the status of the cultural objects themselves, in ways which take on board their nature as aesthetic objects with formal attributes, genre allegiances, and literary histories, and in which the 'value of cultural objects' is apprehended 'in excess of that ascribed to them either as social facts *or* as commodities' (Banks 2017, 31). This will also enable an understanding of the operations of charismatic trust (Leypoldt 2017) and a 'a more nuanced, qualified and holistic approach that considers historical context, subjective appreciation *and* objective quality' (Banks 2017, 33). Although this chapter has only begun the job of accomplishing such an approach for the publishing industry, I would suggest that the formulation of sensing the novel, seeing the book and selling the goods – a zooming in on the 'dynamics of the evaluative moment' (Stewart, 2013) in other words – is a productive way to begin that work. The process of sensing-seeing-selling, and its bringing together of the scrutiny of the aesthetic values of novels, the emotional labour of individual readers who assess them professionally, adjoined to the publishing processes, company formations, material embodiments and market environments, might thus enable a fuller understanding of the networked praxis of literary evaluation.

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