

Chapter 11

Diamonds, machines and colours: Moving materials in ritual exchange

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The purest diamond is an emblematic ideation of an elusive and notoriously complex ethnographic object, the commodity. Its capricious and shifting materiality, challenging perceived notions of wants and desires, use and exchange value and rendered to consumers as a veritable icon of value fetishization, is somewhat paradoxical in that diamonds are the only gemstone that is abundant in nature. But just as much as the materiality of value is not physical but also social (Pietz 1993), there is more to the material of diamonds than the simple calculation of its material properties and qualities. At the turnover moment from rock to commodity, the materiality of a diamond – its *thingness* – remains at the centrepiece of negotiations over value. More significantly, diamonds also emerge as an unstable material by way of a ritualized negotiation. What is the matter, then, with the material life of a diamond stone?

In this chapter, I suggest that the moment when diamonds are traded provides inestimable clues to understand materials in processes of valuation. I seek to demonstrate how the value of one diamond stone (*kamanga*¹) is produced and transformed with other circulating materials in the trading context. I approach this problem by way of ethnographic events of trading diamonds in Lunda, Angola's diamond-rich province.² In the region's *contuários* (also called *prontuário*, *casa grande* or office), everyday talk animates trading rooms and the economy of ritual practice complicates our understanding of sensory perception, bodily praxis and qualitative labour in processes of capital reproduction. I build from concrete instances of trading to connect the material qualities of diamonds and other things that 'leak' in-between different materials (Ingold 2011a: 4) to forms of expert knowledge or the language of 'the market' (Keane 2008). Can the social, institutional and technical process by which diamonds are evaluated change the material itself?

Materials, value and revelation

This project contributes to the field of anthropological thought on materiality, commodities and objects by 'bring[ing] the materials back in' (Ingold 2012, cf. Kuechler and Drazin, foreword to this volume). Similarly to the tension inherent in gold's multiple and immanent qualities (Oakley, this volume), I wish to locate in and through diamonds the play of unequal and asymmetrical exchanges of meaning and signs leading up to the production of value (Munn 1986; Weiss 1996, 2003). Specifically, I aim to demonstrate how materials are aligned in-between a carbon-based physical substance and the socially mediated experience of trading diamonds, thus contributing towards the definition of value and the orientation of social life more broadly.³

Given the 'internal instability of the commodity form and the exigencies of situated practice', as William Mazzarella points out in his discussion of the commodity-image in contemporary advertising, it becomes necessary to investigate 'the question of the relationship between the thingness of things and the meanings with which they are invested' (2003: 26). I approach this problem in the gap between technical grading and the qualitative experience of trading diamonds as a ritual spaced carved between rhetorical negotiation and the allegedly 'objective' conditions impinging on the transaction. Following Gell's discussion of substances and qualities in olfactory dream states, I suggest that awareness to the exchange of materials renders their 'context' and 'sign' 'inseparable' (1977: 33) and thus traceable for ethnographic investigation.

Theoretically, I build on studies of the political economy of language that demonstrate how linguistic and semiotic events factor into economic processes (e.g. Bourdieu 1977; Gal 1989; Irvine 1989). I also pay close attention to approaches to circulation and the semiotic properties of the commodity (Keane 2003; Kockelman 2006; Lee and LiPuma 2002; Shankar and Cavanaugh 2012).⁴ The commerce of diamonds in Angola is particularly suggestive to situate this analysis, both locally and with an eye towards broader scales. In fact, international *diamantaires* are routinely invoked over the course of these negotiations and simultaneously, these moments of trading recall the performative spectacle of financial and stock exchange market trading (Abolafia 1998; Hertz 1998; Zaloom 2006).⁵

In what follows, I evoke the spatial setting of a trading room and some of the social and institutional relations permeating diamond transactions in Lunda Norte, Angola. In a second section I turn to the invocation of the market as ritual language, followed by a concluding analysis of diamonds' 'composite' materials

in ritual exchange. Let us now move towards the trading room itself through the lens of one of Lunda's iconic diamond traders, or *kamanguistas*.

The trading room

Busy scribbling down some numbers from the previous diamond transaction, the trader did not bother to look up at the new group entering the room: 'Are you bringing good *kamanga* [diamond]?' he asked. 'Put good *kamanga* [on the table], can't you see [the market price] is bad?' The stone carrier unwrapped a small piece of paper and placed a rugged rock on a table cluttered with bagged diamond lots and other evaluating instruments. The trader surmised the stone, quickly examined it under the magnifying glass and positioned it on the balance plate – 2.01 carats. Some of the members of the group, presumably but not always diggers, stood up slightly from their chairs to check the weight, either to determine their initial bargaining position or to confirm the measurement given by a previous competitor in case the balance had been fixed. A calculator was passed around among the diggers, confirming the number on display or punching new ones in until finally settling on a price. The trader glanced over at their offer but was clearly not interested in the small stone in front of him, 'all *piqué*,⁶ too ruined', like the many others he will see throughout the day. The main voice in the group responded firmly: 'I'm a son of the house. Accumulate [increase monetary offer]! You're the boss. You have a bank, we don't.'

In his capacity to amass large amounts of cash, Boss Tom is a 'big buyer', known locally as *Pai Grande* (Big Father), *Patrão* or Boss (originally in English). The recent renovation of his commercial space reflects Tom's concern for his public image and that of his 'house'. Unlike his brother and commercial partner, who enjoys buying diamonds in moments of 'collective effervescence' by attending to multiple groups of sellers at once and taking pride in cultivating an image of generosity and exuberance, Tom attempts to distance himself from that image and the social responsibilities accruing from a trader's expected largesse. In his own analogy, Tom is a strict but frank evaluator, playing the 'bad cop' to his brother's 'good guy' persona, and thoroughly seems to enjoy the fine-grained evaluations. The public reputation of the buyer, however, is only a stepping stone to validating the knowledge and expertise necessary to assess diamonds and thus mitigate the risks of fallibility and uncertainty associated with this economy of monetary transaction.

Over time, Boss Tom's trading post has grown from a shabby-looking, poorly lit office into one of the most influential and busiest diamond offices in Lucapa,

a mining town and major hub of diamond mining and trading in the Lunda Norte province. Since my last visit, it had been turned into an upscale and air-conditioned office, furnished with sleek black chairs, an elegant leather couch and a glass coffee table with an assortment of travel magazines. His diamond business works in tandem with the family-owned retail warehouse, located on the main thoroughfare of the city in a two-story building surrounded by high walls and metal gates, which spans an entire block. On any given day, hundreds of people congregate in the vicinity of the warehouse and retail store. Far from the general public at the back, a dozen or so warehouse workers unload trucks from Luanda, stacking large pallets of frozen meat, cases of national and imported beer, sacks of flour and a wide array of other items in high towers.

Tom's trading office is a public reflection of his buying power and reputation, where he often entertains up to hundreds of diggers, their 'sponsors' (financial backers), and petty traffickers. More established diamond traders and state officials also check in routinely, sharing the latest news on the diamond market, soliciting favours, borrowing money or collecting payment for services. Having weathered the impact of the 2008 financial crisis that put a significant number of corporate mining projects on hold or made them insolvent, this was now a full-blown diamond operation, with fixed daily expenses (not including capital to acquire diamonds) of thousands of dollars, up to a dozen cars to support mining operations (transport diggers and facilitate food distribution) and an additional agent on the frontline of digging sites. To cope with growing demand, his business now has multiple evaluating rooms, arranged by estimated price range between the ground and first floors. The most valuable stones are traded directly in his office, where Boss Tom can entertain multiple groups of sellers at once, although he prefers having one group at a time to prevent conflicts and stop valuable information from leaking to rival traders.

My arrival was announced by walkie-talkie to the upstairs room. Although only a few metres away, Boss responded with a laconic 'let him in', and the senior guard unbolted the heavy metal door separating me and the main trading room. I left behind a bustling scene in the commercial warehouse, filled with retail clients loading their vehicles with supplies, a large group of loosely affiliated house employees, and a crowd of spectators. At the Boss's suggestion, I took the chair immediately to his right, across the main table, a spot usually reserved for his junior associate.

The trader's table is the centrepiece of diamond trading rooms, where beneath a fluorescent light one commonly finds a stack of white sheets of paper providing an initial colour contrast for grading purposes. To his left, Tom kept a personal laptop logged in on Skype to communicate with foreign buyers and

family abroad. Behind him, atop a sturdy locked vault, was a currency-counting machine: the coveted sound of flipping crisp US dollar bills is the tell-tale sign of a successful transaction. To his right were two electronic balances, and below his desk, hidden from the curious stares of diggers, he kept a colour-grading machine, the most expensive piece of equipment in the business of evaluating diamonds, used when presented with high-grade stones of dubious colouring. Strewn across the table were various calculators (frequently used during transactions so as to 'talk on the machine'), magnifying glasses for close inspection of diamonds and miniature shovels to move smaller lots of diamonds onto the balance dish and place them in small zip-sealed bags according to carat, weight and colour. He often left these bags in plain sight, a customary sign of trust and clear evidence of his financial power.

Talk of the market

'The best *kamanga* comes from the mouth', I was once told. In a literal sense, the best diamonds need to be hidden away, often in the mouth. More figuratively, a good diamond is also the product and effect of intense debates: the mutual valuation of diamonds is negotiated in language use, and power relations signalled in economic transactions are established in conversation. This statement also indicates the proximity of the material of diamonds to the body itself, in the interpenetrable nature of bodies and commodities, materiality and language. Sellers (diggers, or someone on their behalf) are first known for deploying a barrage of bargaining techniques in order to increase the offer, monetary or otherwise, before consenting to the deal. Second, the body is therein posited as the 'material process of social interaction' where embodied practices are rendered meaningful in its proper material context (Turner 1994: 29).

Trading in diamonds is a seemingly straightforward and ordinary event of face-to-face interaction. A diamond trader (buyer) appraises one or more diamonds and the digger (seller) can accept the offer or refuse it and move on to the next trading post. In reality, however, the ethnographic moment of trading diamonds is far more complicated than what this rendition might suggest. When a diamond trades hands, there is more at stake than a simple monetary transaction defined by an assessment of the gemstone or the reputation of the buyer. Let us consider this problem more closely.

Importantly, representations of the market take centre stage in these negotiations. Traders invoke their privileged and expert knowledge of the market: 'I know the market, you have to trust'; 'my market does not work with this kind of

[small] stone'; or 'the Boss of capital in Belgium says don't buy'. This knowledge of the market is often contested with responses along the same lines.⁷ Rather than being bound by the experts and expertise put forth in evaluation, I take these moments of trade and talk of exchange as ritual events structured in a knowledge and speech of negotiation that anchors cultural constructs designed to interpret diverging definitions of value (Keane 1997; cf. Silverstein 2004). In my suggestion, the shifting nature of the material being traded is articulated in the tension between a 'language of the market' and the experiential and sensorial awareness of the diamond's material qualities.

While talk of the market seems dull and uninteresting, humour and joking are also injected into these conversations, providing a serious commentary on the material of the commodity, capital accumulation, or the market. These communicative strategies, including the mockery of the trader's higher standing, substantiate claims about external and intangible phenomena (again, capital or the market) brought to bear on the exchange itself. In a revealing example, when one trader asserted that 'there is problem in the world market, there is crisis of money', the attending crowd of diggers burst out laughing. Surrounded by the buyer's ostentatious and seemingly successful commercial enterprise, the group of diggers found his claim so preposterous that the supposed gravity of the argument was turned on its head by being rendered as a joke. Conversely, though rare, these jokes can lose their intended effect and become dangerous if the negotiating parties do not signal a willingness to 'play along' (Basso 1979: 43) with the temporary transformation and reversal of social roles thus entailed.

Consider the following exchange in Tom's office. The trading office was full to capacity with about 20 people, but more sellers continued to arrive. Unlike other exchanges, the large stone placed on the table sparked Tom's interest, and perhaps in light of it, he set up the negotiation by complaining about a depressed market. The group's main interlocutor questioned his complaint by trivializing his standard formula of declining markets: 'What crisis? Do we have crisis? Angola never had crisis! Crisis is *there!*'⁸

Reacting to the group's initial offer, Boss Tom pretended to return the stone as a sign of lack of interest, accusing the group of being a 'chatty bunch' (*xaxeiros*), who 'only come here to drink soda' (*gasosa*). There was laughter in response to Tom's banter, and the first moment in the negotiation was sealed. What followed included a number of recurrent elements throughout the conversation: money for work or loans, on the one hand, and the contentious origin of diamonds (with frequent references to digging sites) on the other. Pressed to reveal the stone's colour and weight, Boss Tom accused the digger of being distrustful, hinting at the possibility that the group may have tried to sell the stone to a different buyer

prior to their visit. He continued: 'I'm not worried about the weight, I'm worried about the colour. It is worth little, almost nothing . . . Do you want to sell *kamanga* or do you want to play?'

This moment defined an important shift in the tone of the transaction. Jokes became scarce and recriminations were exchanged between the parties. One of the diggers who had been sitting down suddenly stood up, putting down a travel magazine he had been busy flipping through. Pointing to his wrist, as if personifying a time-is-money attitude, he complained about their wasting of time: 'Let's just negotiate'. He asserted loudly: 'You should encourage. *Kamanga* isn't easy, you don't understand . . . This is the third time we're here. How many times did we come here to receive?' Notice, too, the purported inversion of assigned social roles: Boss Tom did not know the 'price of *kamanga*', according to this digger, and it was at the digger's suggestion ('let us just negotiate') that the transaction resumed. The group remained resolute: 'We're not going to leave with the *kamanga*'. They resorted instead to their familiarity and closeness to the commercial post ('This is the third time we're here. We've taken motorcycles and everything') and their knowledge of digging, asking rhetorically if the trader had ever gone digging. The terms of sacrifice and hardship, in fact, are here reversed: finding '*kamanga* isn't easy', a digger suggested, and 'we are poor because we belong to this company', 'go[ing] for a week of hunger in the bush'.

Although the stone was 'clean' and had 'a good shape', its colour represented a 'problem' for the trader, so much so that both parties seemed unwilling to reach an agreement other than by way of taking out a loan or keeping the unevaluated diamond in the trader's premises. In this type of case, diamonds are kept sealed on consignment to ensure that the group returns to sell their production, setting a pledge of moral debt in a paperless contract.⁹ In addition, some traders find ways to assess whether the group visited a rival trader prior to their arrival. Truthfully or not, however, most diggers are adamant in denying having had any previous evaluation: 'We haven't circled around with that one, I swear, this is our house'.

The trader played off on the impasse by suggesting the group seek a different appraisal: 'You guys are complicated. Go around to any *prontuário* (trading office). \$1,000 (USD) is the maximum they'll pay. L colour, round, 1.95 carats. That's the stone's classification, okay?' Wrapping the stone in a piece of paper, he concluded by saying 'I'll save it with your name on it and give you a thousand dollars' (USD). Avoiding the stalemate, the trader agreed to sell but not without explaining his risk of bankruptcy, the plummeting sale price in Belgium and the need to work to set money aside in a bank. The group left with the money. It was unclear for the negotiating parties whether the money was an advance for the

labor ('work money'), the group's 'contractual' relationship with the company, or monetary compensation in exchange for holding the commodity.

This exchange offers an important contrast between labor, knowledge and capital. Before agreeing to sell, the trader moves from acting indifferently to the transaction to questioning the origin and quality of the stone. Against the potential of subsoil riches and future gains, the trader counters by offering a loan (acting as a *de facto* bank). The expert knowledge required to evaluate a stone, moreover, is juxtaposed to the trader's lack of familiarity with the work of digging. Importantly, in order to convince the group of diggers to sell elsewhere, the trader delivers the stone's minute classification – colour, form, weight – thus acquiescing to his last remaining source of authority over the transaction.

These elements of ritual expertise, play and loss of control (Turner 1977) are critical in the reproduction of capital, defined less by its efficacy (e.g. the calculation of value affixed to a diamond's material properties) than by the elements brought forth to forge the ritual situation and the diamond itself. These can range from the temporary suspension of otherwise rigid social identities, the dispute over the tempo of the transaction ('let's just negotiate') or, finally, the definition of a diamond's material properties in its capacity to circulate between trading posts. In other words, these communicative modalities reaffirm the negotiating power by subverting those in control of the exchange ('Do what we tell you', a more daring digger commanded), shifting between indifference and deference, ritual drama and play, insult and joking, exoteric and esoteric knowledge. What is more, standard formulas of negotiation can be easily denounced as such, both by a process of mimetic parody (notice when the digger pressed the trader over time, pointing to his wrist – where there was no watch) or when a message proves inadequate to its context of delivery.

What is more, if the boss is said to possess a 'bank' stashed away in his vault, talk of currencies and capital is also framed in terms of accumulation, much like prices fluctuate in a geography of upward and downward movements (raise, lower, increase, decrease). Similarly, the market is a constant elliptic reference in the dialogue between buyer and seller, providing the moral predicament and pragmatic justification to contextualize any given offer (e.g. the 'crisis', 'there'). In perhaps the most deployed rhetorical device, traders personify the market and voice its momentary qualities: 'the market is bad' or, conversely, 'if the market was strong I would buy'. This remains true irrespective of diggers' or sellers' attitude and posture vis-à-vis the sale. Finally, although negotiating by invoking the external (and physically absent) properties and capacities of capital and global markets (*there* and not *here*), the outcome of these negotiations requires

an agreement over what is, in the end, present and tangible: the materials in ritual exchange.

Materials in exchange

One of the idiosyncrasies of diamond exchange is that intense negotiations notwithstanding, prices are theoretically predetermined according to a chart shared regularly by the state with all licensed buyers in Angola, providing an approximate guideline for the acquisition of diamonds. Being merely indicative, the chart offers a price range per carat (based on their size, colour, clarity, cut or a combination of these) and is subject to the arbitrariness of the categories themselves. More often than not, the stone's placement within the evaluation chart is the product of intense disputes between sellers and official buyers. In fact, one slight disagreement in colour may represent a difference of several thousands of dollars or more per carat. Diggers and unlicensed buyers do not have access to official charts, and this disparity in knowledge, and the capacity to depreciate the stone rhetorically or convince a buyer of its value, often becomes one of the main driving forces behind the negotiation.¹⁰ In what follows, I examine how specific materials, in the broad sense of resources – from machines, gifts, or colour categories – impact on the material value of diamonds and the establishment of final prices.

Take the following situation, when a 9-carat diamond showed up for sale in Tom's office. He louped the large stone through a magnifying glass, tossing it negligently over a white paper on the table, picking it up and louping it again, repeating the movement a number of times. His cigarette burned in the ashtray, untouched. He opened up the negotiation by intentionally depreciating the stone's quality: 'This is screwed.' Nonchalant, the group's interlocutor asked for a cigarette. Confronted by the seller on whether he wanted cigarettes or money, the digger quipped, provocatively, 'I still haven't asked for the motorcycle key'. Repeating his preliminary assessment, Tom pointed towards an internal 'crack . . . from side to side', refusing to engage with the digger's request for a motorcycle and cell phones. Visibly irritated, the digger responded: 'How many holes do I need to open for a *kibula* (large stone) to come out? How many holes? Tell me, how many holes?' The crack in the stone, he insisted, was 'God's fault', not his.

Like in other transactions, a calculator, 'the machine', was passed around in a muttered negotiation. The group's interlocutor sat across the table from Tom and used his loupe to examine the stone. Along with the calculator machine, the motorcycle key became a focal point of the negotiation ('Give [us] two keys

and then we'll understand each other', one digger commented). All the while, other diggers punched numbers on the calculator, settling for \$15,000 (USD). Rejecting the figure presented to him, Tom belittled the stone, claiming it had 'fire', or internal charcoal residues. The digger stood by the stone's colour, referencing the trader's race: 'It's your colour (white), isn't that good? If it comes out our colour, or coffee-colour . . .'.

In a first reaction, the trader was quick to dismiss the stone by suggesting it was 'ruined', tossing it over and picking it up again. While the group of diggers indulged in cigarettes and alcohol, the trader thoroughly analysed the stone from different angles, meticulously evaluating it. In the meantime, conscious of its potential value, diggers opened up the negotiation by presenting what Tom considered a number of unrealistic demands. Chief among the group's demands was a motorcycle, and convincing the trader that the stone was deemed worthy of it would exponentially increase its valuation. Rather than dismissing the seller's repetitive requests, as if testing the limits of the trader's authority, Tom contrasted them with the stone's defects. Although the 9-carat diamond was large enough for the group of diggers to have a clear perception, and act upon its sheer potential value, it was only when it became clear that motorcycle keys would not be put on the table that the group offered 'their price'. As their patience wore thin, in fact, the forceful negotiation conducted by the group's main interlocutor, and particularly his insistence on the motorcycle, a prestigious sign of material wealth, became a source of contention among the group, some of whom preferred other methods of negotiation. One digger in the group stood up and suddenly sought to expedite the negotiation: 'Let's talk on the machine [calculator]. I haven't had breakfast today . . . We're not here to tell a story but [get] price.'

After a brief exchange, the trader made a counteroffer of \$4,000 (USD), mediated by the calculator machine, which was passed across the table for the diggers to see. 'This is a *kamanga* of problems', he explained. 'If it was a good stone, I'd give [a motorcycle] with pleasure . . . It's not worth buying if it means problems . . . go wash [gravel] and good things will come out'. Tom ended up raising his offer and closed the deal by giving away mobile phones in recognition of the group's allegiance to his trading post: 'Here, phones for everyone.'

The value of diamonds, as I have suggested, could not be ensured without proper market appraisal and the authority granted by technical expertise. Despite being a seasoned trader renowned for his modest evaluations, Tom knew this was a '*kamanga* of problems' and so decided to hear a definitive evaluation. We drove to the main state agency (ASCORP/SODIAM)¹¹ in town, where diamonds legally bought are resold and divided in lots according to official price

charts. The agency's senior evaluator, a middle-aged Israeli, received us in a small office with two chairs, a computer, and practically no decorative elements other than the usual diamond appraisal paraphernalia. In silence, the evaluator proceeded immediately to loupe the stone from different angles, scratching at the surface and placing it inside an ink-based acidic solution for colour reaction. He continued to loupe the diamond, taking measures and repeatedly placing it on the balance tray as if the weight could have changed in the time it took him to examine its interior. To the trader's dismay, he appraised the diamond at about \$500 (USD) per carat, significantly less than what he had just paid for the stone. Had it been clean of its crooked cleavage and *piqué* inclusions, he explained in amicable terms, it would be worth \$8,000 (USD) per carat.

Significantly, material objects such as the calculator 'machine' or the myriad of gifts expected from these transactions can increase the expectations of a stone's material value or, conversely, act to deter the stone's movement. Although meant to complement the monetary transaction, gifts such as motorcycles, cellular phones, clothes, drinks and food can sometimes be equated to the value and wealth of money proper. As one digger put it, in referring to diamonds' fungibility, 'good *kamanga* is [a] motorcycle'. In order to maintain a reputation, out of respect for established customers, or in order to forge the potentiality of future transactions, the trader is often obliged to pay for transportation and food, even when diamonds are not directly exchanged. Work provisions and subsistence goods are also handed out as 'support' in the form of a voucher to be claimed over time (*jeton*, or token). Though wary of customers uninterested in selling diamonds and only looking to benefit from this kind of support, a trader also needs to maintain his presence as a living force in the diamond market and preserve his image of a 'big' patron (*pai grande*). As was explained to me, 'the more you retract [from buying], the more *kamanga* runs away', thus justifying the need to either provide some form of support or buy diamonds at a short margin of profit.

Alongside the calculator and other material objects, 'colour', and the machine purported to define it, emerges as a significant element in these transactions and the negotiation of gifts and monetary gains. Colour is a seemingly objective category in the grading process, more so than clarity or what is often described as the 'inner life of the diamond'¹² (Calvão 2013). The principle is somewhat paradoxical: the most sought out colour is the lack thereof (translucent 'pure white', 'D'). As one trader put it, the 'more colourless, the best colour it is'. While no one would turn down a coloured diamond (pinks are said to be rare, and some traders claim to have never seen blue diamonds), problems emerge with the classification of tones and shades of colour, leaking between categories. Is it

light or full light? Pink, brown, or champagne? The entire process of evaluating a diamond is fraught with uncertainty, and colour categories partake in this economy of risk and speculation. To mitigate the uncertainty, traders occasionally make use of the colourimeter, a small yet expensive device used to determine a diamond's grading by its colour. Based on the diamond's capacity to absorb light, this remains however an unreliable measurement subject to error (Collins 1984).¹³ In one specific event when the results proved inconclusive, the trader falsely explained the limits to his 'machine' according to a colour scheme ranging from D (colourless) to Z (light yellow): 'Look, it's not even K [faint yellow]. It's below K . . . Below K the machine won't say.'

In these circumstances, colour categories combine with other qualities of the stone to create what might be called 'composite' materials (cf. Drazin, this volume). For example, 'white charcoal' signifies an internal 'fluorescent' tension, 'lighting up'. By louping the diamond under water, as is customary in artisanal mining operations, any reflection indicates the presence of charcoal. Irrespective of the colour, 'strong' and 'vivid' tonalities are always valued, and some traders make a point of keeping imperfect diamonds of vivid colours to themselves, removed from circulation. In other cases, however, traders are fast to get rid of certain coloured stones. A diamond that circulates between trading posts quickly depreciates, marked by a potential internal inclusion (Calvão 2013). In some cases, traders suggest that by 'circling around (*girar*) the colour will drop.' In this case, significantly, the movement of colour is experienced in the alignment between a technical classification and the expectation of its value: given the stone's lack of quality, the prospect was that by moving from digging site to different trading post, its colour category, or perceptions thereof, would 'drop' in each transaction.

Conclusion

By situating the act of trading as communicative and social practice performed in interactions between traders and diggers, I hope to have demonstrated how the material substratum of commodity value becomes tangible as a repertoire of knowledge and labor. In the accumulative effect of utterances and discursive interactions, this 'talk of exchange' connects the setting of trading rooms to imagined representations of the global market. In other words, these discursive exchanges render visible how certain materials productively underlie social and spatial relations (*in* practices of exchange), and in turn, how they become productive features and material index of an imagined market logic (*by* the labor

of exchange). This is a dynamic aspect of the ritual reproduction of capital, defined less by the calculation of value affixed to a diamond's material properties than by the elements brought forth to the ritual event itself and the temporary suspension of otherwise rigid hierarchical identities.

Other than being a semiotic object translating in social practice the abstract forces of globalization (Keane 2008), a diamond actively disentangles diverging regimes of valuation (material, semiotic, moral, or cultural) brought forth by the liminal condition of a material extracted from nature and converted as economic value. In lieu of taking the material object as abstracted from a very specific set of political, economic, and social functions, I approached diamonds and other materials – machines or technical categories – in the ethnographic convergence of economic instrumentality and ritual practice, space and time, local and global processes. The participants in these exchanges, put differently, performatively and ritually deploy the object's natural, historical and cultural significance in the mediating effect of language and enveloping social context: enacted in the authoritative translation of the 'language of the market' and surrounding materials (calculator 'machines' or other appraisal instruments), the ritual event of diamond exchange interprets and locks transformations in value. In the process, value is given shape through multiple registers of materialization, be it in the invocation of labor and natural wealth or in the utterances of space-time dialogues of exchange.

One of these registers, importantly, is the expert knowledge required to detect occult sources of value. The ability to 'talk in machines' is crucial to situate diamonds vis-à-vis a broader visual economy, namely that of divination. As one informant described, diviners in Lunda (*tahi*) 'see in their machine', so as to detect the cause of prolonged sickness. Similar to diamond evaluators, the diviner also deploys 'some jars' 'to see, look', and then voice his diagnosis. Similarly to the manipulation of jars in the visit to the senior evaluator of the state's buying agency, this knowledge to 'talk' and 'see in machines', or to let the colour machine 'say' value, echoes the expertise of diamond evaluation and contributes to situating the production of value within a broader field of material objects.

Notes

1. From the word for diamond stone (*kamaang/kamanga*) in local Cokwe-Lunda.
2. Research was based on fieldwork conducted in trading rooms in the provinces of Lunda Norte and Lunda Sul, Angola. Specific evidence for this article was collected on diamond trading practices in the urban axis of Calonda-Lucapa between 2008 and 2011. For the purpose of this article, I focus specifically on one diamond merchant, whom I call Boss *Tom*.

3. The challenge here is the commensuration of value: how, and for whom, is something deemed valuable? (cf. Comaroff and Comaroff 1992). Following Munn's pioneer work on qualisigns (1986) and Harkness and Chumley (2013), I suggest elsewhere (Calvão 2013) how opposing experiences of trading and extracting diamonds organize semiotic qualities of bodily movement (or *qualia*). Here, I wish to focus more explicitly on the material components of trading diamonds.
4. Take, for example, Kockelman's reading of the commodity as a semiotic process that gives way to an analysis of immaterial commodities (2006) or Asif Agha's proposition of 'commodity formulations' (2011).
5. In this, I follow theorizations positing the social and material world of 'things in motion' (Appadurai 1986; Bridge and Smith 2003: 3; cf. Foster 2006) so as to demonstrate the interconnected spheres of production and consumption (Mintz 1985; Smith and Mantz 2006).
6. *Piqué*, or punctured, originally from French. It designates a diamond's range of internal inclusions and spots. While the term has been replaced by more precise technical grading, it is still widely used among Angola's traders.
7. For example, when quipped by the trader with the conventional assertion that the 'market is bad', a digger simply replied that the 'market is not in the field' where diamonds come from.
8. Presumably referencing the decline in global diamond prices.
9. Boss Tom, for example, kept dozens of these stones, each lot sealed with the name of an individual standing in for the group (saying on occasion, 'I'm only taking care of your *kamanga*'). These 'contracts' project the possibility of exchange into the near future, despite no guarantees of a successful outcome as there is no formal control or obligation to sell at the home office. Conversely, this arrangement is frequently invoked by groups of diggers with a history of commercial interactions with a given trader or his company so as to ensure better dividends.
10. This is valid particularly for the case of larger stones without internal defects. With smaller stones, such as *melee* or *huit-huit* (below 0.18 carats) or *sengas* (up to 1 carat), traders tend to expedite the sale or avoid it altogether.
11. ASCORP (Angola Selling Corporation, a joint venture of private and public interests) and SODIAM (Sociedade de Comercialização de Diamantes de Angola, a public branch of state-owned Endiama) are the main agencies responsible for acquiring rough diamonds in Angola. In Lunda, they are used interchangeably to refer to the state's official buying channels.
12. Also described as *pujança* (vitality), that which catches your eye if two exact same diamonds have the same weight, colour and form.
13. Given its subjective results as well as clearly indexing the buyer's interest in the stone, this colour machine is only used sporadically with larger stones.

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