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Working as a real estate agent. Dispositions, matching and the production of market inequalities

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Thèse pour obtenir le grade de docteur en sociologie
de l'Université Paris III La Sorbonne Nouvelle

Working as a real estate agent

Dispositions, matching and the production of market inequalities

sous la direction de Franck Poupeau
présentée et soutenue publiquement par Eliza Benites-Gambirazio
le 6 février 2020

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Des agents immobiliers au travail. Intermédiation immobilière, valorisation du logement et (re)production des inégalités sur un marché résidentiel de l'Ouest étasunien

Résumé

Ce travail de thèse examine la formation et le travail des agents immobiliers sur un marché résidentiel du Sud-Ouest étasunien. Il met en lumière les activités marchandes et professionnelles qui influencent le déroulement des transactions et la valeur des biens, à partir d'une enquête ethnographique de deux années menée auprès d'agents immobiliers dans une ville d'Arizona. Je propose une entrée par les pratiques au travail et par la transaction immobilière en analysant les relations commerciales, professionnelles et marchandes entre collègues, formateurs et agents immobiliers d'une part, et entre agents immobiliers et clients d'autre part. Une centaine d'agents ont été suivis dans leurs processus de formation : durant les enseignements à l'école des agents requis pour passer l'examen de qualification pour obtenir une licence immobilière, les programmes de cours et les heures d'intégration pour nouveaux agents dans deux entreprises immobilières ainsi que des séances de tutorat actives. L'observation d'interactions entre une vingtaine d'agents et leurs clients à diverses étapes du processus d'achat et de vente : premier rendez-vous, visites de maison, inspection, *open houses* ainsi que la réalisation de 72 entretiens avec un échantillon différentié par niveau d'expérience, genre, statut des clients et prix des biens vendus, ont permis de reconstituer la trajectoire des agents, leur statut, leurs représentations au regard de leurs pratiques sur le terrain.

En partant de l'idée que la maison n'est pas un bien comme un autre et qu'il repose sur des relations matérielles et symboliques en rapport à la morale (la maison comme accès à la propriété, garantie de stabilité morale) au statut social (la maison comme style de vie) ou encore à des stratégies de reproduction (la maison comme un placement financier), il ne s'agit pas de voir le marché immobilier comme un pur réceptacle de politiques orchestrées par des acteurs publics ou des acteurs privés, mais de le comprendre dans sa relation entre des normes institutionnalisées dans un monde socio-professionnel et des configurations particulières et négociées d'une offre et d'une demande.

Cette entreprise sociologique ne peut pas faire l'économie d'une pensée en termes de valeur : *valeur d'un bien* ou d'un investissement comme celui de la maison, à la fois au niveau économique, mais aussi symbolique ; *valeur du travail* réalisé dans un marché particulier, et dans quelle mesure le travail dépend en partie des utilités financières retirées par les travailleurs marchands ; *valeur de l'espace* dans lequel le bien est inséré. Ces entreprises ou opérations de valorisation doivent être saisies dans l'ensemble des actions et des interactions ayant lieu sur le marché, et notamment la formation à des dispositions spécifiques pour faire fonctionner et transmettre le marché. Ces dispositions sont envisagées comme un ensemble de modes de pensées et d'actions qui sont d'autant plus puissantes qu'elles fonctionnement selon une forte croyance dans les principes d'organisation qu'elles sous-tendent.

Ce travail s'inscrit dans la lignée de questionnements en sociologie économique et en sociologie du travail sur les « professionnels du marché », tout en proposant une contribution originale à une sociologie des inégalités urbaines. Pour comprendre les mécanismes de marché, j'étudie les pratiques de travail des agents immobiliers et le monde socio-professionnel dans lequel ils

évoluent. En saisissant les mécanismes de marché et leurs logiques sociales, j'éclaire les inégalités résidentielles.

L'agent immobilier est successivement appréhendé comme figure du marché, travailleur professionnalisé et producteur d'espace résidentiel, en tant qu'acteur ayant sa propre position sociale (capital social, économique et culturel) et en tant qu'acteur de terrain ou travailleur (son statut et sa position dans le domaine professionnel de l'immobilier). Il est à la fois engagé individuellement par des rétributions économiques et symboliques, comme « promoteur du marché » ou comme investi d'une mission de préservation de l'ordre des différenciations sociales (mise en correspondance de clients, de biens et d'espaces). Je me focalise sur les pratiques des agents immobiliers à la fois hors et pendant l'échange (constitution de la clientèle, anticipations autour des transactions, transactions réelles). Sont observées notamment les interactions entre collègues lors de la formation professionnelle, et avec les clients lors des processus de captation et avec le marché dans l'ensemble des pratiques de valorisation de l'offre et de la demande, ainsi que la mise en adéquation entre l'espace des clients et l'espace marchand hiérarchisé socialement et spatialement.

L'étude des pratiques et des transactions se situe sur trois niveaux d'analyse :
1) la *socialisation* des agents de manière formelle et informelle par un ensemble de normes et de règles de conduite pour devenir des professionnels du marché et acquérir des dispositions permettant de représenter et de « travailler le marché ». Une attention particulière est accordée à la formation des nouvelles recrues, car en tant que stagiaires, elles apprennent (et sont tenues d'acquérir) des dispositions professionnelles et commerciales particulières ;
2) la *fabrication de la confiance* et les outils mis en place pour « capter le client » notamment dans l'utilisation à des fins marchandes par les agents de relations sociales personnalisées avec leurs clients, incluant un travail sur le genre et la classe dans l'homologie bien- client- agent ;
3) la *participation des agents au processus de création de la valeur* symbolique et marchande des biens par les préférences et les prix, la façon dont les agents les évaluent et les valorisent tout en faisant jouer coopération et compétition.

Cette recherche apporte un éclairage sur le travail effectué par les agents immobiliers dans les processus de choix résidentiels et de création de valeur sur le marché. S'appuyant sur l'école de Chicago, les travaux sur la *growth machine* et sur la ségrégation urbaine, elle montre que la valeur est « spatialisée » par un travail de différenciation sociale et d'homologie entre mode de vie et occupation de l'espace urbain. Cette « mise en valeur » est révélée durant les moments de vente et d'achat, reposant sur des mécanismes spécifiques portés par les agents immobiliers – invisibilisation des espaces, ciblage spécifique, anticipations, perceptions, régulation des prix –, qui donnent lieu à un tri urbain.

Mots-clés : agent immobilier ; marché ; valeur ; travail ; logement ; inégalités résidentielles

Working as a real estate agent. Dispositions, matching and the production of market inequalities

Abstract

This dissertation examines the work of real estate professionals (brokers and salespersons) on a local housing market and highlights how their professional activities contribute to influence transaction outcomes such as pricing, product and neighborhood preferences. Departing from the theoretical framework of market intermediaries, which posits that the exchange of goods is not based upon an automatic price matching between supply and demand, the research explores the formal and informal socialization of agents through a set of norms and rules to behave as market professionals; the use of social relationships to profit-making ends; and the participation of agents in the process of creating symbolic and market value by influencing preferences and prices, generating important implications for social and racial segregation. At the intersection of cultural, urban and economic sociology, this work sheds light on the dynamics of a market with intermediaries to refine our understanding of housing inequalities.

Conducted between 2013 and 2016 in Tucson, Arizona, the research draws on ethnographic fieldwork throughout different entries and sites of fieldwork – at the local real estate school, at two real estate companies and observing interactions between agents, buyers and sellers during various moments of the transaction – and interviews (N= 79) with real estate agents with variation on experience and status within the field, on class, gender and race were also conducted. These interviews and ethnographic observations serve to analyze the discursive and behavioral aspects of market work, how agents both talk and act on the market to create the conditions for market interactions such as selling and buying a house.

The dissertation research investigates first *the acquisition of socio-professional dispositions* and the *ethos of the real estate agent*. It objectifies the professional culture in which real estate agents are socialized and the inculcation of professional dispositions; second, it examines the *discovery of the client* or the *relational mechanisms* of *trust* and client capture. It rests on a game of anticipations which must accurately decipher the social and symbolic horizon of clients. Third, the research evidences the *matching of supply and demand* or the contribution to *clients' preferences*, *pricing* and *location of the goods*. It analyzes the professional and market practices around the encounters between agents and their clients, and the supply and demand of goods, envisions as social, physical and symbolic products. In observing working practices through multiple interactions, the research sheds light how real estate agents shape access to the territory, inequalities and reproduction mechanisms.

Keywords: real estate agent; market; value; work; housing; urban inequalities

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keeping in mind the sociological contribution of my project. He spent endless hours stimulating my thinking, and helped me considerably improved my work. He reminded me to think broadly and to read sociology, history, philosophy. Even if my Ph.D. was destined for an American audience and undeniably nourished by American literature and theory, I could also offer to integrate research perspectives and work from my own country. The research endeavors presented in this dissertation are thus the results of the integration of the theoretical tradition of French sociology.

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List of acronyms used

ARES American Real Estate Society
ADRES Arizona Department of Real Estate
DSO Direct Selling Organizations
FHA Federal Housing Administration
FHLMC Federal Home Loan Mortgage Company or Freddie Mac
FNMA Federal National Mortgage Association or Fannie Mae
FSBO For Sale By Owner
HOA Homeowners' Association
HUD Department of Housing and Urban Development
MLS Multiple Listing Service
NAR National Association of Realtors®
NAREB National Association of Real Estate Exchanges
TAR Tucson Association of Realtors®

"When God created the earth…On the sixth day, he created a salesman and he regretted this decision! Then he covered the earth with water! Noah came and said 'I've got too many realtors out there! I've got to get rid of the salesmen!'
(Edward, realtor®, Tucson, Arizona)

Introduction

"Most impressive of all is Leah Blue, wife of a mafia boss transplanted from Cherry Hill, New Jersey, to Tucson. Leah is into every dimension of real estate. Her starting capital is a reward for putting up with the cross-country move after Max Blue is nearly killed by an assassin and decides to downsize operations to a simple killer-for-hire business. Leah buys and sells and gets a rush that is almost like sex when she outsmarts a broker. She knows that 'the real estate market in Tucson and southern Arizona was wide open, ripe for development' like San Diego and Palm Springs. She canvasses neighborhoods on the edge of town, 'leaving her business cards in case large parcels of desert became available' (Silko 1991, p. 359-361) She has a scheme for developing a desert Venice every bit as audacious as Frank Dominic's and as large in acreage as Ladd Devine's Miracle Valley."
(Carl Abbott Sunbelt Rising, 2011, p. 281)

In her novel *Almanac of the Dead* (1991), Leslie Marmon Silko imagines the story of Leah Blue, a figure of Tucson real estate which is striving for community development. The passage above is recounted by Carl Abbott in *Sunbelt Rising* (2011). This story, although fictional, illustrates the community and real estate dynamics at stake in Tucson and the region since the second half of the 20th century.

My fieldwork journey started in August of 2010 when, coming from Paris, praised as one of the most inspirational cities of the world, I discovered the "*Wild Wild West."* I landed on desert territory on a Friday night. The air conditioning, which was blowing very cold air, made it almost unbearable in the plane. I rushed outside, comfortably welcomed by a hot, dry air blowing into my face. In front of me, a huge standing cactus, a parking lot, and not many people, except a few cab and shuttle drivers. It was almost 30°C at 10 pm, but as the locals say "it's a hot, dry heat," implying "no worries, you will be okay."

A few cacti, highways and gas stations later, in this hostile land, I thought about the categorization people make of "cities"; if the locals call it the *Old Pueblo*, for an old European it is not a city but a *village*…600 square kilometers. Today, after almost ten years of living in Tucson, it still does not feel like a city. It is the Wild West that I think of and not the "urban." The desert is surging everywhere, dust and cacti are almost in each corner of the streets and subdivisions. There are no rivers, no water, no trees…yet, you wonder: how can people build urban spaces that are so enormous, so sprawling, in the middle of this wild landscape, even if they only seem to just be provinces, by European standards? But, in

Tucson, we find the sprawling province, a prime location to investigate logics and contradictions of real estate development.

The West is the material and symbolic place for most of the stories, in between myths and reality, that are told about the United States (Murdoch 2001; DiLorenzo 2010). From the representations in Western movies to the vast literature, the West symbolizes the *wilderness* as the naked state of both nature and human beings, exploding in its most crude and violent ways, as a form of contradiction: a ferocious beauty, as scary as it is beautiful (Arnould and Glon 2006; Knobloch 1996; Udall et al. 2000). The stories around the conquest of arid and hostile lands, inhabited by "ferocious" natives, and led by a few strong cowboys animated by the bravery and the individual quest for prosperity, has accompanied most of us during our childhood, not only in the U.S., but across the world (Todorov 1999; White 1981). These stories get often mystified further by the historical fabric of heroic and entrepreneurial figures, through the recalled real estate success stories, for example, that of Coldwell Banker in Jo-Ann Levy 's *Behind the Western Skyline* (1981), biographies or halls of fame of industry leaders published in magazines.[1]

This mystified individual quest relied on the religious calling to control nature and land[2] and to privately own it[3] (R. White and Findlay 1999). The relations of the settlers to

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[1] This is indeed similar to what Marx reproached to historians and critics in the second preface of *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* reproaching Hugo's analysis of the *Coup d'Etat* only as "the violent act of single individual" and Proudhon's apologia for Napeoléon the hero falling "into the error of our so-called objective historians" while Marx claim to "demonstrate how the class struggle in France created circumstances and relationships that made it possible for a grotesque mediocrity to play a hero‘s part. (Marx and Engels 1852/1978).

[2] There are several historical accounts of the religious underpinnings of the quest for land and nature from English puritans seeking new territory to settle. Puritans like John Winthrop circulated letters to explain their decision to leave England. "The whole earth is the Lord's garden, and He hath given it to the sons of men with a general condition, Gen. 1:28, "Increase and multiply, replenish the earth and subdue it," which was again renewed to Noah. The end is double moral and natural: that man might enjoy the fruits of the eather, and God might have his due glory from the creature. Why then should we stand here striving for place of habitation (many men spending as much labor and cost to recover or keep sometimes an acre or two of land as would procure them many hundreds as good or better in another country) and in the meantime, suffer a whole continent as fruitful and convenient for the use of man to lie waste without any improvement" (John Winthrop, *Why We Should Leave England*, 1629, cited in American Issues Vol.1) (Bremer 2005; E. S. Morgan and Handlin 1958; Winthrop 2009, 1629)

[3] Cf. the description of Howard Zinn: "Behind the English of North America, behind their massacre of Indians, their deception, their brutality, was that special powerful drive born in civilizations based on private property. It was a morally ambiguous drive; the need for space, for land, was a real human need. But in conditions of

environmental constraints were not of secondary importance in that picture: they tell the story of the desire (and sometimes capacity) of men to *dominate* nature; and to bring a vast array of civilizations achievements in a physical space (Gunderson 2015; Kolodny 1984; Power and Barrett 2001; Pike 2010).

This search for human control over nature is common to both the early beginnings of the biggest infrastructure projects and the rampant urban growth of today (Bernard and Rice 2014; Espeland 1998; Ross 2011; Shermer 2013; Worster 1985). But for civilization, it was as if any environmental characteristic such as the amount of water available or the location of aquifers could and should be dismissed, invisibilized (Meyer 1996; Pisani 1996; Reisner 1993; Sheridan 2007). Indeed, "There is no lack of water here unless you try to establish a city where no city should be" (Abbey 1968).[4] With a "depraved appetite after the great vanities, dreams and shadows of this vanishing life, great portions of land, land in the wilderness," it was thus "as if men were in as great necessity and danger for want of great portions of land, as poor, hungry, thirsty seamen have, after a sick and stormy, a long and starving passage." (Rogers Williams cited in Zinn 2003).

The pretty story we like to tell though is one of a personal search for freedom, emancipation, and will: if men decided to live there, then they should do anything to make it possible regardless of the human or physical constraints of the region, what some have called "water wars" (Walton 1991). However, one cannot ignore that the historical appropriation of Western territories is rooted in a "morally ambiguous drive" as the "need for space, for land," in "conditions of scarcity and in a barbarous epoch of history ruled by competition," "was transformed into the murder of whole peoples" (Zinn 2003, 17; Drinnon 1990; Dunn 2002). Even far from those dark times, the organization of men in territories is not a coincidence. They reflect existing inequalities in societies, historically grounded territorial differentiations, conflicts and struggles of appropriation.

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scarcity, in a barbarous epoch of history ruled by competition, this human need was transformed into the murder of whole peoples" (Zinn 2003, 17).

[4] "There is no shortage of water in the desert but exactly the right amount, a perfect ratio of water to rock, water to sand, insuring that wide free open, generous spacing among plants and animals, homes and towns and cities, which makes the arid West so different from any other part of the nation. There is no lack of water here unless you try to establish a city where no city should be" (Abbey, *Desert Solitaire. A Season in the Wilderness*, 1968)

1. Discovering Inequalities in the Residential Space

During my journey in Tucson, I went on countless exploratory outings in the city. I discovered signs of differentiation, from the abandoned neighborhoods of the South, mostly Hispanic but named Washington Boulevard, Billy Road or 22nd Street, to the wealthy villas of the North of the city, on the mountainside, in which Mexican names such Bonita Drive, Pueblo Villa, Placita Vista Hermosa or Las Palmas Boulevard testify to the appropriation of the Mexican folklore and heritage and the marketization of places.

The development of urban centers in the style of newly founded villages is shaped by the socio-spatial organizations of men in territories, both the natural landscape and the built environment: a form of both spatial and social distance, with the poorest members living in certain designated areas, usually where pollution and density are higher and the conditions in which nature arises more unpleasant. Territories are not simply geographical spaces in which people settle, they hold different market and symbolic values. They house poor, middle and rich populations; and they are subject to diversified operations of control. Indeed, spatial arrangements reflect the social arrangements of society, including the group struggles and the inequalities at stake. Socio-professional groups, including developers and real estate agents, are indeed not performing the same work in these territories (Gotham 2002; Squires 2002) as they do not hold the same market value, and are imbued with meanings including social status and reproduction strategies (Bourdieu 2005a) aimed at perpetuating land speculation.

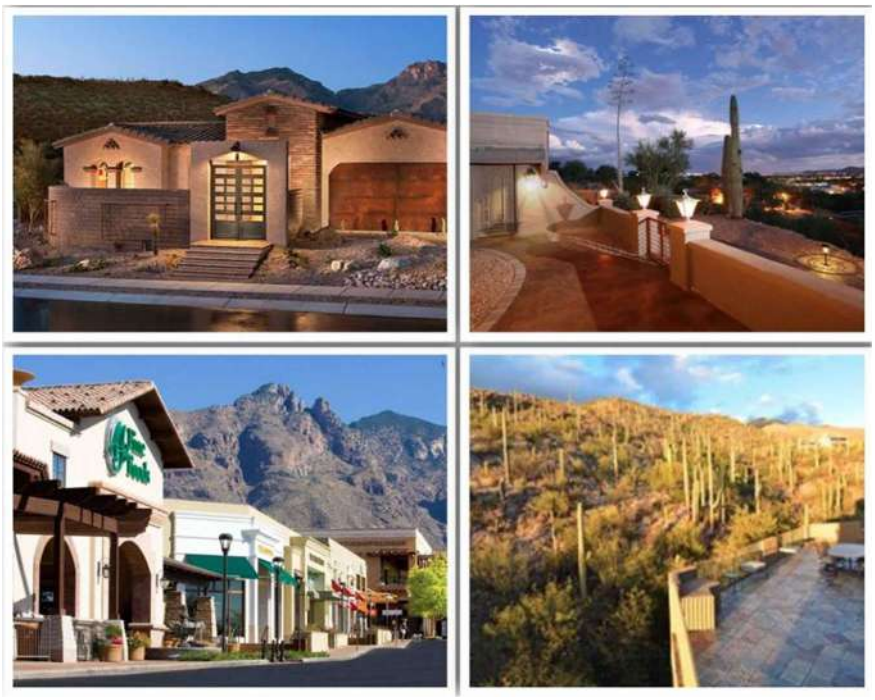
The discovery of the city of Tucson, its streets, its large spaces made of high roads lined with strip malls that reproduce a form of centrality with a large parking and a variety of shops on one side and the residential subdivisions, or homes are standardized, confined between these shopping centers and these major arteries on the other. By venturing into neighborhoods, one is struck by the differences that exist for example, between the North and South of the city. The South, inhabited in some places by a population of more than 80% Hispanic, is desolate (*Picture 1*). Devoid of both public and private investments, the infrastructure is dilapidated, populated by old small houses, sometimes broken (*Picture 2*). Many credit union stores promise to buy everything on credit or get loans very quickly and

dollar stores sell all kinds of very cheap products. The bus stops are occupied by a population overweight and often handicapped.

Picture 1: Stores in the South Side

Picture 2: A Rundown House in South Tucson

The North, on the contrary, which begins after the delimitation of the "River Road," which runs along a concrete-lined dry river bed, is inhabited by a predominantly white middle class and upper class population composed of professors, managers and entrepreneurs, the composition of which the economic and/ or cultural capital is quite different from the South of Tucson. Their houses and villas are new and spacious and enjoy a much more natural setting. They overlook cactus "forests" and can have views of the mountain or the city below. Unlike the South, which has only inexpensive shops, the malls in the North have food shops that often offer organic products, ethical products or a specialization in high-end clothing with Lamborghini's parked in front of some restaurants. They can even be the place of markets for small producers and restaurants of ethnic cuisine, unlike the South which mainly offers fast food. These “representation” of homes are quite carefully considered fabrications. Very often, for example, an expensive photographer is hired to perfectly light and photo the house (*Picture 3*). The images show a sunset sky, as the foreground is lit up in all its “nighttime glory.” Similarly, unsightly bushes or ugly backgrounds are completely replaced by something from somewhere else to make it appear more attractive.



Picture 3: Foothill Mall, Houses and Scenery North of River Road

I noticed the influence of the marketing or thematic architecture of cities created from scratch by private developers on one side, and the desolated nature of spaces whose market value seems very low and therefore of little interest to entrepreneurs. The city is not made for the pedestrian, but rather is the kingdom of the car, few pedestrian crossings, and bus stops, one passes a road and can be found next to a field of trailer homes. Caravan houses are prefabricated as if we were passing from the South American shanty town to luxury villas.

The study of the relations between capitalism, modernity and urban development with all its fragmentations and inequalities involved a real sociological enterprise of understanding the modern economic world, whose capital is concentrated in cities. Even the very basic surroundings in which we move has its logic. It seemed to me that the economy (and the subordination of the social to State-shaped neoliberal policies) was also based on the uses of the city, its goods and its inhabitants as material and symbolic objects put at the service of the production of market value.

The West of the United States can be seen as a "kind of laboratory" in which forms of urban and suburban development and the creation of residential communities for well-off populations looking for a pastoral lifestyle with all the advantages of urban living were and still are *promoted* by a pro-growth alliance between public and private actors. Many researchers have written about the development of the West and the search for water, and especially the role of business elites in the process of urbanizing the West (see Kupel 2006; Sheridan 1995; Reisner 1993; Worster 1985). The theorization of the city as a local growth machine, a term popularized by sociologist Harvey Molotch (1976) illustrates the academic concerns for studying how growth entrepreneurs profit from acquiring land, driving them to acquire more and more; as well as their impact on the shape of cities and communities.

As I embarked on this project, I had in mind the violent images of the conquest of the West, the America of racial segregation, and the incredible influence of the market that was always pointed out in the French university circles to which I belonged. As I learned

about the development of the West,[5] it became clear that if I wanted to understand residential inequalities, I had to go back to the enterprise of organizing land, by looking at the operations of exchange, price, and through the acts of buying and selling.

While investigating the implementation of a new transport system in Santiago de Chile, I had already observed this very fragmented city of forms of urban fragmentation. It also allowed me to question modern capitalism and the conditions and possibilities of a "market". How, even though there are such inequality and violence, the photos of real estate agents and their sign on the side of the road give the impression of possible access to the "house of our dreams"? The yard signs with real estate agents' names and the advertisements for the newly built communities are not random: they tell a story, the story of the social fabric of the West, and the struggles for occupation and land development in the region.

2. The Real Estate Agent in the Residential Space

While driving among residential subdivisions and exploring the dining and shopping strip malls, I found fragmented signs of the presence of real estate agents in the city, seeing advertising signs on the side of the roads but also in various shopping or dining outlets. Agents' business cards were available in stores and restaurants. I even met some agents with their badges, shopping at the supermarket. They were present through their brokerage in street fairs or as part of philanthropic activities in the community. They seem familiar to the local scenery and yet so strange to me.

Their advertising signs, holding both the name of their brokerage firm and their own, indicate an open house or a currently available listing. Depending on if they work alone or

[5] Two authors particularly struck as pointing out the role of real estate interests in the construction of the West. Originally from Minnesota, the writer and environmentalist Marc Reisner got interested in water management and policy. In 1986 was published *Cadillac Desert* that became a classic on the water in the west. Page 305, Reisner writes: "The cities grew up in the middle of the farmland. The real estate interests, the money people – they're all in Phoenix and Scottsdale and Tucson. They didn't want to move. So we're going to move the river to them. At any cost. We think." The historian and anthropologist Thomas Sheridan spent more than three decades studying the interrelations between economic development and environmental issues in Arizona. Sheridan writes: "Fortunes in post-war Arizona were not made of gold or silver mining but in real estate. Arizona became a vast Monopoly board of new land waiting to be developed." (Sheridan 2012, 353).

not, there might be a photo of themselves or their team, many times a female and a male often representing a couple. The goods seem to receive less attention than the agents themselves.

Picture 4: Agences Immobilières in France

I found it quite strange as the sale of residential properties in France was mainly organized by real estate companies (*agence immobilière*) where the discreet presentation of goods invites the customer to push the door of the *agence* to find out more (Bonneval 2011; Bernard 2017) (*Picture 4*). For onlookers, however, they serve as indications of market prices. French *agences immobilières* and wholesale franchises only present the goods with their logo, name and phone number. It appears they made little room for the names of agents even if he or she would be ultimately responsible for showing the goods[6].

Instead, even if the American brokerages are collecting the commission and are legally responsible for residential transactions, they are displayed as less essential, hidden

[6] The role and status of the agent might be changing as well in France. There is a notable rise of independent workers as well as recent emergent popular figures from TV shows such as Stéphane Plaza whose name and photograph are associated with his brokerage.

behind the figure of the agent, displayed through the photographs on advertisement signs on the side of the road (*Picture 5*) and with realtors® business cards (*Picture 6*). To know the prices, the customer must specifically go through a real estate agent and not an *agence*, which will very rarely be the first point of contact for the customer. Indeed, the system of residential sales embedded with the real estate agent is more than professional work in the sense that it is a work done on the market to organize and create the conditions for supply and demand to be exchanged. This begins to explain why, in the United States, we see realtors sending out holiday cards or well-wishes.

Picture 5: Examples of Real Estate Signs in Tucson

Picture 6: Sample of Tucson Realtors® Cards

I scoured the socio-residential space with countless driving around, eating, shopping, reading and talking to the many people I encountered. What was I witnessing? Was it the growth machine at work? Is it a grinding machine that magically transforms a wild savage space into a desirable living space? Or, as I have conceptualized it in this work, a case of understanding the dynamics of a social field, a system of relations constantly mediated at the level of interpersonal encounters between buyers and sellers, operating within a wider system of relations constituted by the state and the market for real estate? I could have "naturalized" the discourses of the University of Arizona students and professors, store owners, etc. who, as desert' aficionados with ecological consciousness, contribute to invisibilise the conditions of production of the residential space in which they live. Without the field of Tucson, as a city, as an urban and social space, I would not have realized the *social significance of the agent*. What also stood in front of me was the constant struggle to make *the market appear human* through the very specific embodiment by the agent.

Picture 7: Phil Dunphy, Realtor® in Modern Family

The interest sparked by Phil Dunphy (*Picture 7*, a key character in *Modern Family*, a TV series of 11 seasons (2009-2020), appeared to speak to both the centrality and fascination exercised by the American real estate agent. Born April 3, 1969, Phil is married to Claire, dad to three kids. He works as a real estate agent, spending his life showing a wide variety of properties, from starter homes to luxury houses. Phil represents the masculine embodiment of middle America, as he is both funny and childish, a cool but often goofy dad, in good physical shape and quite attractive to women. He takes his job seriously, technology - savvy and possesses relational capacities: he is relatable, helpful, trustworthy, honest and loyal to his clients. He is also presented as effeminate in some ways, which is highlighted as "a useful trait for his job as a realtor" as "he has shown power over women because of his reliableness and trustworthy nature."[7] A true embodiment of the interaction

[7] http://modernfamily.fandom.com/wiki/Phil_Dunphy

between the professional and the personal, Phil represents an “everyday superhero,” a kind of “glamor pop” resonating with any average American in a country in which the commodification of land and the sophistication of the house has perhaps achieved its most sophisticated development.

Researching quickly the statistics of the Tucson National Association of Realtors® (2012), I learned that there were nearly 4,800 realtors® in the city, about 1 for every 100 residents. At that point, I began to see that *the social figure of the real estate* agent was a promising topic for a dissertation. Behind the glamourous edited pictures of the agents and the western scenery, something was hidden, something had to be recovered. Perhaps, I was hinted by the image many outsiders have about Americans: they walk, talk, move, advance with sort of naivety and confounding confidence. Instead of indulging in a relativistic cultural analysis, though, I had to understand the social fabric behind the real estate agent. What was behind the "good American middle-class family," the "good guy" or the "nice girl"?

As Halbwachs (1925) said, these images are not purely symbolic but are materialized as objects which carry to some extent our imprints. If they seemed at once completely burlesque making outsiders say Americans are superficial, shallow and cheesy, they also emerge as embodiments of the consumer market-oriented spirit mashed with the spread of narcissism and infantilizing in highly individualistic and capitalistic societies (Lasch 1978). What *i*s the *real estate agent* in its different *roles* – as a community figure, an organized profession and a market intermediary – enable me to learn about the social fabric of modern capitalism?

3. Dissertation Outline

This dissertation is divided into **four parts,** one theoretical and methodological part, and three empirical parts**. It** contains an introduction, **eight chapters,** and a conclusion. I start with a general introduction to the research, bringing up perspectives on the reasons to study the real estate industry in the West.

In the first part, I set up the theories and the methodologies used for the study. The **first chapter** explains the sociological construction of the object, and the theoretical underpinnings of the research, especially on market, labor, and inequalities. **Chapter 2** introduces the core actors of the dissertation and my inquiries around them: the real estate agents, the research questions, the studies on them and the methods and data chosen to address the research problem, as well as the concerns and limitations of the study.

Chapter 3 and 4 consist of the first empirical part of the dissertation: the acquisition of socio-professional dispositions and the ethos of the real estate agent. **Chapter 3** observes the construction of a real estate ethos by the real estate companies and concerning a capitalist spirit. I investigate workers' motivation to enter a real estate career and discuss the broad conditions in which real estate activity can become meaningful. I draw on the specific appeals of real estate, combined with the broader context of labor investment: independence and liberal freedom. I particularly draw on observations of training to "convert" newer recruits into agents, including how they are told to behave to become "the perfect agent." **Chapter 4** investigates the creation of legitimacy in the market through the activities carried out by the trade association, and how professional and ethical work is used to build a space for real estate work, building the professional and market norms in which the agent acts. I look at how real estate agents claim expertise through market knowledge, but also how the core of their argument of authority consists of denigrating the economic aspects of their activity to highlight the symbolic dimensions.

The second empirical part of the dissertation is composed of Chapters 5 and 6: The discovery of the client or the relational mechanisms of trust and client capture. **Chapter 5** enters the specific labor that is done on relationships to get clients and maintain their activity. I review the literature on networks, brokerage, and homophily and present a blended theoretical version of social relations for trust, including the role of different types of labor. I identify two interrelated types of labor done by real estate agent: 1) the *relational labor* using relationships and 2) the *taste labor* or the social and cultural investments done by agents to demonstrate similarity to the clients, and to create a successful matching. **Chapter 6** is specifically dedicated to gender issues, and how *gender* is used *symbolically* and as a *skill* within the real work environment. I trace the use of gender through the early days of

the creation of real estate as a business and an industry and show how the use of "*women natural skills*" served as a moral validation to make the marketization of real estate acceptable. In the field, I observe an injection towards a careful use of emotions, in between the feminine display of caring and the authority and toughness required to be a salesperson. I also uncover the logic of *professional positioning* that goes on in the field of real estate, the fact that women are not advantaged in the hierarchy and that they earn less on average than men. I demonstrate a class effect that changes how gender operates.

The third and final empirical part of the dissertation, **Chapters 7 and 8** – The production of a match between supply and demand or the contribution to clients' preferences including pricing and location– investigate market processes that shape housing inequalities. I focus on agents' work practices, including interactions with clients, showing how agents classify, manage and control clients to bring them in line with the market. I also stress the ways that agents shape the qualities and prices of the products. Departing from hypotheses on segregation and inequalities in the context of housing markets, I address specific potential mechanisms creating and reproducing inequalities. I evidence, for example, mechanisms of *spatializing* (desirable or undesirable areas) and *assigning* (specific targeting), especially by 1) putting the offer on the market from producing to accessing to; 2) working the demand from collecting aspirations to translate them into criteria.

Finally, I conclude on the main findings of the dissertation, the issues I faced, the main limits remaining, as well as the new theoretical and empirical horizons to further investigation.

In Chapter 1, I describe most particularly the sociological literature from which my object has been constructed and the proposition made by the present dissertation. To study sociologically the existence of the housing market in a capitalist society and the production of socio-spatial inequalities, I observe and analyze the dispositions, positions, practices of real estate agents in the Tucson real estate residential market. Through deeply uncovering a professional and market system of coordination and control, a sociological model of inquiry is adopted, empirically grounded while creatively bridging different yet complementary sociological literature.

Part I. The Theoretical and Methodological Settings of the Research

Chapter 1 explains the sociological construction of the object of study, and the theoretical underpinnings of the research, especially around sociological literature on markets and work, the core actors of the dissertation including previous studies conducted on real estate agents. I propose a relational sociology of market intermediaries. Chapter 2 introduces the research questions, the empirical design, and methods used, the production of data as well as the concerns and limitations of the study.

CHAPTER 1: The Construction of the Object

Residential real estate, like other domains, is characterized by the cohabitation (and sometimes tension) between the professionally-derived and market-based fabrication of norms and rules. In this chapter, I depart from the argument that these are not "strictly" separated domains, but they have constantly contributed to one another. How do real estate agents – as professionals and intermediaries between demand and supply – contribute to creating the housing market and the value of the goods exchanged? To which extent do they contribute to residential racial and social inequalities? Relying on the sociology of work and economic sociology as well as the work of Bourdieu and Goffman, the dissertation proposes a relational sociology of market mediation.

By entering the world of real estate, the dissertation proposes to integrate the observation and analysis of, on the one hand, the socio-professional and economic dispositions[8] of real estate agents conceptualized as market professionals (Cochoy and Dubuisson-Quellier 2000b) and their professional and market-based work practices. The conceptualization of a "professional and market intermediation" reconciles these two perspectives by examining how agents both are the product of professional culture and act on market-based practices that contribute to shaping both inequalities and the operation of the residential market. After presenting real estate as a domain of the economy, I highlight the various research (real estate and housing, economic sociology, sociology of professions

[8] I use dispositions in the sense of Bourdieu (1977a) broadly as cognitive structures guiding individuals in their present - a 'way of being' - or expected actions – a 'tendency,' 'propensity' or 'inclination.'

and work) in which my study is grounded. I discuss a series of theoretical breaks to define the specific contours of my contribution. I finally propose that what is needed is a "sociology of market intermediation" which serves both to refine our understanding of markets and the production of inequalities.

1. The World of Real Estate Agents

The world of real estate agents has specific interest for sociological research. The real estate agent thrives on market activity. Building on residential mobility, the agent is both a witness and an actor of residential differentiations, which activity consists in understanding and communicating both materially and symbolically urban spaces. This social figure allows questioning the mechanisms of production and reproduction of inequalities.

The realtor® is also the most common denominator of all real estate residential transactions. As an occupation, it was specifically developed in the United States and still serves as a model for real estate agents abroad. In the United States, several studies have estimated that 90% of residential real estate transactions are done through an agent, unlike France and Germany (Bonneval 2011). Why then, do real estate agents intervene so massively in the US residential real estate market?

While the structural explanation is most appealing and plays certainly an important part in the answer (American agents have developed more "necessary" and "competitive" tools to sell and buy quickly), this dissertation proposes to look at how social and cultural variables can impact that relationship. Why should we have agents if we begin doubting their utility? Why, in the age of information and internet, have they not disappeared? Thus, what is it about them that is quintessentially and historically an American story? In which ways are they informing the unequal development of American cities?

The emergence of real estate markets, of brokers and investors, is historically situated. If Polanyi (1944) is well-known for a contribution to the study of the commodification of land in England, I was surprised by a few general references on the history of private property and the emergence of real estate as a professional field as well. Among the historical works I examined, there was no trace of highly organized markets of

land exchange, and no workers specifically in charge of it. I found bits and pieces elsewhere, and most specifically, a reference to laws that allowed for the emergence of the professional field and the craft of exchanging property.

Rare studies in the late 19th century and early 20th centuries such as Adna Weber's *Growth of Cities in the 19th Century* (1899) and Carroll Wright's study of building and loan associations (1894) documented the housing patterns and conditions. The work of political economist Richard Ely in the 1920s introduced monographic research on urbanization and real estate business to both the federal government and the industry associations, including the collection of data from the US census on mortgage financing. Under Roosevelt's presidency, statistical analysis developed led by the Department of commerce included research on real estate ownership, financing, construction, and uses. The focus of the research tended to be more practical rather than theoretically-grounded, stressing business and regulatory aspects such as land value or pricing (Hurd 1924) and deed restrictions (Monchow 1928). Starting in the 1940s, research was mostly conducted by private think tanks (Colean 1944) and NBER's financial research program (Weiss 1989).

As opposed to personal property in English common law, real estate is a polysemic term that includes both the immovable property as the land and the buildings as well as the natural resources (water, crops, minerals) and the business or the profession of buying, selling and renting properties (Oxford English Dictionary 2018). The oldest real estate transaction in the United States is often symbolized by the Treaty of Paris, which granted independence from England after the Revolution (Smithsonian) but in its modern form, several professional sources often cite New York, with the New York Real Estate Exchange's creation in 1847 (RealtorMag) or Chicago, with the brokerage "Baird and Warner Real Estate" opening in 1855 (Inman). If the real estate market is now considered as the "most important engine of the U.S. economy" (Pattillo 2013), I argue that the development of the real estate market cannot be analyzed without looking at its early organizational attempts.

In looking for books on the history of real estate, I found the Ph.D. thesis of Everett Cherrington Hughes (1897-1983). Most of what is recalled of him are his work on professions, fieldwork methods, and race relations. But as a graduate student at the

University of Chicago, he started by studying the organization of real estate men. Drawing on the historical evolution of land and the model of growth theorized by E.W Burgess (1928) in *The Growth of the City* (1925), Hughes presents the case of an occupational group whose existence rests on the transformation of land into a commodity and the constant mobility of people in the city. As he writes, pricing land is most common in cities, a place of grand mobility, and where real estate men first realized how profitable real estate markets could be:

> To make a commodity is, first, to make an article movable at will. Man is the article which must move to make the land a commodity. He does so in the city. In the maze of real estate transactions which results, flourishes the real estate man. His trade is urban and secular. The land is as near a perfect commodity as the nature of the city and his efforts can make it. The more nomadic the city dweller, the more the real estate agent flourishes. His success is commensurate with the degree to which he can remove from the land the halo of sacred sentiment, and put into its place the secular value of money (Hughes 1928, 16).

For Hughes, the growth of supply and demand of housing materialized in housing booms and can explain the opportunity for businessmen to develop out of this trade and activity. The real estate "boom" in Chicago is arguably one of the reasons the real estate board came about. Hughes himself writes: "the story of the Chicago Real Estate Board is one of precisely that process by which a "boom" business, without order or precedent, is reduced to order and stability" (Hughes 1928, 23). However, the first two attempts to organize were failures as agents faced accusations of dishonesty and stealing. In 1883 after the devastating fire of the city, they created the Chicago Real Estate Board, which grew out of a desire for land control as expressed in their opening statement: "to secure more system and uniformity in the renting, care, and management of real estate in the city of Chicago; to better protect and promote the interests of those entrusting properties to their care; to protect themselves and their clients against dishonest and immoral tenants; and to generally correct existing abuses and to prevent their future occurrence."[9] These businessmen cultivated an "esprit de corps" and operated through the assumption that the new organizational form (a "corporation" à la Durkheim) would help bring more control and closure (a "moral order"

[9] Cited by the Chicago Associations of Realtors® http://chicagorealtor.com/about-us/who-we-are/

for Hughes 1928, 22) related to the conduct of their business activities. The organization provided an umbrella acting towards a relative autonomy under which members are guaranteed access to the market, secure expertise and support for integrity claims.

To the same extent that the sales of life insurance were deemed morally acceptable through marketing and commercial techniques used by sales agents (McFall 2011; V. A. Zelizer 1978),[10] real estate men had to break through traditions to sell goods that people considered they could trade by themselves, and *organize as a profession* to legitimize themselves for making money out of real estate transactions without being judged as "unscrupulous." In *A Nation of Realtors®*,[11] Jeffrey Hornstein explains how a "group of prominent real estate brokers attempted to transform their occupation into a profession," developing the identity of "the professional entrepreneur."

Along with the promotional campaigns on homeownership, housing and credit led the federal government in the 1920s, Realtors® could frame the "house" at the center of the "American dream" and the core of middle-class values, making homeownership a necessary milestone in American life (Belsky 2013; Borjas 2002; Flippen 2001; Foley 1980; Shlay 2006).[12] Real estate as a "professional activity" was not born overnight, but resulted from various governmental policies fostering homeownership, various acts of occupational legitimation and control over certain resources (Abbott 1988) as well as the increasing use of real estate as a secured wealth investment and asset.[13]

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[10] In *Pricing the priceless child*, Zelizer emphasizes the role played by marketing and commercial techniques in the construction of a market for life insurance. These techniques "contributed to the redefinition of the social value of children" (Zelizer 1985, 751). Actors working on the supply side and professionals of market intermediation play an important role in the social construction of the supply and demand for life insurance.

[11] Because the book was financed *by The National Association of Realtors®*, one can doubt about the specific freedom in writing freely about the development of the organization. Although it provides a valuable account, it must be taken with critical distance as most of the sources came from realtors' magazines and trade journals.

[12] Encouraged by Herbert Hoover, secretary of commerce at the time, the developing housing field of the 1920s made several campaigns on a moral tone and utilized tax incentives and other means to increase the rate of homeowners in the United States (Clarke and Zavisca 2014).
Women played an important role in legitimizing the morality of buying and selling real estate, framed as good mothers of the Nation, raising children into good stable private households (Hornstein 2005).

[13] "Culturally, professions legitimate their control by attaching their expertise to values with general cultural legitimacy, increasingly the values of rationality, efficiency, and science." (Abbott, 1988, 16)

Real estate is now one of the largest economic sectors in the United States, representing in 2000 more than 11% of the U.S. GDP at $1.1 trillion (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2002)[14] Most specifically, residential real estate (as opposed to commercial real estate) is often referred to as the "housing market" which organizes the exchanges of housing commodities. Not only is it a simple physical asset, fixed in a specific "space" with its "own economic, political and social relations, but also a financial asset, "mobile and tradable" (Charney 2012). Long thought as a secondary circuit of investment autonomous from the primary circuit (manufacturing) (Beauregard 1994; Fainstein 1994; Gottdiener 1994), in its current form, real estate operates as a separate sector of the economy due to the dual nature of the commodity exchanged, both an immovable, thus spatially fixed commodity, and the subject of the flow of global capital investments (Gotham 2006; Krippner 2005).

The real estate sector also possesses several distinctive features that attract investment. Real estate investments are considered superior against inflation, permit corporations to diversify their stocks and bonds and obtain greater tax benefits than in other investments (Downs 1985; Haila 1998). The 2008 crisis exposed the overall vulnerability of the economy to the mortgage-backed securities promoted by the federal government (Aalbers 2008; Fligstein and Goldstein 2011; Quinn 2010). Thus, the organization of housing through private firms, private trade organizations, local public agencies, federal, State-specific agencies or government-sponsored enterprises can have enormous consequences, both at the macro and micro-economic level.

As a market, real estate is composed by various public and private bodies of government, including 1) private firms usually corresponding to professional bodies such as lender (banks, credit organizations), insurers, brokers and brokerage firms, builders, subdivisers, architects, appraisers, home inspectors, engineers, contractors, private; 2) private-industry trade organizations such as the National Association of Realtors®, the U.S. League of Savings Associations®, the National Association of Home Builders®, the American Institute of Architects, the American Planning Association; 3) local government

[14] Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2002, "Gross Domestic Product by Industry," Survey of Current Business, November. http://www.bea.gov/bea/dn2/gpo.htm).

such as municipalities (incorporated cities and towns), special districts; 4) Federal executive departments such as Housing and Urban Department (HUD) and federal public agencies such as at the Federal Home Loan Bank Board and the Federal Housing Administration (FHA); 5) State-specific agencies including the Arizona Department of Real Estate (ADRE) with a commissioner and a governor and the Arizona Department of Housing which receives federal funding and 6) Government-sponsored enterprises such as Federal National Mortgage Association (FNMA or Fannie Mae) the Federal Home Loan Mortgage Company (FHLMC, or Freddie Mac).

Adopted in 1913, the National Association of Realtors Code of Ethics stipulates rules for the conduct of agents in the best interests of their clients. Organized in 17 articles and standards of practices, it highlights the duties to 1) their clients and customers – including treating customers fairly, not misrepresenting or exaggerating facts related to property or transactions, disclosing their interests if acting for their own benefits, and cooperating with other professionals for the interests of the clients, keeping clients' funds in separate escrow accounts 2) the public – including following the fair housing act, engaging knowledge and competence, be honest and truthful, do not violate the laws and participate in investigations; 3) fellow Realtors® as to not make false statements about others realtors®, to respect other realtors® if they have engaged in exclusive brokerage relationship with a client and to mediate financial conflicts between realtors and among clients. Each broker has employing guidelines in compliance with the law around which activities only licensed real estate agents perform. The name of the employing broker should appear in all advertising ads or signs. They are also responsible to collect clients' payment from each transaction and redistribute, according to a specific splitting structure, the commission earned at closing.

Besides the National Association of Realtors Code of Ethics and the employing broker's guidelines, State real estate and federal laws organize residential real estate. Among them are the Arizona Property and Real Estate Laws, including the Landlord and Tenant Act, which organizes the rights and duties of both tenants and landlords, The Arizona Adverse Possession Laws, which contains rules concerning property titles, the Arizona Homestead Laws which organizes the relation with creditors and regulates the foreclosure and eviction processes. Arizona statutes and court cases also oblige the seller of a property

to disclose the physical condition of the home. This can be particularly contentious in case of disagreement around disclosure elements and statements, composed typically of information on property and ownership, building and safety information, utilities, environmental information (such as lead-based paint, mold or asbestos), sewer and wastewater treatment. Specific laws include liens, property deeds, and transfers, as well as the sales contract that real estate agents learn at the real estate school.

Other laws include the 1968 Fair Housing Act which protects the buyer or renter from discrimination by a landlord or seller based on race, color, religion, sex, disability, familial status, or national origin. Agents violate the Fair Housing laws when they advise housing for specific populations such as "single or retirees only." Because it is considered steering, Agents cannot communicate any specific details on neighborhoods or communities such as school or crime statistics, but they can direct their clients to a police department or statistical data. In most cases, though, the violation of housing laws may be subtle. If a complaint is filed, then the judge will determine whether or the behavior of the agent was considered in violation of the housing laws. Locally though, the Government Accountability Office (2010) reports that enforcements were sometimes inconsistent.

The Arizona Department of Real Estate (ADRE) organizes and regulates both the entry and the curriculum of the real estate agents. It is responsible for the licensing of real estate agents as well as the content and extent of the knowledge (hours required), the practical modalities to pass the real estate license. The department must also review the continuing education of agents as if they want their license to be active, they must engage in ongoing training. The Department also oversees the actions of real estate agents, which licenses can be revoked or suspended. The trade association's objective is to bring their interests to the public and the legislators, develop similar professional standards to the law profession, create a cooperative system with professional tools while limiting outside competition. Real estate firms are competing to recruit agents, not clients.

Weber (1978) argues that markets are organized around two types of interactions: 1) between every buyer and seller and 2) between a selected buyer and a selected seller. However, the relation is not direct, buyers and sellers do not interact directly in real estate markets. Real estate agents' work thus is achieved both before and during situations of

exchanges. The residential real estate market is organized around intermediaries, who are trying to put in place mechanisms to avoid competition. The market is not structured around a competition on prices as the commission rates are cooperatively defined by trade associations at 6% (the seller's agent redistributes 3% to the buyer's agent) but around qualitative investments to specialize in niches, clients or segments of the market as well as to find buyers and sellers.

The client arises thus as central in the market (Cochoy 2004; Karpik 2010), being simultaneously engaged in a transaction involving price and quality of products, but prey to misguidance because of the uncertainty about quality and the opacity of the market. Thus, real estate agents' work is structured around clients' capture mechanisms, including professional tools and devices to attract, seduce, select clients, which will frame buyers' and sellers' path into market exchanges (Trompette 2007).

The market is thus structured around struggles around exchange opportunities. Price is only playing a marginal role in the exchange resolution, as agents mobilize mainly territorial, relational and institutional resources to find clients and operate the matching. Buyers and sellers come to be individually selected out of price and quality brackets, which requires the work carried out by the intermediary.

Commercial relations are based exclusively on the mastery of the interactional situation and the ability to exploit interpersonal skills. In the residential market, real estate agents act as market intermediaries: they work to match supply – which is defined by the inventory of goods available on a market and carried by sellers – and a demand – understood as the total purchasing power combined with a purchase decision. Customer recruitment and retention are presented as the bread and butter of a real estate agent's success. If the behaviors between realtors® must be symmetrical, the rules of interactions between customers and agents depend on the professionally-defined forms of conduct specific to the agent-client relationship. The agent puts himself socially below his client to show respect and deference. This social distancing, by the search for an inferior status, involves both an interaction between the social class of the agent and the social class of the clients.

Not only though agents interact at commercial and professional levels with clients, but also with the public and with other realtors® as colleagues from the same brokerage

firms, or as partners to make a transaction go through, either as the buyer's agent or the seller's agent. They interact with the public most generally to legitimate their professional endeavors. The NAR and the TAR serve mostly that exact purpose of setting up guidelines to make agents' behaviors ethical, to foster knowledge on real estate matters and to defend the interests of realtors® via lobbying.

Realtors® develop a variety of relations of different shape and nature which it is worth explicating briefly. Real estate agents have professional relationships with their peers and with their supervisors. They must interact with co-workers, including seller agents if they are buyers' agents and vice versa. In addition to the symmetrical professional relations between colleagues, real estate agents also maintain subordinate relations with team managers, brokers, or general managers.

As a professionally-organized market activity, residential real estate has particularities: 1) it involves a professional association, real estate companies referred as brokerages, and the real estate agents acting as middlemen, 2) it is local, 3) it is based on technological devices and internet, 4) it is organized structurally around principles of cooperation and control. Most middlemen or intermediaries involved in the sales of real estate are licensed Realtors®, i.e. members of the National Association of Realtor®, either brokers or sales agents. Created in 1908 in Chicago, the National Association of Real Estate Exchanges (NAREB) - who later became the National Association of Realtors® - the original objective was "to unite the real estate men of America for effectively exerting a combined influence upon matters affecting real estate interests" (NAREB 2018). It includes a Code of Ethics, as well as a series of services and tools, which permit members only to access valued information and resources such as listings. If it started with only 120 founding members, it grew out to be one of the most important private-trade organization in the United States with 1.2 million members. Each transaction generates a commission fee that is paid by the buyers and sellers to the real estate brokerage, in charge of deciding the portion paid to their agents, the more successful agents being able to claim a larger part. It is highly local, as housing goods are fixed in a specific geographic location and Realtors® are embedded into the knowledge of a specific local market, a city and a community (Sawyer, Wigand, and Crostown 2005; 2007 FTC/DOJ).

In the early 1960s, the National Association of Real Estate Boards created the national Multiple Listing Services (MLS).[15] To this day, this database provides a listing of homes available for purchase to all the licensed Realtors®. Based on cooperation between its members, the MLS transformed access, as any agent could access the listed goods rather than only the goods they had heard of. The more agents became Realtors®, the more the database gained listings, and soon, the registration was essential to get access to the inventory. The information contained in the MLS was also withheld from the general public, permitting Realtors® to retain control of the inventory.

The National Association of Realtors® has also been instrumental in listing homes in all fifty states with thousands of cities and towns for over 8000 MLS's. In 1994, property listings become publicly available on the internet. With the increasing use of internet search, some argue that realtors® could potentially become useless and progressively disappear. They point out several alternative options available to buyers such as "discount" real estate services (Bernheim and Meer 2007). As the internet became increasingly central in real estate transactions, brokerage companies started to create technological applications to compete (and sometimes partner) with online real estate database companies such as Trulia and Zillow.

Although these companies can serve as indicators, their pricing and their indications on the state of supply is often not as current as realtors-sponsored® real-time information displayed through the MLS. Agents still retain exclusive access and control, notably because Realtors® have access to more detailed information about the listings than their clients and retain the expertise to read and understand the listings as well as key safes to access any good listed locally (NAR 2012).

Structural particularities of the real estate market allow for cooperation between real estate agents to occur and commission fees to stay stable – commission fees are fixed by

[15] Systems of distributing information are also available to legitimize the nearly perfect allocation of persons and goods. The implementation of Multiple Listing Service in the 1950s comes from a desire to widely match needs of their clients with the type of properties that is available: "Beginning with a simple system of advertisement in their bulletin, the Real Estate Board has tried to achieve that perfect market in which every piece of real estate would be for sale by every real estate man. Out of this has grown a system of "Multiple Listing," whereby all members who wish list their wants and offerings in a special bulletin." (Hughes 1928, 27)

real estate brokerages around 6%, generally with a cooperation fee paid by the seller's agent to the buyer's agent at around 3%. MLS has a natural monopoly and excludes "rivals" who would try to cut prices. As real estate agents operate in the sell-side and the buy-side of the market, they should continuously cooperate to bring transactions to completion (White 2006).

Housing goods are thus not only simple consumption goods but driven by political and legal decisions, embedded with private and public infrastructures, and part of complex financial technology. Since the 1960s, housing is also the largest expenditure in the average American household budget, whether through mortgage or rent (Bur. Labor Stat. 2011; Johnson, Parker, and Souleles 2006). Its costs rise faster than the overall income (Quigley and Raphael 2004). Homeownership rates have been comprised between 60% to 70% range from the 1960s to nowadays with a record high of 69% in 2005. Even if the homeownership rate has been decreasing as the result of the subprime mortgage crisis, it has been consistently rising since 2016.

Real estate professionals often repeat "Location, location, location." The first particularity of the housing good is that it is physically fixed in space, for which price and value come not only the good per se but a series of qualities associated with its environment, crime rates, parks, neighborhood amenities, schools and their quality, shopping, and dining options, as well as overall status or perception of the neighborhood. Housing goods are also submitted to political and legal decisions concerning labor, infrastructure, policies, desegregation, zoning or taxation. They can appear as a wealth-generating investment, even more, today, because the State does not guarantee basic social provision. Housing goods are thus obviously material goods, they can be classified by type, by size, by structure, but they also hold the qualities of the spaces in which they are located, influenced by a variety of legal, political and social factors. Finally, they are embedded with economic, social and symbolic meanings. Housing can function as the material embodiment of status (the one who possesses holds a certain position and acquires wealth) and as an economical placement which enacts reproduction strategies (the passing of wealth to one’s heirs). Also, the value of housing should be inversely proportional to the welfare state’s generosity (Conley and Gifford 2006).

In France, the presence of notaries could partly explain the lack of real estate agents. In the United States, some States are obliged to have real estate attorneys who write contracts, while in States like Arizona, a long history of lobbying has prevented lawyers to enter the field. The very existence of socio-professional groups in each local market inherits from the history of the legal battles and power fight to exert control (Abbott 1998). They inform the legal and juridical framework of real estate transactions: these groups can be granted privileges or exclusivity around mandates and organization of exchanges. They create institutional networks and technical devices to assert their power and control the market. The Multiple Listing Service (MLS) operationalized in the 1960s enabled US real estate agents to control their database and organized a system of cooperation between agents.

While the structural-functionalist claim around institutionally and legally-binding networks and instruments allow us to answer our preliminary questions on the presence and the centrality of real estate agents, it is only one side of the story. If the Multiple Listing Service is surely a tool for the control of the inventory, it only works because specific people know how to use it: the information must be directed, controlled but also presented and put in place. Both the highly symbolic dimension of the residential real estate market and the unique characteristics of its goods create strong informational uncertainties and space for intermediaries' navigation, which can only be resolved by the human presence of workers whose provisions can "open", transmit and validate the market.

A structural analysis of the institutional organization of the residential market cannot exist without an analysis of the practices of market intermediaries on the residential market. Now that we have provided general historical explanations for the existence of the realtors®, I propose to answer the following research questions: How to understand more precisely the conditions in which a market is created, maintained, structured? How is the value of the housing commodity produced by real estate professionals? How does the rather obscure housing commodity become "transparent" for buyers and sellers?

My analysis aims to understand the role of real estate agents in the construction of residential spaces and the shaping of residential inequalities. In other terms, the main question I seek to answer is: How do real estate agents – as professionals and intermediaries between demand and supply – contribute to creating the housing market and the value of the

goods exchanged, and to which extent does it structure residential inequalities? I contend that an economic sociology of market work can help us understand the production of inequalities through both structural and symbolic boundaries (Lamont and Fournier 1992; Lamont and Molnár 2002) and a "sense of place" (François and Poupeau 2008). Studying real estate agents in their practices serves to analyze the making of residential choices, and how a determinant "sense of place" operates, not only through individual or households' rational choices but through the controlled guidance of market intermediaries.

After briefly reviewing the literature on real estate agents and markets, I propose, at the crossroads of economic sociology, sociology of work and the professions, sociology of market mediation to answer those questions. Not only does this contribution bridge two literatures, but it also has important implications for urban studies, including geography, sociology, and real estate. The analysis grasps the dispositions required to be a real estate agent – selection, training, and socialization to the job – and the construction of the residential market through the creation of trust, that is, through a belief system and the organization of market matching through prices and preferences.

2. The Sociological Study of Real Estate Agents

Despite the centrality of the housing market in the U.S. economy (Pattillo 2013) and the relative obscured question of market value (Beckert and Aspers 2010; Cochoy and Dubuisson-Quellier 2013; Karpik 2010; Zwick and Cayla 2011), there have been relatively few sociological studies considering the activities of housing market professionals and the role of market intermediaries in market construction (Smith and Munro 2008; Wallace 2008; Watkins 2008).

Most of the interesting work on real estate development has been conducted by economic and urban historians. Historical research on real estate is far from being a unified field, although attempts were made in the 1980s (Weiss 1989). Real estate scholars are disseminated into various programs and disciplines: history, urban planning, architecture, and economics. Since the 1970s, urban geographers and sociologists coming from a neo-Marxist approach have started to investigate capitalism through real estate. One of the seminal critics addressed to real estate research was that, unlike business history evidenced

by the political economy approach of Chandler's *Visible Hand* (1977), it had been limited on the one hand to "dramatic tales of entrepreneurial success or failure" (Weiss 1989, 242) including the rise of metropolitan entrepreneurship through business elites, including Robert Sobel (1989), Donald Trump (Trump and Schwartz 2009), Henry Huntington (Friedricks 1992) who has been able to "promote their interests through municipal, locational, investment and regulatory decisions" (Fleischmann and Feagin 1987, 209–210) (see also Isman 1926; Mayer 1978; Rachlis and Marquesee 1963; Thomas 1977).

Additionally, historical work has been reduced to "official histories of either individual firms or trade associations" (Weiss 1989, 242) such as the histories of the New York and Chicago real estate boards (Eskew 1959; Fish 1979; National Realty Committee 1989; Pegg 1983). Development in institutional economics were thus mostly focused on the history of principles of land investments (Isaac, O'Leary, and Daley 2010; Pisani and Pisani 1989) while critical work, in the vein of investigative journalism or neo-Marxist studies, criticized real estate interests in taking over the development of cities (Boyer 1973; Feagin and Parker 1990; Paulson 1972; Wolf 1981).

Real estate research nonetheless illuminates various processes at stake in the residential real estate market as well as actors acting on them structured around three domains:

1) real estate development, including the sales process and the construction of neighborhoods. This stream of research has looked mostly at the development of communities and the rise of community builders focused on specific geographical-bounded case studies (C. Boyer 1985; Fishman 1987; Gans 1962; Jackson 1985; Linteau 1985; Keating 1988; Weiss 2002; Wright 1981);

2) financial institutions, including the investors, the lenders and the insurers organizing the financing of real estate development projects as well as the regulative instances and policies operating around it, including taxes. Most of the studies in this vein were conducted since the 1950s by the NBER, looking to uncover the structure of mortgage markets (Kalman 1961; Linteau 1985; Marvell 1969) and the boom and bust cycles in real estate (Rabinowitz 1969). They investigated the role of the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) to encourage postwar large-scale development projects and shape neighborhoods and

communities (Buenger and Pratt 1986; Jackson 1985; Schweikart 1987; Taub 1988), including most recently the effects of the Community Reinvestment Act or the Home Mortgage Disclosure Act. They also documented the shift with deregulation and inflation in the operation of the home mortgage business (Downs 1985; Florida 1986), including the relation to mortgage debt and tax policy;

3) Corporations, firms, owners and users whose main activities are not necessarily in the real estate industry, including life insurance and insurance companies, firms operating in the transportation and energy sector;

4) Public sector, in which bodies of government in any of their specific shape, including state governments, local jurisdictions, courts actively produce, regulate and finance the real estate sector. These bodies enforce laws, give subsidies, collect taxes, pass land-use regulations, create laws on zoning, insurance, property tax, insurance, banking, develop urban plans, administer court battles, build and maintain infrastructures, buy and sell land (Campbell and Lindberg 1990; Campbell, Lindberg, and Hollingsworth 1991; Precher 2000).

These approaches have the advantage of highlighting the several groups of actors who played a historically-defined and contextual role in organizing real estate markets, but these studies lack an in-depth sociological analysis of the practices of professionalized groups of actors.

The conditions for market exchange are both supported and created by governmental and business elites (Fligstein 1996; Bourdieu 2000a; Fligstein 2001; Dobbin 2004). The conditions in which these alliances are made and thrive are what permits us to understand the social construction of cities. A proper history of the real estate industry cannot be achieved without reconstituting the history of housing booms, government policy, and reforms, as well as lending institutions. Banks and legislators ruling on banking regulation has been a key support for real estate booms over the last 50 years. For example, researchers demonstrated that the savings and loans industry was huge support for commercial and residential projects until the late 1980s, and helped finance development. In the early 2000s, the real estate market growth was influenced by governmental legislation. The Glass-Steagall Act of 1933 (Crawford 2011 for more), after continuous lobbying from investors

and bankers, was repealed in 1999 allowing investment banking activities to be performed by any bank. This provided an enormous avenue for banks and real estate investors and developers to drastically profit from real estate, as "large fortunes have been and continue to be made and lost in real estate development" (Miles, Berens, and Weiss 2000, 65).

Bodies of private and public government are thus overarching the functioning and the structure of real estate development through its various federal, state or local agencies, divided into departments (Department of Real Estate, Department of Housing and Urban Development, Department of Health and Safety, Department of Water) and other institutions (cities, counties, etc.). These entities, made of various interlocking networks of professionals and regulators, made up the various acts constitutive of real estate and mortgage markets. They are crucial to get the development projects approved, and have put in place a network of professionals. There are many requirements including permits to be issued and approvals to be obtained for different necessities of the project.

There is no sociology of real estate. Early work was developed by the Local Community Research Committee at the University of Chicago generating urban and socio-spatial empirical studies, which investigated the political and economic nature of property relations in the development of cities. Examples of this work include Park and Burgess's *The City* (1925), Hughes's *Chicago Beal Estate Board* (1931).[16] Most critical work emerged later with Mumford's *Culture of Cities* (1938) and Abram's *Revolution in Land* (1939). Seminal research on real estate came from the urban studies of the neo-Marxist orientation of the 1970s that addressed the spatialized capitalist logic of accumulation.[17] Gottdiener's *The*

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[16] A summary of this work can be found in Smith and Leonard's *White's Chicago: An Experiment in Social Science Research* (1929)

[17] Including Harvey, Castell or Sassen among others. "The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connexions everywhere (..) The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world-market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country. To the great chagrin of Reactionists, it has drawn from under the feet of industry the national ground on which it stood. All old-established national industries have been destroyed or are daily being destroyed. They are dislodged by new industries, whose introduction becomes a life and death question for all civilized nations, by industries that no longer work up indigenous raw material, but raw material is drawn from the remotest zones; industries whose products are consumed, not only at home but in every quarter of the globe. In place of the old wants, satisfied by the productions of the country, we find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes" (Marx and Engels, 1952/2002, 46).

Social Production of Urban Space (1985) and Molotch and Logan's growth machine (1976) and their *Urban Fortunes* (1987) laid the groundwork to shift from a demand-driven, consumer-centric analysis of urban development and from a self-regulated market operation to consider market actors' relationships, interests and strategies to grasp monopolistic control, exhorting researchers to study the actions of lobbying, organizing, supplying and manipulating, as led by coalitions of growth entrepreneurs. Despite its originality as a theoretical contribution, the *growth machine* framework did not generate substantive empirical research.

Contrary to the social studies of finance, a social sciences approach in real estate research is almost non-existent. The Association of Real Estate Studies (ARES) is composed of various academic profiles, including economists, engineers and urban planners which work is more on the practical side. Attempts to define the discipline has been made, but it suffers a major "identity problem" (Diaz 1993, 183). Because it is at the crossroad of many different applied knowledge, the interests and focus of which would change depending on if real estate is considered as an economic and entrepreneurial activity, for its legal and institutional mode of operation, or its architectural and environmental design. At the core of this issue of definition is also its position between a scientific and engineering field, whether respectively describing or prescribing, which makes it even harder to be a field. However, studies on real estate values and pricing are the closest to our interests here (Cerutti, Dagher, and Dell'Ariccia 2015; Grether and Mieszkowski 1974; Walden 1990).

On the other hand, the sociology of housing, although a term employed by Foley (1980) is not often referred to as an object of study (Clarke and Zavisca 2015), whether for its effects (Zavisca and Gerber 2016) or for its manifestations (Pattillo 2013) in relation to stratification (Conley 2001) or discrimination (Pager and Shepherd 2008). The ethnography of eviction processes by Desmond (2017) is a good illustration of work focused primarily on the black underclass, and not so much on the housing intermediaries, with some arguing that Desmond actually does not address the issues to which he lays claim, i.e. social structural oppression by landlords and government (Burawoy 2017).

Particular studies done on real estate agents from France (Bonneval 2011, 2014; Bernard 2011a, 2017) and from the United States (House 1977; C. S. Wharton 1999) have

addressed how real estate agents navigate between a service and a commercial world, between finding good supply and understanding and redefining clients' needs. Very recently, two young scholars have started empirical work on real estate intermediaries, respectively in New York and Houston. Besbris (2016) demonstrates that housing professionals trigger emotional reactions which in turn impact decision-making while (Korver-Glenn 2018c, 2018a) investigates the central role of agents in reproducing unequal racial outcomes. These studies demonstrate that market intermediaries are an active part of the process to make the transaction work, working mostly on the clients, proving the need for further empirical investigation.

In sum, to lay the theoretical ground in which this study is based requires operating a series of breaks leading to propositions. First, I propose to study the market not only as a structure made up of economic interests but as social relations mediated by market intermediaries conceptualized as brokers. Second, I break away from the rationality and emotions of economic agents to analyze their dispositions. Third, I break away from the functionalist and interactionist tradition of analyzing work and the professions by considering the professional culture and the working practices of real estate agents. I operate these breaks from classical market approaches to propose a pragmatic sociology of work activities, a third way going beyond both the functionalist and interactionist antinomy, integrating the literature on games and emotional labor.

2.1 From Markets to Brokers

Like other markets, real estate markets are social and political creations (Aspers 2007; Fligstein 1996; Gottdiener 1985). Therefore, studying housing as a commodity does not simply mean determining or predicting housing prices and thereby measuring the demand for housing based on the characteristics of the house and its surroundings, or postulating technical and informational bias which prevents markets from operating perfectly. Instead, sociological investigation on real estate and housing should explore the “real estate infrastructure made up of homebuilders, lenders, insurers, appraisers, real estate agents and firms, and state activity at all levels” (Gotham 2002, 7).

Markets cannot be seen as the form of organization of "economic interests," as they are also "social relations" (Swedberg 2003, 15) framed by a "system of meanings and structures" (Zelizer 1988, 619). Markets are networks of exchanges and social arrangements, which are both *real* while practically turning into a transaction with a fixed price, but also *imagined,* referring to the expected state of demand and supply, and the expectations of buyers and sellers. They connect experienced and potential participants and mediate their relationships. Markets only exist within relatively stable and "peaceful" relationships "transcending the boundaries of the neighborhood, kinship group, or tribe" (Weber 1978, 637) built on agreements recognizing specific trading conditions stabilized through institutional and legal development (Fligstein 1996).

Institutional actors such as the State have a series of measures and laws that are utilized to restrain competition and guarantee stability, making the State an important actor on the market as well (Bourdieu 2005). Markets involve institutions, defined as "shared rules" such as "laws or principles of collective agreement" put in place and validated by states, and may be present in the form of "rights," private property," "governance structures," "exchange rules" or "conceptions of control"(CoCs). Governed by the dynamics of exchange and control, markets are also relations between private actors. Actors of these markets use influences and reputation to convince other markets to adopt their CoCs. While competition may favor one party over the other, it is often perceived as a nuisance. Actors aim to establish strategies to address the negative effects of competition, foster economic gains and create stability by routinizing and stabilizing the exchange (Fligstein 2001; Fligstein and McAdam 2012). To mitigate uncertainty, these strategies enact market coordination, conventions, and rules (Biggart and Beamish 2003).

Not only do markets involve relations between companies, but also interactions between buyers, sellers and a variety of market intermediaries, as well as specific socio-technical devices that help in the calculation process. In residential markets, agents are located at the center of all interactions, between the buyers and the sellers, but they also connect a vast network of professionals such as lenders, appraiser, and service companies (such as cleaning, termite exterminations, roofing, home insurance, security services, pool servicing).

The real estate transaction is an act of anticipation of the potential number of buyers and sellers referred to as "the law of supply and demand" and the potential representations and actions of buyers and sellers in the market. It is eminently social in the sense that it needs to rely on the predictions made about the behaviors of economic agents. A market transaction "is always a social act insofar as potential partners are guided in their offers by the potential action of an undetermined group of real or imagined competitors rather than by their mere actions" (Weber 1978, 636). Economic actions in the market are not automatically given to buyers and sellers, but are being guided by market intermediaries whose work consists in qualifying the market current level of demand and supply, prices, buyers' and sellers' needs and wants). Each buyer and seller access the reality of the market that is both *real* in instant t and *imagined* in instant t+1, showing them the current state of supply and demand, and anticipate on the expected actions of buyers and sellers. Buyers and sellers are trained, through the agents' qualification of the market (current level of demand and supply, prices, buyers' and sellers' needs and wants), to adapt and anticipate the positions of the other party, hence the highly interactional dimensions of transactions, involving information, communication, and negotiation.

Markets can also be seen as network structures in which one participant may gain an advantage in the competition through information (Burt 1980; Emirbayer and Goodwin 1994; Fine and Kleinman 1983; Galaskiewicz 1979; Galaskiewicz and Wasserman 1993; Laumann, Galaskiewicz, and Marsden 1978; Powell 1990). By offering both information and control, networks constitute a form of social capital, critical to navigate transactions. Depending on the quality of connections within the network, the resources and ability to seize them, individuals may obtain privileged entries on the market through access to information which can be used or traded for coordination in the exchange; through time getting the information before other market players receive it; and through referrals as privileged connections or personal contacts may refer us to a third party (Burt 1992). Market players involved in many networks can, therefore, select the contacts that bring them most customers or information, according to its efficiency and the quality of the customers or information communicated.

Not only the handling of information within network structures is thus of central importance, but how reliable and trusted is the information communicated, the structure and the connections in the network. A diverse and wide network guarantees the fact that the information is not redundant and that it multiplies the sources of activity and thus the profitability of the network (Granovetter 1973; Erickson 2003), yielding to the structural advantages of structural holes, a non-redundant relationship between two contacts (Burt 1992). Control of information brings comparative and competitive advantage to the "tertiary entrepreneur," "a person who generates profit from being between others" (Burt 1992, p. 34), a form of intermediary which serves as a device to coordinate.

Residential markets operate not only through intermediaries generating information and trust but also with systems of control. The sale of a house is rarely a direct frontal experience involving only the customers and the products (Canniford and Bajde 2016) and cannot be reduced to advertising strategies that manipulate and act upon customers' wishes (McFall 2009). The "new" new economic sociologists according to the expression used by McFall (2009) argue that the study of economic transactions should shift from the study of consumers to the variety of "market agencements" (Callon and Muniesa 2005), including human agents (friends, relatives), market actors (professionals, marketers, brokers, advisers) and socio-technical devices like packaging, guides, price tags and retail shelves (Çalışkan and Callon 2010; Callon, Millo, and Muniesa 2007).

Markets do not operate on the automatic matching of supply and demand but are brought to function by coordinators. The real estate agent is thus engaged in a form of brokerage (a position between two parties), bringing together two entities that do not know each other but want to complete a transaction. They are present in many different markets, whether they are "boundary personnel" in the cultural industry (P. DiMaggio 1977; Hirsch 1972), insurance salespeople (Leidner 1993; McFall 2011), art gallery owners (Velthuis 2003), human resources managers (Rivera 2012), stockbrokers (Abolafia 1996), relocation service providers (Sigaud 2015) or trade fair organizers (Favre and Brailly 2016).

After breaking away from the market as organizations made up of economic interests to study social relations mediated by market intermediaries, I introduce a second break by

getting away from both the rationality and the emotions of economic agents to analyze their dispositions.

2.2. From Rationality and Emotions to Dispositions and Practical Sense

After the financial crisis, Alan Greenspan, the former president of the US Federal Reserve, pointed to the irrational exuberance that had inhabited economic agents. Sociology often criticizes rational choice theory for considering a *homo oeconomicus* who acts to maximize his interests by calculating the costs and benefits of all his actions. Sociologists claim to distinguish themselves from this neo-classical version of rationality. In highly uncertain environments such as residential real estate markets, information is not perfect and individuals have specific constraints (timing for example), thus we could talk about limited rationality (Simon 1957) or situated rationalities.

Additionally, individuals may act on_other grounds than their interests, including belief, honor or duty (Weber 1920). Recent empirical studies emphasize a variety of motives, whether financial, normative, coldly calculated, cultural or emotional[18] (Abolafia 1996; Besbris 2016; Beunza and Stark 2004; Hassoun 2005; Mackenzie 2011). For example, stock traders feel the "sacred" when they "enter the zone" (Zaloom 2006, 135) or act upon their senses (Widick 2003), while real estate agents develop economic strategies aiming to emotionally capture clients (Besbris 2016). The trap, however, would be to substitute rationality with emotions, creating an artificial opposition between rational, economically-oriented and emotionally-driven actions in which the new emotional turn seems to fall (Bandelj 2009). If emotions are particularly vivid during housing transactions, they must be studied sociologically, i.e. understanding the social categories they engage in. Sociologists must go beyond the behavioral approach of many of the social sciences (among which behavioral economics, decision theories or marketing studies), which envision economic outcomes mostly as emotions and symbols.

[18] Among economic sociologists, there has been a growing interest to study emotions as motives of economic transactions (Hassoun 2005; Zaloom 2006; Bandelj 2009, Berezin 2003, Besbris 2016). These studies often artificially oppose rational, economically-oriented and emotionally driven actions. One should not ignore (or forget to mention) the influence of cognition and psychology into sociology and in the study of economic behaviors. Look, for example, at the importance of the work of Paul DiMaggio in American cultural sociology, or the way culture is envisioned as a resource or as a toolkit (Swidler 1986).

Sociological analysis has powerful tools to understand the categorization of individuals' actions in relation to their economic dispositions and the logic of practice (Bourdieu 1990) that individuals acquire. Individuals are thus neither emotional nor rational but act within a diversity of motives and peculiar social and institutional environments. Sociologists should thus consider "enlarged rationality, in which calculation mixes logic, emotions, and intuitions with moral, social, and normative evaluations" (Gochechot 2016, 412). Arguing for a study of financial activities through a Bourdieusian lens, Gochechot (1990, 2016) draws on the departing positions of the actors, as of social, cultural and educational background represented as *habitus,* and the positions of actors in the field to analyze the ordinary reasoning of financiers.

Real estate agents cannot be reduced to "emotional facilitators" but act on various social categorizations and spontaneous intuitions coming from their acquired socio-professional dispositions and their practical sense. The adequate balance between economic dispositions wrapped up in emotional display is what permits transactions to occur. The real estate agent should also be systematically analyzed as a social actor (with his own social, economic and cultural capital) and as a player in the field (his status and where he stands within the real estate professional field). Specific attention should be dedicated to the newer recruits because as trainees, they are learning (and required to acquire) a specific professional and market disposition. While considering the diversity of the profiles, one should also be conscious about the power dynamics in the field: what "modeled agents" are of high rank in the field? What are the characteristics of the ones below, on the lower end of the field?

The present study uses the logic of practice coming from Bourdieu's work – including on the Kabyle peasant linking work ethos and economic practices (Bourdieu 1990). Bourdieu conflicts with many sociologists (and even philosophers such as Sartre) whose analysis is driven by a philosophy of the subject. They postulate that actors reflexively know what they are doing, say it and act accordingly. For Bourdieu, the logic of scholastic thought should be replaced by "practical logic," which proposes a sociologically grounded analysis of the relationship of economic agents to action. Individuals draw on felt

experiences or what Bourdieu calls the "acquired experience in practice[19]" guided by a system of opposition (hot/ cold, high/ low, feminine, masculine for example).

If practical sense can lead actors to adopt behaviors close to the theory of rational choice or which reproduce a pure and perfect market, it is because actors seek to act in a practical way to the modes of organization they know, or as close as possible to the learned model of economic efficiency or the pure and perfect market. In her classic article, Garcia-Parpet (1986, 2007) shows that the dial of the French Sologne strawberry market was not built out of preexistent rationality, but rather built to conform to a model of competition and transparency resembling the postulates of neo-classical economic theory. The construction of this pure and perfect market was established through a practical sense of the market, resulting in alliances between various buyers and sellers, and not a spontaneous order.

Dispositions can be defined as a set of values understood as mental, social and cognitive structures or modes of thought that influence the action and behavior of individuals. This system of dispositions is inherited from the *habitus*, produced from a form of internalization of social structures, making it possible to act and structuring the action: "it is a propensity to act and organizing principle of the practices," the "exteriorization of the interiority and a structuring structure." It is both a state and a result as "it expresses first the result of an organizing action, presenting then a similar sense with words such as structure; it also indicates a way of being, a habitual state (in particular of the body) and, in particular, a predisposition, a tendency, a propensity or an inclination" (Bourdieu 1972). These provisions do not predispose to determined action, they are born practically in situ: "to have a disposition is to be inclined to act in one way or another in such and such circumstances." Dispositions are "revealed and accomplished only in appropriate circumstances and in the relationship with a situation" (Bourdieu 1998; Bouveresse 1995).

[19] "Observation shows that even in this universe where the means and ends of the action and their relationship are brought explicitly, the agents orient themselves according to intuitions and anticipations of the practical sense, which often leaves the essential to the implicit state and which commits itself, on the basis of the acquired experience in practice, in "practical" strategies, in the double meaning of implicit, non-theoretical, and convenient, adapted to the demands and urgencies of the action. "- Substitute the notions of habitus and field" (Bourdieu, *The Social Structures of the Economy*, 2005, 18).

I start from the premise that, for the operation of the housing market, there must be dispositions and devices for the creation and maintenance of the valuation of these dispositions. For an intermediary to do a market job that is consistent with the state of the market, a market training is thus necessary: the training is not a pure product of technical standards governing the organization of work but is acquired through specific provisions - via both the personality of an economic agent and his ability to grasp the actions to be taken. These dispositions that function as modes of thought and modes of action on the world are enabled through a strong moral belief around the positive function of the market.

Returning to *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905), the thesis defended by Weber is that the development of capitalism was so powerful because it was sustained by religious beliefs around work and predestination. Economic dispositions require that they are thought within the work context. I center most particularly on the role of work socialization and training as a tool by which to acquire market-oriented dispositions.

I establish the third break by considering the professional culture and the working practices enacted in the market. I thus depart from market approaches to propose a pragmatic sociology of work activities, a third way going beyond both the functionalist and interactionist antinomy, integrating the literature on games and emotional labor.

2.3. Neither Functionalist nor Interactionist: Professional Culture and Work Practices

The sociology of the professions, largely coming from the heritage of American functionalism and interactionism, has been largely debilitated nowadays, but it does offer specific tools to study professional work enacted by real estate agents. The functionalists such as Carr-Saunders (1928), Merton (1958, 1960) and Parsons (1939) postulate the unity of professionals, their technical and functional necessity in society insisting on the unity of the profession, and distinguish between real "professions" such as lawyers and doctors and "crafts" which did not achieve the level of development of the professions.

Real estate offers a specific viewpoint on the professionalization of a craft, and the performativity of the model of the professional. Far from behaving naturally as a

"professionals," real estate agents use their professional development, based on *mimicking* highly established and regarded fields such as lawyers, as a way to protect and control their activities. In the case of real estate; I retain from the functionalist approach, the categorization of a profession according to various elements (knowledge, skills, service to society, ethical behaviors) and to see how much they vary from this "ideal-typical model" inspired by the professional achievements of other professions like lawyers. Through the creation and growth of their professional association, real estate agents delimited the contours of their activity, what activities to carry on, how to behave (Code of Ethics) and who to include, using both scientific and moral arguments to reach out to a large base of members.

The interactionists such as Becker (1962), Bucher and Strauss (1961a); Freidson (1988); and Hughes (1958) argue on the other side, that the study of professions should insist on the diversity of practices and the constant struggles for recognition and legitimacy. The ethnography of real estate agents offers also this realistic look at the variety of tasks and practices in the field. An interactionist approach also permits uncovering legitimacy struggles between lawyers and real estate professionals to retain and control working activities and the creation of a "professional-like" bodies of government such as the National Association of Realtors®.

While proposing to pay attention to both the dispositions to work – not only socio-economic but also professional – and the working practices, I offer a third way aiming at getting away from the apparent antinomies of these two traditions to understand the unity of the professional culture while also considering the diversity of the practices (Champy 2011) and the unequal distribution of professional capital (Schinkel and Noordegraaf 2011).

Not only should occupations be studied from the outside, assessing whether they behave as professions or whether they lead relational struggles; but from the inside, looking at the reasons, including the rewards, behind workers' engagement in work activities. As evidenced by classical working-class ethnographies of Burawoy (1979) and Roy (1974, 2006), workers are not just passively absorbing rules but reconfigure managements' orders by playing games. If workers are following and even exceeding the production requirements, it is not so much because they want to be valued by their managers, but rather because they

play a game of "making out" which implies an informal yet organized competition for tokens in the shop floor. Analyzing the games at play within work environments permits one to get at the production of effort and consent.

In real estate, the engagement relies both on a personal commitment guided through the belief in financial and symbolic rewards, but also the specific income structure. Agents need to produce their own income, as there is no collective structure nor any company's capital investment to produce in the market, goods are already given within the market, and value is generated only by the exchange of old and new goods which are not produced by real estate intermediaries.

Long term ethnographic involvement enables observations on how labor processes enfold, and notably how they evolve. Both in France and in the United States, the ethnography of service work gave rise to a "pragmatic sociology of work activity" (Bidet 2006; Borzeix and Cochoy 2008; Ughetto 2007; Ughetto and Combes 2010), that consists of looking at "work activities being performed at the moment" (Durand and Le Floch 2006). Work relations are not only perceived as an imposition (top-down approach) of an employer or manager to an employee but as a co-construction. Besides the various debates going on in sociology about what can be classified as work (Grint 2005; Sallaz 2013), I consider a broad definition of work activities, including those performed by real estate agents without any direct financial retribution but are expected to be transformed into income in the future.

The transformation of work (from the working class to the service work and from wages to new labor contracts) permits us to look at how work activities are both perceived subjectively by workers and worked on through dispositions and devices put in place by management teams. If factory work required a relation of the working class to the cadence and the machine, service work brought workers to directly interact with clients, requiring workers to control interactions through emotions' management and relational competences (Hochschild 1983; Leidner 1993). Work can thus be perceived as a system of interactions (Hughes 1994) between workers, clients, and managers.

Hughes (1996, 66) reminds us that we should not assume what the boundaries of the work activity we are studying are, but rather try to look at the varieties of situations in which

work can be unfolding, looking at the myriad of actors involved in it (colleagues, clients for example).

In the United States, seminal work has been conducted on the socialization of home funeral directors (Barley 1983), medical students (HS Becker 2002; HS Becker et al. 1961) or newer police recruits (Van Maanen 1973) or even traders, bankers, air traffic controllers or consultants (Ibarra 1999; Vaughan 2004; Zaloom 2006). French ethnographers have, for example, study the work at the "counter" involving interactions between workers and users (Dubois 2000; Hanique 2004; Lacoste 1995; Weller 1999), and open up a series of debates around skills, work constraints or work representations. In the case of residential markets, the various relations in which agents are embedded truly requires one to heavily describe the interactional system, between the brokers, the sales agents, but also with the clients (and their characteristics), the companies and their managers, as well as the vast array of professionals working on the market.

Sociologists and organizational scholars have made useful recommendations when it comes to studying work. Anteby, Chan, and DiBenigno (2016) propose to study work and the professions through "becoming," "doing" and "relating." "Becoming" refers to understanding how workers are socialized ("becoming socialized"), controlled by organizations ("becoming controlled"), and classified or ordered socially ("becoming unequal"). "Doing" focuses on the way workers perform their activities including their tasks and practices. "Relating" is defined by the interactions with other professions, including jurisdictional struggles on control over work activities. Although our approach does not systematize the third dimension, my empirical study encompasses the "becoming" and the "doing" approaches.

I also rely on calls made by work sociologists in France. Avril, Cartier, and Serre (2010) propose to study three dimensions: *work situations* (ways in which workers position themselves in their working environment); *work practices* (what they do at work), and their *relation to work* (how do they perceive and engage in it). Considering both workers' practices and discourses (their ways of talking about their practices), their classification permits to distinguish between expected or prescribed forms of work and the work itself in its invisible and informal aspects.

In my analysis, I distinguish the engagement of real estate agents into realty work (*relation to work*), the specific positions adopted within the industry or if agents work in the high, middle or lower end of the market, as a broker or a sales agent, if they can specialize in the goods or neighborhoods (*work situations*) and the specific real estate activities and task carried out while working on the residential market (*work practices*).

Adopting a similar approach to Sallaz (2005, xi) who shows how gambling workers, the croupiers, manage the "emotional economy of blame and credit" in the casinos, I combine Burawoy's game metaphor (1979) to Hochschild's theorization of emotional labor (1983) to analyze the engagement of *self in real estate work*. To become market professionals, real estate agents are required to collide their social and professional identities. Their work engagement is embedded in a system of financial and symbolic rewards which function as a means to demonstrate the comparative superiority of real estate work activities.

I also integrate a Bourdieusian lens of studying realty work. From the positions (and struggles) of workers and the rules defining the organization of the professional field can be drawn working practices and beliefs embedded into a professional habitus, analyzed as a form of practical sense (Bourdieu 1980) that agents construct while being socialized into an occupation. What thus becomes interesting is to displace the question of "what are the workers doing" to the "what are they building in transforming socially acquired dispositions into a professional habitus" (Proteau 2015, 290). Analyzing work practices requires one to put them in relation to the broader functioning of the real estate field, its logic of struggles and retributions. Therefore, researchers should not only look at "work as an activity" but should "objectivize the conditions of possibility of work by observing simultaneously the processes which associate internal constraints of the institutions (history, rules, laws…) to the dispositions to submit to them (more or less) inscribed in individual trajectories."

In this dissertation, I study concomitantly institutional socialization ("how the institution produces its agents (formation, rewards…"), agents' positions (how "its agents inhabit it on the first degree") and beliefs (how its agents inhabit it on a "second degree"). For an agent to be "good" and "successful," it is not enough to "belong," agents "need to adopt fitted manners of doing and of thinking" (Proteau 2015, 290). I get at the development

of the ethos of the worker, the interiorization of practices, representations, and beliefs specific to a certain position in the professional space.

Getting away from the distant theoretical look and the predetermined work categories and professional classifications, ethnography avoids falling into the trap of the professional ideology by proposing to integrate the discursive and spontaneous categories of analysis established by the workers as well as to understand them in relation to engagement and rewards. This empirical study inspired by the sociology of work and the professions should look at both how workers and organizations co-construct the meanings and the structure of the workplace. While understanding how working dispositions, positions, and practices operate in the residential real estate market using the various developments in sociology of work and the professions, I must then return to market mechanisms, trying to analyze both the implications of the specific work activities of the real estate agents for theorizing markets as well as to understand the production of inequalities.

3. Making the Market, Shaping Inequality. Proposing a Relational Sociology of Market Intermediation

The residential real estate market is not the result of a free exchange of goods, orchestrated by prices and levels of supply and demand. Rather, it is the fruit of a work of matching or intermediation done by market actors, who actively shape both the market and urban territories. Based on the integration of economic sociology and sociology of work, as well as the contribution of Bourdieu and Goffman, I propose the study of market work – whose contribution is to bring economic sociology and sociology of work to a dialogue (Bandelj 2012) – to address empirically the social and relational fabric of markets. Developed by Dubuisson-Quellier and Cochoy (2013, 2), market work refers to the activities that "create the conditions for economic exchange (…) shape demand and consumers' preferences as well as features of supply," as well as "organize the encounters between suppliers and demanders, producers and customers, products and consumers." Market intermediaries refer thus to the market actors who perform market work. I conceptualize real estate agents as

professional market intermediaries between buyers, sellers as well as many other market professionals, constituting the human and emerged figure of the residential real estate and housing industries.

3.1. Where Bourdieu Meets Goffman: Housing Transactions as Interactions

I uncover the social fabrics of economic transactions not only conceiving them as the mere reflection of the politics of the State and players' social positions in the field as Bourdieu implied in the *Social Structure of the Economy* (2000/2005) but as real and imagined interactions. Goffman proves useful in this endeavor by allowing a sociological analysis at the "infinitely small" level (Bourdieu on Goffman 1982, 112) without being reduced to an analysis of the micro. A Durkheimian interpretation of Goffman suggests indeed that Goffman analyzed "total institutions and punctual configurations" by integrating "macro-sociological and global concepts, which overhand the punctual configurations" with "the most pointillist analysis, the most immanent and particular situations" (Castel 1989, 31).

By integrating Bourdieu's logic of practice of the study of the Kabyle peasants with Goffman's interaction rituals, I propose an original empirical and theoretical contribution to the sociology of markets and work. The general question driving the research is the construction of markets, i.e. what in Bourdieu and Goffman can help us to theorize as to the construction of the residential real estate market. I propose to study economic actions through pre-situational dispositions that are enacted in situations, in which individuals entering in interactions perform depending on their social and professional roles and their audiences, enact. This analysis reveals the structural and relational fabric of the social order, eminently based on a sense of practice, a sense of the game or the sense of the performance.

In their conception of the social order, whether it is found in "interaction" or in "structure," it is not about individual characteristics possessed by individuals, but about the relations between them that make them act in a certain way, i.e. in the practical logics embedded in the social order. These relations must not be the core of the sociological analysis, which should avoid falling into the hyper-empiricist trap, revealing only the

subjective meanings that people attribute to their actions or the "analysis of discourse (…) without studying the social conditions of its production" (Bourdieu 2014, 34).

Thus, "the truth of the interaction is never entirely to be found in interaction as it is visible to observation" (Bourdieu 1977, 16:81; Bourdieu 1990, 127) but rather into the analysis of the situations and moments that unfold, as Goffman (1989, 131) argued: "I don't give hardly any weight to what people say, but I try to triangulate what people are saying with events."

"There is no interaction that so well conceals its structural truth as the relationship between buyer and seller in the property transaction" declares Bourdieu in the study of the market for individual homes (2005, 11). In this analysis, he perceived interactions between the salesman and the buyer as scripted around the broader functioning of the field: "the seller must lose as little time as possible, he should thus anticipate to speed up the process" (Bourdieu et al. 2014, 32). The unfolding of the interaction is thus expected, as it reveals the structure of the field (positions and dispositions) and the housing and credit policies of the State: if the buyer first thinks he is "testing" the salesman, after a few questions, the salesman takes control of the buyer and evaluates his buying capacity: "the buyer will get the house corresponding to its credit, i.e. to the social value measured by the bank" (Bourdieu 2014, 34) concluding that "In appearance, he is selling houses, but in reality, he is selling credit to buy the house" (Bourdieu 2014, 14). For the salesman, the buyer is only a number within a series and develops "generic anticipations sociologically formulated" that are "valid because of his experience" (Bourdieu 2014, 33).

While the residential market is based on a system of exchanges between buyers, sellers and market intermediaries, it seems that Bourdieu's analysis of the home market remains static. The salesman only adopts a secondary role, as a pure relay of the state authority or in the already organized social space of the developers. It appeared then that there was no place to think about the role of market intermediaries on the market because everything could finally be summarized in all the juridical and legal norms that organized the transactions, as dispositions were already stabilized. If Bourdieu did not seem to care much about interaction order, Goffman's work can help make the situation, the moment of the interaction, the focal point of analysis, theorizing the social order as rather precarious

and fragile, in which individuals try to protect themselves against embarrassment. They need to "perform" by taking a line to "maintain face" (Goffman 1967, 6). Controlling the interaction becomes central in housing transactions because there is a risk transactions can fail at any time. Intuition and authority, playing honest and direct, enacting both deference and demeanor through dispositions and skills (deference and demeanor) are at the core of the brokerage role.

Because real estate agents often act as direct representatives of their clients or as a temporary "coach," they are the personal face of the transaction (personification process) and need to perform specific work to make customers feel comfortable with them. As Hughes (1928, 25) puts it, "the client places his interests more or less completely in the hands of the dealer, and the broker must be careful of the handling of the property thus entrusted to him." The constant search of real estate agents for the trust of their clients is at the core of real estate relational practice as they must convince a pool of customers to hire them. The agent is required to clarify on which "side of the fence" he stands:

> Is he acting for himself, or another? When he acts as an appraiser, has he any reason to favor a higher rather than a lower valuation? If he holds the earnest money, has he any motive, other than a desire to be fair, to tender that money to one person rather than to another of those interested? (Hughes 1928, 23)

By separating their interests from the interests of their clients, they wish to get away from the figure of the "con man", a figure that was analyzed by Goffman in most of his studies (Pettit 2011) and protect from the wrongdoings of any of their representatives, and allowing clients to make decisions based on market data only. Behaviors can make an impression upon others. Controlling the interactions is what assures the conclusion of the housing transaction. Along with the fact that "the individual will have to act so that he intentionally or unintentionally expresses himself, and the others will, in turn, have to be impressed in some way by him", Goffman (1959, 2) describes how the expert or the professional presents themselves and their product in a way that helps the audience (or the client) to understand and position the desired object or action as something "positive."

Situations are thus defined and circumscribed by the role of each participant. The role of each participant is eminently normative and constructed in the encounter between

"face work," social status and organizational positioning. Status and positioning within a social world are accompanied by a set of tasks or ways of behaving, which obliged their recipient to carry (more or less) responsibilities. The holder must thus behave accordingly to fulfill his role, which could very well vary according to the participants, the context, or the social meanings of interactions and situations.

The agent is in a constant fight to demonstrate that he is not a con man and can be trusted through the purchase of a good. Not only does he ensure trust, but also signify his added value by providing information constructed as facts, an important contributor to market operationalization and shape. Far from being free of interests, the work performed under the umbrella of the organizational affiliation, such as a board or an association; requires conveying an interest for the client that aligns with its interests. Goffman writes in this respect: "When an individual appears in the presence of others, there will usually be some reason for him to mobilize his activity so that it will convey an impression to others which it is in his interests to convey" (Goffman 1959, 3). This form of work to promote their interest is not necessarily performed consciously as their persona is created through professional socialization around a set of norms, formal and informal rules.

The real estate agent, through the ambiguity of role definition between commercial entity and service provider, is a particularly fertile terrain of investigation for revealing the types of situations that Goffman talks about. The example of the waitress given by Hughes and discussed by Goffman is thus edifying: she must control the interaction in the way she appears both assertive and inferior to the client.

The work agents perform is imbued with symbolic meanings. One of the potential conditions for the existence of intermediaries is the high symbolic fabric of the goods they sell: they never sell a purely strategic and material investment, but the matching of a social status and a good, representing at the same time the good itself and the space, the neighborhood in which it is inserted. As Bourdieu shows in the market for individual homes, salesmen strategize around the dispositions of the customer, to effectively "trap" them and "orient different types of victims to their room of respective capture." The seller is only effective if he is flattering preexisting dispositions to exploit them better, submitting the consumer to its own goal in the appearance of serving the consumer (Bourdieu 2014, 38).

Salesmen might mobilize a wide array of symbols such as “poetic style,” and family vignettes associated with the house, or with estates and mansions (Augé 1989). The consumer would pay a very high price for their desire for both symbolic and material reproduction, shown as signs of authenticity and durable transmission. House is a “placement” not only because of its economic cost but also because of the reproductive strategies it involves: “The house is inseparable from the household as a sustainable sociable group and the collective project of perpetuating it” (Bourdieu et al. 1990, 6). Not only the house is a material product, but it is also valued as a family financial investment, and a symbolic creation of art (Bourdieu 2005, 60).

The particularity of the housing transactions I observed is that they enact a ritualized staging of a middle-class ethos, akin to the formatted "middle-class interaction" described by Goffman (1959). To convey products' value, agents portray an idealized, stereotyped, simplified and normative image of the home to appeal to the middle buyer and seller.

Taste emulation and anticipation thus function as an assertive and reassuring mechanism to produce a “marker of class” as goods are the materiality in which status is embedded. Symbolic is embodied in products like houses, which reveal the material inscription of symbols into the material and physical: “the taste classifies, and classifies the one who classifies” (“*Le gout classe, et classe celui qui classe*”). Those lines of distinctions are operationalized as tools to calculate, to distinguish between the “beautiful” from the “ugly”, the “distinguished” from the “vulgar” (Bourdieu 1984, VI). Middle taste refers to the “good cultural will” relying on an imitation of the sense of distinction of the higher class, but with the permanent tension produced by the fear of acting as the lower classes and to appear vulgar; hence, the desire to elevate oneself in the social ladder and to show the proper signs of distinction to integrate the higher classes.

Taste does not play out only as a form of “conspicuous consumption” designed to convey social standing (Veblen 1909), but as an engagement into a struggle for the acquisition of capitals by the middle class, especially the ones that are insecure in their position (the petit-bourgeois and their "cultural goodwill" according to Bourdieu), from which agents intuitively and practically draw. Taste not only relies on aesthetic judgments on what is beautiful or the emotional engagement that makes the buyer see the value (Besbris

2016) but acts through products as a comparative measure of worth. It is both a criterion for reselling in the sense that the symbolic product as highly desirable would be transferable into economic capital (Bourdieu 2011). Taste is thus embedded in a strategic, yet practical sense of reasoning, transferred from the agent to the buyers, who are themselves projected in the shoes of the seller aiming to maximize profit. The taste-rationale, often brought or reinforced by real estate agents, becomes a central aspect of the operationalization of markets. If the taste of the clients is too different from the "middle-range" taste, such that they do not like any product, then the agent can also recommend them to start building their own house, and carefully stage the valuable features they will have. Through taste, but also expertise, it is a whole system of calculation that is put into place.

The calculation is thus the result of economically-oriented strategies mixed with "intuitions, tastes and distastes" (Godechot 2016, 412). Value in the market is produced by a collective definition of taste (what is thought after and that becomes trendy in a specific market), on what are the desirable features (including location) that would be translated into a specific lifestyle. To sell goods, agents have to sell a way of life. Houses are thus mobile products in the sense that they are transformed by agents to convey appropriate social standing. Lifestyle and distinctive habits are embodied through consumption and products (Bourdieu 1984).

This stabilization of the conditions of exercise of the profession involves the concealment of the economic principles of the organization of the activities. Professional investments put at a distance the sphere of money and trade. By operation of denial of the economy, the possible conditions of existence of the activity of the agent are made visible. This "invisibilisation" is not trivial but refers to what Bourdieu called the economy of symbolic goods (Bourdieu 1977b, 1980; Maguire and Matthews 2014). Similarly, in the high priced homes' market and the market for art, the market is put at a distance during the transaction, and becomes all the more effective as it is not thought of as such, organized rather around the belief in the magical added value of the product or the artist. The symbolic level transforms the scope of the transaction: the act of buying in itself becomes stronger than the modalities, the uncertainties and the risks surrounding it.

Markets are not static but formed through anticipated expectations, which are recovered and exploited by real estate agents. A series of relational acts – whether interactions, deliberations, discussions – collectively contribute to decisions (Beunza and Stark 2004). Economic agents with the guidance of real estate agents learn to anticipate and plan their actions in anticipation of what others might do (Beunza and Stark 2004; Godechot 2016), which can be linked to Goffman's interaction form (1956) and what can be called "coordinated expectations" (Carpenter 2003).

In the presence of others, individuals seek to acquire information about others and to effectively mobilize it such as socio-economic standing or status, and expectations that individuals have about themselves and others, such as honesty or competence. The seeking of information is realized on practical grounds: it is intended to define the situation, as participants will know what their partners expect from them and correspondingly what they can expect of them. With this information being clarified, they would thus know how to behave according to the responses they want to obtain. Anticipations and predictions thus play a fundamental role in the fabric of the social order as each participant must thus "give, intentionally or not, an expression of himself, and others should retrieve a certain impression" (Goffman 1959, 11).

There exist also situations of simulation and cheating to transmit false information. This leads also to understand why situations can be strategically maneuvered to obtain a certain goal, such as the seller or the waitress in a specific professional or work context, using a variety of available tools to control the interactions such as "tact, savoir-faire, diplomacy or social skill." Participants can either avoid contact by changing the topic of conversation or the directionality of the interaction. In case of an offense, participants can correct or repair to stabilize the relation.

What is at stake is to capture the social in the "misfires" of the interaction (for example, expectations that are not satisfied) concerning categories of social classification, as breaks or apparent exemptions from the norms serve to assert them. It is, for example, not to risk a refusal that the buyers take special care not to make an offer that is below a certain price because, at this level, the signal sent would lose the face of buyers, considered as not serious or offensive. This system of anticipated expectations is not necessarily enacted

directly in interaction but makes the interaction present while individuals make decisions, as their economic actions would send signals to others.

Around the work of Bourdieu and Goffman, dispositions and configurations of micro-situations of real or expected interactions permit us to understand the social relations within the work context. Analyzing the social nature of spatial structures gets at the analysis of the micro functioning while not forgetting the importance of "heavy concepts." The social order and the interactional order are thus put in relation (Castel 1990). The theoretical reasoning exposed above leads us to see that these market operations cannot be analyzed as purely technical automatic acts of matching between supply and demand but as market work is done in interaction using specific socially and symbolically located dispositions put at the disposal of clients.

3.3 Housing Intermediation: Assessing Value, Producing Inequality

I postulate that the interactive work done by real estate agents has deep implications for the production of markets. As Vatin (2008, 2009) argues, bringing together a theory of the market and value and a theory of production and work present the advantage of deepening the analysis of both working activities and market endeavors. The coordination system, directed by real estate agents, is a social structure, that by bringing information to clients, shapes judgments and decisions in the market. Real estate agents are not solely bringing buyers and sellers to meet, but also strongly mediating this encounter, even encouraging buyers and sellers to transact through agents and never to meet physically before the end of the transaction. They also ensure that buyers and sellers do not meet to keep the control of the sale and deal from agent to agent (the agent of the buyer on the one hand and the agent of the seller on the other).

The broker as described in social-network analysis (Burt 2005) can play the role of the “prescribers” holding “advantage in information or influence” (Stovel and Shaw 2012, 148) and shaping consumers’ choices by “establishing systems of judgment and control of information and knowledge about quality, price, or any other characteristic related to the market" (Karpik 2010). The agents transmit information on the property, the market and the neighborhoods to clients, but also to a network of professionals within the real estate

industry. They control information on quality, price, or any other market feature to address the uncertainties faced by market participants (Hatchuel 1995; Karpik 2010; L'Benghozi and Paris 2003).

By putting work at the center, the objective is to study the construction of value in the market. Following Vatin (2013), I distinguish the process of *evaluation* of the value of the good, i.e. to estimate, judge and appreciate) and the process of *valuation*, which would consist in increasing the value and esteem towards the good, ultimately resulting in an increase of its market value (the price). While evaluating is close to statistical reasoning, "attributing a value to a good, a thing, a person," valuing is intrinsically dynamic and means "to increase value, to add value." The analysis thus aims at "grasping the process of valorization in its practical modalities embodied in acts of work" by "combining economic sociology and sociology of work in the spirit of inter-fertilization between these two research traditions" (Vatin 2013, 27). The study of market intermediation overcomes the dichotomy often made between "the technical authority" and "the economic authority" as if it was possible to separate on the one hand "a productive space, determined by a proper set of norms" with "labor management techniques which would result in products" and on the other hand "the question of the valuation of these products on the market scene," i.e. "the establishment of the market price" (Vatin 2013, 27). In the dissertation, I show how intermediation is a dynamic process that consists of the interrelations between producing value (both at the material, social and symbolic level), working on shaping qualities of the products and setting up prices.[20]

This approach also shifts away from seeing the broker as a pure vehicle of information drawing on the social positions and the emotional state of consumers (anxiety or excitement) about an already-defined "state" of the products (Cochoy, Trompette, and Araujo 2016). In its *real* and *imagined* form, the market is equipped based on informational tools, created by and for the agents as professionals, to judge, calculate and classify goods, territories, and actions. Even if a product is not picked by the buyer, for example, the seller's

[20] The question of prices is of central importance in all market transactions. As Ross, a New York real estate investor (2015, p. XVI) claims in his sales advice book, "almost every problem has a price tag."

agent can receive feedback from the buyer's agent on what was or not liked by the client. The communication and the negotiation (if needed) happen only between the agent's buyer and the agent's seller. Additionally, agents usually detain access to other market professionals, which are connections that help them make future sales.

As brokers, real estate agents are indeed directly paid for the coordination functions, bringing supply and demand to a match, introducing the central question of their economic interests. While agents say they have no interest in the transaction, they are indeed propelled into action in the market as independent workers to reward themselves financially, but also to preserve the proper functioning of markets and the course of urban development. If they should, theoretically, only represent their clients (servicing aspect), in practice, they are required to make transactions happen (commercial aspect). As Stovel and Shaw (2012, 147) put it: "when economic relationships are confounded with personal relations…brokers may squirrel away their gains in order to maintain the illusion that they are status equals with their clients."

Protecting themselves from the consequences of their "opinions" on potential liabilities, the agents work to give the illusion of presenting a plurality of information, a guarantor of their neutrality. The agent ensures that market and neighborhood comments, presented as neutral because they are based on statistics and inventory status, are passed on to customers and that customers appropriate them, allowing agents to transfer judgments on the value of a property to his client.

In the real estate market, the asymmetry of information and uncertainty about the price and quality of homes hints at the work done by agents on preferences and value to both render homes "transparent assets" and profit economically from transactions. As Gotham (2006, 235) states:

> The sociologically interesting problem concerns how a spatially fixed and opaque commodity like real estate is transformed into a transparent asset that diverse buyers and sellers, in different places, can easily understand and exchange. Determining a property's exchange value requires detailed knowledge of the local real estate market, systems of financing, and networks of activity.

Houses are the specific property of the technical appraisal and not agents. They are working to pass this value to the means of their customers, to convince buyers or sellers that the product they are buying or selling is valued at its fair value.

Although they say that everything is based on the "needs" of their customers, they do constant social work to get their clients to match their needs or desires and their financial means, by making the wishes of their customers conform to the needs of their clients. Agents do not only rely on the economic capital of their clients but work to build trust, learn to read and form the arguments that their customers will be sensitive to. This power is based on the acquisition of a symbolic ("professional") capital that ensures their recognition and legitimacy. Their training, socialization, and level of experience also go into the acquisition of this symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1979).

Becoming intermediaries between the market and the goods (houses), the agents have indeed a strong position to get buyers and sellers to buy or sell a property: they have the function to "reassure" (Lambert 2015). Their job is to highlight the "value" of commodities, having as a reference authority the market, as an "outside," legitimately legitimizing. This matching of value and taste (reinforced or created by the agent) is conditioned by the customer's borrowing possibilities, which establishes the customer's economic value.

Using their exclusive access to information and technical resources such as the MLS (Multiple Listing Service), agents are particularly active in fostering knowledge and bringing tools to influence product features and transaction outcomes. They present the market in a specific light engineered to make clients realize the potential of the products and their prices. Agents' work aims to "disinvest" the client from his or her own process of calculation, leading agents as the only calculation device left to the seller or buyer.

Agents, therefore, act as "taste brokers" (Sherman 2011a) highlighting specific features of a product to increase the value of the goods. They use symbolic and cultural clues to assess the value gain from the product featured. They also make evaluative anticipations about the reactions (and actions) of their clients depending on their social position and their tastes. They draw on the social work realized to classify clients to learn what would suit

them and what they would like. This work does not only rely on the amount of cultural capital people already have but on the “cultural goodwill” (Bourdieu 1984) they perform.

As the intermediary acting either as the buyer or as the seller, the real estate agent shows signs of compliance and anticipations to the other party to make sure the transaction does happen. This is both governed by social rules of interactions including self-presentation (Goffman 1959) and practical knowledge (Bourdieu 1980) inherited from the rules of conduct and beliefs operating in the real estate industry. They become the only recipient or holder of the informal yet gut-felt rules (Wallace 2008) and intuitions (Callon 1998b) driving the market as a “thing”, an “outside legitimizing force” (S. J. Smith, Munro, and Christie 2006).

The salesman (or real estate agent in this case) is in charge of disinvesting the client and assigning him his place both socially and geographically: “here is your merchant value, this is what you are worth, and then from what you are valued at, this is the house you can get. If you want 200 square meters, it will be at 200 kilometers from the city center, if you want 100 square meters, it will be at 100 kilometers” (Bourdieu 2014, 34).

Buying a good is thus not only selling a material structure but a lifestyle, specifically embedded into its location. It is the convertibility of economic capital into symbolic capital that is at stake here: a financial investment is an investment in the future that can be passed on (Fligstein and Goldstein 2011). This transmission is based on all the resources attached to real estate: spatial and physical resources, such as access to schools and the neighborhood, the distinction made by having "a good lifestyle in a good neighborhood". The economic value of a housing good is highly dependent on the value of the space in which the good is inserted. As claimed by Wacquant (2018, 90) taking Bourdieu to "town," "the urban" becomes "the domain of accumulation, differentiation, and contestation of manifold forms of capital, which makes the city a central ground, product, and prize of historical struggles."

Market mediation is not neutral as the working practices of real estate agents act and reinforces the socio-spatial and symbolic dimension of market value. Individual homes are not only material goods but eminently symbolic. The legitimation and the acceptance of this

market order are at the heart of strategies acting on the s[21] and belonging. These strategies can be thus understood as *financial* (*placement immobilier* in French) as material resources that can be passed on to heirs; *spatial* as physically situated resources or site effects (Bourdieu 1999; Bourdieu and Passeron 1990), which are accessible to schools and access to neighborhoods' structures; and *symbolic*, resting on the distinction inherited from having "good lifestyle" in a "good neighborhood."

Real estate agents are not external to the sense of place they are conveying to make their living, they are themselves working to achieve financial, spatial and symbolic rewards. The strategies are exploited to some extent not just by real estate agents but by the housing industry composed of public and private actors that came to development in the 1920s. Studying the construction of real estate as a market (or a network) which generates economic value means thus to understand which are the specific drives for people sustaining it.

The social processes at stake in the intermediation act draw on and reproduce the spatial distribution of individuals in a given territory, which is more commonly referred to as urban, residential or housing inequalities. The dissertation thus brings together three objects generally treated distinctly by the subfields in sociology: 1) market and value; 2) production and work; 3) space and inequalities. To think about the unity of these domains, I first ask the question of the market – which reveals the importance of the study of market work, including the devices of quality and judgments put in place – and look at the relative absence of an economic thought of space (both in classical economics and in economic sociology.)

In this co-construction of the "sense of place," the real estate agent is one important holder of the appropriate ways in which the transaction should unfold. These appropriate ways are based on the development of categories of perception in the social world; but also in the world of real estate. The agent relays those perceptions to his clients. This permit to assert the sense of place in a way that reifies the value of spatial structures – not because of the "physical location" of those goods, but as the reflection of the social organization of

[21]ense of place can be understood as strategies of placement, which are always social but specifically, residential as where we live and reflects who we are, that can be adapted in the popular proverb: tell me where you live, and I will tell you who you are (Bourdieu, 1984).

positions. For example, if a wealthy white family decides to live in South Tucson, they are crossing a boundary, they are indeed mismatching with their expected actual status. By living in South Tucson, the wealthy white gets over a moral boundary too. The physical and the social spaces thus should be aligned as the daily space of life in its materiality and should reflect the space of a social position. In this dissertation, I aim to show how this "sense of place" operates differently according to goods, the buyers and the sellers that are met by the real estate agents. The sense of place is present in a "service relation" or in "commercial relationships" as it is not just an adaptation to satisfy the market, but a form of reaffirmation of the social "supposed" form (a form of social order) by which individuals must obey.

Although sociologists think of discrimination as a form of violence which must be fought against, the market, like a black box, always appears in its most neutral and legitimate form, and in fact, the principles of market organization through the acquisition of dispositions and the action of putting them at the disposal of individuals ("*mise à disposition*")[22] refers to the organization of men in their space which at the same time is social both in the material and the mental.

I contribute to the deconstruction of the idea of commodity and market, where the study of the commodity itself and the establishment of prices via work is rendered complex by integrating the study of the work of evaluation and valuation of goods, within a social, political, cultural context of social acceptance of the market, its conditions of development, as well as the work done around symbols, emotions and taste, and all the adjustments and workarounds to standards created by the work of market intermediaries in interacting with customers and the market. I put in the center of this analysis the dispositions acquired by the agents and passed on to the customers, and the idea of "working the market." A work of matching is done using specific dispositions and the making available of supply and demand, socially and symbolically located. This work is revealed in the interactions, where the conventions, informal and formal socio-professional standards, the anticipations of the

[22] I use 'mise à disposition' in relation to Bourdieu's 'dispositions.' With that, I claim that market intermediaries' socio-professional dispositions acquired during training are being transferred, shared and even inculcated into clients' rationale, motives, and beliefs.

behaviors to be adopted, which justify the creation of tools and instruments of measurement of the quality, the relation to the signals communicated by the prices.

After setting up the theories, literature, and background for this project, I now provide the methodological settings of the research. I describe more in details my immersion into the world of real estate agents.

CHAPTER 2: An Immersion in the World of Real Estate Agents

As scientific inquiries, sociological puzzles require empirical investigation. Embedding one's self into a socio-professional world requires careful analytical steps, avid critical sense, and a variety of sources that can nourish one's thinking, while not substituting the analysis to mere empirical observations. Achieving this balance requires the construction of an object of study that relies upon previous sociological theories and thinkers, as well as formulating a contribution that can be answered with a specific methodology.

The construction of a research object is not a linear process, nor is the immersion within a field site. In this chapter, I describe the research questions, the methods and the site of inquiry. I then uncover the production of data, including interviews, fieldwork and professional documents. I explain how I proceeded to analyze the data. Finally, I consider the limits of the study.

1. Asking Questions

In Chapter 1, I presented the theoretical foundations of this research. I integrated sociological literature on work and on markets as well as the developments of Bourdieu and Goffman to propose a relational sociology of market mediation. Although the housing market is one of the "most important engines of the U.S. economy" (Pattillo 2013), I showed that there have been very few studies considering professionals' role in its construction. My research responds to the calls that have been made to use a qualitative methodology to study the micro-processes that makeup market transactions (Smith and Munro, 2008; Wallace, 2008; Watkins 2008).

As mentioned earlier, the research investigates the discourses, practices, and strategies of real estate professionals as market intermediaries, as well as the structural and relational forces operating through them. The main question I seek to answer is: how do real estate agents – as professionals and intermediaries between demand and supply – contribute

to creating the housing market and the value of the goods exchanged? I focus on three topical parts and their associated questions:

1) Becoming a real estate professional

What is a real estate agent? How do real estate agents decide to become agents and acquire identities as professionals? What are the norms and rules associated with the profession and how do they shape agents' activity? In this first part, I study the acquisition of professional status through knowledge, training, and organizational features to better understand how agents operate in the market, how they acquire rules and norms during professional training, and the career trajectories that shape their behaviors.

2) Becoming a "successful" agent - the use of relationships

How do real estate agents find clients? How do clients find agents? What type of relationships exists between the two? How do the relationships between intermediaries and clients participate in the functioning of a local housing market? What are the characteristics of especially successful agents? In this second part, I investigate how relationships between agents and clients are constructed and maintained, hypothesizing that to be successful agents have an interest in sustaining those relationships beyond initial transactions, and most specifically in becoming "friends" with their clients.

3) Interacting with the market and with buyers and sellers - the influences on the creation of value and inequalities

To what extent do real estate agents contribute to matching/redefining/revealing the original demands of the homebuyers, considering the current state of supply or specificities of the market? How do agents represent the expectations and constraints of future buyers during these moments of interaction? How do they shape price and supply while interacting with sellers? How, and to what extent, do agents foster the unequal distribution of people in a territory? In this third part, I analyze closely the ongoing relationships between real estate agents and their clients. I focus on how agents and clients interact, and whether and how agents shape the nature of clients' needs, transaction outcomes, and residential inequalities.

2. Setting up an Empirical Investigation

Primary data collection included interviews with agents; observations made during active participation in training—both at the real estate school and at two real estate companies—and during various stages of interactions between real estate agents and their clients. I also collected training and professional material (books on how to become an agent, codes of ethics, and professional documents).

Ethnographic data permit the use of behavioral rather than simply declarative data, as individuals are not conscious of their behaviors and often seek to present themselves in a positive light (Jerolmack and Khan 2014). Rather than considering interviews as pieces of comparable information, I relied on the practice of ethnographic interviewing considering the social positions and trajectories of each interviewee to analyze their discourses and practices (Beaud 1996).

2.1. Site

The study presented here addresses the working practices of real estate agents (brokers and salespersons) in the city of Tucson and its surroundings, a medium Southwestern Metropolitan Area of the United States of nearly 1 million inhabitants.

In the introduction, I presented the discovery of Tucson through real estate agents' signs and the interest generated by the discovery of urban inequalities during my first field trips. Additionally, Tucson represents a medium-sized American city where the housing market is quite dynamic, which makes it a good site for observations and a good counterpoint to the often taken in examples atypical markets around the country, such as New York City (Besbris 2016) or Houston (Korven-Glenn 2018a, 2018b).

Tucson is the second-largest urban community in Arizona after Phoenix. Its residential real estate market is representative of the country: the average medium-sized house value and a homeownership rate are like those of the United States (respectively $168,000 vs. $177,000 and 63% vs. 65%) according to the Census Bureau (data 2009-2013).

Real estate agents are often "realtors," which is a name granted to the members of the National Association of Realtors® (NAR), also represented at the local level by the

Tucson Association of Realtors® (TAR).

The NAR® is the largest trade association of the United States, with 1,368,530 members as of November 2018 and 1,165 local associations as of January 2018 (monthly membership report and NAR® membership statistics, May 2018). The NAR has experienced significant growth over the last century, from 1,646 members at its date of foundation in 1908, to a record high of 52,921 members in 2017.

Created in 1921, the TAR®, which is a local association member of the NAR®, and to which the clear majority of agents are affiliated, counts about 5,100 members as of 2018. On the website of the Association, Tucson, more commonly known as the Old Pueblo, is presented as "one of the most unique and beautiful cities in the world" enjoying "vibrant culture, glorious weather and a spectacular natural setting" allowing it to "attract new residents and visitors at a growing rate." Tucson's real estate market, like many other local markets, has suffered from the crisis of 2008. However, since the end of 2011, the market gradually came back to the levels of activity before the crisis, with the volume of sales and purchases generally returning to a balance.

3. The Production of Data

3.1. In-depth Interviews with Residential Real Estate Agents

I interviewed a total of 79 agents,[23] which were all affiliated to the NAR® and the TAR®[24]. My sample consisted of a mix between convenience and snowball for a total of 38 women and 41 men. Interviewees were mostly college-educated, white or Hispanic, and between 21 to 72 years old. Interviews lasted between 90 to 120 minutes at real estate agents companies' offices or homes. I recorded 75 interviews, which I transcribed, coded, and analyzed myself. Interviews were semi-structured to allow emerging themes within the conversation. I asked agents how they would go about finding clients, and how they conducted their real estate

[23] I had a total of 76 interviews because three interviews took place with a team of two agents.

[24] I tried to talk to agents that were not affiliated to the NAR® but I could not find any that were actively practicing. One of the potential explanations is that there is little chance you can achieve activities if you are not affiliated. I discuss that more in detail in Chapter 4.

activities, what made for a good and "successful" real estate agent, and what their interactions were with their clients.

3.1.1. Objective

Interviews were designed to understand each of my three specifying research questions (that I called "parts" of the dissertation) in relation to the social characteristics of the interviewees, including their basic socio-demographics (marital status, age, occupation, status, race) and their social and professional trajectory (social class of origin, and education, residential, professional, religious trajectory).

To uncover *the construction of agents as economic actors and market professionals*, I focus on the trajectories of the agents - asking them about how they started, how they were trained, how they talked about their business activity and career, how they defined what is a "good agent," and how they recognized a "successful agent." The goal of the interviews was to learn from agents about their discourses and beliefs relating to their work practices and the boundaries they draw around good and appropriate work.

To investigate the *constitution and maintenance of relationships between agents and clients* or the *encounter with the client*, I asked about how agents initiate and sustain relationships with buyers and sellers. To help agents be more specific, I focused on the current pool of clients the agent had and traced back how they met, how they entered in contact, and how they defined their relationship. I paid attention to how agents classified their relationships, including when they mentioned "friendship" with clients and social interactions that were not merely oriented towards business purposes. Additionally, I concentrated on labor performed by the agent to get and maintain their clientele. I asked women more specifically about their experiences with clients, probed them on the meanings of being a woman in the real estate field, whether it had helped or hindered them in their professional development.

To learn about the interaction between agents and clients, and their *influence in the creation of value or the study of urban inequalities*, I asked agents about their perceptions on prices and value, and how they went about defining the "right" price, assessing the value

of a house and a neighborhood, understanding the functioning of the market. Because my focus was on the work of real estate agents, I did not formally interview clients—although I had several encounters at coffee shops to discuss their real estate experiences. My focus was on the agents' perspectives, how they represented the nature of their interactions with their clients, as well as how they went about finding goods and assessing prices and value.

I moved from the research questions in conceptual terms to the interview questions, translating into non-sociological intelligible terms that were adapted to the vocabulary of the interviewees. I tried to avoid the imposition of a problem, but sometimes my lack of knowledge on the subject served as a revealing moment to advance my inquiry. The more I became accustomed to the real estate world with its vocabulary and sayings, the further I could question the interviewees and deepen my engagement in interviews. I placed the questions into a logical order, trying to ask factual questions first to build confidence, and questions that imposed a vision at the end.

In the interviews, insights were not gathered through direct questions, but through opening a conversation to address specific moments of their trajectories (the occupation of their parents, where they grew up, their entry into real estate) and specific transactions in which they were involved. As suggested by Beaud and Weber (2010), I transformed an "abstract question" into a "decomposed series of most ordinary social practices and events" and paying attention to "the objects, places, moments" crystallized into social relations such as their offices, the interactive routines in which they were embedded so that I could grasp as well as gather information on the professional events they attended.

I listened carefully to the participants discursively "making sense" of their own social world and their reality. I gained knowledge not only about the social and professional trajectories of my interviewees but used them to deepen my understanding of the world (or the game) the interviewees are embedded in, paying particular attention to the language used and their description of their working activities.

The interview guide I designed around the three specifying research themes was especially useful to start my interviewees, but I revised it as I went along. I provide an interview guide in the appendix of this dissertation.

3.1.2. Sampling

While deciding on a sampling strategy, I asked myself about what I wanted to know and how to accomplish it. The questions I asked tapped into "why particular people feel particular ways," "the processes by which these attitudes are constructed" and "the role" played by individuals within organizations or groups (Palys 2008, 697).

I started pilot research in a qualitative method class designed for market research taught by Melanie Wallendorf at the University of Arizona. She provided me with the contact of three realtors® that helped me get started. Through them, I also became more familiar with the discussions and the activities agents engage in, the vocabulary they use and the structure of the real estate field. I asked each of them to provide me with other contacts. After I realized the contacts they provide were mostly highly accomplished and in dominant positions within the field, I actively sought out individuals with distinctive characteristics. Distancing myself from random and representative sampling, I use purposive sample strategies (HS. Becker 1998; Palys 2008; Stake 2010).

The first strategy adopted was the *maximum variation sampling* which consists of choosing "cases or individuals who cover the spectrum of position and perspective concerning the phenomenon one is studying" (Palys 2008, 697). One of my first strategies was to rely on the overall composition of real estate agents through the demographics of realtors® provided by the NAR® (2012), which are in the majority composed of sales agents and brokers (65% percent of realtors® are licensed as sales agents, 21% hold broker licenses, and 15% hold broker associate licenses). A proportion of 63% of all realtors® are women, the most common realtors® being a white female of 54-year-old who attended college and is a homeowner. The median transaction number is 11 per year on the residential side for a median gross income of $39,800 in 2017, a decrease from $42,500 in 2016, for realtors® with an experience of 10 years, of which 4 years at the same firm. Around 30% of Realtors® have some college education, 30% hold a bachelor's degree, 13% a graduate degree and above, 13% an associate degree, 6% attended graduate school and 8% are high-school graduate only. 86% of the realtors® are also classified as independent contractors, while 5% are employees and 9% classified as neither. After pilot research, gathering

information on the Multiple Listing Service and statistics from TAR® that my interviewees informally provided, I got a sense of the real estate space in Tucson, and was able to establish categorizations according to the following:

- *Niche occupied:* Based on what I observe, I expected the segmentation of the market around niches: whether on goods' prices and territories. I distinguished between the high-end market (consistently above $500,000), the middle-high (between $250,000 and $500,000), the middle-low (between $100,000 and $250,000) and the low market (under $100,000). Most interviewees I came through contacts were either in the high and middle high of the market, so I had to actively seek out agents that were on the lower ends by using the information on agents' prices of current transactions on the Multiple Listing Service. Because Tucson's population has a high percentage of Hispanics (above 40% of the population as of 2010 Census), I also wanted to select realtors® who deal with Hispanic buyers and sellers.
- *The professional rank of agents and level of experience* (associate brokers vs. simple salespersons): Associate brokers have more experience and credentials than salespersons, which gives them more legitimacy and credibility to operate in the market. I investigate this difference as I expect that, within the world of agents, professional status matters. I also over-sampled newly licensed real estate and followed them through their training (observations). Observing new agents' accomplishments and activities permitted me to observe most particularly the classification and categorization of what the work of a real estate agent is. Real estate agents benefit from an in-between position, made of trying to "fit in," and "master the game" as they try to emulate and copy their mentors, but also learning what kind of agents they would be, learning the strategies and learned techniques of positioning, the boundaries between what is good or expected of them and what is bad within the world of agents.
- *Socio-demographic characteristics of agents, including gender:* NAR® statistics demonstrate that there has been a massive entry of women into the profession. I made an effort to have about 60 to 70% of women in the study to follow the national average of the realtors®. However, I ended up having slightly lower than 50% and as I expected that gender would play a role in the ways that agents accomplish their work. I tried, as much as possible,

to attain a balanced sample between younger and older agents, of various social backgrounds, to assess potential variation across gender, class or age lines.

I planned for about 60 interviews. I tried to obtain a balanced sample of agents according to their ranks (associate broker vs. salespersons), gender (women vs. men) and ethnicity (Hispanic vs. white) with more than 50% women, 50% brokers and 50% salespersons, and at least 30% of high-end agents. *Table 1* and *Table 2* represent the distribution of my interviewees according to their ranks, ethnicity, and gender. I finally obtained 79 interviewees, for a total of 76 interviews.[25] I was not able to find a Hispanic real estate agent working in the high-end market while in the middle-low, I had more agents. Even If I aimed to recruit about 60 to 70% women, I ended up with fewer women than men (48% vs. 52%). The overall goal was to have about 35 to 40 women out of 60 interviews. In the observations, I had slightly more women (53%).

Table 1: Distribution of Interviewees according to their Rank and Ethnicity (N= 78)[26]

	Associate brokers		**Salespersons**		**Total**
	Hispanic	**White**	**Hispanic**	**White**	
High	0	15	0	2	**17**
Middle high	4	8	2	4	**18**
Middle low	2	6	7	16	**31**
Low	0	0	1	3	**4**
None	1	4	1	2	**8**
Total	**7**	**33**	**11**	**27**	**78**

Table 2: Distribution of Interviewees according to their Rank and their Gender (N=79)

	Associate brokers		**Salespersons**		**Total**
	Women	**Men**	**Women**	**Men**	
High	9	6	2	0	**17**
Middle high	5	7	2	4	**18**
Middle low	5	3	9	15	**32**
Low	0	0	2	2	**4**
None	1	4	3	0	**8**
Total	**20**	**20**	**18**	**21**	**79**

[25] I also interviewed three teams, so a total of 79 interviewees but 76 interviews. I included the characteristics of both team members

[26] I interviewed one black agent who worked in the middle-low range and that is not featured in the table. 8 agents did not have clients at the time, so I filled out "none."

After conducting 79 interviews total, I decided I had gathered enough data on each of my research themes and no new insights were emerging. The interviewees started to echo what previous interviewees had said, by which stage I had gained a significant understanding of the structure of real estate. In other words, I had reached theoretical saturation (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Ragin and Becker 1992).

I used convenience and snowball sampling to recruit interviewees and drew on the personal and professional networks that I developed through field research to complete the sample. Because I did not achieve an adequate sample through my networks, I contacted a random selection of realtors drawn from the publicly available list on the TAR® website. I also contacted Hispanic agents through the professional lists The National Association of Hispanic Real Estate Professionals (NAHREP). I sent an email to tell them more about the study and arrange a time and place to meet.

3.1.3. Transcribing and Writing Notes

After each interview, I jotted a memo, which consisted of notes on the specific context of the interview – elements that were talked about during greeting moments and relative to the exploration of the real estate office – but also the interactions that took place while I was there: between agents and their managers, between colleagues while making coffee or chatting, or when I was introduced to agents. Because the presence of the interviewer often acts as a revelator, I took seriously the interactions between the agent interviewed and his colleagues and paid attention to small stories, gossip, and anecdotes that came out during meetings. I looked at the vocabulary used and analyzed misunderstandings, especially common in the first interviews. I was particularly careful in being attentive to such moments before I turned on or after I turned off the recording device (Musante DeWalt and DeWalt 2002). I also made notes on what appeared to be 'revealing moments' of the interviewee, and what I thought were the key highlights of the interviews. I then listened to the recordings of the interviews specifically noting anecdotes that were particularly useful, serving as a form of pre-coding. I also established an informal classification of the interview based on

the “objective” and “subjective” quality of the data I had acquired (Beaud and Weber 2010). The notes helped me to analyze and write up of the fieldwork and the research object.

3.2. Participation Observation

I conducted participant observation in different settings. The first stage of the observations took place during the licensing at a certifying real estate school and the training of real estate agents at two companies. The second stage of the observations was conducted exclusively with real estate agents in their interaction with their clients.

3.2.1. 1 School and 2 Companies

As I wanted to understand agents’ entrance into the realtor world, I followed the path of an aspiring real estate agent getting into real estate school through the licensing exam, and the training of real estate agents in two companies. The goal of the ethnographic data gathered at the real estate school and training programs were to analyze the set of norms, practices, and beliefs acquired through socialization within the real estate industry. I pay specific attention to events and rituals signaling the integration of the agents such as graduation ceremonies at the school and the real estate companies.

The first sets of ethnographic observations were made at the pre-licensing, training and mentoring sessions received by real estate agents. One set of observations was made at a local real estate school and other sets of observations at two real estate companies. Desert Realty was, on the one hand, only present locally but partially owned by an investment company managed by Warren Buffet (with a revenue of $242.1 billion in 2017). Real Prosperity was on the other hand internationally present and claiming to be the “world's largest real estate franchise by agent count” (with a sales volume of $303.4 billion in 2017 in the United States only), respectively in first (about 35% of realtors® as of 2016) and third position (about 15%) in terms of agents’ numbers. The observations tackle my first specifying research question about the construction of agents as market professionals.

I relied on the practice of organizational ethnography (Hodson, 1998; Zilber, 2015) and workplace ethnographies (Burawoy 1979; Desmond 2008; D. Roy 1974; Sallaz 2009).

At the real estate school, I took the courses (90 hours) required to pass the qualifying exam to obtain a real estate license, which ranged from housing laws and contract writing and pricing. I chose Star Realty School based on preliminary data gathered during interviews with agents. About 90% of the interviewed agents trained in Tucson told me they took licensing classes at this school and when asking informally at real estate companies, Star Realty was always mentioned as the "only good school" in the area and fitted the paradigmatic case sampling as an "exemplar for a certain class" (Palys 2008, p. 697).

During my observations at the school, I took the licensing class as I was going to become an agent, but I did not hide I was studying sociology at the University of Arizona. I disclosed to only some of my classmates I was doing a study of real estate agents. I stayed purposefully vague when I was asked about it. It did not pose an issue because everyone was coming from a variety of backgrounds and it was assumed that by learning all of this, I could myself become an agent. Indeed, a lot of my classmates encouraged me to do so. The groups of students were composed of all age ranges, we were respectively 41 and 43 in each class, starting from the early 1920s to the late 1960s, there were a group of 9 instructors with different positions (appraisers, managers, or brokers), experience and domains of expertise (laws, appraising, contracts).

The two real estate companies I chose offer extensive training for their new agents. Each program was approximately of the same length (about 70 hours in 2 weeks for one, and about 80 in four weeks for the other, plus active mentoring sessions). Instructors included newer to experienced agents and general managers. Desert Realty, an independent real estate firm, was created locally in 1926 and merged with a large national residential real estate brokerage company in 1999. In 2013, the company claimed to have 1,300 licensed real estate sales associates in 37 offices across Arizona and Mexico. It was ranked as the top 30 independent real estate companies in the United States, according to the Real Trends 500 Survey. Real Prosperity, an international real estate company, was founded by Franck N. and Kyle B. in 1983 and claims to be agent-centered, a company "built by agents, for agents." Frank N. wrote several books about how to succeed in the business and has developed a unique selling model based on the training of agents, profit sharing and local involvements in communities. As of 2014, the company claims to have 110,000 sales

associates and to be affiliated with "700 market centers" around the world, one of the largest company by agent count.

In the school and companies, I observed how agents were trained, which character and personality traits they were told to develop, which behaviors they were told to exhibit both with their peers and in front of customers, and which tools with which they were provided. During the interactions, I recorded at how agents behaved in front of customers, and which personality and characteristics they displayed. I paid specific attention to inconsistencies between what they were told to do, what they said they were doing, and what they were actually doing. My fieldwork themes emerged from these observations. These interviews and ethnographic observations allowed me to analyze the discursive and behavioral aspects of market work for trust, as well as how agents both talk and act on the market to create the conditions for market interactions such as selling and buying a house.

During training and mentoring, I also encountered various agents, such as trainers and managers. I used elements of my interactions with them during the chapters, but do not include them in the sample of agents I interviewed and followed.

Observing Pre-Licensing, Training, and Mentoring

Star Realty School was created in 1973 and has been a family business since its creation; it claims to be ranked as the first or second school in Arizona. The school was created by John Star, a realtor®, a lyricist, singer and folk musician whose additional interests were brought into classes, notably singing after our class sessions. He has what might be described as a "family owning spirit" and his wife Laura Star is now the owner and the school director. Their daughter Beth is always at the school, providing coffee, chatting with the instructors, making sure the classes run well and managing two staff members, Nancy (60-year-old) and Jen (about 35). The school is located on the north side of Tucson and looks like a house transformed into a business office. It has two classrooms (one with 60 and one with 40 seats) and six instructors giving the pre-licensing classes. The instructors have more than 15 years of experience in the real estate business: selling, managing properties, or being mortgage brokers.

I participated in the licensing classes thanks to the funding of the Graduate and

Professional Student Council at the University of Arizona. I followed classes both in the day (8:45 am to 4:30 pm from Monday to Thursday) and in the night ((Monday till Friday 6:30 till 10:00 pm). Technically, I could have finished the required 90 hours in 3 to 6 weeks, but I took over four months to complete the coursework. I repeated some classes as it was allowed. This allowed me to be inserted in the field, but without being always there. The combination of days and nights was also good as I mostly met workers and students in the night, unemployed in the day.

Taking courses enabled me to observe interactions between instructors and future agents, and to speak informally with future agents and develop relationships with them. Although some of the course content is very technical, the classes are a space of socialization for newer agents. The pedagogy and the constant insistence on the norms and rules of the business may influence how future agents acquire a specific professional ethos. The classes were also a good way to learn more about the history and the legal aspects of real estate in the United States and Arizona. I analyzed what specific social dispositions the instructors were talking about to become a "good agent." I observed the interaction between agents and clients and acquired general knowledge on real estate, as well as moral standpoints on how to comply with the law, how to behave properly and ethically, and what "good" agents should do and should not do.

I also conducted interviews with newly licensed real estate agent to gain more insights on how their socialization and integration process. I followed some agents after they completed their licensing and joined a real estate company. This allowed me to compare how the professional ethos acquired in licensing courses is deployed or changed through work experience. It was also a way to observe more experienced agents, and mentor-mentee relationships, within the firms that they join.

Additionally, as sites for observing training, I chose *two real estate companies*. The first is a local-owned agency that is the biggest real estate company in Tucson, and the second is a branch of a national company, which relies heavily on marketing and sales methods. Both have extensive training programs and are known to recruit newer agents. I secured access to the schools with preliminary interviews and informal talks with office managers who agreed to let me sit in the training sessions. This allowed me to observe how

younger agents are socialized into the world of real estate agents.

Desert Realty is an independent real estate firm that was created in 1926 by Jim L., who saw the potential of developing real estate in the Tucson community. The ownership changed in 1980 and it merged with one of the largest residential real estate brokerage companies in the United States in 1999. The company also has a long history of giving to charity and has created a foundation in 2002 to help improve the living conditions of Arizonans. In 2013, the company claimed to have 1,300 licensed real estate sales associates in 37 offices across Arizona and Mexico. It was ranked as the top 30 independent real estate companies in the United States according to the Real Trends 500 Survey.

Real Prosperity is an international real estate company founded by Franck N. and Kyle B. in 1983. It is advertised as being agent-centered, "built by agents, for agents." Frank B. wrote several books about how to succeed in the business and has developed a unique selling model based on the training of agents and their local involvements in communities. As of 2014, the company claims to have 110,000 sales associates and to be affiliated with "700 market centers" around the world. The company is the largest company by agent count in the United States.

These two companies offer an extensive training program (about 2 full weeks) and each agent benefits from a mentor who guides them through their first transactions and helps them with any questions they might have. I observed what the companies had to say about how to become a “good” agent. This set of observations complemented the licensing classes, as the agents learn about how to behave in front of clients. I investigated how instructors and experienced agents taught new agents how to represent the company and themselves, the norms and behaviors expected from them and emphasized by the company and the trainers on the one hand, and as experts with tools and knowledge on the other hand, to maintain their own reputation and that of the company.

Observing Interactions between Agents and their clients. Consistently with my third specifying research question – the influence of agents in the creation of value – which implies the study of the "interaction effect", I observed the interactions between real estate agents and their clients unfolding during the transactions.

As soon as I was done with observing the school and the training, I asked agents with whom I developed a good relationship for permission to observe their meetings with clients, whether through interviews or training observation. All the agents I shadowed were either interviewed before, during or after the observations. I observed a total of 18 full-length transactions between agents, 11 with buyers and 7 with sellers, plus 42 transactions observed partially in different moments (open houses, clients' houses, house hunting rides). Not all these interactions resulted in the buying or selling of the property.

Participant observation permitted me to observe the practices of agents and their interactions with buyers and sellers. Observing these interactions allowed me to observe the degree and nature of discrepancies between agents' discourses during the interviews versus their practices with clients; as well as to compare training they received on how they are supposed to behave, and how they indeed behaved in front of their clients. From preliminary interviews, agents said that they are friends with their clients. Observing their interactions with clients helped to tease out to what extent this was an aspect of their self-presentation versus an actual business practice.

All the realtors® observed were also formally interviewed. The interactions with the client are important moments for my research but often were the most difficult to "manage." These moments can be "tense" for the real estate agent. Including an external observer then appeared to many realtors® to be a form of "distraction" or an additional transactional difficulty. Those who allowed me to shadow them were pleased to be "riding along with someone" and did not feel the inconvenience as we went along.

Fieldwork Table. The fieldwork table below (*table 3*) contain specific characteristic of agents observed during interactions with clients. I include their pseudonym, socio-economic background and level of education, gender, ethnicity or race, age and marital status, status and level of experience, market segment in which they work (low, middle-low, middle high or high), the types and numbers of transactions followed with them, for a total of 35 buyers' transactions, 19 sellers' transactions and 7 open houses.

A more detailed table is included in the appendix section including all the agents observed, with more detailed characteristics on the agents whether they had at least one

parent in real estate or business. I was sometimes able to record interactions between agents and clients. I wrote detailed field notes about the encounter in both cases, but the listening of the recording helped to grasp additional elements.

Table 3: Agents Followed through Transactions (N=15)

	Socio-economic Background and Education	**Ethnicity Gender, Marital Status and Age**	**Status and experience**	**Market Range**	**Transactions observed**		
					Buyers	Sellers	Open houses
Ben	Working class, MA	Hispanic man, 37, married	Sales agent, 4 years	Middle High	4	0	0
Pamela	Upper class, MA	White woman, 52, married	Broker, more than 20 years	High	3	1	0
Rudy	Working class, some BA	Hispanic man, 27, single	Sales' agent, more than one year	Middle Low	2	2	0
Kate	Upper middle class, BA	White woman, 33, married	New sales' agent, less than 6 months	Middle High	2	2	2
Kara	Middle class, some BA	White woman, 37, single	Sales' agent, 5 years	Low	3	1	1
Patrick	Middle class, high school	White man, 62, married	Broker, more than 20 years	Middle Low	2	2	0
Corey	Working class, no degree	White man, 48, divorced,	Sales' agent, 5 years	Middle Low	3	2	0
Alex	Middle class, BA	White man, 28, single	New sales' agent, less than 6 months	Middle Low	3	1	0
Nancy	Upper class, BA	White woman, 58, married	Broker, more than 20 years	High	1	3	0
Sonia	Upper middle class, BA	White woman, 59, divorced	New sales' agent, less than 6 months	Middle Low	3	0	1
Terri	Upper class, BA	White woman, 44, single	Broker, about 10 years	Middle High	1	1	1
Brian	Working class, high school	Hispanic man, 39, married	Sales' agent, about 2 years	Middle High	2	1	1
Thomas	Upper class, MA	White man, 55, married	Broker, more than 5 years	High	1	2	1
Donna	Working class, high school	White woman, 60, widow	Broker, about 15 years	Middle Low	3	0	0
Bob	Middle class, no degree	White man, 58, married	Broker, more than 10 years	Middle High	2	1	0

Total	33% working, 27% middle, 13% upper middle 27% upper	80% White, 47% women; median age 49,6; 53% married, 27% single, 7% widow, 13% divorced.	53% sales' agents Including 20% new, 47% brokers	20% High, 33% Middle High, 40% Middle Low, 7% Low	35	19	7[27]

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of Interviews and Observations' Population

	Interviews (N=79)	**Observations (N=15)**
% Married	39.24	53.33
Median age	48.43	49.60
% Women	48.10	46.67
% White	75.95	80.00
% One parent in real estate	20.25	20.00
% One parent in business	54.43	53.33
Total in %	**100**	**18.99**

I provide in *table 4* above the basics socio-demographics of the realtors® I interviewed and followed during my fieldwork. About 40% of the interviewees' sample was married, with a median age of 50, 48% women, 77% white, and 20% who had at least one parent in real estate and 54% that had at least one parent who was in the business-related occupation. For observations, more than half were married, and the median age was slightly lower, they had at 23% a parent in real estate and 45% in business. They were more than half of women as well and 80% white, with 2 Hispanic.

Access. I made an effort to organize my entry into the field, and the questions I was going to ask, but flexibility was key. Most participant observation data is produced at the time of interactions and cannot be anticipated before. I use as often as possible an audio recorder and a notebook. I was often told respondents that I wanted to learn more about real estate as a future agent and as a resident, which helped put participating realtors at ease concerning my notebook and note-taking. I kept this activity limited though, as it also disrupts the flows

[27] I did go to about 20 open houses total, even without disclosing my identity as a researcher to observe the presentation of self of agents in front of clients and the relational labor. I did not include them here.

of conversations and direct interactions, and does not allow the researcher to concentrate on the gestures and expressions made by the participants.

Writing Field Notes. I wrote down detailed descriptions of the interactions taking place in chronological order (Wolfinger 2002). I asked specific questions to the field and to the data collected including the field notes revolving around what people were doing or trying to accomplish paying particular attention to how they were trying to do this, the specific strategies they adopted, their verbal and nonverbal cues and gestures, the way their talk about, characterize and understand the situations in which they are taking part. I also included what I learned from my observations and what I thought was at stake during the interactions (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011, 146). The questions I asked following along with some interpretations provided an analytical material for inferences. Besides including reflexive personal feelings and thoughts, I tried to quantify and qualify the operations agents as market intermediaries had to perform, such as "counting, calculating, and enumerating" surging as "timekeeping, controls, and planning" (Peneff 1995, 122).

For each observation, I followed the same protocol as for interviews: I recorded some parts of the interaction, but rely mostly on memos in which I detailed these interactions. I usually recorded my field notes in a notebook and then scanned all the notes I had in order, which then allowed me to organize and code them. I took field notes that detailed as much as possible the interactions between the agents, the characteristics of the interaction (members, duration, location, particular features), and my impressions on what was happening.

At the real estate school, where I was not allowed to bring a computer, it was rather easy to take field notes because many students had notebooks and were taking notes. I then transcribed my field notes on my computer soon after the class ended. Additionally, I audio recorded key moments or specific observed situations. I worked on, improved, and re-worked my field notes immediately after each participant observation.

3.3. Documents

Real estate agents sometimes referred to documents that would help me to understand better an aspect of their activity. When available for me to take home, I asked to be provided with such a document. Sometimes, there were documents that participants give to their clients (questionnaire for the first visit), or documents that respondents read internally (ranking of production among agents in the metropolitan area). The latter mostly consisted of training material and tools agents use with their clients. More specifically in Chapters 3 and 4, I rely on professional documents produced by the companies, the NAR®, and the TAR®.

4. Data Analysis

4.1. Analyzing Ethnographic Material

Rather than thinking about interviews in a quantitative logic as textual material per se as pieces of comparable information and interviewees as "essentially interchangeable" (Palys 2008, 697), I envisioned the interview ethnographically and in relation to the acquisition of broader knowledge around my object, and most specifically of my understanding of each of the three specifying research questions.

Relying on the ethnographic practice of interviewing presented by Beaud (1996), I used interviews in two different ways. First, to get at what we can qualify as "objective data" which designates certain facts we can assume to be true: the position of agents into the field, their current transactions (which could be partly verified through the MLS), the specific steps of their entry into real estate, the occupations of their parents and their entry into real estate and their actual position. Second, to collect "subjective data" which constitute "judgments on the facts" for example when agents say "we are here to help rather than to sell." I also gathered what I call information data which refers to the understanding of real estate dynamics that I verified and crosschecked during various interviews.

More than just being embedded within a foreign world collecting information, the sociologist should adopt a specific position: a form of coming and going between the theory and the field, between being close to her or his respondents and being removed from them.

The sociologist is thus required to avoid falling into either the empiricist or the scholastic or theoretical reasoning trap (Bourdieu 1990).

To avoid doing so, consecutive breaks are needed to discover and analyze the object carefully (HS. Becker 1998; Bourdieu 1996). I experienced this first hand during my fieldwork. The first moment consisted of falling into the professional ideology and the discourses of the actors, which was required to be embedded and think like a "real estate agent." I remembered being entirely devoted to hearing and buying their "we are here to help" discourses. The second moment happened when I distanced myself from their discourses to analyze their social and professional positioning, as real estate agents to a specific external audience, but also as seeking professional status and reconsideration from their colleagues. I discovered for example that the help discourse they use was partly attributed to the figure of the salesmen and trying to build trust in the market.

I realized that postulating the non-consciousness of the agents did not mean to discard at once their accounts and to get away from the positivist assumptions that social actors were lying, dishonest or unaware. In this sense, "who a person is and where the person is located within a group is important" (Palys 2008, 697). I considered interviewees' responses as a potential explanation of their position rather than posing social desirability issues (Tourangeau, Rips, and Rasinski 2000).

Once I considered their positions with more distance, I arrived at the third moment in which to analyze what agents do and talk about: I had to return to what they say to explain it fully and to observe instances of variation and breaks in their discourses. I thus tried to classify more precisely who was saying what and in which context, towards which audience. I discovered, for example, that they use front stage, during interviews and in front of client, a rhetoric around "helping." However, backstage, while I was observing, they talked about profiting and classifying clients and goods on expected economic value.

I discovered what Becker (1998) calls the hierarchy of credibility as the first brokers I met were all very experienced and considered successful in the field, they had won several achievement awards and had acquired significant reputation in the community. They were thus giving me their situated version of the real estate game. I was sympathetic and empathetic to them to the point that their charismatic and relational capacities were perhaps

obfuscating at first. As I realized the hierarchies through encountering the reality of agents' transactions, discovering the professional status of each and meeting aspirant agents, I was able to consider better "from where" they were speaking, and as Becker (1998, 91) says to "doubt anything anyone in power tells you." At the same time, the tales are not only a question of who is in power but also work because those who are not dominant believe them as well: "from the point of view of a well-socialized participant in the system, any tale told by those at the top intrinsically deserved to be regarded as the most credible account obtainable of the organization's workings" (Becker 1970, 126–27). I discovered also that most of the newer recruits were fascinated by the holders of the game and look up to them to "develop their business." I realized then I did not thus have to be a naïve believer but I did not have to discard all of it at once.

The analysis of the discourses in relation to the structural organization of the field could indeed inform on the discovery of "differential distribution of knowledge" and points of view as Becker (1998, 100) analyzes through (Simmel's essay on secrecy 1950, 307–76): "The reason why they didn't know them was not that they were stupid or uneducated or lacking sensibility, but that campus life was organized so as to prevent them from finding out." The sociologist cannot afford to "ignore things that the people (he or she is) studying do" (Becker 1998, 101) specifically because it runs the risk of missing the sociological analysis of his or her object.

To analyze "subjective data," it was necessary to understand both the structure of real estate and to consider the "entire socio-professional path of the individual as the appreciation that the conditions of an apprenticeship can be very different, at the mature age according to the path traveled since" (Zarca 1989, 9). I relied on Bourdieu's analysis of the double truth of social existence, "the truth of the actor, absorbed in the game" by highlighting how they talk about what they were doing (discourses), and "the truth of the observer", examining the conditions of the game's existence" (Burawoy 2018, 73), looking at how real estate agents went about their practices. Cross-checking agents' narratives with what I knew about their position in the real estate field allowed me to avoid the tendency of "psychologizing" and to situate socially the lived experiences of the agents. These elements were essential to then understand how they talked about their practices into the field.

The fieldwork journal and then notes I jotted down served to analyze how agents were behaving in front of clients versus how they were behaving when not in front of them, on the specific actions they took during the transactions, on what they say to their clients, and on how they try to work out deals and negotiate. I adopted the same overall analytical strategy that I did with interviews, as I never took interviews *per se* as textual material but as a situated discourse which informed on the practices of the agents, rather than treating it separately from those practices.

Overall, I produced different types of data that I had to classify and order. First, I gathered background data, which enables us to have a better knowledge of the world of the respondents. The technical knowledge then allows understanding better the agents' references during both conversations and interactions with the clients. The acquisition of this knowledge came incrementally during and after my pilot research. This pilot research allowed me to discuss and to bring theory back in, and I believe I led to more informed ethnographic interviews and fieldwork after completing the pilot studies. This knowledge was also confirmed (and even questioned at the time) during training programs or informal conversations, in which a lot of additional topics arose that I had not previously encountered. Besides gathering this background knowledge, I had to make sense of three types of material: objective positions of the agents, practices, and subjective points of view and adopted a plan to code them.

4.2. Coding Interviews and Fieldwork

With the interviews and field interactions transcribed and the fieldwork notes taken on both the interviews and the participant observations, I constructed a first coding scheme that evolved with what I had obtained in the preliminary data collection process. I coded both my transcriptions and my field notes and wrote an analytical memo centered on the established codes. I refine my coding scheme as I gathered more data.

From the fieldwork done at the school and the real estate companies, I obtained a total of seven 96-pages notebooks of fieldwork notes that I scanned or reduced to themes, plus all the training books that I used to supplement my analysis.

These cues operated as a proxy to situate each real estate agent I spoke with and

followed. Some notes, notably recalling interactions with trainers and agents at the school or the companies and encountered during the fieldwork at the school, were not as carefully coded but may still appear during the narrative of the chapters. The following was thus designed mostly to code the social background of the agents, the discourses they had on why they decided to enter real estate, as well as their reflection on their practices. The fieldwork notes were treated similarly allowing us to understand how the discourses on their activity sometimes differ from the actual practices. I had thus a total of 68 codes in Atlas.ti. I include a summary of the codes and sub-codes in the appendix section.

To code the interviews, the participant observations and the documents gathered during training and meeting with agents, I used ATLAS. ti, a Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDAS) software.

All the codes were generated based on specific cues given by interviewees and on the interpretations, I made based on fieldwork observations. I aimed to use both interview and fieldwork, signaling each interviewee with the letter I (Interview) and F (fieldwork) as ethnographic data, to understand that interviews analyzed as texts have to be linked with the specific social positioning of the agent talking.

Coding Positions

Each interview and fieldwork session also had a qualitative narrative specifically to note insights not captured by any text and worked also as part of ethnographic data. Each interview or fieldwork session also enabled the grasp of a structural position for each person I encountered (how experienced and how much they sold in real estate). I position each participant, to understand their primary and secondary socialization with their family background, university degree, and their previous occupations, where they were born and their age.

I thus first use a series of codes to assess agents' socio-professional backgrounds, including whether their parents were in business-related fields or worked in real estate as well as to generally which kind of education they received as well as their previous occupations. I distinguish between sales/business, education/teaching, administrative and others. Based on the conversations I had with agents, I assigned them also according to a four-point scale of ++/+/-/-- on their economic and cultural capitals, defined through a proxy

of where they live, what milieu they grew up and interacted in, and what activities they had besides real estate. These codes were used to assess the socio-demographic profiles of the agents, as well as the capitals of the real estate agents.

I also wanted to assess their specific position to the field so I created a code to assess their level of experience, status, and position within the field. This was done by gathering elements around the time they spent in real estate and assessing a code to whether they were newly recruited, recently started (up to 2 years), with some experience (from 2 to 10) and significant amount of expertise (superior to 10 years), and their actual status (whether broker or sales' agent). I coded also in three categories the respondents' reasons for becoming a real estate agent, whether it was influenced by family, friends or other and whether they had been influenced by someone that was a realtor®. The other codes address most particularly the activities that agents were carrying out or their points of view.

Coding Practices and Points of View

Although I thought about distinguishing between the interviews and in the fieldwork, I realized that these are often mixed, so I relied on the I and F letter I assigned to each piece of material so that I could know whether this was the practices that agents were telling me about in the interviews or whether it was the practice I directly observed while in interaction with a client. I created specific sub codes for the front stage/ backstage when I noted discrepancies between what I had observed in terms of saying and doing in front of colleagues or me and front of clients. To the same extent, points of view were also interesting because they could inform and reflect on certain practices. I thus not only referred to my codes but while coding the memo I wrote about each individual I interviewed and followed to enrich the data. Although I coded fieldwork notes, I wanted to make sure I did not miss any analytical element so I had separate files that were both memos on the full or partial moments of transactions followed with each agent and themed memos specific for each type of interactions followed.

For my interviewees, I followed the three themes I evoked in interviews, including first understanding their entry and socialization into real estate that I evoked above; second, by coding their relations to business and clients, for example the categories used to classify

clients (socio-economic background, friends vs. business), how they describe what are the sources of their business, whether marketing, colleagues, referrals; third to understand how they go about working with buyers and sellers, find goods, assessing prices. I particularly looked at the differences between how female agents socialize and use different resources and strategies compared to their male counterparts, creating a code for gender and sub codes around it. I also created codes that correspond to their points of view around good vs. bad agents, which emerges notably in terms of expertise and relational skills. These codes serve for example to create the argument in chapter 5, complemented by the types of work I had observed while following agents.

5. Limits and Future Directions

Due to the time constraints and my sample strategies, the data produced exhibits several limitations. By being aware of those limits is a way to address what the study can and cannot achieve and proposing then future directions. I address the difficulties raised by conducting such a study. I first highlight the issues of access and entry within the field, reflecting on the constraints of qualitative research. I thus discuss the ambiguous status of sociological endeavor, being torn in between deductive and inductive thinking, and more specifically of qualitative data because of the contradictory injunctions felt within the academic field. I finish by proposing ways to address these limitations for future work.

5.1. Gaining Access, Deciding Where to Observe

For the interview process and the school classes, I could gain access easily. I was initially worried about gaining access and especially about how to explain my position during the class. Sometimes I disclosed that I was a student at the University of Arizona and that I was conducting research on real estate. Most of the time, agents seemed to be genuinely excited about my project but not necessarily curious about knowing more about the research itself.

For the ethnographic observations during the training in the real estate companies, I concentrated on two real estate companies that are fairly established in the Tucson market, which might also overlook the homogeneity of training for all agents and skewed the

selection of agents. I had however confirmed hints from the choice of the companies that these two companies represented the most popular for younger recruits as they provided training.

At the companies, I had two contrasting experiences: at Desert Realty, doors were wide open, the managing broker thought that the reputation of the company was to manage good relations with people both in the industry and outside, holding well-regarded and high-status positions. I played on the fact that I was doing a Ph.D. at the University of Arizona as I had talked with branch managers who often were impressed by this, added to the fact that I never lied about where I came from when asked: Paris acting as a signal of appurtenance to a certain social class to most Americans. They gave me all the training material, accorded me a similar status to other trainees, and I was not required to pay any fees. At Real Prosperity, the integration was more complicated, I had talked first to instructors who were completely fine with letting me participate in the class, I talked with the training manager and she was fine too at first, but then talked to the general manager who raised the issue of giving me access to the material studied in class. The training manager requested that I meet with her to explain that she wanted full access to the written outputs. As I told her everything would be anonymous and I became more integrated within the companies, she seemed to gradually accept my presence.

My colleagues at the school or at the real estate companies that were not in direct managing positions were friendly with me, and some of them even excited I was there, they implied that I would make a good real estate agent because people "naturally come to me" or "like me." I expected this double position to be hard to manage at times, but the most difficult was to establish trustworthy relationships to be able to follow agents in any interaction with their clients. For the shadowing, I contacted the agents I had developed good relationships in the training process, as well as previous people I interviewed and asked also the managers for agents they would know in their companies. I discovered that agents were much more reluctant to have me observe them in their interactions with clients. I had difficulty recruiting agents to shadow, as agents raised issues of confidentiality and trust. With most, observing them constituted an intrusion into a highly intimate setting, in which they constantly expose themselves.

The easier task was then to find "willing" people that thought of me as a tool for their development. If they were new to the business, they often saw my presence as a way to improve. For more experienced realtors instead, I acted as a form of legitimation. Finally, three of them never felt comfortable with my presence. I cannot discard here the risk of survivor bias because I was able to only get two agents working specifically working on the lower end of the market, although I did observe some lower end interactions. I felt that the glamorous aspects of real estate were always what agents wanted to show. However, during interactions, things were not as neat as agents wanted to present. Plus, I tried to balance that by explicitly seeking lower end interactions. I did observe two interactions with an agent after driving around in lower-priced areas and calling directly at the phone number written in the advertisement sign.

I also tried to gain more understanding and closeness with real estate agents outside of the professional setting, participating in events at restaurants or during short class breaks for example. I went to lunch many times during lunch break at the school and the two real estate companies. I saw some friendships develop between classmates, as some of them met outside the class. I was also aware that I could not be too "close." Playing on my mixed foreign identity of French and Peruvian allow me to create proximity, specifically with high-class agents and Hispanics' agents and also clients. Because of my foreign status, I sense I was also kept at a certain distance, which had the benefit to make me appear different yet inoffensive. I realized later that being naïve could be transformed into an advantage in the field. The position of the student, as eager to learn and not very threatening, was also very comfortable. It allowed most of the agents I encounter being very reflexive about their practices, to justify and explain to make me learn.

5.2. The Ambiguous Status of Sociological Endeavor

As Bourdieu, Chamboredon, and Passeron remind us in *the Craft of Sociology* (1991), there is no greater disease for the sociologists than to consider data blindly, whether to rely on the "sacro-saint data" as a proof that sociological endeavor is indeed scientific or sorely lacking hindsight from the native world we study. After amassing such an amount of data, the goal is however to find a way to organize it, to make it coherent to the reader, but also to

administer proof that what we produced is both theoretically and empirically grounded. This is probably the most difficult task in conducting good sociology first because of the tension between what we distinguish as qualitative and quantitative production of data. Whereas qualitative analysis should be comprehensive and detailed in its categorization, quantitative data needs to be representative, systematic, comparable and quantified across cases. While I tried to quantify some of my interactions and my interviews, I felt that the power of the methodological tools I used was limited to do so. I could have better systematized the market segments and the social classes of interactions, but that would have required a different empirical design towards which my in-depth explorative and ethnographic approach certainly did not allow on a fully satisfying scale. I also felt I was imposing quantitative thinking on the methodology that was not designed for that.

One of the tensions emerging throughout the dissertation is the difficulty of administering carefully the hierarchies happening within the real estate world. When I started the dissertation, I had in mine Bourdieu's social space of distinction and I could have probably with more systematization created a similar professional space of agents. Indeed, I have several hints I could do that in a future study, as I learned so much more about the lines of distinction in their work. However, even my questions did not first address the hierarchies in the socio-professional world of agents, t they turned out to be essential throughout Chapters 7 and 8, as the agent who works in the lower vs. the higher end of the market is not adopting the same strategy. I could compensate for the skewed vision I had towards the middle-high end of the market by looking at the lower end, but the protocol and the decisions to study buyers and sellers rather than renters or investors also limited my capacity to infer on those markets.

While I had moments in which I try to deeply go into describing the "modeled" real estate agent, it was harder to systematize the variation across gender, social classes and professional status. Instead, when I tried to do this, I felt like I was getting away from the precise description of the case. Probably my focus was to some extent disturbed by understanding the activities of coordination that agents should undertake with the multiple audiences and players in the field. Not only do they work to develop a relationship with their

clients, but they also need to handle public representation and acquire potential customers, and have relations with a lot of market professionals.

5.3. A Few Directions to Address Limitations

Neither Interviews nor observations address effectively the quantification of data. In 2012, I participated in the GDA workshop organized by the Sociology department of Berkeley. The mathematician of Bourdieu, Brigitte Leroux, trained practically a young group of scholars on the method of multiple correspondence analysis (Leroux and Rouanet 2004, 2010), arguing that this approach does not force a model into data but adapts to it[28]. I believe I have the material to map out the field of my interviewees, but I would have to sample the population of agents differently. Proposing to create a representation of the social space of the market, similarly to what Bourdieu did with *Distinction* (1979), could be a potential rich contribution for a sociology of market work, economic sociology and to think about new forms of studying inequalities. Not all market workers are created equal. Thus, instead of focusing only on the work activities, I would be set to observe consistent variations – evidenced probably by classification struggles around the definition of work activities. It could also help to establish more carefully how the processes of inequality can systematically vary in the sub-segments of the market.

I am also aware that the organizational and regulatory elements describing the operation of the market are sometimes missing. I did not wish to discard them completely and I think Chapter 4 is trying to address some of this. Instead, while focusing on the work activities, I sometimes dismissed the importance of housing laws, for example in shaping how agents behave in front of clients. It is not my point here to claim they are not central in the organization of the market and only parts of the "background picture." I am thinking of better ways to integrate this in the development of my arguments, notably by relying on the work done through the extended case method and the workplace and market ethnographies.

[28] Indeed, several critics to regression analysis demonstrated that it tends to make variables compete and that it is therefore not truthful to social logics, and proposing new methods (Melamed, Breiger, and Schoon 2013; Rihoux and Ragin 2008; Shalev 2007). The classes taught by Ronald Breiger at the University of Arizona and the multiple methods workshops were also a huge push towards relational analysis and using new methodologies that seemed more fitted than regression analysis.

Finally, the "interaction effect" I set to study is somewhat hinted at but lacks deep systematization, in part because by focusing on developing the knowledge by looking in-depth in each case, I did not foresee as much how to address it across cases. The data I produced included mostly a range of middle to middle high-class individuals which I am not sure I am theoretically able to disentangle. Perhaps the case of study (Tucson) is most suited to address the lower spectrum. With a study on renters and investors, I would have probably been able to make reasonable hypotheses to test variation.

I now enter the empirical parts of the dissertation putting in evidence first the training and socialization of real estate agents, and their professionalization at the organizational level, structured by the trade association and the development of expert knowledge and ethical claims.

Part II. The Socialization of the Real Estate Agent: Socio-professional Dispositions and Professional Claims

Chapter 3 and 4 consist of the second part of the first empirical part of the dissertation: the acquisition of socio-professional dispositions and the ethos of the real estate agent. Chapter 3 considers the construction of a real estate ethos by the real estate companies and its relation to a capitalist spirit. I investigate workers' motivation to enter a real estate career and discuss the broad conditions in which real estate activity can become meaningful. I evidence the specific appeals of real estate, combined with the broader context of labor investment: independence and liberal freedom. I particularly draw on observations of training to assess how trainees are told to behave and how companies convert trainees into real estate agents. Chapter 4 investigates the creation of legitimacy in the market, and how professional and ethical work is used to build a space for real estate work, building the professional and market norms in which the agent acts. I look at how real estate agents claim expertise using market knowledge but also how asserting their authority consists of denigrating the economic aspects of their activity to highlight the symbolic dimensions.

In Chapter 3, I rely mostly on training materials and observations made at the school and during companies' training. I also use most sporadically the interviews I have conducted. I rely on the codes of positions and entry into real estate,[29] including guidance received by friends or family, mentorship and integration into real estate. I draw also on subjective perceptions of what are agents expecting of the profession, while in Chapter 4, I use data from the professional association, both at the local and national levels, with the framework of Spillman (2012) to address my case. I also explain the specific ethic and expert work done by real estate agents. I move from the dispositions acquired the *within world* between agents' level of interaction, with peers, colleagues and other newer recruits to the dispositions learned as *external* self-presentation modes co-constructed with a public audience and to be accepted as a legitimate occupation.

[29] Cf. the coding scheme providing in the appendix section.

CHAPTER 3: Building a Real Estate Ethos. The Conversion Process and the Construction of Socio-Professional Dispositions

On the first day of the training course at Real Prosperity, every recruit is handed a physical and a PDF version of their 600 pages long training book. Composed of 12 sessions, it is a mix of lectures through bullets points and recaps, scripts, an online tracking-system, and productivity-based exercises. The book explains to newer agents on how to begin and succeed in real estate. Launched by Real Prosperity in 2011, the training course is designed, according to the company's words, "to propel both newly licensed and experienced Prosperity real estate agents into immediate productivity." During that first morning training, the instructor tells us to open the book at Session 1 page 23 on the point "Don't Let Myths Slow You Down." He asks one of the newer recruits to read:

> Sadly, many good agents hold themselves back from ever realizing their full potential because they hold on to old, negative beliefs about success. This can cause self-doubt, which in turn limits one's success. We call these beliefs myths because they are rarely, if ever, true. The source of most of our fears is a myth. I find it extremely helpful to think of fears in terms of what generally creates them—myths—and what sets us free from them—truths. It's about learning to look past your fears to the truth of a situation, investigating the myths, and avoiding the misunderstandings that hold us back.

Companies invest in the language of fear and failure when training their newer recruits. The training material highlighted above is not a manifestation of a practical issue agents will learn to deal with, but a repeated subtle inculcation that takes various forms: it is a mantra that older agents repeat to newer recruits for them to assimilate but also an individual self-reflection on their own decision to start “being in real estate.”

The discourse around the "anxieties of making it" is present in various moments of the interactions at the companies or during informal conversations and interviews. As we have seen in Chapter 2, the organization and the structure of work imply an insecure in-

between position for many real estate agents who work under the umbrella of a company but whose income is entirely dependent on the type of transactions they can secure. Learning the craft not only requires handling transactions but also to find and recruit clients, beforehand. While entering a real estate company, newer recruits are often drawn by a professional ideology about, on the one hand, the insecurity and the difficulty of making it, and on the other hand, the promises to do so if they rationally follow the steps towards success.

The goal of real estate companies is to recruit and retain new members by motivating and engaging the workers to commit to their organization by achieving "success." Similarly to churches or to multi-level marketing organizations, they must also engage a particular spirit, made of aspirations towards economic security and "big dreams" which aims at bringing the "little guys" to feel excitement and commitment towards their activity. This requires a specific preparation of the self, which needs to be modeled to develop the supposed right personality for real estate activity. Companies thus aim to organize the belief in prosperity and success through rationalized and practical training to achieve it.

As described in Chapter 2, data on training comes from ethnographic fieldwork at Star Realty, a real estate school that offers training for passing the real estate salespersons exam, and the training programs offered to newer recruits by two real estate companies. The local company which I name Desert Realty, gets more than 30% of the local agents and the international company, that I call Real Prosperity, gets about 15% of them. However, this second one, which claims to be agent-centric, is fastly growing. For one year and a half, I followed many aspirant agents entering real estate. I took the licensing classes, went to take the state and national exam with them, followed them in the companies where they took their training and observed them in their interactions. I also interviewed them to get a better sense of their expectations as well as their fears.

What does make a worker engage and commit to real estate activity? To begin with, an explanation could be offered by the development of an entrepreneurial spirit in the context of neoliberalism (Foucault 2004; Fridman 2014). Considered as the antithesis of the bureaucratic order or the corporation, real estate activity thrives on a proposition of independent work, thus agents rationalize their entry into real estate by a desired sense of

control, including flexibility (time control), autonomy (no hierarchy), and financial incentives (money). Although useful to think about the transformation of capitalism, these discourses only rest as so at the subjective level when real estate agents talk about their commitment. In order to understand work, the sociologist must take into account the "twofold truth of work" which means to first break from the "subjective truth" ("the truth of the actor, absorbed in the game" Burawoy 2018, 73) to build the object of inquiry and then to reintegrate it into the analysis (Bourdieu 1996a). In this perspective, the topic of inquiry becomes the *investment in work*, which is common to both Bourdieu's prescription on how to study work and Burawoy's empirical research around games, *Manufacturing consent* (1979).

How specifically do the school and companies recruit and train new agents? What methods do they employ? What type of dispositions do they teach agents to acquire? Revisiting Burawoy's original contribution of workers' engagement into game playing (1979), along with contemporary work (Sherman 2007; Sallaz 2009; Occhiuto 2017), I investigate the construction of the real estate agent ethos through professional socialization by looking at the dispositions that should be acquired by the agent and the organizational system that generates both effort and consent. In this chapter, organized in four parts, I move away from the explanation in terms of individual entrepreneurial spirit to study the *organizational discourses and practices around the management of self*. This can be traced back to legitimizing shifts in managerial ideology (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005), giving rise to a newer "spirit of capitalism" defined as an "ideology that justifies people's commitment to capitalism" and "renders commitment attractive" (Chiapello and Fairclough 2002, 186).

I start by showing that real estate companies aim at disciplining the self of its employees (or real estate agents) to overcome their fears and to develop an economically rational ethos, through their training programs. Companies also organize the system of belief required for conversion by sharing success stories, defining a common corporate culture and invoking spirituality and community to their work environment. The management of self is also praised in the companies' training, which aims to translate "personal lifestyle goals" into economically oriented actions on the market. This new ethos reveals the required mental

dispositions needed to act practically in the field of real estate, i.e. to sell houses and to make the market reproduce itself.

1. Rationalizing and Controlling the Self

In the real estate industry, the worker's income – whether a broker or sales agent – is based entirely on his production. The relationship between worker and capital thus appears to be direct, i.e. the worker's income is based on the sales he makes. In reality, the employer (referred to as managing broker) is "paid" for the transaction. He/she then gives a percentage of the sales to the worker.

Becoming an agent also requires learning to manage the uncertainty of prospects, at least for the first two years. Uncertainty in the outlook (commission payment, canvassing, building a network of customers) reinforces the importance of the discourse around commitment and conversion. At Real Prosperity, about 80% of the recruits surveyed came from middle-class families or integrated white working classes, most of whom are shifting occupations - bank and insurance employees, waiters, small business owners and or primary and secondary teachers mainly - and must assume discursively their choice to "start in real estate." During interviews, several agents evoked the fear of reconversion. Conversion is not obvious. This "fear" must, therefore, be accompanied through professional socialization and repeated inculcation during the various processes of integration and training of real estate agents.

Both companies invest considerable resources in training. Training takes place throughout 2 to 3 full weeks, in which new real estate agents are going to learn about a mix of practical hand-on advice, along with detailed stories about real agents to clients' experiences and a presentation of the technical and marketing tools the companies offer. They learn how to behave properly to generate income and how to handle their transactions including how to fill in a contract, how to write and present offers, what to do about the title and what do to do when the house is in escrow.

The moments of training are particularly adapted points of observation to reveal the construction of “models,” that agents are taught to follow and adapt to in order to become successful. It is both based on imitation of more experienced agents and a repetition of a set of norms. Every agent has different social capacities to "succeed", made of his capitals (economic, social, cultural) but also illustrated in his practical dispositions.

These "network-centric" organizations are presented as a departure from the corporate world, less vertical and more horizontal, a promise of work control of one's life and autonomy. They aim to instill in recruits not only a set of practical competences but a vision of the world with a working ethos that is aligned with a transformation of self to achieve "success" through independence and autonomy. This requires inculcating discipline but also relying on a strong belief system that is created and recreated during training sessions, informal conversations and a series of interactions in which newer recruits interact with experienced agents or trainers.

1.1. Gaining Control over their Work and their Professional Trajectories

In offering rationales for becoming a real estate agent, respondents often draw a contrast with aversive aspects of previous occupations. About 80% of my interviewees demonstrated ruptures within their occupational trajectories where they perceived a lack of control over their work. The newer recruits I interviewed, as well as the most established ones, highlighted their desire to break from the hierarchical model of the corporation. The reasons for entering the real estate world are explained by a form of "dissatisfaction" with the “cold,” "competitive" and "hierarchical" way in which labor relations are in big corporations. This is the case of James, who used to work for an investment bank in New York. He highlighted how “greed” takes over, it is a cold environment, fast-pasted, cut-throat and there is neither control nor ownership of anything: “it is not your business, not your clients.” He claims real estate is more human, it is driven by personal relationships. The agent has to be pro-active to recruit clients: “you can’t just rely on things coming to you, you have to go out and make it happen, things happen in this office because you're being proactive, you're not just sitting around hoping that the phone rings”.

The association between the corporation, the "bureaucracy," and the "politics" is a theme that emerges in about 30% of the discussions and interviews I had with real estate agents. For example, Jocelyn refers to what she calls "politics" in corporate careers, i.e. the system of organization rewards, placements, and hierarchies within the corporation: “every day you had to be there and I did not really like the politics, you know they were a lot of… Politics, you know, positioning, bureaucracies, it just did not make me happy and I did not want to engage.”

Despite previous professional trajectories - Carrie holds a Bachelor of Librarianship and spent part of her career at the Congress Library in Washington; Nancy was a marketing assistant for a large firm in a big city in the East Coast; Brian was a "loan agent" for a large local bank; Amanda worked as a manager of a beauty salon; Rebecca was a single mother with two children and a secretary; Rudy was employed at a bank– about 2/3 of the agents I followed in training or during transactions attached to their previous work a form of constraint. These imposed constraints are of three kinds: hierarchy, limited income and time.

This rejection of the conventional standards of the corporation or the hierarchical form of exercising work is, on the one hand, listed as one of the reasons for the choice of becoming a real estate agent. On the other hand, it is also remembered during their working life as a reason to justify and reassure oneself of this decision that weighs heavily on family and personal life.

If this rejection explains a part of the workers' engagement to real estate work, it does not explain the whole process through which workers attain a vision of the attractiveness of agent work. To develop a fuller understanding, we turn to observations of training and interactions between agents. As the onset of a personal project, going to the school of real estate agents, passing the license exam, and getting started in the business allows agents to assert a chosen project rather than imposed wage work, and a form of control over their professional life and more generally their moral capacities of *really making it*, i.e. achieve by owning rather than working.

The possibility of control also implies the envisioned financial possibilities in real estate, which are seen as "not limited": many agents employ the metaphor of "growing (your)

business" contrasting it with the high limitations of corporate careers. Rudy – a 27-year-old agent, just about over 1 year into business, with Mexican parents of working-class background, his dad was a carpenter in Mexico and died when he was 5, and his mom worked cleaning houses – wants to run his own business and start working for himself while given the opportunity to make "uncapped" money compared to corporation work. The limited income is mostly highlighted by about 50% of the male agents; women are rarely evoking their reason of involvement as "making more money."

Instead, women mention control of their schedules. About 1/3 of the agents rationalize their choice by reflecting on how a schedule imposed as a Monday to Friday 9 to 5 job did not fit in what they had hoped for in their work lives and career trajectories, especially concerning the sensation that they could control their own lives. The flexibility - especially for women who say they can look after their families and have staggered schedules - is presented as an attractive of the profession. Carrie describes how her work as a librarian and the constraints of the working hours weighted on her: “I have had a previous job at a library in Washington D.C. at the library of Congress and I loved the work but I hated the schedule, I don’t like to be inside all day. I worked at Tucson Public, now it’s called Tucson Pima, but once again, after 3 years, I could not stand the schedule.” Rebecca has been raising two kids alone. She recalls how she benefited from the flexibility allowed by the agent job to take care of her children: "I had kids, I needed a flexible schedule, you know I had to be able to pick them up from school, it was a huge consideration because I was a single parent."

Direct selling organizations foster similar motivation for women to engage, as they can draw on a better sense of self by concealing their professional and familial identity, being their boss and manage their time (Biggart 1989a). Interactive service jobs can also generate consent by allowing a certain form of control during interactions (Hochschild 1979; Leidner 1991).[30]

[30] In Chapter 6, I demonstrate most particularly the work done by women and how they might both benefit and encounter challenges while working as a Realtor®.

Agents frequently invoke the sense of "being one's own boss." Carrie, 2 years into the business, for example, recalls the reasons for entering real estate: "I did this job to have the flexibility and to be my own boss and to have no accountability for anybody but myself. So yeah, I think there's a fine line between being super busy and having a good life." While observing agents during listing presentations, I noticed that out of 12 agents, 3 of the newer agents used the rhetoric of "owning a business." For example, Alex, 28, who has been in the business for less than 6 months at the time we met, was a business accountant in a small firm, when he decided to "get into real estate": "I always wanted to run my own business and work for myself and have that creative play into my business." For him, real estate can be a way to get this higher sense of self through what it states as positive rewards for being an entrepreneur:

> I'm not saying I don't like showing up and doing work, but I want to do it my way. What I'm trying to say is with that initial investment of a thousand bucks, you could potentially make, in a matter of years, the same money that a frickin' CEO makes. In like, a fraction of the time. I love the idea of opportunity. Of freedom. Of flexibility. Of control. I think most entrepreneurs look at things that way, too. They look at how I can control more of my life. How can I control more of my health? They want to be in control of their relationships, their finances, their time, their freedom. That's why most entrepreneurs start a business. It's a huge risk, but they're like 'I have ownership of my life.' That's ultimately why so many people are unhappy with their jobs. They just don't have ownership. It's not theirs. What I just did today. That's me. That's Alex. No one else is doing that. I want to have at least one or two things that separate me from all the other realtors here.

Similarly to what Sherman (2007) highlights about the strategic game played by luxury hotel workers to assert their pride and sense of self, real estate agents take pride in feeling independent and making the move of starting their own business. During fieldwork, I heard the constant refrain: "We are all independent contractors running our own businesses." Carrie, for example, is proud thinking that it is "her" money and that this is not part of the money generated by the real estate company directly. Kim also tells how "getting into real estate" was a personal and financial investment project, like setting up on her own account. It gives her a form of worth and a rationalized work strategy, including setting goals and make plans in all dimensions of her life. Real estate agents, like Occhiuto's taxi drivers (2017), say they find a sense of control over their schedule, specifically in investing in an

atypical form of work arrangement. Even though, this sense of control requires actions to overcome their fears.

1.2. Transforming the « Weak Self »: Overcoming One's Fears

In *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2004), Michel Foucault argues that the neo-liberal organization of society reflects the expansion of the mechanism of the market in all spheres of social life, which in turn requires market actors, individuals who are shaped into "homo economici who calculate, compete, and invest in themselves" (Fridman 2014, 92). Neoliberal governmentality is both the government of oneself and the government of others, the transformation of subjects into responsible entrepreneurs, activating dispositions. In the real estate world, agents need to control the weak self by overcoming their self-doubts and their fears while they are also trained to become organized and efficient. Finally, to discipline the self, one must personally commit to making sure one delivers.

Younger recruits express their fears of changing or switching their occupation. Alex, who I have followed for several months in various transactions, was often trying to motivate himself. The first time I went with him, he was very worried I would judge him, worried he would not act "properly" in front of clients while smiling and "keeping a good face." He was often very anxious, ordering coping amounts of food after listing presentations and asking me: "how did I do"?

The risk of "blowing it" though is almost as scary as not "making it". Ross, in business for 20+ years, ranks each year with the highest GCI of the Tucson agents. He talks about the pressure to not "blow" the chances you have in real estate, a pressure that is consistent with the statements of over 60% of my interviewees: "when you quit a job where you have a paycheck every two weeks to go into a job where you're not guaranteed anything, you don't want to blow it."

These anxieties are the daily expressions of learning to "build up" within real estate, i.e. having their clients, developping their reputation, acquiring a form of respect and starting "making it." One of the constant fears is not having enough money saved up to "hold on"

enough until the first transactions, and to risk having to face the possible decision of quitting. Several times, he expressed his anxiety towards starting:

> It's tough. That first year was scary. You go from making a paycheck to not making a paycheck. The only time you really get a paycheck is when you sell a house. These people right here? I probably won't get paid on them—let's say they buy this house. I won't get paid on them for almost two months. You know? I did all the work but I didn't get paid for it right away. So that's tough.

The absence of the paycheck occupies most of the discussions I had with agents, as they talk about all the time they invest to learn how to do the job, to prepare listing presentations, to reply to phone calls, emails, to visit houses without ever getting the certainty that the transaction will go through and that they will indeed receive payment.

The decision of leaving a steady job with a paycheck to a rocky start without even be sure that they are going to be able to make it is what I have heard a lot in the discourses of the newer recruits. When I met Amanda, 36 years old, she had started real estate 7 months ago. She had one transaction in escrow and was working with two buyers. She was the manager of an upscale hairdressing salon when she decided to start real estate school:

> I remember sitting in class at Star Realty, and say 'what am I doing, I'm leaving this whole salary, I have this whole...I can't believe I'm gonna leave some company that I've worked for a long time, and that has nurtured me and taken care of me, for something new, and the opposite of what I've done, in a financial industry'…and our instructor was like, if you're not nervous...if you're not afraid of something, it's not worth it, and I was just (yelling) 'are you talking to me, because you must have been reading my mind, because I'm seating here like what the hell am I doing,' and when he said that I said, okay, I'm going down the right path.

While Amanda is afraid of the lack of security she is going to experience at the beginning, the instructor is playing indeed a very important role of reassurance. During my training at Star Realty, the class size was small and agents socialize, sit close by, talk, as well as, share lunch with the instructors. These moments of informal conversation often give rise to the instructors playing the card of the "fears" and trying to give to the agent the ethos of a challenged self. I heard at least three instructors actively playing the card of the "fear". One of them asking us to sit down and think deeply: "is real estate for you?", and if we think we had the type of personality required, and two others telling us it was normal to be scared.

If we were not willing to act upon those fears, then we didn't need to waste our money and sit through the class.

Both Desert Realty and Real Prosperity surf on agents' anxiety by playing on two registers: on the one hand, they acknowledge the anxieties faced by agents; on the other, they motivate them by trying to get another perspective on their fears and to handle them better, to overcome them. Companies acknowledge the internal struggles faced by agents by reassuring them about their decision. If trainers often acknowledge that everyone has fears, they praise one's greatness by the ability to go beyond their fears. The "conversion" into real estate is associated with the form of superior choice. Becoming independent, an entrepreneur, for what we were told, required faith and a positive mindset, which not only made us happier but also superior beings.

At Desert Realty, Greg, 8 years into real estate, is giving the Friday morning class on "open houses". Rob, manager, and head of the training program at Desert Realty has told us before that Greg is "killing open houses" and jokes on how since his beginning he was always holding houses open for all the senior agents in the company:

> The lecture material is fast-paced, with lots of elements written on the billboard. Greg makes students impressed, they are very concentrated and you can feel the energy from his lecture. Steve, seated next to me, is even whispering to me: “Whaou, what a guy, what a class! He's such a good speaker!" At the end of his lecture, students are eager to ask questions. Matthew, a 34-year-old agent seated in the third row asks: "What are the most common mistakes people make when starting in the business?" Greg answers straightforwardly: "I would say fear. I'm not going to do what makes me scared, don't come to grip with their relationship with fear, they don't overcome that mentally, they do the nuts and bold, but don't focus on their best bet, how do I make this week work? Rewards are for people that can do stuff or make it happen. You have to be mentally strong." He goes on: "you know everybody is afraid, the difference is what is your reaction towards fear, you can either not act upon it, or just make it your motor, and deal with it. (field note)

The newer recruits present in the room are impressed by this very enthusiastic and friendly figure whose motto is: “If you can get over your fears, you can make it.” It indeed provides an argument of fairness that everyone can be compensated proportionally to the efforts made, appearing in many of my interviewees’ discourse, in contradiction with the corporate or employees’ mindset.

When talking about prospecting, the textbook of Real Prosperity also draws on the fear of a "no;" the fear of rejection and how to get another perspective on it. What is at stake is engagement through motivating recruits. Agents should not be discouraged in seeking business. They should "work at it" rather than think about stopping it all at once:

> A Note on "No". Many agents resist prospecting because they fear the word "no." Be prepared to hear it. Even mega agents hear "no." The best way to cope with this fear is to change your perspective. "No" is rarely, if ever, personal. It usually means "not now," "not without additional information," or "not this one," but it almost never means "not you." Think of it this way: Every "no" just brings you closer to a "yes." When you hear "no," think of it as "know" and realize that the reason someone has said it is that they need to know more. Keep gently probing to find out what they need to know more about. And, in the end, if their "no" means "no" and that's it, then thank them pleasantly and positively move on.

The attitude towards the "no" reflects overall the needed ethos of the agent. The training serves the companies, not only for the acquisition of practical knowledge by the agents on real estate transactions but also as an incentive to transform the worker's attitude towards oneself, overcoming one's fear and adopting this positive mindset. The acquisition of this ethos is translated into a specific attitude towards the activity of real estate, which means to be constantly relying on prospecting.

After the training at the companies, I interviewed 15 agents. With about half of them, I had ongoing relationships, involving several informal conversations. When I asked them about the difficulty of their new occupation, about two-thirds insisted on the necessity of getting over their own fears. I met Matthew again about 5 months after the training, he had decided to team up with another experienced agent to learn from her. Like Matthew, when I asked him about the experiences of his few first months in real estate, he explained that it was only him – himself – that could hold him back. He had to get away from his "comfort zone":

> My own demons. Fear. There's always the fear of rejection. There's always the fear of 'If I try to call them, why am I not reaching them? Why do I get their voicemail? Do they have me on the block? Do they block my call because I'm that awful realtor calling them back?' But you know what? I'm going to keep at it and I don't—it's really funny, too, because when I'm outdoor hanging, the door hanging is almost an exercise of getting rid of my demons because there's always that fear of rejection and blablabla…and that's why I do it. I know when I'm out there I'm outside of my

> comfort zone. That's the only way things happen. When you get outside of your comfort zone.

The turn of the positive psychology and the recovery movement, which exhorts individuals to take care of one's self and to get over their addictions, whether drugs, alcohol or overeating, is indeed very present in the discourses of self-help adopted by real estate agents. Individuals are encouraged to seek transformations, through getting away from their fears and demons. In a blend with libertarianism, which posits external slavery, as collectivity has made individuals lose their sense of actions by becoming weak, the recovery movement has encouraged individuals to gain autonomy, and to free themselves from their internal slavery. In this discourse, one must overcome one own weakness to become strong.

Real estate agents, because they are socialized to believe it all rests on them (their selves), are constantly trained to be better people, not just being the typical salesman, but to be willing to take up a challenge. This requires a specific personality that trainers and successful agents are trying to communicate to the newcomers: "You don't have to sit and wait, otherwise nothing is going to come to you. You have to be pro-active."

This uncertainty is associated with a form of positive praise for why people should start a real estate career. For about 70% of my interviewees, the belief system takes them as far as thinking about making this choice as a reflection of their great personality, as it requires a leap of faith to get away from the stability of a paycheck (or what is associated with it in terms of benefits) earned in the corporate world. What becomes important is which is also to get away from the most unpaid service jobs or occupations, presented as the least financially rewarding occupations well-off such as primary and middle school teachers.

Vocabulary around faith came out in more than 80% of my interviews and during many accounts of the formal discussions. Workers voice their concerns along with a strong belief system required to get into real estate. A 40-year-old agent, Bruce, director of a public school before passing his real estate license, started 6 months before our interview. I interviewed him after the 3 weeks training undertaken at Desert Realty. While stressing his dislikes for his previous occupation, he expressed nervousness about “starting his business” but also the “leap of faith:” “You know, it’s really weird. I thought I would lose a lot of

sleep at night because this is a leap of faith, but I sleep a lot better. I think my quality of life is a lot better." The belief, that he could become "independent," reassured him about his decision and his prospects in real estate.

Later in the conversation though, he also reveals (without being conscious about it) that the process of "conversion" is not as individual as one may want to show. He brings up the relationships he had in real estate before his decision, especially one of his friends, who has been a broker of another local real estate company for more than 10 years. This friendship, along with other relationships coming from his previous occupation, strongly played a part in shaping Bruce's confidence and belief. Schools and companies and their training can act similarly for newer recruits who need to hold on to strong belief about their capacity to succeed.

Experienced agents I interview (about 20) often take pride or praise others for being pro-active, entrepreneurial and fearless. Edward, who has retired for the corporate world, has started in the business 8 years ago. He has teamed up with his wife for 2 years now. Not only does he praise her for being an exceptional real estate agent, but also for having the right type of personality, being fearless, self-reliant and friendly.

Lenny, 69, retired from the air force and Southwest Airlines, stresses the excitement of watching the business grow, along with his long-term objectives. In his discourse, the commitment to the business is present, and the feeling that he is achieving a "form of success" within what he has decided to do:

> I think my goals are…I've kind of broken my mind in 20 years' periods, 20 years as I went to college, 20 years in the air force, 20 years in Southwest Airlines, hopefully, I can do 20 years at this before I get too old, my goals are to be successful in this business to allow me to have freedom for the rest of my life. I'll seat down with Janet, my partner, and our team member and we'll set our goal for the next year, we'll say I want to hold open houses which allows you to gain contacts, which allows you then to grow your business by increasing your contacts, so by meeting people, you grow your business.

Through this commitment to the business, Lenny reveals the metaphor of "growth" in practical actions, designed to make his commitment come true. The vocabulary used by the agents I followed is charged by figures of growth, whether they talk about developing,

finding new clients or growing their business." Along with the vocabulary of growth, agents often refer to experiences of "transformation" or emotional commitment. Lester (1974) connects the "leap of faith" to a conversion experience, what she describes as a "transformation of their worldview and a concomitant sense of excitement, anticipation, and commitment."

It might explain why I did not see as many people quit. I saw some changing status, going from lonely agents to teams, especially in Real Prosperity, or even changing companies. But the pressures and the chances of making it are not equal among all real agents. Those whose decision appears the most "secure" are the ones who have the significant financial capital to be given the time to see if real estate would work for them. Those who don't have the same opportunity or need to make a living out of it describe how their decisions were associated with a form of "risk" of giving up a specific position where they had made a stable earning and a paycheck. Those who did not have comparable corporate work, typically younger, out of college or without any other opportunities, claimed they were less aware of the challenges of starting a business, ending up downplaying their fears and emphasizing the rewards they were expecting.

Along with the relational aspects of the personality, companies train agents to control themselves. The self is not necessarily strong from nature, yet it should be trained and discipline to be so. Agents need to learn how to be empowered by managing their own time and their finances. As agents in both companies repeat often during classes, "you need to hold yourself accountable." Companies thus design programs to educate agents to hold themselves accountable.

1.3. Educating the Self: Financially Responsible, Organized, and Efficient

In companies' training, the agents receive several injunctions. One of the most common is to be organized, efficient and responsible. During their integration and training at both companies, real estate trainers insist that agents are now in charge of their own business and need to set up both their goals and their financial capabilities. The training takes the form of classes called "accountability", "independent contractor" or "goal settings", in-between "financial empowerment" and "paternalist education."

Tony, a chief financial officer at Desert Realty, is "responsible for the company's financial management activities, operations, facilities management, and information technology which comprises telecommunications services, network infrastructure, and data center management" according to its own website. He has long expertise in finances, notably in Ventana Medical Systems and B/E Aerospace. He is part of several associations, both charity and growth organizations, and participated in the 96th Arizona Town Hall "Building Arizona's Future: Jobs Innovation and Competitiveness." He is very active in the Tucson community teaching several classes on financial literacy on productivity and business tools at the University of Arizona, Tucson Unified District, and Tucson Urban League. On the first Thursday of my training (May 14th of 2015) at 1 pm, he is teaching the class: "independent contractor: what do I do?"

> When you are an independent contractor, you are responsible for everything, from your taxes to your benefits, including managing your finances. After federal, state and local taxes, you get only one-third of what you earned. You need to fill out self-employed taxes with the IRS, plus the 1040 C and ES, plus Medicare." My advice is 'find a good tax accountant who does not have real estate agents as clients' as this will lead you to clients and generate business opportunities, you pick some business along the way, it's a win-win.

After developing on the problem of the timing of the commission check and the fact that if the deal does not close, then the agent does not receive any income, Tony insists on the necessity of having some goals and basic financial education:

> First, getting out of debt is a good idea. Second, you will need financing planning, with a financial planner or a book to educate yourself to achieve goals with your existing resources. For example, let's say you want to buy a new car, you need to calculate your asset, what you own, compared to your liabilities, what you owe, which will give you your net worth, so you need to factor in your insurance, your property taxes, your maintenance, your gasoline and then thinking how much you can spend on that care. Well, a Mercedes is 60 000, a Honda 20 000, and maybe you can buy a slightly used care, less than 10 000 miles with a full warranty because new cars lose a lot of their value when they go out of the garage. You need a plan, and then to set your goals. Let's say your short-term goals could be to pay off your debts off in 12 months, to build 3 months' equity, or to save $10, 000. Instead, your long-term goals could be to purchase a home, educate your children, or build wealth.

He then draws on the board the following:

Budget	Expenses
Commission income Could be variable (market forces) or base income (reasonably guaranteed)	Debts Contracted obligations Savings (for long term goals)

“You have to differentiate needs and wants”, needs are for “survival such as food, shelters, clothing”, he explains, whereas wants are “discretionary items that are optional.” He brings up US bureau of statistics:

> They provide the following model budget where housing should be 24% of your budget, utilities 8%, food 14%, clothing 4%, transportation 14% and personal/debt 12%/. "You have to make investments to get wherever balance you want that fits your budget and your expenses. The advice I'm giving you is: be conscious about making a decision and thinking smart: how can you get what you want at a lower cost, including lifestyle, retirement and big-ticket items, you can go to Cosco, or maybe the coach you want to buy is too expensive.

For Tony, the availability of cash should always be the priority. It is essential to avoid unexpected liabilities on your house or your medical bills for example. He recommends everybody to buy a good finance book (such as Dave Ramsey or Suze Orman) and to also hire an accountant, an attorney, and a financial advisor. The training is less complete in Real Prosperity but also covers managing and setting up goals, which I discuss in part 4 of this chapter.

The companies are also socializing the newer agents to money management (Jacob, Hudson, and Bush 2000) for them to acquire financial decision-making skills: they are encouraged to draw a financial life plan, save for retirement and organize themselves to careful budgeting from month to month. The agents in this sense bear the burden of organizing their work activity and finances. These programs not only apply for agents but are also available for first-time homebuyers. The education and discipline of the "self" are also designed to improve the engagement of the self into work, and what I call the organization of belief.

2. Organizing the Belief in the Self

The concomitant development of positive psychology at the end of the 1990's reflected by the numerous publications by psychologists and economists (Frey and Stutzer 2010; Kahneman et al. 1999; Seligman et al. 2002) backing up scientifically positive mindset, good healthy habits and relationships goes hand in hand with new managerial discourses around the worker. The vivacity of the business literature around job and company satisfaction is highlighted in outlets such as the Harvard Business Review, which articles – "how to be a company that employees love," "treat employees like business owners" or "how to make employees feel like they own their work", "building a winning culture" to cite a few titles – all underline the management of workers through the management of their happiness and feelings suggesting that "psychological ownership" can "trigger a mindset of possession" which makes workers healthier, happier, more motivated and focused (Gino 2015).

But these economical injunctions are also rooted into the meeting of Pentecostalism and the American gospel of pragmatism, individualism and upward mobility through the gospel of prosperity, a theology preaching material well-being and wealth as the will of God (Bowler 2013; Haynes 2013; Hladky 2012; Neubert et al. 2014; Schieman and Jung 2012). More prevalent in the States of the Sun Belt (Coleman 2000; Van Biema and Chu 2006), the partisans think that their physical, psychic and economic conditions (health, happiness, success, wealth), often referred as "blessings", are the results of the strength of their belief and their hard work rather than divine intervention. In the manner of Benjamin Franklin in The Protestant Ethic, the gospel of wealth and success professed by Andrew Carnegie or Russell Conwell combines poverty with sin ensuring that everyone can become rich by working hard (Bowler 2013).

The industry of happiness as Illouz (2007) calls it, may take various forms as well as manifests in workers' professional and personal lives through different aspects. If sociologists have investigated the managerial injunctions towards service workers to carefully manage their emotional display (Hochschild 1983), not much is known about the values and the ethics behind those transformations. Doing real estate, i.e. succeeding or being able to make a consistent income from it, can be associated with a form of conversion,

which requires to invest symbolically in a "new self," driven by the idea of business and personal growth. Paying closer attention to the language used in these stories, we can find theological thinking and sacred terminology: "be better people," "going down the right path," "being committed," which represents the switch from a regular job to a form of religious calling or a mission. Goals are important in trying not to "blow up" the chances: the overall act of committing to the business is maintained through specific acts designed to "make it grow" or to "feed into it."

The corporate discourses and practices are based on the need to "convert" recruits who are often fragile when they enter the profession. In contrast to a religious conversion that could appear to be "miraculous and immediate," professional conversion requires "pedagogical work", which at the same time includes socialization to the "way of thinking" and "the type of attitude" demanded by the institution. The system of representations underlying transformation is based both on this "pedagogical work" and on "the social conditions that made this inculcation work possible and effective." In its transition from a simple worker to a real estate agent, the "conversion process" is a series of subjective transformations that accompany and condition, in the illusion of freedom, the transformation of the objective social status of recruits" (Suaud 1982, 10–11).

This individualization of success in real estate work is found in the mobilization of commitment discourses around the "desire for success" and "self-belief" on the part of managers and new converts. This process requires "discontinuous and extra-ordinary actions of the prophet" but which must be continually prolonged in "a continuous inculcating action" (Darmon 2011, 47). What is produced in the staging of this belief is an "invisibilisation" of existing constraints (competitiveness between agents, the functioning of the real estate market). In part 3, I argue that the new ethos inculcated to the real estate agent is sustained by a system of belief in the self, armed in the companies by corporate culture and rhetoric resting on organizational spirituality and building on the prosperity gospel.

2.1. Staging the Belief in Growth: Ceremonies and Stories of Personal Achievements

As I was reading through my field notes and listening to the recordings of the interviews, I realized agents' discourses on commitment and emotional attachment to real estate were not isolated. In many of the settings I have observed, the agents had to rationalize their choices to enter real estate, and they were more often talking about it as a "real transformative experience" where they had to be personally involved. Like Alex that I mentioned earlier, many of the agents talk about a "revelatory moment" in which they decided to transform their lives. Even if such a moment exists, the momentum needs to be maintained on the one hand by a strong belief and on the other hand, by the continuing actions of a series of professional trainers, managers and experienced colleagues who shape and reinforce the commitment. By using the language of commitment, agents particularly try to value their entry into the real estate business. Not only they changed their working activity, but they also had to be personally involved and emotionally committed to becoming realtors®.

The language of commitment is present in most of my interactions with agents, whether towards themselves and the activity they started or towards their clients. Many of my interviewees express their commitment to a transaction and the business, not only as a "professional activity" but towards a "strong personal commitment." Here are the words used by Carrie, who mentions later in the interview the emotional labor she put into the business:

> I really care and I want it to work! I'm kind of one of those people, like, I want to keep things together. I don't like it, I just like…if we're committed I want to make it work. I don't want to jump ship. Let's try to keep it together. Let's try to come to a compromise' kind of thing.

The ideological discourse around individual possibilities in Multi-Level Marketing companies (MLM) or Direct Selling Organizations (DSO) are created and maintained through frequent gatherings, weekly meetings, rallies, luncheons, and several on-going pieces of training. In these meetings, they are mutually self-reinforcing each other, praising their progress and their way of life (Juth-Gavasso 1985, 177–78). These ceremonies are often the place of self-praise and reinforcement, where participants can sing songs, can

scream a short simple motivational phrase or share their success stories. The apparent unity of the meeting also erases the idea of a rat race or an individualistic competition, as profits are not limited. The meetings can often resemble religious settings (Lester, 1974, p. 26). To further legitimate their model, evacuating any structural discourses on why people are not necessarily making it, they tell the stories of ordinary individuals who became incredibly wealthy. They go against the corporation model in which the amount of capital and educational credentials are necessary to get in. To succeed, individuals would only rely on their belief, their effort, and their commitment.

Echoing the theology of prosperity, the training manual for new agents highlight "abundance" in the professional achievement goals of agents. In speeches, pamphlets and training programs, the company's experienced managers and agents aim to instill in new recruits the precepts of individual development and theology of prosperity - "be better people", "grow your business," "be engaged", "stand out from your fears" - to solidify their commitment to work.

The trainers evacuate any structural discourse by seeking individual reasons for the lack of success. They tell stories of ordinary people who have become incredibly wealthy or stories of people struck by an illness or natural disaster that succeeds. Based on the almost permanent use of the blessing (Bowler 2013), these stories highlight the unshakeable faith in God, the transformation of negative emotions into positive emotions or the incredible generosity of the members and the support they receive by the members of the company. These testimonies of agents all show falls followed by redemption, failures followed by success, a promise of rebirth, suitable for conversion into Protestantism.

This prosperity theology grew in the 1990s. It relies on the promises of a "richer life" whatever the participant past may have been. These ideologies vary in the emphasis on community versus self-help. This ideology is sustained by the underlying idea that there exist losers and winners in today's economic game, and some of these losers have been abused by corporate work; they lose their capacity to create, to have initiatives, imaginations, and dreams. What the ideology thrives on is a discourse of potential lives lying ahead of you: agents can, if they work hard, desire it, apply our method for success, get to be in the category of people who made it, in an image of the self-made people, what Conn

(1982, 35) calls the "American way, the tradition of hungry, hard-working men and women breaking out of the life of the have-nots, to take their places among the haves."

2.2. Real Prosperity, a Space for Organizational Spirituality?

In the two companies, the drive towards financial success and personal achievement is strongly put forward but Real Prosperity offers a space for what is called "organizational spirituality" that Desert Realty does not provide. As I came to know more of my interviewees, I discovered that more than 80% were Christian, and about 40% revealed their church affiliations were associated with Pentecostal movements. I did not realize the connections between prosperity theology and real estate until I put together the position and trajectory of the CEO of Real Prosperity and the discourses of some of my interviewees about wealth and financial security.

Real Prosperity is at the head of a large franchise network - it grew from 70 associate agents in 1986 to the largest franchise in the United States in 2013 with more than 180,000 associates spread over 975 sites, after a strong international expansion. Real Prosperity claims to have "shared $ 98 million in profit and sharing growth." To recruit and retain its agents, Real Prosperity mobilizes a symbolic universe of beliefs and religious practices. It uses at least strategically the encounter between spirituality, personal development and economic profit in what might be called an "organizational spirituality".

In the display of the "big Real family" of Real Prosperity, the collective meetings function not only based on a pooling of the opportunities of transactions but also around testimonies. Each person is invited to share a problem of health or family, a work on oneself in progress. The "packaged life" comes from a sacrifice of the relative mediocrity of one's life, and to develop the apparatus to be working as one's boss, becoming a master of one's life. In 2004, the CEO of Real Prosperity co-authored "The Millionaire Real Estate Agent," which became a national best-seller. The book states: "it's not about the money, it's about being the best you can be."

Raised in a Protestant family in Texas, attending a Baptist church, Real Prosperity CEO earned a BA from Baylor Baptist University. He claims to have founded his company on "Christian values" around a "belief system" that operates for the "success of all". The

motto of the company is indeed formally written in brochures and marketed on the website as "God, family, then business." When I asked him about the relation between his faith, religion, and business, he answered the following: "I am a Christian and Real Prosperity was founded on Christian principles. It's as simple as that. As to God, family, business, that means that we will never ask anyone to violate the order of these priorities"

Evangelical Christians believe in the importance of doing everything they can to fulfill their mission on Earth. Even if workers (which often call themselves members) are conscious that companies cannot self-defined as Christian, about 60% of the agents interviewed see the values of Real Prosperity as the bedrock of a Christian commitment. Pat, a coach and real estate agent for the last 3 years, believes he has a mission to fulfill:

> In reality, theologically, there is no such thing as a Christian company as a company can't commit its life to Christ. With that being said, there can be Christian within a company but a company can adopt Christians' values like (*the CEO*) said. I believe every Christian is called to be a missionary, some are called overseas. Our mission field happens to be called Real Prosperity. I believe we have a leg up based on our values to have Gospel conversations.

The discourse on values is also mixed with a moral stand on happiness and greatness, in which the condition of success also lies in the management of the self. For example, the slogan God, family, business is evoked as the cornerstone of its values. "Real Prosperity never wants us to do business to the point of forgetting our values, our families and our God. If we are not happy and healthy, then we cannot and we will not do our best" tells Sarah, 29, 2 years into real estate, in an informal conversation on the values of the company. Another catch slogan of the company that comes up during training programs is the "Be < Do < Have". During an informal conversation during lunch break, Joe, 7 years in the company, finds in Real Prosperity the overall values that he feels most aligned with:

> I felt like I really agreed with the values of the company. I met great people with whom I pray, who pray for me on a regular basis. Real Prosperity's order of priorities "God, family, business" is in perfect accord with the way I lead my life. In training programs, we are told the following order: to be <make <have (BE <DO <HAVE). If we are good people, the best we can, then we do, we will have. As compared to wanting to have in order to become something.

Newer recruits also deliver this discourse. They emphasize the spiritual aspect of their engagement in Real Prosperity. Here Rich, a white agent of 54, recalls why he "joined":

> One of the reasons that I personally joined was because I intended to align myself with a company that shared the same core values that I do. This has caused great connection to other professionals all over the country that I have become personal friends with. I've met great people who I pray for and they pray for me on a regular basis. The "God, Family, Business" belief has certainly impacted how I run my business and lead my family.

The vocabulary of "joining" the company also reveals the personal decision of choosing the company among a pool of others, as one would affiliate with an organization. These organizations socialize their "members" to avoid the term "employee" and use the language of free vertical affiliation such as "membership" or "sponsorship."

As evoked by Joe and Sarah, the values of the company serve also as a community of support during difficult times. About 20% of the real estate agents I talked to in Real Prosperity brought up the praying moments as important. In an email thread of conversion with Tom, one of the senior managers, he told me the following:

> Regarding God's PRESENCE at office. Yes, god is invited/allowed at the office. Agents openly discuss God working in their lives and families. We have prayed over agents, families and life situations at the office in a team. Recently an evening Bible Study has started, open to all agents. I'm not sure who led this, and clearly, not all agents are Christ Followers, but the environment is positive and open and you don't have to hide your belief (like in a strict office cubical environment) and are encouraged to express your views.

Although not all agents are Christian, Real Prosperity might in the view of believers like Tom, provide a friendly environment towards religious practice. Donna's brother, a 57-year-old agent that has recently entered the real estate through the introduction of his sister, evokes the prayers he made for a change in his career, and he enormous help he received from the other agents at the office:

> At a recent committee meeting, my wife was with me (long story: major auto accident in March, both my wife and I still receiving treatment and recovering) due to doctor's appointments. Before we started my fellow agents surrounded my wife Jeanne, laid hands on her and prayed (powerfully) before we started talking business.

Participants have declared often that in tough times, they could count on other agents' support. Real Prosperity even created an emergency fund to help those in need, and the charity sister organization they have also legitimate their sense of giving and caring for the community they are in. One woman explains how going through the loss of their husband, several agents helped her out, to sort her life out, and provide comfort and friendship to hold on to.

The real estate industry thus presents similarity with the prosperity gospel. Real estate companies can serve as a prolongation of the congregational ritualized church community, providing a space for the gospel and a simple packaged life plan with an economic network of support. It is presented as a transparent company and family operating between associates more than a company with employees, redistributing all of its profits to its real estate agents. It focuses on the central figure of the real estate agent, integrated into a system of relations presented as non-hierarchical and non-competitive, where "everyone works to the success of each."

2.3. From a Family to a Corporate Culture

The family model also works as a cohesive and redistributive one, where everyone can "share the profit of the company." Some agents like Donna's brother rationalize their entry by acknowledging the profit share: "my sister and sponsor was an agent and told me about that little thing called profit share." The profit share is also emphasized by Real Prosperity, as the proof of the equal status of all the members, who are not hierarchically dependent on each other, but co-dependent.

To recruit new agents, each company is trying to frame itself as "the best company," more a family than a company, providing a "friendly" environment, where everybody can come as they are, "free" of "bringing their business where they want it to be." For example, the motto of Real Prosperity, "God, family, and then business" means to employees that the values of community and family supersede business. This calls to mind Biggart (1989) who shows how direct sales organizations (DSOs) have embraced a discourse about the loss of community values, and how their business model gained power. Real Prosperity often emphasizes an idealized version of the community of support, an obvious technique of

seduction towards the recruits. Training leaders in both companies emphasized during the time of the training that real estate is a big family. For example, Joe, who gives us the class on prospecting, repeated many times the rhetoric of asking help and being supportive:" Here at Real Prosperity, we are like a family. There is nothing you cannot ask, and you can rely on us, there's always someone out there to help you out."

Lenny, the retired pilot who works at Desert Realty, also stresses the importance of the company being family-like, in contrast with the "cold" corporate world:

> We're able to interact with the people very well, and we work as a team. It's such a good group, it's a family type of feeling where everybody helps each other out and that's kind of the way that this office, in particular, there isn't anyone here that is unapproachable, that you can't ask questions, or find information for you, you don't feel reluctant to talk to anybody, you walk into someplace and you get that feeling right away.

Real estate companies also function well to bring anybody on board, as a form enacting old familial types of small businesses, in which most often, the wife works with her husband, or the son with his dad, as well as brother and sister like in the case of Donna and her brother. I interview only 4 teams but I encountered about 15. The majority was composed of "close kindships": husband with wife in 70% of the cases. There were also big teams with more than 3 agents. This seems associated with a regain of control over their life, and the capacity to bring "personal relationships" to the cold sphere of the economical, something that has been separated in the corporate environment. Such familial sponsoring, as well as familial metaphors for the company itself, is also observed in MLM and DSO organizations (Biggart 1989; Morgan 1991; Roberts 2012).

The discourse of the "team" is very present. Indeed, both companies have meetings called team-building where they share information and build a sense of collective. Matthew explains that he signed up with Desert Realty because "I really liked the idea of a local, family-owned company" while Virna, a Hispanic 42-years old agent, justified the choice she made to switch to Desert Realty and implied a rejection for the corporate-like office setting: "It wasn't this family-like office that we had any more. We had this corporate guy that

wanted to change everything, and all of the agents started leaving and just the company went down and close down but I left before, so then I moved with Desert Realty."

Real Prosperity has attracted attention from some of the leading business schools of the country, including Yale and Stanford. Recent academic and new coverage praise the company for their culture, and the impact it has on people's lives. The "culture" as emphasized by the company consists of being interdependent and on "achieving success through the efforts of others" (Larcker and Tayan 2015, 2). The company's belief system is represented by the WI4C2TS with the following principles: Win-win – or no deal; Integrity – do the right thing; Customers – always come first; Commitment – in all things; Communication – seek first to understand; Creativity – ideas before results; Teamwork – together everyone achieves more; Trust – starts with honesty; Success – results through people.

The claimed success – also confirmed through the increasing number of agents enrolling in the company and the fact that the founder of the company has written best-selling books on how to be successful in the business – is attributed to the specific environment including cooperation and profit-sharing. The Stanford study argues that its "operating model results in an organization that is essentially agent led. All major initiatives are originated in the field, and agent initiatives are implemented in a market center only" (p. 3), suggesting this is the way an organization becomes more powerful, by being bottom-up rather than top-down. Being powerful is interpreted as the lack of vertical organization, the traditional corporate model but rather a form of the network of interdependence on everybody relies on each other and is "free" to reach whatever level (financially) the employee – which is never treated as such – would want.

This claimed "culture" also rests on the insertion of the neo-liberal project within companies, where self-help is the pillar of success, and all workers need to be pro-active and should be rewarded in the function of that, the "all entrepreneurs" model that is disseminated in various spheres of social life. The individual does not fall into the trap of the employee model – which is considered not stimulated and lazy – but can reveal him or herself into a project in which he or she will be fully committed.

This model of organization represents a blend between an old idealized vision surrounding craftsmanship – a family producing and benefiting directly from the product of their labor without intermediaries – and the new version of an entrepreneurial self – which work is not dictated by a boss but where he or she can assume significant responsibility into success as well as into failure. Led by two managers at the national level, the agent training curriculum is based on the "prosperity gospel," which puts forward a belief system based on perpetual growth without limits - " the market does not dictate whether you will succeed or not, it only tells you how you will succeed "," there is no limit to what you can achieve."

Although I take examples mostly from Real Prosperity, Desert Realty is also among the companies who surf on freedom and opportunities, presented as the pillars of the American dream. Here the positive psychology indeed blends nicely with the organizational spirituality preached in the gospel prosperity theology: what is limiting is not the structural limits based on the state of demand and supply but one's belief and commitment.

Another element of differentiation of a business cult and a normal business lies in the blurring between working and personal time: "Normal businesses also draw boundaries around work time, leaving personal, social and family life separate and protected from commercial pressures or involvement. So, the boundaries around personal life limit a legitimate business' ability to influence and affect any individual at the level that a cult does" (Bromley 1998). The blurring of boundaries between personal and professional lives pervades neo-liberal capitalism and is not in itself sufficient to define a business cult.

In the case of real estate, as with MLM, companies thrive on offering unlimited rewards to "the little guy" including financial salvation, happiness, dignity, freedom, spirituality or community (Fitzpatrick and Reynolds 1997). The justification for such blurring is a model of unlimited benefits, which are not limited to the financial benefits but a form of overall individual salvation.

This model of salvation is built around relationship marketing (not direct branding) which promises unlimited income. There are always people to be known, more clients to recruit, and more referrals that can come through. Thus, both market limits and competitors are completely erased. Finally, losses are hidden as organizations pretend it is only profits

and nobody can ever lose money. Each worker is thus encouraged to go on, to have confidence and hope, and to work hard at it to achieve it.

Recent work on the prosperity gospel explores how this form of religious identity is as much a cultural production as it is a theological one. Religious identity is mixed with rituals that enact practices and norms that are validated through various capitalist contexts, especially within consumer society (Lofton 2011, 2012; Snarr 2011; K. D. Miller 2002; L. J. Miller 2008). This can explain also why even in Desert Realty, that never engages in the same rhetoric and tools (youtube channels and self-help books) nonetheless trains their agents to a similar curriculum. The unity of real estate practices is also shaped by the National Association of Realtors® and the competitive features of the field, in which this mental system based on belief is organized towards practical goals, which is designed, engineered, to make transactions happen or what I call: to engage practically the self.

3. Engaging Practically the Self: Framing Production as Self-Growth

I have demonstrated so far those real estate agents are trained to be disciplined and to believe both in their work and in their company. If the management of the self is the first required step, this management only has a purpose as it serves directly the market, i.e. the flows of the transaction, the exchanges of supply and demand. To sell the market, real estate companies train newer recruits to engage practically the self.

3.1. Fear as a Motor for Prospection

As we have seen in part two of this chapter, overcoming fears is one of the biggest struggles real estate agents face. During the training at the companies, managers, trainers, and experienced agents repeat that they need to make their fear a motor. They stress that if agents are afraid to prospect, this will impede them to generate income, as the real estate business is a highly relational one. How is the engagement of self-required to sell the market?

Overcoming one's fear should be done as a signal for client capture. Indeed, real estate agents might convey a form of trust by sounding and appearing to know what they are doing and to be in charge of the transaction. Bruce, described earlier, refers to his newer

practical experience where he feels like being direct, honest and confident in what is going to bring transactions.

> You need to inspire confidence and a form of authority (…) getting away from shying to say something is the most important (…) take this example, I had a situation where I'm not going to negotiate. It's funny because in the negotiation today with the listing agent, she asked—her clients want us to contribute $700 for their roof repair, and I'm like 'Umm, I can't do that. My hands are tied. Let me know what you want to do.' What happens is five minutes later she knuckles under and she says 'Well, can we only do this, this and this?' and I'm 'Sure!' I knew what the non-negotiables were from my buyer. I'm not going to buy a house! I'm not going to pay for the house!" (…) You need to have this straight and direct personality and be good at relationships. I'm direct when I need to be direct. I think I'm personal when I need to be personal.

The speech delivered by Greg about getting over one's fears is operationalized at various stages of the transaction, but especially for prospecting. Agents need to own what they are saying and try to convince people to work with them to generate income and foster the flows of the transaction, i.e. render the market active:

> On the second day of training at Real Prosperity, Lindsey is talking to newer recruits about "energizing your business" and "prospecting": "don't worry about having it perfect" she says" "go up there and figure out a way to go get it, go find people. A day without prospecting is not a workday, you need to take the time to prospect, at least 2 hours a day." "You are lucky to be here, we're being about practicing" Here, she refers to how prospecting requires practicing with scripts before getting more in detail all the ways you can prospect both buyers and sellers. (field note)

3.2. The Scientific Organization behind the Self-Producer

During the Desert Realty training, the manager of the professional development addresses the agents by understanding that out of the 4,600 realtors® belonging to the TAR®, there are only 500 that are out there. Real Prosperity also adopts similar reasoning when talking about the competition: "you have to have your own proposition value" repeats one of the experienced agents, ignoring most of the time the structural forces around real estate practice, and letting the agents believe it is for them to get what they want from the business. Rob, manager, and head of the professional development at Desert Realty states:

> Competition is only 500 agents, there are officially about 4,600 but they are not necessarily doing business, you count, there are 25 000 pieces of business. The Top 500 agents are (almost) all Desert Realty agents. There are a lot of opportunities that

> lie ahead of you, as 1/3 of the agents are going to exit business; 1/3 are new and 1/3 are working and being true professionals. You need to have core values and distinguish yourself. What is your service to the customer? Service- integrated experience for the customer. You're an independent contractor, you're the asset of the company, and you go home and you decide where you want to work. Talk doesn't cook rice. We are all about measurement, everything we do is measured, each tool, and how it's utilized.

The speech delivered by Rob stresses the importance of arming the self with helpful tools and measurements, which are going to translate agents' life goals into business objectives. This works as a help for the self, which is validated with a scientifically and professionally legitimized system that allows to "bring the business" towards where the agent "wants it." In this operative model, the agent is not passively receiving a business (and the related relationships) that he does not master – as the discourse of James highlighted in part one – but he is controlling how it handles the business and where he wants to put it at. Similarly, a set of tools that put into place to present one's self and to manage relationships as I highlight specifically in Chapter 5.

The organization of real estate activity is also done through what agents call "team meetings." Every Wednesday at the "team meeting" of Real Estate, all the agents of the North-East Office of Real Prosperity are coming together to talk about what is new in real estate, what tips they can share for business, what listings they have on the market or even more personally: who is celebrating a birthday, or talking about their involvement with charity organizations. On Wednesday of the month, the award celebrations take place: who has achieved the greatest gross income commission, who is selling the most upscale houses, etc. Often, these activities take the form of games: riddles, or questions made to be guessed. Most of the time, the PowerPoint or the board serves to increase the energy of the room. At the beginning of each meeting, the same rocky song is played, and each meeting is punctuated by moments of self-praising with sentences sung such as "I can be successful" or "I can achieve my goals." The praise of what it means to be a successful realtor® is the collective reassurance that work is going in the right direction and that people should be motivated to go on with their activity.

In the classes, the instructor is pumped up like he is going to teach a gym class: How

are you guys today? All timidly reply, good. Yeah, yeah?!!! Great, good mood, good spirit, let's rock this. Gary is part of the Vanguard group which is comprised of 8 agents. It was created in 2010. He states that the strategy of the group revolves around "innovation," and the creation of a-89-step home marketing system in which they are "providing advice to sellers to sell their homes quickly for top dollars." From 9 to noon, on Friday, March 6th, 2015, Gary is teaching the business strategy class to coach agents to achieve the highest financial rewards as it is what supposedly their main motivation should be.

> Your business strategy, it's all about numbers. For example, with 3 appointments, you get one listing, in a week, you get 1.5 listings that equals 75 listings per year, and the calls you make, you can do 200 calls in 7.5 hours. At the end of the day, if you do that in a year, you can get $400 in profit, net. Let's see how it works.
>
> He writes on the board the following:
> 45 listing closed
> 78 buyers closed
> 165,000 average purchase price
> 4,950 GCI per close
> ---
> $608,850
>
> ➔ $ approx. 400,000 in profit

He follows the discussion on the accountability agents should rely on to comply with their objectives and goals. During those ceremonies, agents are always encouraged to think about their numbers. In each company, the strategy is fixed at the beginning of the year, then, usually increased at each anniversary year. With most my interviewees (90%), the theme of setting goals with their managers came through. In the following section, I evidence how goal settings are embedded in the management of self and how it incentives workers to produce more.

3.3. Generating Business through Setting up Financial Goals

During a training session at Desert Realty, the trainer uses the booklet activity to describe what agents are supposed to do to be accountable to their life goals. The session starts with a demand for the agents to think about their Big Why defined as "a statement that drives,

motivates, and inspires you. It's a statement that reminds you why you're here." Agents are presented with goals settings for their lives that need to translate precisely into "number of transactions" per month. Sometimes, the goals can be set as precise daily activities that are shared by the recruits. Kate, who started about 6 months ago at Desert Realty, which was nervous about starting, is rationalizing her position and deciding whether she should set up goals:

> You know, I need to do that. I started and was like—I was going to do a manager meeting where I—and then she had to reschedule and I never rescheduled because at that point I was so, like, I didn't know. I felt like 'Can I even close?' I just had no idea. Now that I have two under my belt I feel like maybe now I should plan goals and get realistic about it. Like, now that I have this I think I can possibly do this. So, I don't know. I started off saying 'I want to close six deals this year.' But I don't know. Maybe I'll try to make it a little harder. I don't know. Then I also—I don't want to…I know that you can have like…things going and then it can be slow for like four months.

These "transaction objectives" can feel fuzzy to agents with non-commercial professional backgrounds like Kate, who feels like, she has not acquired the practical dispositions to act accordingly. On the contrary, agents like James, who has worked in investment banking and whose dad is a high-end architect, are used to think in terms of business plans. The training aims to provide a common ground, in which agents are taught to think in terms of goals so that they can be productive at selling. Many new male recruits were indeed much clearer about getting those transactions. Real Prosperity also provides a collective system to make agents accountable for their objectives. At Desert Realty, they started a weekly meeting, where everybody was supposed to talk about their progress during the week.

Through their training programs, companies also present a system of goals and rewards. Supposed to be followed by newer recruits, the step-by-step programs picture financial and symbolic rewards obtained from the engagement into real estate activities. By fostering enthusiasm in an individual project which is directly transferrable in applicable goals for one's lifestyle, real estate companies are generating the incentives to engage in the market.

Setting goals is part of the construction of the ethos that every newer recruit is supposed to adopt. At Real Prosperity, the objectives set up can be reached through "systems" that are provided to "achieve success." The first section of the textbook "Energize your business" states:

> Our training puts you on track to make a minimum of 16 transactions a year and well on your way to receiving 100 percent commissions. By deciding to embark on this journey, you've shown that you already have the right mindset to succeed in real estate. You have the motivation, drive, and passion to help people — all the gear you need to run a thriving real estate business.

What Is Your Goal?

Whether it's 16 transactions or many more is your choice. What's important is that you have a goal, check in on it every day, and always work at the right tasks to keep you moving toward the goal.

Calculation example

A	Annual Gross Income Goal	$100,000
B	Average Sales Price	$200,000
C	Commission Percentage	3%
D	Commission Dollar (B x C)	$6,000
E	Annual Transaction Goal (A / D)	16

STOP *and* DO

Your Goal

Fill in the blanks to calculate the number of transactions to attain your personal income goal.

A	Annual Gross Income Goal	$
B	Average Sales Price	$
C	Commission Percentage	
D	Commission Dollar (B x C)	$
E	Annual Transaction Goal (A / D)	

Time: 5 minutes

Figure 1: What is Your Goal, Real Prosperity Training

The material presented in Real Prosperity's textbook is for example designed to make the agent work on his transaction goals that have been previously defined as personal lifestyle wanted achievements. No matter what the transaction goals are, they are achievable with setting up daily objectives, such as a list of activities that need to be done at certain times.

This has been also known as micro-management or time efficiency, to encourage oneself to be productive. But in the case of the real estate agent, this needs to be rationalized within certain production goals. For example, the 5 minutes' exercise is designed to make the agent fix a "personal income goal" which is going to be transferrable into several transactions that should be done.

Observations at the school and companies reveal the importance of financial considerations - having succeeded is measured in terms of financial success and special techniques are offered for agents to achieve their financial goals. The informal discussions on how much they earn, how many transactions they do, how many buyers they encounter, or how many listings they have got that inhabit the daily interactions make it possible to detect the rapid insertion in the world of the agents where the success is measured in a volume of transactions. Agents are indeed socialized by their trainers and their peers to know what their financial goals are. There are also small talks around how many deals other agents must get to succeed. They talk about how many deals they want to get to make it in their business and brag about their capacity to get some listings.

> Tuesday 3 PM, after a training session at Desert Realty on the objectives to set to achieve professional success. Agents discuss at the coffee break about their clients. One says, "How many escrows do you have right now?" The other replies: "Well, I do not have one" and the first replies: "I, one, and I hope two soon"; "You have to meet clients and make sure they really want to materialize, it takes time when you're new," says the second, "but I hope I have my first listing, to recover this by another agent, he is too busy, he too has too much. (field note)

When prompted, agents are willing to talk about their inventory, and associate it with pricing, and think about how much they can make at the end of the day:

> How many listings do you have right now? I have many, these are great listings also, like very high priced so that is an almost guaranteed income. This woman in my office does tons of business. Her business is so admirable but I'm also like 'Do I want that?' Maybe sometimes you don't invest in that because you don't want that. You don't want so much of that. She sells something like fifty houses a year but a lot of hers are like $300,000 and under. So, it's like, quantity. I think ideally, you'd want to sell fewer houses, but more expensive houses. But getting into that market is harder. I've met some high-end buyers but the sense of urgency isn't there. They're kind of like, 'Maybe a year or two.' They have the time to kind of wait on stuff. Or they have a house they need to sell before they want to buy a house. (informal conversation)

Are financial rewards the end goal of agents? Rudy, whom I introduced earlier in this chapter, stresses his desire to make money, but also to grow as much as possible, envisioning and planning his future financial rewards. The financial uncapped possibilities provide a sense of engagement for middle and lower-class workers. But Rudy is also motivated by "being the best" at what he is doing, which also hints towards the desire of status also within the field of real estate. After a few days of following him in his transactions, he confesses the money attraction. During interviews though, agents are always trying to downplay the monetary aspects of their involvement, almost like it would be dirty to speak of wanting to be in real estate for the money. They often frame their endeavors as helping people. It suggests a form of denegation of "making money[31]". If Rudy was one of the few that acknowledged directly the pure drive for money, about 70% of my sample have referred to a specific lifestyle they wanted to conduct.

During the training at companies, agents are highly encouraged to think about financial goals in perspective of imagined material and symbolic retributions they can bring. The real estate agents are inscribing their trajectories within the ascension of the lower-middle class to their envisioned desired life achievements, which are principally derived from materialistic desires such as financial success and lifestyle rewards (going to have holidays inexpensive hotels, or buying an expensive home). The setting of financial goals is thus part of a broader definition of the lifestyle and status they envision for themselves.

3.4. Achieving a Higher Lifestyle: The Symbolic Retributions

This desire to make money also reflects on a push towards interpersonal success and status as well as how lower-middle America wants to become a high-class society. Individuals and workers are subjects of injunctions not only of geographical mobility but more largely of professional mobility. Additionally, it echoes the development of the positive psychology movement, and the numerous books about self-help which often emphasize the "virtues" of being self-reliant, goal-driven and getting what you want in life, including money, family

[31] I discuss in Chapter 4 the use of the discourses around helping.

and lifestyle. The model of engagement in capitalism works through mental structures. About half of my sample of agents belonged to the lower-middle class and envisioned to behave like the upper-middle class. Rather than paying the bills, members of the upper-middle classes must always make more money, achieve financial success and build material wealth.

The companies are encouraging the goal-settings towards getting material and symbolic rewards. The emphasis on the "Big Why" and the class led by Pete are designed to provide the necessary skills to align the individual objectives and the professional objectives that each newer recruit is supposed to acquired.

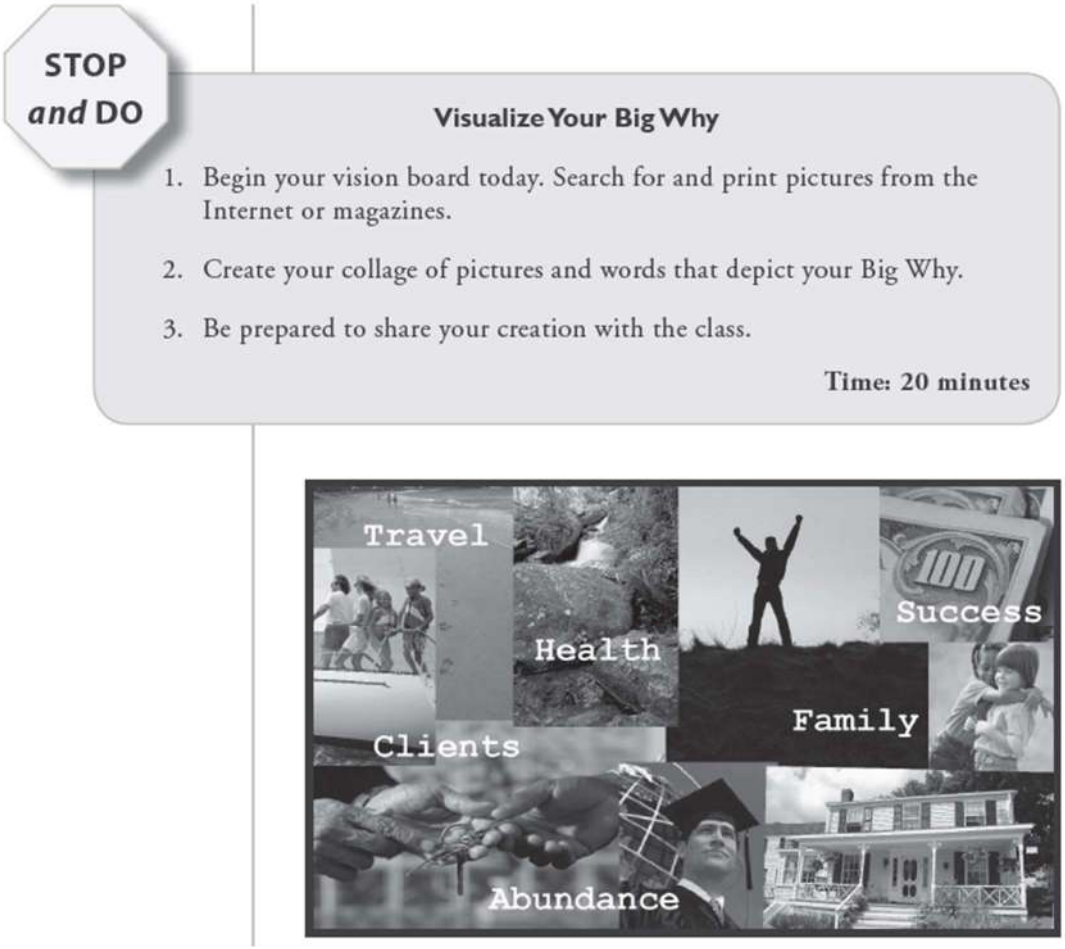

Figure 2: Visualize your Big Why, Real Prosperity Training

For example, the Desert Realty booklet provided to agents emphasizes the capacity of promoting their life objectives, through mental representations and pictures of material possessions which symbolizes lifestyles such as a dream car or a dream house. They call this the vision board:

> *The Power of a Vision Board*
> Countless successful people create vision boards (or vision books), which contain pictures and words that visually represent their most important goals, aspirations, and desired outcomes. These people know that in order to achieve their goals, they must look at them all the time. A vision board accomplishes just that. It serves as a constant reminder of your vision and goals and renews your energy and enthusiasm for maintaining your focus on your Daily 10/4.
> The pictures or words you put on your vision board might represent objects, such as your dream car or house. It may include pictures of your family, places that you want to visit, objects you wish to attain, or words that express the emotions and attitudes you want to feel.
> *How to Create a Vision Board*
> 1. Find a quiet, relaxing space with no distractions where you can work on your vision board.
> 2. Go through magazines or browse the Internet to find pictures or words that bring your Big Why to life. The images you choose should evoke emotions and prompt you to think about how you would feel if YOU were in the picture.
> 3. Be careful not to think or judge too much. Let instinct be your guide.
> 4. Place your vision board where you will constantly see it.

Even if these goals can appear "neutral" as every agent might define their life goals differently, most agents expressed during training sessions their desire to have bigger houses, cars and being able to buy products that could fit with their new lifestyle. This process is also observed in the coaching programs offered to agents.

Developed by one of Real Prosperity's senior executives, the CONQUER program offers, for $900, a training delivered over 8 days (one day a week for two months) by a charismatic coach using concepts, language techniques, and real exercises. It is intended to generate real estate activity (lead generation) and improve the organization of the life of the agent: how to increase productivity, how to become a better person, how to achieve these professional and individual goals? CONQUER teaches techniques developed by the general

head of training at Real Prosperity, Kalia, who is believed to have based her method on the Bible.

The program is presented on the flyers handed out to the agents at the end of the training sessions as a "transformative experience", a " life by design" rather than "by default" leading the agents to "go straight to their dreams". It advertises to "condition professionals to adopt the mindset that will allow them to get out of their own way" and make them able to "overcome their limiting beliefs, set goals, deliver powerful scripts to naturally influence people" and "build an abundance of leads."

I was invited to come to the training one day. The training, which takes place in a church, goes on for a total of 8 Tuesdays during which we will learn the material, practice and get away with some tips for handling better "our business":

> 8:30 in the morning, about 120 people are present in the room and an important step where the host, Kyle, shouts in his microphone "Hello everyone. Are you ready for the ultimate experience, are you ready to CONQUER? ". It is much more like a sports event or a TV set than a business meeting. There is also food, breakfast, lunch, snacks. There is a good general mood, the agents know each other, exchange news of each other's family, and look very excited to start. Kyle begins with a speech about the objectives of the training, the scripts to learn, the practices to adopt, the songs and the motto that will animate these 8 days. Indeed, throughout the day, people repeat several currencies such as "I can do it" and "I will succeed." (field note)

The training manuals also encourage officers to understand the motivations behind their work - this is to identify individual objectives that refer to the normative framework of consumption related to the family unit and the household: The photos and keywords presented in this excerpt emphasize success around the family, physical well-being (health) and economic success (consumption of travel, purchase of a property ...).

Agents are encouraged to sign up as it will help them grow. Some agents have taken it several times over their careers. For example, Donna, who has been in the business for 15 years, has taken Conquer 3 times already and says she is always getting "something new" out of it. Conquer advertises than its graduates have "increased their closed transactions by 50%" and "income by 114%."

Located within the lower rank of occupations, real estate agents may deal with a variety of clients, but most of them are looking at the higher-priced homes as a way to make

higher commissions but also to be able to resemble their clients and to embody through the display of the product of their envisioned personal lifestyle. I have interviewed 38 female agents and went to 7 of them through their daily interactions, with 3 of them in high-end transactions. Not only has real estate brought financial rewards but it has allowed (or made them want to) for at least 15 women agents in my fieldwork to perceive themselves as "high end," experiencing a transfer of capital from their clients.

They envision the product as a form of symbolic transfer, as houses can represent who they are as a person and to which categories of people they belong. The "nicer homes" then are a way for the agent to embody who they want to become in their lives and how they assert their position within the social and occupational class. It highlights the incarnation of status and the distinction acting in the market through the figure of the realtor®. Amanda for example, the ex-hair dressing salon manager presented earlier in this chapter, is envisioning her position both in the real estate industry as a reflection of her values and social status.[32]

Conclusion

How does one become a real estate agent? From what specific formation does one benefit? After providing a first explanation related to the desires of agents to become independent, to "own their selves," I objectify the professional culture in which real estate agents are socialized and the inculcation of professional dispositions. I discuss how they are socialized and trained to be "thinking" like a real estate agent, which requires acquiring individual dispositions to sell the market.

In this chapter, I describe the acquisition of *socio-professional dispositions* and the *ethos* of the real estate agent through the process of conversion led by real estate companies. The construction of the real estate ethos appears thus not as a magical operation of a "convinced worker" but as the result of an inculcation process that includes the socialization of agents through training programs and systems of rewards. I demonstrate the particularity

[32] I discuss this point more in detail in Chapter 5.

of the imagined contours of the working *self* in real estate. This modeled worker should be organized, efficient, responsible, and capable of overcoming his or her fears. The capitalist ethos rests on the strong emotional involvement and belief in the rewards provided by this system of competition which is presented as a win-win strategy that is presented as a "body incarnation" of what the market should look like: unlimited and always growing.

Although there is a dissociation between religious beliefs and business practices, real estate companies often function through the model of network and close community which stresses the importance of family, community, church, and God as pillars of American life. Even if real estate companies differ from quasi-religious organizations in terms of recruitment, they present similar features, including the use of social networks through family and friends, personal involvements to sell, the absence of barriers (unlimited profit, lack of competition between agents etc.…) which transforms working into an emotional commitment and a believing engagement into capitalism.

The importance of the government of self as stressed out by Foucault is part of the new neo-liberal modernity in which workers are embedded. The new valued "self" is pro-active: "in order to survive the rat race, one has to become active, inventive and resourceful, to develop ideas of one's own, to be faster, nimbler and more creative" (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002, 23). Individuals are caught in a new type of oppressive system, where they must learn to see themselves as the "center of action" and put plans in place for actualizing their biographies. The "assertion of self" becomes a practical necessity while retaining some of the traditional ethics (caring for others).

However, the construction of the "figure" of the real estate agent can be related not only to new techniques of management and the broader neo-liberal society (Amable 2011; Foucault 2004; Fridman 2010) but also to the prosperity gospel and on the middle-class financial path to status. I explore how workers' motivations come not just from the desire to get away from "bad jobs" but from a process of conversion to the self-help cause, involving material and symbolic dimensions. In line with workers' images and myths about the activity, the management teams of real estate schools and companies work to maintain active an image of what real estate activity is about, to generate both consent and effort. I contribute

to the discussions on the strategies firms use to control workers, which are often "neither negative sanctions nor positive incentives" (Sallaz 2015, 30). Besides having social relationships such as colleagues, real estate work represents a realm for the affirmation of self, for boundary work and for positioning one's self into a social spectrum of occupations.

In Chapter 4, I show how professional claims and development came to construct real estate as one of the most attractive occupations. After looking at the historical development of the National Association of Realtors®, I discuss more particularly expert knowledge and ethical claims.

CHAPTER 4: Building Legitimacy and Control. The Trade Association and the Professional Claims around Expert Knowledge and Ethics

> "Just as "lawyer," "doctor," "banker," and "dentist" are professional titles referring to specific vocations, so REALTOR refers to the real estate business. The professional title of REALTOR stands for knowledge of property, current values, and real estate trends; years of experience in handling all types of transactions; a high code of business ethics, and basic integrity and fairness in all dealings. These qualities make up a REALTOR."
>
> (Advertisement for the Lansing Board of Realtors in Michigan, 1946)

Throughout the century, many commercial advertisements emphasized the professional expertise and integrity detained by members of the National Associations of Realtors® (NAR), the Realtor®. As opposed to the real estate agent which is only licensed by a national and state-level exam, the Realtor® is a member of the NAR and subscriber to the Code of Ethics, which obliges him or her to strict conduct and allegiance to its clients' interests. While this may seem like pure ideological propaganda to serve the needs of a growing business, one should pay attention to the agents' vocabulary of motives and meaning-making actions to understand the purposive creation of the real estate residential market. I propose here to investigate the claims around real estate "professionalism," through the creation and development of a trade organization, the NAR. If the conception of business interests has been often reduced to individual actions oriented toward rational and means-ends goals, considering the "organization" informs the construction of a business, as it reintroduces analytical history and empirical elements looking at the work achieved in and through the trade association.

Due to the structural features organizing the business, the face of the real estate trade was, and still is, represented to the public by the figure of the real estate agent. Since the business comes only through clients, the real estate agent is particularly cautious about managing his or her reputation and generating trust. Professional claims around the activity

during my fieldwork show that constant reinforcement of the professional real estate agent" aimed to distance him/herself from the image of the "greedy salesman."

Looking back historically to the development of real estate as an occupation, similar stories arise around the suspicions of real estate to be "selling sharks" and to want to steal to the public. The creation of the collective mark registered in the U.S. Patent Office in 1916 (which later became a trademark) illustrates the desire to appear morally and ethical irreproachable, as evidenced by a cartoon story one can read in the NAR trade journal in 1960:

> Realtor was coined to distinguish ethical practitioners. In 1915, Charles N. Chadbourn, past president of the Minneapolis Real Estate Board, was distressed to read a newspaper headline: real estate man swindles poor widow. Realizing that this reflected on the board members, he coined the term Realtor to indicate those of repute in the business.

The story told by the NAR®, for example, emphasizes the importance of trust in front of the public to maintain both individual and collective interests. One of the challenges faced by Realtors® has been to demonstrate both their honesty and the usefulness of their activities to the public, all treated as potential customers. How does an occupation retain the exclusive control over an activity in which its agents may not be considered useful?

My research considers the occupation of real estate agents, which has not traditionally seen as a "profession" but whose workers constantly claim the "professional ethos." According to the General Social Survey (2012), real estate agents are perceived as a service occupation which holds a relatively low level of prestige (4.8). Nevertheless, the occupation is built internally around a strong set of training, people and business skills, and a trade association which constantly reinforces claims around professional service. Because of its contradiction – being at the same time located at the lower end of services, requiring no formal education and at the same time, making the internal claim about a high-status professional occupation – the study of real estate profession offers a good angle to discuss the construction of legitimacy through both professional and ethic work.

Considered as the "voice of the industry", trade organizations are believed to have a "unique role in societies due to their level of resources and expertise at their disposal" (Rajwani, Lawton, and Phillips 2015, 226). Yet, scholars point out the lack of empirical research around them and the disproportional focus on non-profit organizations. Additionally, trade associations are often analyzed as "non-profit" of "profit-making actors" (Lawton, Rajwani, and Minto 2018; Marques 2017; Worth 2018).

Looking at that historical picture, one can consider that, to defend their interests, real estate men understood the need to create an organization. While Swedberg (2005, p. 83) highlights "the importance of institutions for the realization of interests," one may ask to which extent trades can solve "coordination problems" (Chwe 2013), organize to settle prices, limit the threats of regulation and competition (Aldrich and Fiol 1994; Barnett 2009; Sine, Haveman, and Tolbert 2005) or even become represented as "social movements in the market place" (Rao 2008; Esparza, Walker, and Rossman 2014). How to analyze the "professionalization" of real estate? How does the occupation of the real estate agent succeed to become an institutionalized occupation in the United States?[33]

By relying on work done in sociology of occupations and professional work as well as on trade associations in the United States, I investigate how "professional claims to jurisdictional control over work" are evidenced in accreditations or specialized training and content, as professions become "carriers and creators of discursive authority" (A. Abbott 1988, 69–79).

In this chapter, I provide a background history around the development of the trade association and the professionalization of real estate. I envision the trade association as a form of collective organization to defend market interests. I more specifically develop the professional abstract knowledge and ethical claims achieved through specific devices; involving both discursive practices and programs developed by the NAR®.

[33] According to (L. White 2006), the Association of Real Estate License Law Officials (ARELLO) estimates about 2.1 million "active" salespersons and brokers in the United States, with about 360,000 additional "inactive" salespersons and brokers as of the third quarter of 2005 (Association of Real Estate License Law Officials (ARELLO) 2006, 5). In Arizona, real estate salespersons and brokers represented as of 2017 respectively 3,340 and 1,580, that one needs to add to 5,470 property or real estate managers, 1,020 appraisers out of the 2,704,050 workers (www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_az.htm#00-0000).

Relying on Anteby, Chan, and DiBenigno (2016), scholars can effectively address the study of occupations and professions as "becoming," "doing" and "relating." If I demonstrate in Chapter 3 how agents are "becoming socialized" to norms, rules, I rely here on the study of the trade association as a form of legitimation for the profession, but also a form of "control" in the learning of legal, ethical and accepted behaviors. I try to get a sense of how the professional development of the agents has served the strengthening of agents' engagement into the professions and as served their business interests as well.

1. The Professionalization of Real Estate and the Fabric of a Trade Association

NAR® plays an important role in organizing residential and commercial real estate activities. Not only does the association disseminate research and statistics about real estate transactions, they foster real estate industry growth by offering real estate education through designation and certifications, political advocacy at the federal, state, and local levels; and a variety of knowledge (legal, financial, technological) through the association and its related institutes, societies, councils, and a university's activities and events. Its members are known as realtors® and it is the largest trade-industry in the United States with over 1.3 million members and 1,165 local associations. I first present the trade association as a new organizational form to defend business interests. I thus investigate their professional claims considering their interests in the market place. Finally, I look at the creation of a collective identity.

1.1. The Trade Association, a New Organizational Form to Defend Business Interests?

Real estate markets emerged at the turn of the 20th century through the institutionalization of a network of professionals who enacted laws and created local trade associations. The exchange of land, titles, and buildings is primarily a matter of masculine elites. Encouraged

by a network of economic elites and the increasing opportunities for urban development, entrepreneurs (real estate agents, promoters, brokers and other traders) have created local real estate boards since the early 1870s. Founded in Chicago in 1908 as the National Association of Real Estate Exchanges (NAREE), it became in 1916 the National Association of Real Estate Boards (NAREB) and the NAR® in 1972. The national association and the local boards were instrumental in disseminating practices whose main objective was, as NAREB describes "to unite the real estate men of America to effectively exert a combined influence upon matters affecting real estate interests" (Weiss 2002; Glaeser 2013).

The association is composed of both individual and organizational members. NAR® members are composed by a far majority of residential and commercial real estate brokers, real estate salespeople[34] (which are commonly referred to as real estate agents), but also by a vast array of occupations such as property managers, appraisers, mortgage specialists, and counselors, to name some. Individuals are also members of one of the 1,165 local boards or associations in the country. They pledge to respect a Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice.

Defined as "economically regulative organizations" in Weber's analysis, trade associations transform the "simple pursuit of their economic purposes to a collectively understood orientation to shared interests in managing their broader social context" (Spillman 2012, 31). The development of American business organizations from the civil war to the beginning of the 20th century – from the creation of Chambers of Commerce in 1768 in New York, to the early foundations of "club associations" and the development of more formalized associations from the 1820's to the 1880's – illustrates how trade associations "became part of the normal way of doing business in most American industries" (Spillman 2012, 42).

This "organization revolution" was not indeed specific to real estate but has been operating in other industries, especially in manufacturing, in which organizations became "necessary means to achieve individual and collective goals of business" (Roy and Parker-

[34] According to the 2018 statistics of the National Association of Realtors®, 65% percent of REALTORS® are licensed as sales agents, 21% hold broker licenses, and 15% hold broker associate licenses.

Gwin, 1999, 215). With the purpose of "managing markets to protect the performance of their members" (Spillman 2012, 43), associations aimed to control both external threats of other occupations trying to take over their business activities and internal conflict because they were now a network of colleagues and friends more than competitors.[35]

Through the membership of both companies and individuals, trade organizations claim to defend the interest of both the industry and their members while contributing more broadly to the advancement of society. While creating institutional legitimacy, the NAR® organized around the defense of its members' interests. Transforming a business into an organization served, on the one hand, to manage the uncertainty and create a set of tools to control the market and on the other hand to be presented to the public, to achieve recognition and build a reputation.

In his Ph.D. thesis on the development of the Chicago Real Estate Board, Everett Hughes (1928; 1931) shows how real estate men organized to transform a business activity into a formal organization. He recalls how real estate business shifted from:

> an upstart, unscrupulous business to a settled, somewhat respectable one," describing the realtor as "the type who has been in the business longest" and the type that "thinks, moves, and has his being in the world of real estate." He is fairly well assimilated to a code of real estate ethics or practice, supports the policies which the leaders of the business conceive to be for the ultimate welfare of the trade. The real estate board is his club, and generally his only downtown club. It is among his fellows there that he has his professional or business status. (Hughes 1971, 336).

Hughes traces the transformation of the status of the business endeavors through the belonging of the real estate agent to aboard. The standardization of discourse and practices, including obeying strictly to a Code of Ethics, allows realtors® to unify their voice through the board to support the fight against specific policies.

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[35] Their primary goal of these early associations was thus clearly to control their operating market: create stability in their business by controlling price and production so that they could manage the risks of competition. For example, associations in the manufacturing and commercial sectors aim to "avoid price warfare" and "mitigate the effects of over-capacity" by "organizing industry-wide price-fixing": they set "production quotas" and obtained from their members "to produce at some fraction of capacity"; firms were also given the "exclusive right to sell their output in a particular locale" (Schneiberg and Hollingsworth 1990, 325).

Even with the development of corporate hierarchy and the antitrust law of 1890[36], trade associations remained part of the business landscape. They kept growing. Over 100 of associations formed between 1900 and 1909, 183 formed between 1910 and 1919, and 194 formed in the 1920s as actors reinvented associations (Berk and Schneiberg 2005, 73). According to their account, the NAR® is arguably the biggest organization by members count. It grew from 19 founding boards in 1908 to more than a thousand today, and from 120 founding members to 400,000 members in the early 1970's and 1,368,530 members as of January 2018.

Trade associations do not only operate at the national level but the local level, with local associations overseeing Multiple Listing Services (MLS). For example, the Tucson Association of Realtors® (TAR) was created in 1921 with a handful of brokers. They claimed 5,100 members as of December 2018.

Both the NAR® and the TAR® also became more formalized, with staff members organized as a bureaucracy receiving wages and working full time and with activities afferent to both political lobbying, and to the monitoring of the industry's economic situation. The workforce employed by the association became at the center of a system working "*for* its members" rather than "letting the members through their committees, do all the work" (Galambos 1966, 50-55).

Trade associations are based on memberships, their goal is to restrain competition and operate as gatekeepers within the industry (Aldrich, Zimmer, Staber, & Beggs, 1994; Spillman, 2012). They are can be similar to "market-oriented mutual benefit associations" like professional associations or labor unions (Gazley, 2013; Haynes Gazley, 2010). They define the normative institutionalization of professional practices (Aldrich and Fiol, 1994; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Sine et al., 2005) through "rules that introduce a prescriptive,

[36] The antitrust law passed in 1890 aimed to control monopoly and economic concentration, by prohibiting "every contract, combination or conspiracy in restraint of trade" fostering thus a decentralized and free competition of market actors. The law did not act in the intended way as it was not given much presidential interest and Republicans prevented enforcement. When Roosevelt finally acted on it at the beginning of the 20th century, he would differentiate between the "bad" and the "good trusts", and eventually limited the capacity of organizations to set prices and control productions while legitimizing the large corporations and the corporate hierarchy as a legitimate form of industry governance.

evaluative, and obligatory dimension to social life" (Scott 2008, 54). They thus shape the development of the industry, through the prescription of preferred conducts and actions, the constitution of standards as well as the control of technical market tools.

But as Spillman (2012, 29) puts it, how can we understand trade associations: are they "more like cartels, lobby groups or professional associations?" While thinking about trade associations in their historical development, one should also consider how the organization thrives on a series of claims, which pertains to the professionalization of its members.

In the following part, I look at the National Association of Realtors® through the lens of the sociology of professions, within both its external and internal logics, which concur to make it both a system dedicated to exerting control and domination over other professions, but also within a shared understanding of its interests, a common culture rewarding specific members and emulating a "sense of the game."[37] Both this logic of influence and belonging define the industry.

1.2. Professional Claims and Market Interests

> "Know them *by* this emblem. You will see this emblem everywhere in town. It identifies the members of your Real Estate Board. It is the distinguishing mark of the real estate broker who, because of his to the Realtor Code of Ethics, is privileged to display this seal. To him, real estate is a business, yes – but a business to be transacted on a professional plane with the highest professional ethics always in mind. So, look for this Realtor emblem when considering any real estate transaction. Let it serve as an assurance that you are dealing with a man experienced in real estate and one who is ready and willing to give you the benefits of that experience" (National Advertisement Campaign "Consult a Realtor" by the National Association of Real Estate Boards in 1926)

While the creation of a trade association is mostly analyzed within organizational theory and business and management research as an instrumental action to organize interests, the nature of the members' claims and activities may be analyzed through the analytical framework of the professions. The envisioned dichotomy between business occupations (profit-making)

[37] I refer here to « sense of the game in the sense of Bourdieu when he draws on Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations,* London, 1967, which means that agents not only learn rules of a socio-professional world, but they learn to play the game and have acquired the sense of the specific rewards they can obtain from it. It is developed in Bourdieu's *Logic of Practice*, Stanford University Press, 1990.

and the professions (public good) might explain this lack of attention. Indeed, Spillman (2012, 226) notes that "few scholars have noticed that business associations are likely to understand their strategies of action in terms of "professionalism" as to see them more economically in terms of industry stability and profit." This vocabulary is mostly native as profession and professional are terms that are constantly used by realtors® themselves. Indeed, "profession is one of the many natural concepts, fraught with ideology, that social science abstracts from everyday life" (Larson 1977, XI).

The rise of professionalism in the context of the increasing competitive phase of corporate capitalism has hidden the "great transformation" in a world "being subverted and reshaped" by "the utopian endeavor of economic liberalism to set up a self-regulating market system" (Polanyi 1944). The noble endeavor of professionals (protection to the public, interests of the clients instead of a profit motive) would potentially come as what Polanyi (1944) calls the "countermovement" for "the protection of society."

However, professions emerge first as "means of earning an income based on transacted services; in a society that was being reorganized around the centrality of the market" in which the "sellers of services" had to "capture and control expanded markets." The professional claims came thus as "new forms of eliciting and guaranteeing the buyers' preference and trust" (Larson 1977, 9–10).

I propose to depart from the professional claims made by realtors® to understand how these claims play out in the construction of real estate agents, mostly in their market interests, both at the organizational level – through the actions of the NAR® and at the individual level – through interactions between agents and customers.

The study of professions has traditionally been limited to the study of a set of professionals such as managers (Grey 1998; Jackall 2001), physicians and doctors (Freidson 1960; Bucher and Strauss 1961b; Vollmer and Mills 1966; Dodier 1993) or lawyers (Hagan and Kay 1995; Hawes, Rich, and Widmier 2004; Liu 2013) all of which hold considerable status in society. However, since the 1990s, there has been growing attention to less prestigious types of occupations such as nurses, technicians, firefighters, flight attendants, insurance workers, traders or economists (Abolafia 1996; Barley 1996; Desmond 2008; Faulconbridge 2006; Fourcade 2009; Hanlon 1994; Cameron L. Macdonald 1998). I pursue

this endeavor by linking both the literature on a profession, on business and work focusing specifically especially on the construction of realtors® via the ideal-typical figure of the professional.

To understand the construction of realty as a profession or an occupation with professional claims, I first distinguish between the realist and the constructivist approaches in sociological research. Both are useful to understand the formation of real estate as an occupation whose claim is to provide a professional status to its members. While the realists argue that a profession is determined in part with formal requirements and characteristics, the constructivists see is as a collective and historically situated enterprise to dominate a field of activity (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). They argue that professionalism should not be determined by formal characteristics but rather by the collective construction of what is to be a "good worker" (Schinkel and Noordegraaf 2011).

Intermediaries in the exchange of land, titles, and buildings such as real estate agents seek to demonstrate trustworthiness through intended claims of professionalism. Blending the realist and the constructivist approach, in a critical approach of the notion of profession, the construction of professionalism can be analyzed through the development of a trade association in which knowledge and skills are legitimized and institutionalized, in which service ethic or calling function as a form of self-legitimation, consisting in making the outsiders believe the professional always work for the higher good and the community (Wilensky 1964; Freidson 2001). Indeed, the discursive and practical development of an occupation into a profession with the construction of an "exclusive group" equipped with specific devices, ethical behavior and "abstract knowledge" (Abbott 1988, 8) serves as a form of symbolic capital that confers legitimacy and provides social closure and autonomy (Bourdieu 1990, 112).

Professionalization can be used as an argument of "softening" and "humanizing" the activity of selling, i.e. able to use knowledge, professional expertise as well as the morally good person of the agent to rationalize markets and transactions. As Hawes, Rich, and Widmier (2004, 27), who raise the question of "profession" in sales, contends: "most salespeople usually exhibit what would be considered professional behavior, that alone does not constitute what is necessary for the occupational group to be recognized as a profession

by members of our society" i.e. "courteous, efficient, and productive manner." As an ideal-typical figure, the professional sets aside his interest to indulge clients' interests and comply with the duty imagined by a society of professionals.

But there are strong interests in presenting an occupation as a "profession:" the benefits of being a profession generally include gaining status, trust and acquiring the power of decision in corporate settings. The characterization of a commercial activity into a professional one changes the normative frame of the relation between the buyer (and seller) and the intermediary: "Unlike commercial relationships, where caveat emptor ('let the buyer beware') is the predominant attitude, the relationship between a professional and his or her client is supposed to be guided by the precept of credit emptor ('let the buyer trust')" (Volti 2012, 155).

In the United States, skills, knowledge, ethics, and entry requirements came to construct real estate as a profession and to ultimately achieve legitimacy through their professional capital (Schinkel and Noordegraaf 2011). Notions such as knowledge, expertise, associations, closure, status, schooling, standards and codes should be then understood within the dynamics of the real estate field, visible through the growth and the role of trade associations. These claims of professional status are not operating by themselves and rely on, not only on the real estate agents but are organized in various aspects through the institutionalized legal framework of the trade associations which allows the control over industry orientations and actions (Spillman 2012). Professional status is institutionalized through NAR® which provides a Code of Ethics and is enforced by legal entities. More than 95% of the real estate agents are affiliated with the NAR®. This institutionalization is in contrast with most sales occupations, which have no single dominant professional association.

Besides its association, real estate agents are organized by national and federal bodies of governments, such as State-departments of real estate, and federal laws, such as the requirements to enter the profession that includes education and licensing. The State accredits the schools that can deliver the classes to become a real estate agent. While medical professions generally require a level of graduate education, realty has softer barriers to entry: to become an agent, there is no need to have a specific college degree. A high school diploma

and being 18 years old are the only requirements to take the licensing exam. It thus seems that the entry through diplomas is not how the symbolic capital is acquired but rather during the professional exercise. The role of NAR® in establishing the profession is largely discursive—in naming the profession and providing models for success.

In addition to being organized around specific requirements for entry and education, a profession also delivers and generates "a well-developed body of knowledge" (Hawes et al. 2004, 30) through an institutionalized form embodied by the schools, the training, the licensing, and the accreditations (Abbott 1988; Freidson 2001; Halliday 1985). This is the case in US real estate, as Hawes et al. (2004, 34) argue: "Most people would agree that commercial real estate agents require specific legal knowledge of their working environment and the skills to negotiate in such climates" as well as a set of skills specific to sellers (Futrell 2002).

One crucial act of legitimation is the creation of a professional group associated with a Code of Practice or Code of Ethics which rests on the idea that the action of one of the members of the group affects the professional group and its activity as well. The regulation of real estate behaviors by the standards of the NAR® is framed as the pursuit of the moralization of real estate activity as agents face the need to legitimize their endeavors.

The "Profession" Criteria or How Real Estate Can Use Professional Apparatus to Become Accepted

In a realist approach, Hawes et al. (2004) ask whether sales occupations can be considered as a profession. The attributes of a profession, according to their literature review of the authors, include six criteria. I summarize these criteria below while highlighting how they play out for realtors®:

1) Knowledgebase/ training school, relative to the mastering of selling which comprises a specific body of knowledge acquired through an institution. In the case of sellers, the mastering is done according to the authors around the art of selling, but in the case of realtors®, and because they are selling real estate, the knowledge comes from selling but also from knowing a complex product: real estate. The continuing education and classes provided by the companies as well as the TAR® demonstrate this endeavor.

2) Autonomy/ public confidence: sales' people are considered rather autonomous because they spend more time with customers than their hierarchy and as sales' people are

shifting from "selling to serving customers": "salespeople are becoming independent of sales managers and moving away from 'selling' toward 'serving' as costumer consultants and business partners." (Anderson 1996, 17). They also control to some extent key elements to the success of the transaction. Within sales' people, "manufacturer's representatives" receive even more autonomy because they are "self-employed and earn commissions from their principals only when sales revenue is generated. Manufacturer's representatives are sometimes permitted to determine almost every aspect of sales policy except for setting the product's price." (Hawkes et al. 2004, 32). The inclination towards service provide is evidenced by the "common definition" on how real estate activities should be conducted.

As for public confidence, the licensing process is considered as an element to achieve recognition in the community. For real estate agents, the licensing is the norm, with the control of the local legislation: "For example, each commercial real estate agent in Ohio needs to have an Ohio-issued license to conduct business in that state. States also have respective governing boards setting rules to which those commercial real estate agents must adhere." (Hawkes et al. 2004, 32). Similarly to Ohio, Arizona has the requirements for licensing, with certification programs and ongoing and renewed education to keep a license active.

3) Service to society, because sales' people are in contact with a variety of actors: customers, other employees, investors, business partners, investors, resolving conflicts among the many goals of the different actors and paying attention to each of these actors allows them to be successful. Anderson (1996, 17) stresses the embracement of the "value-added service" and the importance "to develop mutually-profitable, ongoing partnerships with customers." This is not new as Brandeis (1914, 3) asserts that "the old idea of a good bargain was a transaction in which one man got the better of another. The new idea of a good contract is a transaction that is good for both parties." This is very present discursively when questioning real estate agents about their endeavors and within the classes taken on the Code of Ethics and their duty of service.

4) Culture/ organization of colleagues: it includes the values shared that contribute to shape individual behaviors and codes of conduct, as "common vocabulary" such as "closing, prospecting, gatekeepers, trial close, qualifying, cold calls, and sales pipeline" and focus on the customer and the "underlying belief or value that the needs and wants of the customer must be met to yield sales success." The vivacity of meetings organized by the TAR and the companies aims at creating this environment fostering the belief in what the realtor® does, often a superior calling, reinforcing a positive culture and environment.

5) Ethical code, considered as "one of the major challenges sales faces on the road to being viewed by society as a profession is the development and adherence to an ethical code" (Hawes et al. 2004, 33-34) which, according to them, present benefits to buyers and sellers, and especially permits accountability. Some authors argue that they are no possible long- term relationships (Lagace, Dahlstrom, and Gassenheimer 1991). If sales' people

behave illegally or unethically. In the case of sales, only 1% of sales' people are a member of the international organization of sales whereas realtors are almost all affiliated to the National Association of Realtors® which possess a Code of Ethics.

6) *Necessary task/ exclusive skill*: the basic definition of sales proposed by Daniels et al. (1987, 1) is "the intermediary relationship between the holder of goods and one who wants the goods from the holder," considering the central role played by the seller: "Without the salesperson, production takes place and customers demand product, but in many instances, especially in what has traditionally been known as an "order-getting" context, the two groups may never meet." (Hawes et al. 2004, 34). Structurally acting as an intermediary, the realtor® can control both clients, and organize the encounter and the negotiation. The specific skill he holds is the first of cooperation and negotiation while keeping the two sides (supply and demand) separated. He acts thus as a knowledge broker, which I discuss more in detail in part 2.

1.3. The Creation of a Collective Identity

Spillman (2012, 20-21) challenges the assumption that "business associations are simply organizational tools for the promotion of business interests" and stresses the importance of "collective industry interests" which operate around an occupational cultural made of identities, norms, status, and camaraderie. Business associations should not only be perceived as self-interested, profit-driven or cutthroat but through their "sense of shared ideas about collective interests" resting on "solidarity in strategy."

First, trade associations differ from bureaucratic organizations because rules are defined as collective shared interests of everyone in the industry, rather than as an imposition from experts into the workers. They provide a more legitimate form of industry governance by emphasizing egalitarian decisions representing the whole of members rather than acting as chiefs and unquestionable authorities. Rules found in the bureaucratic order are thus replaced by technology or standardization of procedures and the professionalization of workers so that they have rules built into them rather than external and the homogenization of the professional culture so that the workforce adhere to collective identity, shared interests and resulting norms promoted within the industry.

Trade associations thus operate under two logics: membership and influence. Through the logic of membership, trade associations must unify members whose interests

are divergent by “stabilizing relations among members” (Aldrich and Fiol 1994; Harris, 1998). They ensure that members maintain and renew their membership every year. Indeed, they provide resources for the courses required to be actualized now and then to hold the real estate license active. With the logic of influence, trade associations should effectively bring their agenda to the table of other industries and the State. If the association claims to treat each member fairly and similarly, a problem highlighted by scholars is that trade associations are most often dominated by elite actors and benefit the most powerful actors in the field allowing for both coercion and defense of well-established actors (Conti and O’Neil 2007; Brady 2017; Galbraith 2017).

Under the membership logic, the stabilization of relations among members equates to the creation of an internal sense of the game valued and embraced by all the realtors®. Schinkel and Noordegraaf (2011) argue that the professional field can be drawn in the same way, and particularly using the notion of symbolic capital and its scarcity. While the functionalist vision of professions emphasized the association, ethical norms, and the technical knowledge, professionalism is envisioned within the possession of symbolic capital: "where tenants of nobility possessed social capital as symbolic capital, and where the upcoming bourgeoisie possessed economic capital, professionalism was a third way, a form of status or symbolic capital based on cultural capital" (Schinkel and Noordegraaf 2011, 86).

Professionalism as a symbolic capital permits to address social closure and the autonomy vis-à-vis other social fields. The professional habitus lies in “predispositions that simultaneously reproduce and manipulate the borders of an occupation both within a specific professional field and within the larger field of power in which such a professional field is situated” and “for professionalism to function as symbolic capital, its access needs to be restricted on the basis of a submission of occupational fields lacking the symbolic status of ‘profession’” and “based on the shared recognition of the legitimacy of professionalism as symbolic capital” (Schinkel and Noordegraaf 2011, 87).

Within this framework, professions are envisioned as "networks of positions that successfully claim professional capital and that, in doing so, can dominate over occupations unsuccessful in doing so." (Schinkel and Noordegraaf 2011, 87). The relation between

lawyers and real estate agents, and notary and real estate agents is, in fact, illustrative of field struggles: while in France, the notary holds significant power in the sales of real estate where they are required, real estate agents are used in only half of all transactions (Bonneval 2012). The example of the professionalization of medical occupation is being achieved through the requirements for entry through education and diplomas (the institutionalized cultural capital according to Bourdieu (1984), and the medical habitus acquired during education.

Additionally, a profession can also be seen as an "occupational culture" in which workers develop a sense of solidarity and camaraderie, foster a collective identity that might work to frame the most important issues to bring up as priorities for the actions of the trade association. Associations such as bankers' association for example "call for better acquaintance, for pleasure, for amusement, to get us away from home for a holiday – for a good time generally."

Numerous events and activities are designed to produce and reproduce this sense of the game. For example, every year the TAR® organizes a "Real Estate Expo" in which all the companies are represented and guest speakers are invited. The last one, in September 2018, had over 100 booths with a lot of different companies of Southern Arizona, including banks, credit unions, title agencies, service companies such as termite and pest control, developers, loan companies and real estate brokerages. The expo this year featured Theresa Barnabei, who offers what she calls "life success coaching" designed to "create an environment that fosters continuous improvement and business growth." Before owning her consulting firm, she graduated as a sociology major and became an instructor and a branch manager at Desert Realty. She delivers a three-hour lecture course in which she teaches cooperative marketing, learning the “neighborly way”, and how to be fair, friendly and work in a “team spirit” and that fulfill with the requirements of all agents to renew the NAR® Code of Ethics by the end of the year.

The TAR® constantly organizes classes and has ongoing education and training. For example, on November 15th, it provides a class counting for continuing education credit as three hours of Agency Law, but that resembles a marketing class called “Providing Millionaire Service:”

> Agency is all about protecting and promoting the interests of our clients. But what if we do it in a Millionaire Service way when we exceed their expectations, grow our business by serving more customers and develop systems that keep it all together and streamlined. We will share with you proven success models used by top producing agents all over the country who consistently close hundreds of transactions with satisfied clients.

They often promote speakers to raise the motivation and productivity of the realtors®, offering similar training that, as evidenced in Chapter 3 what the two real estate companies we shadow, Real Prosperity and Desert Realty, do in their newer recruits' training. At the TAR® Expo of 2017, they invited Matt Jones, who is a "national inspirational speaker," to present latest book *Happiness is a Marathon: 26.2 Ways to Stay Happy at Work and in Life* on redemption and success: "Matt was diagnosed with cancer on September 11, 2002. He went from being a three-time cancer conqueror to relearning how to walk, to surviving a bone marrow transplant, to completing seven marathons on seven continents and yes, that includes Antarctica!"

Along with real estate brokerage firms, trade organizations disseminate what it means to be a realtor® and the best way to "generate business." Trade members must acquire a sense of their market endeavors and learn practically which strategies to enact to deal with legitimacy and competition. But these organizations are also the ones who directly create, while shaping legislation, a set of norms, standards and collective identity, to help reduce uncertainty and mitigate competition.

Along with the significant generalized growth of American trade associations during the 20th century,[38] NAR® has grown to be the largest trade organization in the United States. Its activities are both internal and external to the industry. Internal activities focus on education, information sharing, networking, and accreditation, the development of certification standards, marketing and research while external aim to influence both the political through lobbying and making sure policies and regulations are not detrimental to

[38] There are nowadays more than 4 000 business associations and thousands more regional or local which have diffuse goals and carry out a vast array of economic and non-economic activities with only a few that are publicly recognizable.

the industry; and the public, through civil actions, dissemination of knowledge, research and advice.

These activities materialize by a series of concrete productions such as the Code of Ethics, newsletters, directories, guides, press releases. Besides having media centers, NAR® organizes events such as conventions, expositions, trade shows and other meetings, such as charity events. It also hosts a university and provides training and professional opportunities for its members. The trade association highlights both the particularistic interests of their members but and the collective shaping of an identity of excellence, acting for the public good, fostering solidarity and technical expertise.

In the following part, I explore both the organizational level processes around expert knowledge and ethical/ moral claims. First, I discuss the expert knowledge which played an important part of the process of legitimation of the real estate agent. Second, I discuss the ethical work needed to validate the professional ethos and legitimacy. I also show a sense of the game is developed which contributes to developing internal forms of reproduction and status.

2. Expert Knowledge Claims

> "A Realtor knows today's market. He handles hundreds of similar transactions. He can get you a fair price, quick sale. A Realtor has a list of prospects who are honestly interested in finding a home. He shows by appointment, eliminating the stream of casual lookers who otherwise would troop through your house. A Realtor screens out the prospects who are financially unable to meet your price. No wasting valuable time showing your home to those unqualified to buy. A Realtor is prepared to arrange the intricacies of financing to complete the deals. A Realtor has the technique and "know-how" necessary to close the transaction properly."
> (Advertisement for the realtor week hold April 13 to April 19 of 1956)

> "Did you know that many REALTORS® can and often do act as consultants in the areas of financing, real estate investment and taxation, design, and construction, value appraisal, and energy efficiency assessment? Realtors® are experienced businessmen and women who have access to the most current information in the real estate industry. They're familiar with home values and the housing market in your area"
> (Advertisement by the National Association of Realtors® in 1984)

In Chapter 3, I looked at the training provided by real estate companies to transform the worker into a real estate agent and to motivate engagement. Here I depart from research on

sales occupations to discuss expert knowledge claims made by real estate agents. If research on sales occupations has demonstrated that salespeople need individual characteristics and self-motivation, effective time management, feeling of self-worth and perception to be successful at selling, it has not been very attentive to the role played by trade associations to increase sales' performances. The argument I make here is that NAR® and TAR®, as trade associations developed a set of tools, programs, and events to create and disseminate a body of knowledge both to the public and to the real estate agent, strengthening both its structural and cultural force on the market.

2.1. From the Knowledge of the Salesmen to the Organizational Claims to Expert Knowledge

Since the seminal study by Ford et al. (1987), scholars in sales management and marketing research have investigated the determinants of sales performance (Leigh et al. 2001). They consider both micro and macro factors affecting transactions. In the increasingly developed knowledge-intensive (Verbeke, Dietz, and Verwaal 2011) and science-based economy (Stremersch and Van Dyck 2009), these scholars argue that salespeople are not only service workers performing emotional labor (Horschild 1979) but "knowledge brokers" whose job is to transfer knowledge to customers. Their brokering role includes a transfer of the "know-why", or the science behind products and services and the "know-how," referring to the uses of products and services by their customers.

The efficiency of the transfer rests on the cognitive abilities necessary to the assimilation of knowledge and the capacity to tailor it to a variety of customers), working thus to "shape the minds of their customers" (Verbeke, Dietz and Verwaal 2011). Within this framework, salespeople need to develop both selling-relating knowledge (macro selling) and interpersonal skills (micro selling). The selling-related knowledge includes specific knowledge on sales: the knowledge around sales situations, classification of prospect and appropriate sales strategies (Leong, Busch, and John 1989, 164) but also technical knowledge about finance and economics, knowledge about customers, prices and the products.

Many scholars argue that in the current knowledge economy, knowledge is endogenous to the creation of value and intervene at all stages of production and marketing (Achrol and Kotler 1999; Vargo and Lusch 2004). Additionally, and since the customers are more tech-savvy and go on the internet to search for knowledge of the products, salespeople are pressured to "possess knowledge that is scarce and unavailable to the customer" (Verbeke, Dietz and Verwaal, 2011, 422). The capacity to own and control knowledge becomes even more central and is thus essential to the production and reproduction of salespeople (Hauser, Tellis, and Griffin 2006).

The transfer is done through interactions between salespeople and customers, in conservations about prices and products in which the salesperson must make the customers discover how the solutions provided solve an issue or cater to their needs. The needs are created through the framing of a problem by market and state actors; and the highlighted value of a particular solution. For example, the goal of the 1920's national campaign conducted by the NAR® was to develop homeownership by advocating the benefits of homeownership over renting. Knowledge is not presented as an "all-time truth about prices and products" but as a common shared-understanding of a situation and the concrete best options to act "rationally" in a market. Real estate agents are most often the ones in charge of bringing knowledge and transferring it to their clients.

On the other hand, salespeople are also social actors possessing their specific characteristics, including demographics such as race, class, gender, marital status and experiences. As a function of social characteristics, work engagement (Sonnentag 2003) and workers' motivation (Walker Jr, Churchill Jr, and Ford 1977), interpersonal skills refer to the "understanding, persuading and getting along with other people such as customers" (Ford et al. 1987, 104).

For researchers, sales performances depend both on the personal traits of salespeople entrepreneurial and optimist, flexible, and motivated and on the organizational environment in which they operate: colleagues, training, coaching and goal-setting programs provided by managers can benefit the transaction (Ford et al. 1987; Lam et al. 2010) which was extensively discussed in Chapter 3.

The blending of these organizational and individual elements[39] around a specific salesman ethos permits salespeople to be reactive, adapt to the customer, and cope with uncertainty, according to this stream of research. I continue by addressing how organizational programs and tools are designed to equip real estate agents as salespeople, as well as how on the individual and practical level, agents work on their knowledge and on their capacity to transfer it.

2.2. Programs and Tools Generating Knowledge (Organizational Level)

Beginning in the 1920s, there has been a progressive acceptation of the idea that science and knowledge were necessary for modern real estate (Weiss 2002, Hornstein 2005). "Realogy" was thus set to encompass a wide variety of knowledge including "city and regional planning, architecture, housing reform, demography, sanitation engineering, and road surveying." As recalled by Hornstein (2005, 110-111), the discourse of Nichols, a successful realtor and community builder of the 1920s, illustrates the framing of a specific competence, using the model of other occupational groups claiming professionalism: "Any man who wants to know anything about law must go to a lawyer. Any man who wants to know anything about medicine must go to a physician. If he wants to know anything about real estate or land he must go to a real estate man." This knowledge claims served partly as a legitimation to the public: "If we simply serve as a medium for the mere exchange of real estate, we are not a profession; the world does not recognize any calling as a profession unless its members intelligently work to add knowledge and betterment to the world."

Real estate advertisements compare the REALTOR to the doctor or the lawyer, stating both the expert knowledge acquired and the ethical aspects of the endeavors. The archived pictures and documents from the NAR® give access to the advertisements published between 1920 and 1960. I provide here the example of the of John Sorrentino and Son Realtors' advertisement in 1946:

> Just as the degree M.D. identified members of the medical profession who have spent years in study qualifying themselves to treat your physical health, so the term REALTOR designates members of the Real Estate Profession who have qualified to

[39] I discuss these expert claims at the individual level in chapter 5.

> competently serve you in real estate matters. The term "REALTOR" is not another name for "Real Estate Agent." It is a name which can be used ONLY by persons in the real estate professions who have qualified as members of the National Association of Real Estate Boards, through their membership in the Chicago Real Estate Boards. This means that: 1) They have personal standards and business competence to warrant entrusting them with important matters involved in real estate transactions; 2) They must abide in their business by a Code of Ethics; 3) REALTORS are active in initiating and supervising local, state, and national legislation protecting the interests of everyone interested in real estate.

These advertisements usually communicate to the public, framed as potential clients, the integrity of the realtors®, the legitimacy of their activity, and the desire to become as "commonly" accepted and used as doctors.

Today, contemporary realtors justify their role by their amount of knowledge and expertise about the local housing market, the city, and the community. Expert knowledge is not only discursive but is available through the development of statistics and technology, which as the association develops with a full-time staff and more members, can work for its members and create what Muniesa, Millo, and Callon (2007) call "market devices."

Beyond the dichotomy of humans and machines, blending Bourdieu's dispositions and Foucault's dispositifs[40] into economic agencements rendering "things, behaviours, and processes economic," market devices are socio-technical agencements which allow to bring about economic exchange and to create value. By owning for-profit The Multiple Listing Service of Southern Arizona (MLSSAZ), the TAR® created its system of cooperation based on the exclusive access to supply information. Thus, real estate agents are almost required to subscribe to membership if they want to exercise real estate activity. It is the only existing platform for exchanging information on goods available on the market; neither Trulia nor Zillow have access to such information. The association claims to have permitted in 2018 over $2.6 billion in real estate transactions last year.

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[40] The "market device" blends dispositions in Bourdieu's sense (*Outline for a Theory of Practice*, 1977) as cognitive structures guiding individuals in their actions and Foucault 's *dispositifs* (2012), as heterogeneous spoken (speeches) and unspoken devices (institutional, architectural forms), with a strategic function related to power (*Discipline and Punish*, 1977).

As a market device, the Multiple Listing Service (MLS), operated through local boards, restricts access to the members of the NAR® to information and resources about available supply. This type of technological innovation contributes to the institutionalization of the real estate occupation while encouraging everyone to become a member of the trade association. With the claimed objective of improving the face of business activities while serving the higher good of their clients, and the community (Freidson 2001, Wilensky 1964), by detaining exclusive access to the supply, real estate agents control and shape market structure and outcomes.

The programs and actions sponsored or organized directly by the NAR are part of constant actions to maintain people engage in the industry as well as to attract people to buy and sell houses with the goal of "managing markets to protect the performance of their members" (Spillman 2012, 43). But as Bradley (1965) shows, the goals of a trade association like the NAR® were not only to manage price and production but to engage with "information sharing, education, and sociability." The American Iron and Steel Institute for example provided for "the mutual interchange of information and experience, both scientific and practical," established "trade statistics, making collections of books and mineral samples" and encouraged schools to offer a "proper and thorough scientific training" of young "ironmasters."

The NAR® and the TAR® provide research and statistics on buyers' and sellers' demographics. These studies are made available to the members to help them manage the market and operate their business based on client classifications. Companies also play a role in helping agents to categorize their customers, through providing examples of the types of consumers they will encounter or management tools to classify them. Trade associations also write articles drawing on statistics about the generations of homeowners, supported by data made in conjunction for example between the NAR® and Harris Interactive in which they surveyed 3,372 Americans across generations: X ranging from ages 35 to 50, Millennials or Y ranging from 25 to 34, and Z from 18 to 24, in which they compare their responses towards homeownership, housing features, and real estate investment.

Trade associations also follow buying and selling trends to understand why and how they care about homeownership, for example by showing that student debt is a "roadblock

to homeownership" through articles on their platform that takes on their analysis of the situation: for example, this article by Anthony SanFilippo which is titled "Low inventory, rising interest rates, and student loan debt are all factors contributing to the suppression of first-time homebuyers." A network of statisticians, consultants, and experts working and speaking under the umbrella of the NAR® are closely monitoring homeownership rates and perceptions, seeing how they can impact the trends. These articles published on their website or their trade journal are designed to produce knowledge that is directly available to real estate agents and designed to be shared with customers. For example, a self-designed real estate consultant or expert declares that "even with poor credit, one can buy a house" or that "this is the best time to invest in real estate as interest rates are the lowest they have ever been." This vast network of experts and consultants produces and shares financial and technical knowledge daily.

Not only does NAR® provide information to agents, but it also works towards the education of its members, and deliver a series of accreditations (designations and certifications) which are obtained by agents after they take a variety of courses offered by local real estate boards affiliated with the NAR®. They range from relocation, resort and second home specialist, foreclosure, pricing strategy, buyer's specialist, negotiation expert or short sales and foreclosure resource.

The National Association of Realtors® produce knowledge on a variety of topic such as 1) Legal: Real estate laws such as land uses and property rights (curriculum at the real estate school and handled by the Arizona Department of Real Estate); 2) Financial: Financing, credit, insurance, taxes; 3) Marketing; 4) Technology: related to the new technology available and its use and mastering; 5) Housing statistics and demographics, including research reports and articles; 6) Market, product, and transaction-related knowledge such as neighborhoods, pricing, negotiation.

The National Association of Realtors is partnering with local associations to provide classes and resources. The Tucson Association of Realtors® is directly providing locally most of the programs that the NAR implements, the accreditations but also, for example, the Graduate REALTOR® Institute (GRI) which courses claim to bring cutting-edge knowledge about real estate standards and practices, including the sales process, legal and

regulatory information, technology and professional standards. These classes are designed to be a mix between Statistics also present the increase of income among realtors® who took the course. Part of the courses is taught by other realtors® either practicing locally or in other parts of the country.

The development of the REALTOR® University with a specific degree came according to the NAR® from an "Advisory Group on Professionalism in the industry" in which members agreed that, to "improve the practice of real estate", was to "ensure" that "the REALTOR® mark" was "perceived as an assurance of experience and professional service." They thus developed a roadmap to offer academic degrees and educational training for members. The key challenge is to offer relevant courses that can "reflect the evolving nature of the real estate industry, technology influences, public policy demands, and encourage lifelong learning" and as well as produce "high-quality research" and make "public policy recommendations" that "supports broader social and societal goals."

Not only do the national and local associations help agents with marketing and transactions-related information but they also do provide a variety of monthly statistics about the situation of the market. The Tucson Association of Realtors® provides what they call a “statistics library” in which they bring month and yearly statistics coming from the Multiple Listing Service, including “sales and active inventory, averages, medians, pending sales, listing price information, days on market.” Tucson Association of Realtors® also provides courses for agents to navigate the Multiple Listing Service (MLS) that they run locally.

The construction of the real estate activity into a profession makes it the basis for realtors® legitimation and importance in the market. Studying real estate activity as a socio-historical construct permits us to see how professional competence is both operationalized and appropriated by real estate agents in their day-to-day activities. Looking at the research on sales – traditionally high in the post-Fordist organization of labor (no direct control but incentives through financial rewards and commission-based structure of pay) – permits an understanding of how sales' occupations were constructed and understands the relationship between lower level of acceptance – selling is seen as morally reprehensive because there is

a suspicion of favoring their advantage to the detriment of the buyer – and high level of professionalization (or at least, push towards professionalization).

The display of expertise is one of the ways the market work of agents generates trust. If it is a necessary condition, it is not a sufficient one because of the specific status of sales occupations, a point that I discuss specifically in chapter 5. According to the real estate companies, the trust existing between clients and agents – implied in the idea that people do business with you because they know you and like you – can be established through different means. Alongside the traditional and "needed" professional competence, the agent presents himself as a "good man" who is liked and whose clients can easily identify with.

3. Ethical and Moral claims

"The Golden Rule I will apply
In everything I do;
In all I sell and all I buy,
To clients I'll be true;
With my competitor I'll be
Forever fair and square,
My honor and integrity
I'll guard with zealous care.
Our Code of Ethics I'll uphold
In every act and deed,
My word I'll keep as good as gold
This is my daily creed"
(The Realtor Creed, NAREB, 1930)

3.1. A Social Movement in the Marketplace?

On the NAR® website, one can read the following: "From city hall to the U.S. Capitol, REALTORS® are actively involved in a wide range of issues related to the health and well-being of the communities where they work and live. Through their membership in the National Association of REALTORS®, they are a powerful voice in support of the dream of homeownership and work to build strong communities and a vibrant business environment that benefits everyone."

According to the Center for Responsible Politics (2012), the NAR has ranked as the 2Nd larger top spender in lobbying after the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. They spent $64,821,111 in 2016, with 46% to Republicans and 30.8% to Democrats. They advocate for

the defense of private property rights, taxation, and deregulation of financial services. NAR is also a member of the Real Estate Roundtable, a lobbying group in Washington, D.C. Some examples of their activities and programs include for example "Home Ownership Matters: Have your voice heard at the local, state and national levels of government on core tax and property issues." In which the public is invited to make their voice heard about these topics with advice and guideline on: "Equity Buildup: Owning a home is a good investment"; "Tax Incentives: Mortgage Interest and Real Estate Property Tax Deductions are a financial benefit"; "Neighborhood Pride: Homeowners form the bedrock of successful communities: Homeownership Matters offers a unique platform to engage your representatives on important homeownership and property issues.

Trade organizations have been recently conceptualized as social movements in the marketplace (Rao 2009, Esparza et al. 2014). The social movement theory of resource mobilization (McCarthy and Zald 1977) analyses organizations in their coordinated and strategic efforts to produce and appropriate specific resources to pursue collective actions outside of the institutional and organizational channels (Edwards and McCarthy 2004). But trade organizations as interest groups could also be analyzed through the same lens, even if they act within already existing institutional channels. They can contribute to managing organizational legitimacy (Snow, Soule, and Kriesi 2008), to building sociopolitical legitimacy allowing to exploit political opportunity (Aldrich and Fiol 1994), and to mitigating reputational risks (King and Lenox 2000).

Although the NAR® is now well-established to defend the interests of real estate actors, thinking in that frame allows an understanding of how the trade association supports both the internal creation of shared interests and the representation of collective interests that might be challenged by the State regulators or by other industries. In this sense, the trade association aim to both improves the conditions of business for the good of the members by pursuit changes in public policies and reforms while managing its legitimacy and reputation. It contributes to influence and trust in the political realm (Schaefer and Kerrigan 2008; Tucker 2008). They are granted access to policymakers while developing

strong political resources and capabilities to lobby and engage in political advocacy (Minto 2016).

3.2. Programs and Tools Drawing on the Defense of American Values of Ownership and the Public Good (Organizational Level)

The lobbying, programs, and events sponsored through institutes or councils or organized directly by the NAR around homeownership and financial wealth foster the attraction to the industry, both for newer recruits, for buyers, and sellers. Specially, at the beginning of the century, the trade journals "intermingled discourses about business identities, manufacturing identities (republican virtues of productivity), nationality, family, masculinity and Christianity" in which "speakers frequently raised their collectivity above interest to a calling" (W. G. Roy and Parker-Gwin 1999, 223–24).

Besides being "property professions," real estate agents are often portrayed by the NAR® as "community champions." Stories about discrimination and community struggles are also put at a stage to portray agents bringing possibilities to the community members by educating them and making them see the benefits of homeownership while becoming financially responsible. Brenda, who portrays herself as an educator and a guide in Mississippi for example, says:

> She realized this community needed help. There were good people out there in Vicksburg. Hard-working families whose banks wouldn't touch with a ten-foot pole if approached for a loan. These folks were living paycheck-to-paycheck renting properties rather than owning them. It was a vicious cycle, and one Love decided she wanted to fix. So, she went back to the licensing class in 2002, and this time she took the test – and passed (…) She's been helping the people of Vicksburg ever since. She focuses her efforts on the underprivileged, the poor. The uneducated and uninformed. It's a segment of the population too often forgotten by the hustle and bustle of everyday America.[41]

The legitimation of real estate not only came from the organization of their interests but also both a capacity to draw on middle-class values in the early 20th century and the

[41] http://homeownershipmatters.realtor/mississippi/vicksburg-realtor-goes-the-extra-mile/

promotion of homeownership by the State and a variety of private actors. For historian Jeffrey Hornstein (2005), the successful organizational development of real estate agents was the product of their ability to make the group's formation coincide with the values of the American middle class, entrepreneurial spirit and the ideology of property at the end of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century.

Real estate agents developed an entrepreneurial identity by merging individual ownership and social success in the iconography of financial stability and the "American dream". The 1920s saw the emergence of the "American House" as the object of knowledge and intervention of experts and professionals: domestic economists, planners, architects and reformers of housing. Everett Hughes, in his thesis on the development of the Chicago real estate chamber (Hughes 1928) sees the creation of the chamber as the primary objective of legitimizing the existence of real estate agents, and transforming a negative occupation (real estate sharks) into a "respected and respectable" one by the multiplication of elements affirming of their "good practices" represented in the codes of conduct and ethics, programs supporting private property and narratives of educational value.

The preamble of the Code of Ethics also illustrates besides the strong integrity and honesty realtors® should obey the moral endeavor in which real estate agents should submit.

> Under all is the land. Upon its wise utilization and widely allocated ownership depend the survival and growth of free institutions and our civilization. REALTORS® should recognize that the interests of the nation and its citizens require the highest and best use of the land and the widest distribution of land ownership. They require the creation of adequate housing, the building of functioning cities, the development of productive industries and farms, and the preservation of a healthful environment. Such interests impose obligations beyond those of ordinary commerce. They impose grave social responsibility and patriotic duty to which REALTORS® should dedicate themselves, and for which they should be diligent in preparing themselves. REALTORS®, therefore, are zealous to maintain and improve the standards of their calling and share with their fellow REALTORS® a common responsibility for its integrity and honor. (Preamble of the 2019 Code of Ethics, NAR®)

Although this can be easily discarded as a professional ideology, on can look more precisely at the actions taken, the programs developed, and the individual practices of real estate agents., All these emphasize specific perceptions and discourses around

homeownership and American values. The preservation of homeownership, through the framing of American moral and cultural values, is being transferred by a set of tools, documents, training, articles which maintain and reinforce these core values. These articles portray the agent as the "good guys" bringing the dream of homeownership through various portraits of these modeled agents that try to make people build equity. In this case, the agents are seen as facilitators of these transactions.

The NAR®, for example, has several online platforms designed to communicate what they frame as information and knowledge to the public. For example, the platform HomeOwnership Matters exhibits the following title: "Have your voice heard at the local, state and national levels of government on core tax and property issues" and is defined in the following way:

> HomeOwnership Matters is an education and advocacy campaign committed to protecting the dream of homeownership. This initiative provides useful information on real estate, tax, and property policies to inspire homeowners to take action, protecting homeownership now – and for generations to come.
> Homeownership Matters provides an ideal platform for current and prospective homeowners to have their voice heard at the local, state and national levels of government on core tax and property issues. With proposed policy changes happening in communities across the country, it is more important than ever to stand-up for homeowner rights.

Programs such as "Neighborhood Pride" encourage homeowners to lead "successful communities" and to engage representatives on the issues, for example by taking the pledge and sign the homeowner bill of rights. The platform REALTOR® Party provides grants, financial supports, and training for potential candidates who want to run for offices, providing that they are friendly to realtors. The NAR® provides booklets and materials for the training, which is run by state or local associations. The material contains sets of knowledge on the reasons to run for office, the planning and budgeting of a campaign, the research and the targeting, the navigation of the internet, of volunteers and grassroots. The goals of the training are stated as:

> Assess whether they possess the basic traits necessary to run for office; State (in 30 seconds) why they are running for office; Describe the elements necessary for developing a campaign plan and begin the planning process; Discuss their research needs based on their target audience and their budget estimates; Based on their individual

campaign's strengths, plan for the fundraising methods that can prove most effective and lucrative; Determine the best methods for contacting their constituents, based on voter demographics and budget; Analyze the electronic campaign options available and determine which, if any, will prove most effective for their outreach; Assess the multiple avenues to approach a get-out-the-vote plan and determine which elements would be useful to their campaign planning.

The developed strategic plans to run for office through the NAR® resources demonstrate the desire to influence political decisions and to support core values and interests defined by the National Association of Realtor®. Dissemination is also conducted at the local level. Associations also confer actors' authority (DiMaggio and Powell 1983) and reward those who play by their book or standards while engaging in the soft retaliation of those who do not (Baum and Oliver 1991). The Tucson Association of Realtors® ensures, through a series of actions, that realtors® are protected and highlighted as guarantees of the protection of the public.

Besides their ethical claims, the association also defends political interests based on their real estate expert knowledge. TAR intervenes on political issues such as endorsing local political candidates or their support on specific voting propositions, such as Proposition 126 of October 2018 in which they organized campaigns to vote "Yes" as fear of taxing services and in the claimed defense of small businesses.

In terms of community investment, they provide documents such as the "Better Block Guide" which are designed to "empower communities and their leaders to reshape built environments to promote the growth of healthy and vibrant neighborhoods." The book also presents potential actions to add value to a neighborhood such as "temporary treatments (i.e., painting, bike lanes, and parklets) to vacant buildings, underused streets and public spaces." There are presented as ways to foster solidarity within the community and allow neighbors to participate. The other aim is to "convince public officials, stakeholders, lenders and property owners" of the area's potential." What is interesting in this presentation of Better Block is that it is described as an alternative to "traditional long and boring planning processes" involving "endless public and committee meetings," causing "a strife among stakeholders and residents."

The National Association of Realtors® praise homeownership as well through publishing articles and new-reports highlighting statistics and scientists backing positive news for the real estate market, for example writing in a November 20th online article that "Mortgage Debt Nears a Pre-Crash High, but That's No Cause for Concern" and why we should be concerned mostly about "asset" rather than "debts" or articles such as the following one who highlights optimistic prospects:

> New findings from a survey from the National Association of REALTORS ® show that 77 percent of Americans think that now is a good time to sell a home, a new record high. Respondents in the West were the most likely to believe that now is a good time to sell (85 percent) as well as those who currently home a home (82 percent). Much of this optimism comes from several successive years of robust home price growth.
> NAR Chief Economist Lawrence Yun has this to say about why property owners feel ready to list their homes. "Though the vast majority of consumers believe home prices will continue to increase or hold steady, they understand the days of easy, fast gains could be coming to an end. Therefore, more are indicating that it is a good time to sell, which is a healthy shift in the market."
> Story Springboard
> Read NAR's third quarter Housing Opportunities and Market Experience (HOME) Survey for more information on consumer housing preferences from July to September 2018. Speak with some REALTORS® in your area about consumer sentiments about the housing market. Ask someone in your community who recently listed their home why they chose to do so now (News reports: October 8, 2018)

At the local level, TAR® also advertises on its website to "forget the newspapers" as "Homeownership is in your reach starting now." Although the association acknowledges a series of problems that could impede to buy (down payments, closing costs, and loan qualification standards), it seems to have organized bureaucratically as it advertises "people, groups, and programs that work full time to help make homeownership a reality." They provide information on the improvement of credit score, programs to help put the down payment claiming to bring "educational resources to prepare (you) to become a home owner."

The education is offered usually in partnership with other companies or websites directing potential candidates to use them such as annualcreditreport.com or moneymanagement.org in which are highlighted stories about individuals who came out of

debt. These stories also resemble what we have highlighted in the training of the real estate companies in chapter 3 (overcoming one's fear to be walking on the path of success). Programs are designed to educate and discipline people to be financially responsible and organize planning. Financial education is also in partnership with FreddieMac CreditSmart® program designed to:

> help consumers build and maintain better credit, make sound financial decisions, and understand the steps to sustainable homeownership" as well as "increase consumers' financial understanding by teaching life-long money management skills and showing consumers how to avoid foreclosure and keep their home.

On the one hand, these programs praise homeownership and on the other hand sound financial decisions, to help people get on their feet by then allowing them to take large mortgages. Some scholars and news reports have allegedly claimed that realtors® were at least partially responsible for the subprime mortgage crisis but when I was at the school, an instructor showed a video that highlighted the practices of Wall Street and on some mortgage companies but never pointed out anything concerning the realtor (cf. The Sub-Prime Blame Game: Where Were the Realtors?). What I observe in the field was that there was a strong push to make people buy and sell properties as only these transactions are bringing income to the realtors®. This situation might not have significantly changed from the recession and with the prices being high again, some analysts believe the crash is going to happen (Is the real estate market going to crash?). This strong push to buy and sell is encouraged structurally because of how the agent exclusively generates income from transactions, thus needs to act as a "good man," an advisor rather than a salesperson.

3.3. Being a "Good Agent": The Advisor Rather than the Salesperson (Individual Level)

The invisible but harsh competition takes place among agents, whereby specific techniques and instruments are used to get clients and to generate trust. The strategic investment in the professionalization, standards, values, and ethics; crucial for communicating with customers, is still held against the common image of the realtor® as a greedy salesman. Due to the ambiguous status of sales' occupations in the world of professions, sales'

intermediaries try to break from the moral ambiguity of sales, epitomized in the image of the unscrupulous "car-salesman type" whose only objective is financial gain at the expense of customers' financial and social well-being.

To combat this image, the sales agents I observed seek to demonstrate they are "good people" who want to represent and help rather than take advantage or exploit the vulnerability of people (McFall 2011, Mullaney and Shope 2012). Self-presentation techniques include distancing themselves from the idea of a "greedy salesman" and its personification of a "cool" and "likable helping identity." The figure of the agent is nourished on the one hand by the myth of the individual entrepreneur or the self-made man, and on the other hand by the masculine gallant figure, presented as a man of integrity, of honesty or educator at the service of the weakest. Similarly to what McFall (2012) observes in her work on the insurance agent, "the good guy" is family-driven and pays specific attention to not display a "higher status" than their clients, embodying a form of middle-class identity. To relate to customers, he or she deemphasizes the economic dimension of their actions by framing their work not as pure selling but as service for a higher good (financial stability, homeownership dreams).

By giving the illusion that their interests disappear behind the interests of their clients, the 15 top producer agents I interviewed discuss their desires to get away from the figure of the "con-man" by "cooling the mark out" (Goffman 1952). Jessica, a 57-year-old agent is within the top 1% most Gross Commissionable Income of all real estate agents in the community according to statistics furnished by the local real estate board. Distancing herself from the “greedy agents,” she explains being genuinely interested in fulfilling her clients’ needs:

> I have a client who has some friends. They’re very scared to sell and they’re elderly. She wants them to talk with me because she knows that I will not be aggressive, and I will not make them feel pressured and cornered, that I was going to sit down with them and explain the process. I’ll probably get the listing, but I’m really doing it to help them. A lot of real estate agents are aggressive and hungry, they live from check to check. I have a different perspective than a lot of agents, because I do it as a choice, not because that I have to.

Other agents also downplay their role as salespersons. Intuitively, they know they must hide away from the image of the salesman, which is seen as forcing people into making a decision or choosing something they do not want to. Instead, presenting the market relation between the intermediary and the buyer or seller as a "relationship" makes it appear softer and fits agents' representations. Terri, a 44-year-old agent, 10 years into the business, stresses the role of a counselor rather than a sales agent:

> I'm pretty shy, I mean not hide in-the-corner shy but I just, I don't like to promote myself, I always thought that you had to be a salesperson, but I'm not just a salesperson, but I was more, with my business, I was in charge of customer service, and that's what I believe in, I never thought, nobody can sell me anything, talk me into buying something I don't want to buy, I hated people that were really brushed like that, not hated them, cause my partner is the best salesperson I ever met in my life, it's not about how you talk somebody into something, it's about relationships, building relationships and being genuine, not fake because you won't sell them something, and she rolls. I just have a philosophy, I really like helping people and meet their own goals, trying to help them solve a problem, because sometimes, it can be really overwhelming, let's say you have a house that is underwater, it's you know, you buy it for more than you can sell it now, and you're trying to transition to a new job, you have to sell, you have to figure out, what do you do, a lot of people are just paralyzed, it feels good to be able to consult them, and help them to get where they can finally meet their goals.

Less-established agents also stress the same discourse, although their lack of stabilized income makes them often very uncomfortable because they know they need to secure transactions to at least get some revenue while still protecting the clients, which does not necessarily, implies to finalize the transaction and certainty not necessarily quickly. The real estate agents are thus always trying to balance a difficult structurally-constraining position. Sonia, 59 years old, who started about 6 months ago in the business, is talking about the ambiguous relation between making money and providing the best care to the client. There is a seeming opposition in her discourse between taking care and making money:

> It's hard to not look at people and see dollar signs at the beginning. I'm somebody who wants to build relationships. I want to help people, but at the same time, there were little points in June and July where I was like 'I need to eat! I need to get paid!' So, it's tough to not—you have to keep that separate. You have to look at the money at the end of it. At the end of a sale. Before that, you have to look at it as 'I need to

> take care of these people and make sure they are getting what they need. You can't even think about the money. At least that's what works for me. I can't even think about the money. The only money thing that I need to think about is holding open houses at $300,000 homes instead of $150,000 homes, because in the long run that will get me clients that are higher buyers and that will make me more money at the end of the day.

Sonia is strategically reasoning about how to generate transactions. One of the arguments repeated during training at the real estate school and the real estate companies is that by being the best you can be and friendly, transactions are going to flow naturally. Matthew, a 32-year-old agent who started about a year ago, is even going as far as not wanting to be "known" as the "realtor" because it represents the role of someone trying to profit from the sale of a piece of property. He prefers to be seen as a facilitator or a guide and to be able to build a connection with his clients. When I asked him about presenting himself, he declared:

> Yeah, I don't think that being an agent should define you. I don't want to be…I don't want to be known as a realtor. I want those people—I want those people that I help to remember that I helped them. I want to build a valuable relationship with them forever.

In this specific example, Matthew tries to downplay the realtor and reframe his status as an advisor or counselor who aims to make people achieve their goals having control over very specific and fine knowledge on what to do, which steps to take to achieve them. The goal per se of this advising is beside the act of buying to frame it more globally to the economic benefits of the clients, by highlighting the financial advantages of owning versus renting, the building of equity and financial freedom, and the grasp on the community (homeownership makes better neighbors).

Even fairly establish agents like Suzy, 30-year-old, are trying to downplay the importance of money over the service:

> I don't want this to be about money. Ever. I want to get a paycheck and be like 'Whoa! Look what I've made for just helping somebody!' That would be a wonderful benefit. But at the end of the day what I really want to do is just make sure that people are being taken care of. My main selling point of me is I want people that I've worked with to sit there with their friends, family, whoever…and for their friends and family to be like 'Oh real estate agents are— 'blah, blah, blah…' they're just out to get you'

> or whatever, and for those people to be like 'Actually, we had an amazing experience. Here's his card. If you ever need anything, call him. He will make sure you are taken care of.' That's what I want. I want to be an exception. I want to be somebody that is known for 'Client comes first.' That's it. Because I don't want to be—that's the thing. It's like—this can't get back to my boss---

To discursively build a sense of the value of their occupation, the clear majority of agents try on the ground (11 out of the 12 I followed evidenced degree of control) to put incoherence the transaction outcome (money) and the needs (and wants of the clients). Without ever being conscious of it, their knowledge of real estate matters is engaged in the enterprise of showing the value of buying and selling no matter what[42].

The stories about the "bad agents" were a very common subject in my interviews. Without asking questions about specific agents, when prompted about "good agents" and stories, they often drifted to talk about those "lousy" agents that were only here to "get the money" and were not servicing the whole community of realtors. Cynthia, 55 years-old, with significant status in the industry and 18 years of practice, is describing the "bad" agent:

> A lot of real estate agents are aggressive and hungry, and you know, they live from check to check, so we all practice differently. We've very strange animals [laughter]. We are. I mean my husband calls it the cult. [laughter]. He's like, "How is the cult today?" And I have a different perspective than a lot of agents. Some are aggressive. You know, you're in an open house. They walk in. "Are you working with an agent? Are you prequalified?" I would never do that to a person. I would walk in and say, "How are you? What brought you to Tucson? Are you from here? You lived on this street? Great. How long have you lived here?" It's never about immediately trying to close people.

This vision of the "aggressive" and "pushy" agent is a common figure among the real estate agents I interviewed and shadowed. Mentioned by 70% of the agents in the interviews, it is used to further reinforce the boundary between the "bad" and the "good ones" which are always the category in which the agent interviewed is placing him or

[42]. With the acquisition of professional status, agents would have thus more choices on which clients they can choose to accept or to refuse, without downgrading significantly their income. But they drop clients often because they anticipate that their investment in time and energy would not traduce well in commission, thus as they grow in status, they learn to decipher "good" vs. "bad" clients. I discuss this in Chapter 7.

herself. Matthew, who just started four months ago, talks about being uncomfortable about how his mentoring agent handles her business:

> There are times when she is pushing for a sale and I kind of lit there like that's not how I would handle it. Maybe that's why she's making the money she's making and I've made the money I've made <Laughs>. She's like, really pushing for a sale to go through. She'll tell her clients it'll be fine. And I'm just like I don't know. I wouldn't say that because I don't know for a fact that it's going to be fine. What I would say is—I don't want to put pressure on my client. I want to put pressure on the other agent. Be like 'Hey, we need to get this done without making your seller hate you and without making my buyer hate me. I want to do what's right for them. If canceling is the right thing, so be it. There are a bunch of other houses out there.

But Matthew, as a newer recruit, also stresses the pressures to get a transaction go through, which is one of the "grey areas" agents sometimes evoke. After investing a lot of time working on a transaction, recognizing and guiding clients through canceling a transaction is the equivalent of losing money, or at least not getting any income for the time invested into serving those clients.

Since the transaction goes exclusively to the agent, the management of reputation is crucial for newer agents. Lenny, who is teaming with a more experienced real estate partner, discusses the importance of appearing as a good person. A good person is not forcing you to behave a certain way, but that behaves as a friend, showing a degree of understanding and reciprocity. In that model, the real estate agent needs to be somewhat laid-back and leave people feeling in charge while he is carefully making them feel emotionally convinced by the agent:

> I try not to push. The last thing that I want is—the first impression is the biggest thing. That's going to decide whether they spend more time with you or not. It's the same as a house. Having good pictures on the listing. If they look at the pictures—it could be the best house ever but if you took pictures on your phone, odds are it's not going to work out. If you got a professional photographer to take pictures of that terrible house, the listing could look great and people will want to get inside the door. I have the same thought when it comes to meeting people at open houses. I need to make the most—well, okay. Truthfully, I need to make the least negative…I don't want to be the guy who is like 'Hey! What's your name?? What's your email address?? What's your phone number??' Nobody wants to give that stuff out to some stranger! When you go to Sears and you buy—you can just be buying a little tiny thing—a little trinket for your mom and set it down and they're like 'What's your phone number?' and it's 'Why…?' and 'Oh, because we need it.'…'No you don't.

> You don't need my phone number!' So, I try to just ease my way. I introduce myself, I give them a little spiel about the home and say 'You guys are more than welcome to go on through.

Professional roles entitle individuals to act in a certain way. Even if agents can enact personal styles, they should obey a certain image that the public has of the role the individual is fulfilling. As they are required to please their audience, expectations can become "scripted" (Goffman 1967). In interacting with the public and the customers, agents are required to signal competence. To acquire professional recognition and success, they had to respond carefully to those expectations. Not being pushy goes hand by hand with behaving well, in an ethical manner. Being ethical for Tim, who has seven years of experience as a business agent, means that you should state everything that is going on in the house, you should not "steal" clients from another agent. There are indeed rules of behaviors to respect, that are not necessarily law and order, but are ethical and a matter of fairness, competence, integrity:

> I don't want to B.S. anybody. I don't want to be the guy who is like 'Yeah, well the air conditioning vents are more apparent in here than in the last room and that's why there is a cooler temperature in here.' I'm not going to make stuff up along the way, you know? I'm just there to…I'll answer your questions if you have any. If you have little comments, I'll just…'Mmm-hmm!' Like I said, I want to—it's kind of a glass-half-empty way of looking at it but I want to have the least negative perception of me. I'll just say 'Do you already live in the area?' That's a question that always starts a conversation. I'll say, 'How long have you been looking?' and then I'll say, 'Who is your agent?' That is a great question because if they have an answer, then 'Okay, great!' and it's like 'Awesome' and that's it. If they say, 'I don't have one' it's like 'Okay…' and then at the end I give a little sell on the app. That's how I get their info without being like 'What's your phone number?' and writing it down. Coming off as pushy is like, the worst. At least for me, that's the worst way to come off. Just from my personal perspective. I want to deal with people the way I want to be dealt with. Don't get in my face, don't ask me for all of my information. You don't need to know my birthday, you know? So, it kind of goes back to when you're a kid and the whole 'Treat people the way you want to be treated. I treat the people who walk into the house exactly how I would want to be dealt with.

This is also a way of managing the expectation of the clients and holding some core values in the definition of the interactions. The ethic relationship to work is discussed in detail during training when talking about the "value-added" of the agent, and how to be a

good "agent" rather than a greedy salesman – which is often represented with the image of the car salesman. Using the relationships and the excellence in servicing, leaders and coach agents often teach the agents to be model of exemplary business, which is personified by a form of success which never lies into an objective of making a lot of money.

Real Prosperity is also talking about framing a value proposition, for example Ben, a four year into the business agent, 37 years old, emphasize the importance of a value proposition that can take the form of a "motto" or "find something that people know about you and will always associate you and that thing." "Of course, it's about relationships, handing out cards, meet people, do the research, but you have to make yourself noticeable, make a brand out of you," he says.

In both Real Prosperity and Desert Realty, the training programs are designed to teach agents to be relatable. Barry, branch manager at Desert Realty, 10 years into the business, acknowledged by his colleagues as a “great guy,” “an exceptional public speaker” and a “fantastic team leader,” is teaching a class to newer recruits on how to develop their activity:

> Why are you in this business? Your purpose statement is I am in this business because I want to "positively impact people's lives," or because I want to "learn from them and me," or "how can I make their lives better." These are good versus saying "I am gonna make money off you." You know market leadership is about compassion, innovation, collaboration, passions. Where are the gaps? Well, not everybody has that culture of excellence. Mission, production, and will are all good, politics is bad. Don't forget to ask them questions, don't talk, talk, talk at them, get them to talk and exchange with you, what are they do they want, or why are they selling, what's their dream experience in a home? It's not about business, it's about relationships, so you just need to put yourself out there, and not sit in the office, but go to preview properties, do open houses, meet people at the bar, at the restaurant, at the supermarket.

This holding into core values of improving people’s lives serves the legitimacy of the agent but not only; it permits to create a sense of worth in the lives of the real estate agents, and draw a sense of similarity with their clients, to define how they make sense of their utility and pride in their occupation.

Barry is also describing the important relational work that goes on in the everyday lives of realtors®. They must continually engage with potential clients and adopt also certain

strategies. The relational work carried out by agents attempts to manage self-presentation, to appear as friendly, understanding, caring and listening. If they do not want to be perceived at pushy, it is also because it is envisioned as the worth selling technique, as the salesman should work at invisibilizing the commercial relationship that goes on between him and his client and aim to build up a normal relationship. The next part of the dissertation addresses the construction of the "successful" agent by relational work.

Conclusion

How to make sense of the "professionalism" of real estate? I have provided historical background in the development of the trade association and more specifically about the National Association of Realtors® and its local trade association, the Tucson National Associations of Realtors®. Interestingly enough, the focus on inquiry shifted from the "agent" itself, which during interviews made important claims about expert knowledge and ethics, to the more organizational fabric of this discourse. The discourses around "professionalism" did not emerge out of now where but are part of a history in which professionals organized the monopoly of expertise and knowledge tended to symbolize power.

A careful analysis of this work deconstructs the claims of higher service to society and increased knowledge of the realtors® and in the worlds of Hughes to "start the study of any social phenomenon at the point of least prestige. For since prestige is so much a matter of symbols, and even of pretensions…there goes a tendency to preserve a front which hides the inside of things" (Hughes 1971, 341–42). If I had first access (as highlighted in Chapter 2) at the most prestigious face of real estate, these "professional ideologies" suggested a hidden sociological truth that lies beyond. By first uncovering these "ideologies" and where they came from, I can look at the least prestigious and most contradictory practices in the follow-up chapters of the present dissertation. I provide in the third part or second empirical part of the dissertation a discussion on the expert, relational and taste work done concerning the clients as well as the complex gender dynamics.

Part III. The Discovery of the Client: The Relational Mechanisms of Trust and Client Capture

The third part, and second empirical part, of the dissertation, is composed of Chapters 5 and 6: The discovery of the client or the relational mechanisms of trust and client capture. I ask the following research questions: How do real estate agents find clients? How do clients find agents? What type of relationships exists between the two? How do the relationships between intermediaries and clients participate in the functioning of a local housing market? What are the characteristics of especially successful agents? In this second part, I investigate how relationships between agents and clients are constructed and maintained, hypothesizing that agents to be successful have an interest in sustaining those relationships beyond initial transactions, and most specifically in becoming "friends" with their clients. The presentation of self occurs not only in interaction but beforehand. Agents routinize their work while confronting themselves with the client's social figure. The work carried out during actual encounters requires thus to be anticipated, planned, worked on before the exchange itself.

In Chapter 3, I showed that real estate agents acquire specific dispositions, a real estate ethos, embedded into playing the professional game of real estate. In Chapter 4, I demonstrated that agents acquire a form of legitimacy in front of the public by the institutional building of expertise and knowledge through their professional association. In chapters 5 and 6, I consider most specifically the discovery of the client, in which agents are prompted to sell themselves to gain clients.

Chapter 5 enters the specific labor that is done on relationships to get clients, and to maintain their activity. I review the literature on networks, brokerage, and homophily and present a blended theoretical version of social relations for trust, including the role of different types of labor. I identify two interrelated types of labor done by real estate agent: 1) *expert labor* used to assert clients their specific knowledge make them competent to lead transactions; 2) *relational labor* using relationships and 3) *taste labor* or the social and cultural investments done by agents to demonstrate similarity to the clients, and to create a successful matching.

Chapter 6 is specifically dedicated to gender issues, and how *gender* is used *symbolically* and as a *skill* within the real work environment. I trace the use of gender through the early days of the creation of real estate as a business and an industry and show how the use of "*women natural skills*" served as a moral validation to make the

marketization of real estate acceptable. In the field, I observe an injection towards a careful use of emotions, in between the feminine display of caring and the authority and toughness required to be a salesperson. I also uncover the logic of *positioning* that goes on in the field of real estate, and that are produced in interaction: women's bodies are used as commodities, women need to adopt masculine traits of behaviors while men profit from feminine skills.

In Chapter 5, I establish codes around what I saw was the specific work of real estate agents playing in the field. Drawing on work on services, sales, and network analysis, I first evidenced the importance of capturing clients and dispositive to work on it. I saw expertise, relational and taste work going on while I follow clients in interaction. I also draw on the narratives gathered during interviews to explain how agents make sense of the work they are doing.

In Chapter 6, I specifically code for the way agents are talking about their activities: how they frame their work, and how they go about mobilizing certain vocabularies, motives of actions. I did not specifically ask about gender unless I found no answer within their narratives or actions. This code did thus emerge much later in my coding scheme. I just started to see that the work was framed differently. I also evidence a tension around "making it" and the financial pressures and obsessions agents expressed backstage. I develop the "commodification of the agent" in a published paper (Benites-Gambirazio 2017). Then the class component became evident as some women were making much more money than men, and that there was a tension there as well.

CHAPTER 5. Selling Themselves to Capture Clients: Expert, Relational and Taste Work

Economic relations are a vehicle for creating trust, meaning, and values. Relations between buyers and sellers do not form as an automatic process of matching between supply and demand but are brought about by coordinators or market intermediaries (Bessy and Chauvin 2013; Callon 1998a; Kalleberg and Marsden 2005; Rivera 2012). Besides working on-demand, consumers' preferences and supply, market intermediaries create "the conditions for economic exchange by "organiz(ing) the encounters between suppliers and demanders, producers and customers, products and consumers." (Dubuisson-Quellier and Cochoy 2013, 2). To organize the matching between demand and supply, workers acting in residential real estate markets are first required to find and capture clients (Trompette and Boissin 2000). As intermediaries, their work aims to bring supply and demand to align, but also to establish a relationship with potential buyers and sellers through a process of *matching* (clients with houses, but also themselves to clients).

In this chapter, I study the *market work* performed by real estate agents to establish trust and to capture clients. If agents ultimately need to sell products, one of their main activities is to individually attract and retain their customers, in a way that makes people hire, recommend, and reuse them based on the quality of the service they provide. I argue thus that to sell the market, workers first need to sell themselves to customers. These market intermediaries are in a constant quest for demonstrating trustworthiness to their customers, placing them at the center of the social construction of trust and confidence in the market. Located halfway between the world of sales and services (Bernard 2012), an important part of agents' performance can be attributed to self-presentation (Goffman 1959), through the display of individual attributes and behaviors aimed to fulfill the ultimate goal of matching.

I discuss the building of trust to capture clients by reviewing the literature on brokerage and referrals; relationships, homophily and matching; and on niches before highlighting the main

contribution of this chapter. I present the results in three empirical parts: 1) expert work, in which I respectively show how agents claim authority through market knowledge, organize clients' capture via expert tools; 2) relational work, in which I look at how agents show they care about people, their work is organized around a scientific system of getting clients through relationships and how agents work on self-presentation and likeability; 3) taste work, in which I demonstrate how to taste work is done through demonstrating socio-demographic and cultural similarity with both clients and products.

1. Building Trust to Capture Clients

Trust is central to the unfolding of economic transactions and market outcomes. Companies and customers seeking partners for commercial transactions often rely on someone they trust or recommended by a trusted party (Granovetter 1995; Macaulay 1963). Prior research on the use of networks by firms and in job searches demonstrates that networks lower information costs through a trust mechanism (Portes 1998; Bourdieu 2011). While economic sociologists contend that interpersonal ties are key in securing information and trust (Granovetter 1985; Uzzi 1999), there has been less attention to the actual work of creating a trust to facilitate market transactions (Bandelj 2009; Cochoy and Dubuisson-Quellier 2000a).

1.1. Brokerage and Referrals

In organizational theory and in social network analysis, intermediaries appear in the form of the "broker" (Burt 2005; Fernandez and Gould 1994; Obstfeld, Borgatti, and Davis 2014), a "type of catalyst brokerage that rests on the intermediaries' advantage in information or influence" (Stovel and Shaw 2012, 148). In economic contexts, these brokers bring together two entities who do not know each other but want to complete a transaction. They can be "boundary personnel" in the cultural industry (DiMaggio, 1977; Hirsch, 1972), insurance salespeople (Chan 2012; Leidner 1993; McFall 2011), art gallery owners (Velthuis 2003), human resources managers (Rivera 2012), stockbrokers (Abolafia 1996) or real estate agents in the housing market (Bernard 2011b; Besbris 2016; Bonneval 2011).

Realty work shares features of brokerage, that is, the capacity of an actor to make two parties meet and come together (Stovel and Shaw 2012). In economic contexts, brokers bring together two entities who do not know each other but who want to complete a transaction. The difference between brokers and real estate agents is that agents represent one side of the transaction (the buyer or the seller) whereas brokers do not represent any. Brokers are paid thus for their "coordination function." In practice, brokerage deviates from the ideal in which it "has no residual effect on actors' subsequent decision making" and especially "when economic relationships are confounded with personal relations…brokers may squirrel away their gains in order to maintain the illusion that they are status equals with their clients" (Stovel and Shaw 2012, 147). Realtors might reduce their commission or offer extra additional service to make their clients believe that they are equal in the transaction.

A specific form of brokerage important to realty is referrals, a "type of catalyst brokerage that rests on the intermediaries' advantage in information or influence" (Stovel and Shaw 2012, 148). In labor markets, "referral hiring" is a well-documented process (Fernandez and Castilla 2001; Fernandez-Mateo 2007). Workers who successfully recommend hires to companies might be rewarded; however, if the referral does not work, the intermediary can suffer reputation damage. Referrals are common practice in many business industries, including the real estate industry. To keep up with the market, agents must find sellers or buyers that are willing to hire them. How do realtors obtain and manage their clients? Based on my observations, many real estate agents use their social circles to gain clients and refer to clients as "friends," which is also used as a strategy to claim trust. This particular relationship between agents and clients is possible only in the intermediary position – buyers and sellers do not even come into contact as it is both the agent of the seller and the agent of the buyer who comes into contact.

DiMaggio and Louch (1998) assert that sellers prefer to avoid selling within their social network because of the expected detriment within the transaction. This should limit the number of transactions made by sellers and buyers that are "friends" as their interests are antagonistic: the seller wants the most out of his house, the buyer wants to pay less. This offers a space for agents to become the broker between two parties, rather than "friends" or

"friends of friends" exchanging goods together. It also opens up the possibility for the framing of realtor ties to clients as friendships.

As realtors® operate through referrals, the quantity and the quality of the relationship is central in how many transactions they will be involved in. Although buying or selling a house is commonly considered as a one-time transaction where there is no "repeat business," a powerful process of recommendations arises through social networks. Agents are active in the process of establishing ties, but also need to maintain and reactivate these ties often to get listings. Agents consider their work as "repeat business" as they do not consider that the relationship with a customer stops when the transaction is over, rather they maintain the relationship through regular contact using emails, phone calls or even invitations to social gatherings or restaurants. One of the realtors I interviewed explained the elaborated system that she has to classify customers by type and the way she contacts them personally for their birthday, sending them useful documentation related to their hobbies or just an email to "keep in touch." Many interviewees describe these ongoing relationships with their clients as friendships. This needs to be explored further as it can be seen as a strategy to "maintain the illusion they are status equals with their clients" (Stovel and Shaw 2012, 147).

1.2. Relationships, Homophily, and Matching

To generate trust (and sales), the market intermediary has to sell himself. In direct sales and marketing, this takes the form of "relationship selling," including "securing, developing, and maintaining long-term relationships with profitable customers" (Beverland 2001; Johnston and Marshall 2005, 5). Research has found that sales are more likely to happen if clients see salespeople as similar (real or perceived, demographic and ideological), likable (such as being friendly, supportive, and empathetic), or relatable (sharing of personal information) (Evans 1963; Gadel 1964; O'Shaughenessy 1971; Koppman 2016). As "similarity breeds connection," these relationships are built on the basis on homophily – the bounding of people with similar characteristics whether on the basis of status or values (Lazarsfeld and Merton 1954; Rogers and Bhowmik 1970) – as social psychology findings demonstrate that exchanges and interactions are more frequent with people who share similar features and present similar "sociodemographic, behavioral, and intrapersonal characteristics"

(McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001, 415). Homophily is occupying a central role in the process of matching (J. S. Coleman 1990), “the process by which social actors form mutually exclusive pairs from a pool of potential partners” (Stovel and Fountain 2009, 365). Forming partnerships is at the core of specific market activities as intermediaries use social categories to establish trust and bring supply and demand to concord.

“Homophilous matching” is seen as mean by which social structure drives individuals’ and organizations’ behaviors (Coleman 1990) while "cultural matching" refers to how employers hire their recruits based on cultural and social similarities such as hobbies, experiences, and self-presentation (Rivera 2012). Homophily is not necessarily based on real similarities but also on "perceived" ones, arguing that the latter is ultimately more beneficial to the transaction (Rogers and Bhowmik 1970). I argue that agents rely on a form of "business homophily" to resemble their clients. They do so by investing in aspects of their personalities or hobbies that suit the clientele they want to target. Another way to think about homophily and matching is in the process by which agents specialize in one sector of the market, whether socio-demographics, geographical area, or types of goods.

In practice, matching is realized through the presentation of expertise (Gay and Zhang 2014), the acquisition of a professional “savoir” (Stroobants 1993) but, most importantly, through the display of homophily (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001), with socio-cultural investments aimed to demonstrating likeability and similarity with clients. I argue that real estate agent market work to establish trust consists of selling themselves to sell products by realizing a triple matching between them, the product, and their clients, a form of association between lifestyle, status, and products (Thye 2000). I evidence a form of constructed homophily that permits agents to attract and retain their clients.

1.3. Niches

From the organizational literature, we know that organizations that specialized are more “successful,” because they have a more “coherent” identity (audience perceive them better because getting information is costly) (Hsu and Hannan 2005). Having a “coherent” identity is perceived positively by audiences as it gives them certainty, and is seen as an advantage

for producers as it is less costly to specialize than to do everything. Not all agents specialize in one niche, but one hypothesis is that when they do, they become more successful by either increasing their clients' recruitment, by investing less into network expansion and easily transferring reputation between clients' network contacts[43]. Reading the real estate business literature, I identify three broad types of niches based on 1) customers and demographics (first-time homebuyers, relocated buyers, single, Hispanics, low end vs. high end…), 2) geographical location (northwest, downtown, specific neighborhood/ zip code), 3) type of goods or properties (golf, gated, ranches, condos…).

Business investment is done at the level of the individual framing of himself or herself and is designed to increase business activity. Therefore, I argue that there is a form of constructed business homophily that permits clients to trust better their agents. The common characteristic serves a signal on how trustworthy and interesting the agent is. Realtors might thus invest in one characteristic. An example of this process would be a Hispanic agent who specializes in Hispanic first-time homebuyers, or an agent living in the Northwest area of Tucson specializing in it, or a fan of architecture who specializes in historic properties. Agents often invest in one personal characteristic of themselves, which often match the personal characteristic of their client. They tend to mimic their clients' attractions and repulsions.

If the formation of niches works through real estate, niches may operate on the basis of personality specialization, and how agents frame themselves by acquiring reputation and by associating themselves with specific clients and products[44]. I outline below the types of market work they establish to sell themselves.

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[43] The work of Erin Leahey and colleagues (Leahey 2006, 2007; Leahey and Hunter 2012; Leahey and Reikowsky 2008) might help develop better hypotheses on why.

[44] Even if the paragraph does not clearly demonstrate nor systematize this claim, this is a hypothesis I can investigate in future work. Hispanics and Luxury/High-End Real Estate are two particular niches worth exploring.

1.4. Expert, Relational and Taste Work

Because of the ambiguous status of sales' occupation in the world of professions, sales' intermediaries have to perform extra labor to produce trust, as opposed to doctors or lawyers for example. It requires a break from the moral ambiguity of sales, epitomized in the image of the unscrupulous salesman whose only objective is to financial gain. Research has shown how salespersons seek to demonstrate they are "good people" who want to represent and help rather than take advantage of people (McFall 2011; Mullaney and Shope 2012). They deemphasize the economic dimension of their actions by framing their work not as selling but as service for a higher good (financial stability, homeownership, helping clients achieve their dream). In service occupations, workers are also required to engage in satisfying the customers, provide them with comfort and ease, by performing emotional (A. Hochschild 1983) or interactive work (Leidner 1993; A. Wharton 2009), but their work is much less attached to specific customers and consists in a series of non-personalized deference acts rather than acts of significant bounding. In sales, the demonstration of "being a good person" through likeability and relatability is a central path to trust.

I contribute to the literature by showing how the building of trust in economic relations is achieved through specific market work on expertise, relationships and taste to present themselves as trustworthy and capture clients. I summarize below the three dimensions of market work operated by real estate agents to establish trust.

Table 5: Conceptualization and Operationalization of Market Work Forms

Type of work	Concept	Specific Investments	Trust mechanism
Expert	Market knowledge	Formal (trends, figures, interest rates), Intuitive (future state of the market)	Qualification (agent is perceived as "qualified")
Relational	Likeability	Relationships and self-presentation (personality, style)	Bounding at the individual level (agent is perceived as "good")
Taste	Similarity	Common attributes (socio-demographic or cultural)	Bounding at the socio-cultural level (agent is perceived as a "superior" person)

Drawing on the preliminary work conducted, I also propose to shift from "Why do people engage in economic exchanges with people they know?" (DiMaggio and Louch 1998, 620) to the question "why do people engage in economic exchanges via professionals that have been recommended by referrals or who they know personally?" What are the roles of agents in the referral process? I contribute to the understanding of why and how relationships are central to the functioning of market activity, not as in labor markets for the job candidates but for agents that work on the market.

2. Expert Work: Claiming Market Knowledge and Using Expert Tools

In Chapter 4, I saw how market intermediaries seek to demonstrate trustworthiness through intended claims of professionalism. If the use of real estate agent permits in many cases to have access to precious information and resources, realtors® have claimed their professionalism through the development of their occupational association in which knowledge and skills become legitimized and institutionalized. They also signal their purpose of serving the higher good of their clients, and the community as a whole (Wilensky 1964; Freidson 1988, 2001). The discursive and practical development of an occupation into a profession with the construction of an "exclusive group" equipped with specific devices, ethical behavior and "abstract knowledge" (A. Abbott 1988, 8) serves as a form of symbolic capital that confers legitimacy and provides social closure and autonomy (Bourdieu 1990, 112). Displaying market expertise – through learning and mastering statistics and local real estate trends (average price, price development, construction in progress, interest rates, etc.) – is thus used to legitimize the agent and to generate trust.

2.1. Claiming Authority through Market Knowledge

The knowledge of the housing market – including basic trends and few key numbers – confers a position of authority to the agent, who claims to know and understand the market. Real estate training at the two companies insists in the ability to know several features relating to the market such as to know if we are currently in a "demand" or "supply market,"

the interest rate or any type of information that would influence the housing prices and the value of a community or neighborhoods.

Trainers in both companies insist on the necessity to be ready to talk about the market with clients as well as random people, explaining for example the financial advantages of owning vs. renting, the advantages of the lower interest rates or any type of information that would influence the housing prices and the value of a community or a neighborhood.

"I gained people like that at the grocery store. They saw my badge and asked me how was the market. Just be prepared to provide answers" recalls Brandon an agent with 3 years of experience at Desert Realty. Recommendations made by the trainer include always wearing a badge with name and affiliation. A supermarket is a great place as it is a place of great movements, and according to most agents interviewed, random people stop to ask and say: *"how is the market?"* Agents are encouraged to be "scripted" and to recite a set formula. The aim is that agents need to be ready to give a specific speech on the current state of the market, for example, the financial advantages of owning vs. renting, or the mortgage deals because of lower interest rates.

Real estate agents' investments are formalized through the knowledge of trends, figures or interest rates, and the capacity to talk about the state of the real estate market. During training at Real Prosperity and Desert Realty, agents are encouraged to learn a few economic figures. Trainers insist on the ability to know several features relating to the market such as to know if we are currently in a "demand" or "supply market," the interest rate or any type of information that would influence the housing prices and the value of a community or neighborhoods.

The work of Wallace (2008) on the York housing market looks at how real estate agents and developers talk about "knowing the market" and use it in their transactions. Agents make professional claims on their knowledge of the housing market, the products they sell, and the prospects of the housing market in the future through expert work. These claims are also supported by the use of high-tech tools and a variety of applications aimed at convincing customers that they will receive a worthy service. The display of knowledge on the housing market – including basic trends and few key numbers – confers a position of authority to the agent, who can give specific advice regarding economic and financial

decisions. Market intermediaries use "gut feelings" (Wallace, 2008) and intuitions about the functioning of a market (Callon, 1998) often through assumptions about economics that format the economy (MacKenzie and Millo, 2003).

Although value ultimately comes from an aggregation of opinions on value, about two-thirds of agents believe they adapt to the market and do not drive it. They make clients revise their "options" through scripted statements such as: "If they are not willing to decrease their price, then their house will not sell quickly" or "I show them what the market says, the market doesn't lie." All the agents I followed during transactions aimed to be both assertive and reassuring by making buyers and sellers realize that what they did was the "only good thing to do." They use the MLS and the "comps[45]" to assert their power, and smoothly bring clients to admit that they are wrong, for example, that they cannot get as much as they want for their property, making them realize what the market is like.

Displaying market expertise – through learning and mastering statistics and local real estate trends (average price, price development, construction in progress, interest rates, etc.) – is thus used to legitimize the agent, and to convey trust to future clients. Presenting data – which both tells the seller and the buyer that it is a good time to sell or invest – is seen as a neutral activity whereas it is designed essentially to influence choices or active behaviors in the market. I observe to this extent that data presentation techniques (and the discourse around it is) do not include any direct sales components. Knowing and conveying the market serves to deemphasize the actual economic transaction, viewed somewhat negatively by the clients, and acts as a tool for trust.

In the field, I observed that market knowledge is an important theme for agents who need to work on the demand side, and "bring it in line with the market" which I describe most particularly in Chapter 7. Market knowledge is also embedded in professional expert tools that agents use to capture clients.

[45] This refers to a method of assessing the value of a good through comparison of similar products within the neighborhood over the last six months.

2.2. Organizing Client Capture through Expert Tools

Agents make professional claims on their knowledge of the housing market, the products they sell and the prospects of the housing market in the future through expert labor. These claims are reinforced by the use of high-tech tools such as the Multiple Listing Service, a variety of apps to convince customers that they would provide a worthy service. Agents also use statistical reports on the state of the market, their company app' to convey to their clients this is a good time to invest or to start selling or buying. Data presentation techniques are used to undermine the importance of the act of buying and selling and act as tools to assert market authority. One of the managers at Desert Realty argues that the system at the company is designed to "bring everything to the agent himself": even the report or the app' is branded towards the agent, for agents' branding and ensuring clients' fidelity.

The daily interactions with clients not only occur in supermarkets but in neighborhoods, agents chose to invest in, where they also often live in and are involved in the neighborhood management through the Homeowners Association (HOA). They try to establish themselves as "neighborhood specialists." Techniques of geo farming can be used to gain clients by showing attachment to the neighborhood and the knowledge of the inventory.

The formal and intuitive level of expertise and knowledge of the agents – in addition to function as tools to build trust through association with capacities and experience (being perceived as the best experts by their clients) – serve the higher purpose of making clients realize reality (break unreasonable expectations) and let them be more aware of their possibilities, and thus close the transaction, seal the deal. If expertise is a necessary condition, because of the specific status of sales occupations, it is not sufficient to resolve the problem of trust in home buying and selling.

3. Relational Work: Relationships, Self-Presentation, and Likeability

3.1. The Figure of the Agent: Showing Care

Despite their attempts to legitimize themselves as a profession, real estate agents are consistently ranked with a lower prestige score (4.9) than most professionalized occupation,

such as lawyers (6.4) and surgeons (7.7), but still more than the used car salesman (3.5) (General Social Survey 2012; Smith and Son 2014). Indeed, salespersons, in general, are often accused of being untrustworthy and deploy a variety of techniques to influence transaction outcomes and to accomplish their financial goals (Prus 1989). The common public figure of salesmen is car dealers, who are seen as favoring their own best interests, trying to take advantage of the customer by fooling him on the product. Because real estate sales are a commission only-based activity (Kalleberg 2000), one rationale is to simplistically assume that agents only care about "the art of the deal" and how to get the commission out of the transaction.

Commercial transactions rest upon the capacity of market players to judge the "good" character of the purchase; and specifically, on the trust given to the person in charge of asserting the quality of the purchase. To generate trust, agents must work to demonstrate that they care only about their clients' best interests, while secretly working on their own, as Hughes states in his thesis about the world of real estate men.

By giving the illusion they separate their interests from the interests of their clients, they wish to get away from the figure of the "con-man" by "cooling the mark out" (Goffman 1952). Jessica, a 57-year-old agent who is selling half million to multi-million dollar houses is within the top 1% most Gross Commissionable Income of all real estate agents in the community according to statistics furnished by the local real estate board.[46] Distancing herself from the "greedy agents[47]," she explains that she is genuinely interested in fulfilling her clients' needs.

> I have a client who has some friends. They're very scared to sell and they're elderly. And she wants them to talk with me because she knows that I will not be aggressive, and I will not make them feel pressured and cornered, that I was going to sit down with them and explain the process "When you sell your house, here's what you need to do." I'll probably get the listing, but I'm really doing it to help them…A lot of real estate agents are aggressive and hungry, they live from check to check. I have a

[46] The GCI or Gross Commissionable Income, which is the commission received by the agent after the brokerage split-up fees, which varies significantly between brokerages. For example, if the broker takes a 20% commission fee for each transaction, the agent who sells a $100,000 house with a 3% commission would ultimately get $2,400 (- $600 in fees).

[47], In fact, none of my interviewees present themselves as greedy and working for their interests, as they have internalized the professional discourse surrounding their occupation: "you are helping rather than selling."

> different perspective than a lot of agents. I think I do because I do it as a choice, not because that I have to.

The precise management of self-presentation, as the socially constituted ways the agents present themselves to their customers, through a system of signs such as pronunciations, clothing, postures (Bourdieu 1984), is adapted to the audience and the stakes of the interaction (Goffman 1959). In the context of real estate sales, the "successful" self-presentation should first rely on building friendly relationships. Repeated contacts with customers can lead agents to even claim that they develop strong ties and friendships. Many female agents claim they met great friends, friends that they won't have met otherwise.

If agents need to demonstrate that they are "good persons" who do not want to take advantage and are representing the best interest of their clients, they also have to be good at developing meaningful relationships that will serve their business (Lamont 2012). Besides, they work on constructing socio-demographic and cultural similarity – a form of homophily – to establish their authority and support market operations.

3.2. The Science of Relationships

"People do business with you because they know and like you" repeats Tom during each morning session. During the new agent training at real estate companies, trainers and managers insist on the necessity to invest in "warm techniques of selling." Real estate companies dedicate about 40% of their training sessions to the techniques and tips to develop and maintain relationships. In the training material used in Real Prosperity, the chapter "the power of prospecting vs. the slow burn of marketing" emphasized the benefits of "working on people" to find clients.

> The power of prospecting vs. the slow burn of marketing. Although lead generation is a combination of both marketing and prospecting, productive action in ninety days requires you spend most of your energy prospecting rather than marketing. Many agents try to kick-start their career with marketing rather than prospecting because of their fear they will hear the word "no." People are so much less predictable than logos and business cards, aren't they? But hear this: People are also much more profitable than any professionally designed marketing piece ever will be. Every "yes" you hear will easily pay for the time you spend collecting some "nos." The

time and expense that marketing requires, however, will take much longer to cash in on.

The concept of Sphere of Influence (SOI) is highlighted as the safest and most profitable investment for the success of the realtor®. It consists of knowing people and getting referrals from people who know each other, whether acquaintances, family or friends[48]. Jerry, who has been training new agents for five years, and has himself been an agent for 9 years, lead the session "grow your SOI" at Desert Realty.

> You have to meet people, your goal is to meet people, you've got to grow your SOI to 300 people (…) Approaching people, it's a blessing, but it's more than that, it's business generating, every single event your kid does, wear the badge, wear the badge when you go to the grocery store. Some people call it networking, it's just about talking to people, about real estate, but also about what they might like or need.

Real Prosperity booklet also provides guidance on how to handle meeting people to get business:

> You've learned how critical it is that every one of your Mets[49] knows—and continues to be reminded—that you are a real estate agent. Your goal is for your Mets to have you top of mind when they or anyone they know has a real estate need. This is why every time you're in contact with your Mets, you give them a quick reminder and instructions on how to refer business to you. When someone you know refers potential business to you, that potential client is a referral.

Specific relationship techniques are developed by real estate companies, and enhanced with technological tools, to put the agents in the best conditions to create and maintain relationships with people. At Desert Realty, the system is perceived as "scientifically proven," and technological software is used to vary the means of contact. The SOI is necessary to create the desired level of activity and the agent must "manage" it. Bill, who trains and leads the technology services in the Desert Realty, shows to newer agents how to maintain their sphere.

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[48] Referrals are a common practice within the world of business. Because there exist uncertainty and risk around a market transaction, "actors seek a referral from those in their network when they believe that others have more knowledge or experience evaluating a particular type of product (or candidate) or if they believe that someone may be able to advocate on their behalf" (Stovel and Shaw 2012, 148).

[49] Mets refer to the people agents had previous contacts with independently of the deepness of the tie.

> Where do you meet people? What do you say? How do you act? It's all part of a management system. If you manage your SOI, straight line of business, more important than taking people, look at 48, 49 or 50 homes, and they might not even be buyers. Each of your SOI is getting 24 points of contact from you, that's necessary, so you gonna do 2 calls, 4 newsletters, 6 My property alerts, and 12 housing reports. If you go meet people, and be in touch 24 times a year, then, it's going to happen, it works, it's meaningful. You will get 12 to 15 deals a year.

Desert Realty advises agents to be in touch 24 times a year in various ways, and most particularly, to provide a "housing report" that relays customizable statistics on average prices by neighborhood or subdivision sent to customers every month by email. The formal side of the report adds that the newsletter allows the agent to "make the relationship less cold" and to position themselves as an information relay of the town or the neighborhood. The agent should also customize according to the audience, including the calendar of sports events, cooking recipes from the best restaurants in town. Real Prosperity recommends an "8 by 8 touch campaign" which includes a touch every week for 8 weeks, with written notes, emails and phone calls, to remind the person about the agent, and ask for referrals As Rob, director of training in Real Prosperity, points out, it is a way to make it "soft" and to be closer to the sphere:

> We need to warm it a little bit, you cannot just send housing reports, people figure out it's a robot sending them stuff, it's not you. For example, in the newsletter, you can personalize it depending on your sphere. You know, I have Kate, she's an attorney, Erica is an architect and Dan is a dentist, do what works for your sphere. My sphere they are very professional so I wouldn't want to send them a cooking recipe or a photo of my cat, but if your sphere likes that, you can do it. I usually put stuff on real estate mortgage, I also like to thank people who referred me (…) It's a soft thing, you present lifestyle, from local attractions to sports events or schedules. You can present day trips, downtown events, UofA football or basketball schedule, helpful links for the community they live in, whatever works for your sphere and you want to convey.

3.3. Working on Self-presentation and Likeability

The presentation of self is seen as a signal of professional competence. Goffman (1959) emphasized the changing nature of presentation formats depending on the interaction and the context. Here, I define “self-presentation” as socially constituted ways that the agents present themselves to the customers. Bourdieu (1984) has shown how the social world

consists of a system of signs that are mutually reinforcing - pronunciations, clothing, postures and ways of being - which unconsciously define affinity or repulsion.

Agents are told during training sessions to adopt specific forms of self-presentation: being likable and warm and invest in something you like. Trainers insist agents need to invest in their person: "You're your greatest asset, clients need to like you." Through several techniques (letters, being in the board of the HOA, organizing events or parties), agents put in conformity their professional and social identity. As one of the top agent of Desert Realty, Ben, 3 years of experience, argues for a process of personal identification to real estate: “think and be real estate”: “When people talk to me, they know I’m in real estate, I don’t have to say it, they know they can ask me about real estate, I’m not just Ben, real estate is my identity.”

The agents also believe that their "style" of personality allows them to be able to get more customers. Betty, 55 years old, who has a long reputation as a top agent in the community, suggests that agents must positively present themselves, be friendly and honest as basic requirements. Paul, a 42-year-old agent I met during an open house underlines how a sales and teacher background is useful to become a "good realtor®," as they are used to and able to talk and interact with different audiences. However, they cannot satisfy everyone. Carrie suggests she gets along better with certain types of clients and argues that there are as many "styles" of agents as "styles" of customers. The agents must positively present themselves, be friendly and honest. These are elements of real estate agents use to distinguish between a "good" and a "bad" realtor®. The personality of the real estate agent is strongly influenced by secondary socialization learned through their training and their mentors, important figures in the success of the agent. It is not only a standard of behavior but also a form of self-presentation that the agent is supposed to incorporate and reproduce in its professionalization. To what extent this form of self-presentation varies from one agent to another?

Christine, a 64-year-old agent who has been teaming with her husband for 2 years talks about being “really straightforward about everything” and that her customers often praise her honesty. She refers to how her style is perceived by customers:

> Yeah, and that someone trusts me enough to call me again, and say, hey, you know, we want to work with you again, great, because you already know each other, you know their style, they know your style (…) I'm really straightforward about everything, and that's pretty much my style. If you want to know what I think about a color, should you change those window coverings, trust me, I'd tell you (laugh) but some people, they don't like that, they need, they do however they do it, you know, and I don't know (…) I think it is, I mean, some people are as upfront with me as I need them to be...

It is important for agents to be presentable in a professional situation during an "open house" or in front of customers but also in any kind of social interaction. According to Brian, the ability to be present and to speak easily to all types of people turns out to be a particularly important quality for an agent, but that can only arise with experience.

> Yeah, at 18 you can start to be an agent but then you need to have a specific personality, I mean, sales and teacher background is good but also, go to talk to different persons, be present.

Agents, by a set of practices, can create and maintain social relationships. Although they are strategically focused on maintaining their activity, they claim that is why makes them like their activity and help maintain the attractiveness of the profession, because they can "learn about people," and eventually find a space for socialization and friendships. Not only do they work their self-presentation and their likeability when they meet people, but they also work on finding similarities between them, their clients and the houses.

4. Taste Work: Demonstrating Socio-Demographic and Cultural Similarity

4.1. Establishing Similarity with Clients

The formation of networks operates through a signaling process of socio-demographic and cultural characteristics, particularly in the way actors present these characteristics and the associated norms, values, and attitudes that are expressed through "style." DiMaggio (1992, 127) refers to “the assessment of sympathy as a cultural matching process, in which participants rely subliminally on the verbal and nonverbal cues to estimate cultural overlap, experienced as comfort/discomfort, and confidence/unease." McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and

Cook (2001) demonstrate the existing homophily in social networks while (Vaisey and Lizardo 2010) show how the similarities of "cultural worldviews" are important drivers in networking. At a level of equal skills, employers are more likely to choose candidates with whom they have one or more socio-demographic and cultural characteristics in common (Rivera 2012).

The observations reveal how agents construct their personality and social being as fitting within niches, even as they constantly adapt to the types of clients they encounter, developing activities and hobbies that are most likely to fit with their clients'. The advice given by experienced agents during training activities is to specialize in something that either the agent has interests in or in a specific characteristic of themselves that might help them find clients (ex: ethnicity, business owner). Attracting the "right kinds of customers" is also what will supposedly bring the business any agent would dream of. This can also be found in training material. One of the books assigned to agents in their training states the following: "your clients will match well with your expertise and abilities, and service will become an easier and more natural offering. If you attract the right type of customers, you'll also reap greater quantity and quality of referrals" (Zeller 2011, 15).

Many agents may specialize in one sector of the market, whether based on socio-demographics, geographical area or types of good[50]. Many agents enter particular niches that they see themselves being “successful in” because of their experience, personality, social background or because they share a salient characteristic of the people or goods in the niche. While agents claim to enter niches because they “feel” that they “fit” with the niche, observations show that agents also construct their personality and social being as fitting with the niche and constantly adapt to the types of clients they encounter, develop activities and hobbies that are most likely to fit with their clients’. I reveal how this operates by asking questions about how agents came to develop this specialization, as well as observing in interactions, how they present themselves and interact with clients.

[50] An example of this process would be a Hispanic agent who specializes in Hispanic first-time homebuyers, an agent living in the Northwest area of Tucson specializing in it, or a fan of architecture who specializes in historic properties.

The goal is to transform passions, interests, hobbies, and personal characteristics into a usable resource for business. Being in coherence with the sphere by conveying the specific attributes of the clients is similar to how Leidner (1991, p. 162) describes the work of insurance agents who had to be *chameleon*-like to do their job, a form of investment and control of their self-presentation.

Agents sense that their work consists of establishing bounding with people: they claim to be often able to establish an even stronger connection if they have common socio-demographic or cultural characteristics with their clients. As James declared: "A lot of it is bounding, yeah, it's relationships, it's all about relationships and you can't have a relationship with someone if you don't have anything in common with them."

One technique to find clients is joining a club where participants will have some common hobby or passion. James, a 38-year-old agent, who started real estate after working in the fashion industry in Japan and New York, recalls what he did when he started in real estate.

> The first thing I did when I moved here, is that I join La Bonita (a golf course), and I went and played tennis, not that I really enjoyed playing Tennis but I was just trying to meet people, I would go to like social events that they have, and sometimes, I felt like an idiot doing it because that was so not my style, I don't like going to this kind of like organized mixer or something like that, what are you gonna do, you have to meet people somehow.

James also believes that finding common interests matter to develop relationships and ultimately being successful as a realtor®:

> I think it's good to be able to talk sharp to your clients because if you think about your clients and what their interests are (…) With clients who are working in the money environment you can walk in and then say what do you think about this and you say I don't know, you know, they are gonna say what do you mean you don't know. You have to be a little bit of a chameleon in this business, I was never really a basketball fan, but I came here and Arizona Basketball is huge, and I remember somebody asking me about Arizona Basketball and they were talking about it and I had no idea what they were talking about, nothing, and I felt like an idiot so I started watching basketball, now I'm a season ticket holder and I enjoy it, I really do genuinely but you have to be interested in what people are interested in (…) You have to have commonality between you and your clients, and I'm specifically looking

> at what my clients are doing and I try to gain interest in these things, I mean I really do, and often, I find that I'm interested.

The presentation of similar characteristics is perceived to operate as a signal on how reliable the agent is. Sometimes, the bounding is less strategically formatted but allows for some opening. Brian, 39, who works in a team with his wife, gives the example of a client that her wife "won" when she realized she was from the same town.

> My wife, one time met the owner of a house, they discovered they were from the same town in Illinois, so then, the woman owner said that she didn't like the listing agent, she was never around, and she asks my wife to be the listing agent, and then she told me "yeah, yeah, we got a new listing honey."

He also stresses a form of capital – being of Mexican origin and speaking Spanish – that allows him to invest in a "Hispanic niche." On the other hand, his wife, who was project manager at the local observatory before becoming a real estate agent, is in contact with more affluent customers due to her professional networks.

> I grew up in Nogales, my wife does more pricey houses, 600,000 and above whereas I work with all price range, and so I have worked also with Hispanic families, with houses about 80,000, and it's different, you have to walk them through, they don't know much, and the whole family will come out and see the house, you work with people.

As a former business owner, Maria, 48, believes that her experience allows her to easily get along and understand business owners. She feels like she is better able to respond effectively to their needs because besides her expertise, and has developed an "intuitive understanding and identification" to her clients, a majority of business executives. Other agents use socio-demographic salient characteristics to build their network of clients.

Kate, which self-denominated as the "reading realtor®" is passionate about reading, she was a librarian before becoming a realtor® and has a passion for "quilting." Her activity mainly comes from her social circles and networks of socialization, whether academic or professional socialization (networks of librarians) or a leisure club or association (quilters) to which she belongs. She also underlines her mission to help single mothers to become homeowners, believing she can understand them better because she was one and knows how

"hard" it was to be one. She reports frequently using that "characteristic" to "attract clients." Her network of customers, which blinds with her social network, is composed of people having at least one socio-demographic or cultural common characteristic.

For Kate, the discovery of a common socio-demographic characteristic with some of her customers, allowed her to develop a deeper emotional connection with them. With a mission to help single women to realize their dreams by becoming homeowners, she believes that she can understand single mothers because she was a single woman and knows how hard it was to be one.

> Years ago, when I was younger, I really had a mission to help single women because I was single and had two little kids, to help single women buy houses because it gives you a lot of financial security, and a lot of them were afraid because of this obligation, the financial obligation, and I got a lot of personal satisfaction, that sounds so selfish but it's true, out of helping these women understanding, yes, they could afford to buy their house.

According to Kate, buying a house and becoming a homeowner is vital for a woman alone because it is a way for her to ensure financial security for their children. This indeed demonstrates the presence of reproductive strategies ingrained in the purchase of real estate (Bourdieu 2000a). Kate makes a comparison with her personal life when she "goes out" with single people rather than married ones.

> If in fact they could if they could qualify for a loan and felt comfortable enough with it and it will give them and their children security, because renting never would and it will also help them financially help their acuity build and the tax rate for homeownership etc, and even if they were just single women I related because I was a single woman, most of my friends were not married people. Married people and single people don't really hang out a whole lot together. I mean they do, some but your closest friends are usually more like you or you know what I mean.

Agents can stand out from one another in the forms of self-presentation, but they all follow a controlled form of presentation, used both in their personal and professional interactions and that they mobilize unconsciously for creating and maintaining social relationships. While self-presentations represent accepted ways of conveying the identity of a realtor®, the discovery of common socio-demographic and cultural characteristics transforms the nature of the relationship and introduces an intuitive form of trust resulting

in increased chances of completing a transaction and activating referrals. Agents also rely on building similarities between them and the products, the houses they showcase.

4.2. Establishing Similarity with Products

In residential real estate, transactions are highly dependent on the strategies of presentations of the houses. Real estate agents aim to match their self-presentation to the products. The house symbolizes good taste and manner, essential to the maintenance of social status. I demonstrate that there is an active work that goes into signaling trustworthiness through taste and lifestyle. Agents rely on a form of homophily to resemble their clients. They do so by investing in aspects of their personalities or hobbies that suit the clientele they want to target. The relation between the product, the taste and the type of client does also function as a taste job and the creation of commonalities between clients, products and agents. Real estate agents in the middle-high and the higher end market perform taste work. They are not selling a house, but a lifestyle.

> Nancy has been a licensed real estate agent since 1998, she is 58, and works for an international luxury real estate company in a medium city of the Southwestern United States. When I met her in 2014, Nancy immediately stood up from the laid-back crowd of the West, blond and tall, high heels and sophisticated style. She was selling multiple millions of dollars' houses a year she was proud to showcase. It was like she owned them herself, she had cared about them, chose the best stager and photographer to make them look "stunning." She also had her pool of clients she dearly cared for, send emails, postcards, place phone call them depending on how "friends" or good clients they were. She believed she understood her clients because she "knew their style" and had a similar taste for "fine architecture." (field note)

The story of Nancy illustrates how many agents in the middle and high priced residential market go about selling goods; they invest the products (staging, photographing houses) and most importantly in themselves making the lifestyle and taste a central component of their work, as status and products are often associated. Agents I followed during their interactions with clients, most commonly during house hunting rides, and listing presentations, are using specific spaces and components of the house as a symbolic vehicle to convey lifestyle, taste, and meaning to their clients.

Another agent I followed through the course of a transaction, Sonia, 59, new in the business, has been referred to new clients by one of her friends. She never met them before, but already knows something about them. Jessica, pregnant with their first child, is a college professor and Matthew is a baseball coach in a local team. They want to sell their house to buy a bigger one. She brings me along to set up her listing presentation to preview the house. She has researched the house title and the comps before the meeting. While walking to the house and chatting with Jessica, she is referring to the cleanliness and the space of the bedroom, envisioning specific features to highlight the value of the home, and especially envisioning specific lifestyle markers to the product ("huge master bedroom," "beautiful newly redone kitchen"), she probes "ideal for a young new couple" while referring to the "great dining minutes away from the house."

Agents are thus trying to convey status through both the representation of the goods and their presentation of self, that needs to align to the "worth" of the goods. They put the forefront of symbolic elements while showing houses with their clients or discussing listing preparation. This is most particularly true with houses whose prices are in the middle and high price range.

Women interviewed are most invested in the product itself as they feel they know more about the house. Besides the argument of "making money" in selling higher-priced houses – which is both used in men and women discourses — women seem to be excited by getting in the nicer houses with the nice appliances and furniture[51]. For many women agents, housing a "feminine" matter, as women know "how to feel" when they are in a kitchen or looking at a yard. If men want the practicality and the formal characteristics (2 bedrooms, facing north, great view…), women say they have a comparative advantage in "feeling" the house, not just seating it and describing it. They can convey their "feel good" mind towards their clients and make them feel better about what they are being. Women agents invest the space of the house and their emotional naturalized state of mind to explain why they are more successful at what they do and make a space for themselves, as Nancy states:

> The more likable you are, the better you'll be in it. You notice that there are more women are top producers than men because. I think we're more perhaps empathetic,

[51] I discuss this point more in details in Chapter 6.

> relatable. Manner terrific, and the negotiation, the feel-good, you know, the fuzzy. The woman, you know, lightening up and, you know, being relatable about how fabulous a kitchen is or view or a yard or, you know, of course, the personality is paramount (…) if you look at the top you know 50 agents, I'll say, that's it' predominantly more women than men, and if there are men, they're probably doing more foreclosures and short sales and working with asset managers, you know, more business. But, the women are working with the actual end-user (…) We – Most women have just a different vantage point of, you know, being mothers. And I mean, really empathy is the only thing that comes top of my mind is that women are so empathetic, really, don't you love your girlfriends, I love my girlfriends [laughter] and my clients like the women, I just, yeah we end up becoming good friends because you go through this like very intense process.

To compete in front of other goods and to sell, the projection must appeal to the "wants" of the customer (taste), make it look good on photographs and present specific amenities to fit an "average adequate taste." The photographs and the features described (3 bedrooms house, fireplace, terrace, pool, etc.) aim at projecting buyers into the house. The moment of the physical visit is of crucial importance for the self-realization of the client, to bring clients to envision themselves living in the house.

The presentation of the agent thus matches a specific lifestyle that is embedded within the object meaning. The "appeal" to buyers' taste is reflected in the suggested uses for each feature that agents are trying to communicate to clients via their socio-economic dispositions emulating idealized projections: a big kitchen space conveys the importance of moments spent cooking while the room colors designate which specific members of the household will go in each (the pink room for the girl, the blue room for the boy, the white "parental suite" for the parents).

It is also important that the house appears “depersonalized” taking away all the personal family pictures so that the clients can project themselves. Agents I followed during their interactions with clients thus use both the features of the houses (spaces and components) and their personal stories and experiences as symbolic tools to convey lifestyle, taste, and meaning to their clients.

> Pamela, a former marketing director, 52, who has raised two sons, is showing three bedrooms two bathrooms’ homes to Steve and Ana, a couple with two kids who recently moved from California. They want to upsize and care about a “nice outdoor space” with a “functional yet stylish living room.” Referring both to the product and

her personal experience to draw taste similarity to her clients, she mentioned how the kitchen is at the same time practical and stylish, insisting on the granite countertop and the color or reflecting on the magnificent light it brings during the day. She reinforces the status of her clients that she senses by the quality of the clothes they wear and the fact they come from California, probing the outdoor space, and describing how much of a "great fit" it would be for a family like them (field note).

Agents also talk to undecided clients about desirable features of the house by praising also the economic rationality, demonstrating to clients that they do not only buy but manage and value their property assets. For example, a granite counter-top kitchen is thought to be the most desirable kind of kitchen, automatically sending a "desirability signal." It would thus raise the price of the whole product and create an advantage in comparison with other products without it. On the other side, sellers are encouraged to highlight the value of their house by reorganization the decoration or disposition of amenities or by starting to work on the house. That can mean for example redoing the kitchen to increase the value of the good.

Much of what goes on in the interaction is the "adequate" reproduction of a form of distinction, embedded into the aesthetic judgments on what is beautiful or not, appropriate or not as features of the house.[52] Taste does not play out only as a form of "conspicuous consumption" designed to convey social standing (Veblen 1909), but as an engagement into a struggle for the acquisition of capitals by the middle class, especially the ones that are insecure in their position (the petit-bourgeois and their "cultural goodwill" according to Bourdieu). Through products, taste acts as a comparable measure of worth, which allow the convertibility of a symbolic capital into economic capital (Bourdieu 1986). Taste is thus embedded into the strategic but practical sense of reasoning transferred from the agent to the buyers, who are themselves projected in the shoes of the seller aiming to maximize profit. The taste-rationale, brought or reinforced by the embodiment by real estate agents of a

[52] It operates specifically in the middle and high-priced market and does not necessarily hold in the lower-end of transactions where the product's lack of qualities is euphemized or the product is targeted to a specific audience, whether poorer clients ("proximity to bus stops" signals that it is destined to bus users or people without a car) or investors ("ideal investors" signals that they would will be able to rent it high and take the most advantage of their investments). I develop more on this work and how it impacts products' features in Chapter 7.

specific lifestyle, becomes a central aspect of the operationalization of markets. Thus, agents draw on their taste and socio-economic dispositions on products' components to convey appropriate social standing.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I contribute to the literature on work by showing how real estate work is performed to capture clients. I have assessed how expert work, relational work, and taste work operates in the real estate world. Selling does not come with a frontal aggressive performance but rather but findings ways to build trust using socio-cultural tools to match taste and status with products. They do so by creating relationships to provide a warm and reassuring context to make clients feel good about their decision. They balance the "cold reality of the market" with "warmer relationships" to ease people and allow them to feel good about what they retroactively and discursively construct as "their choice."

A permanent tension among agents though is observed between "economic success" and constant distancing from the economic sphere ("we're here to help," "it's not about money, it's about finding what the clients need"). The "good agent" contrasts the figure of the "car salesman" who wants to complete a transaction as quickly as possible and only cares about its financial retribution. Sociological research has shown that economic activities are embedded in social relations. By reversing the questioning, one may question the use of social relations for market purposes. In Chapter 6, I expand on the hypothesis by exploring how gender is used for commodification purposes. Work activities carried out by the agents are not neutral, and they involve a gendered performance that acts differently for men and women.

In Chapter 7, I investigate more thoroughly the social classification of clients and the work done on products. I demonstrate that the market work performed by real estate agents does not only results in outcomes (customers buying and selling housing products) but actively shape local residential real estate markets. Real estate agents seek understanding and similarity with their clients, which in return helps clients to align with the proposed

match (good and neighborhood) made by the agent, or what Besbris (2016) calls the process of individualized matching.

The exchanges between customers and intermediaries are not only a way to match but also to produce particular preferences in customers. In markets for symbolic goods, the high level of uncertainty makes the work of market intermediaries even more crucial to mediate relationships between customer preferences and the market (Velthuis 2003). Chapter 7 looks most particularly at how pricing and preference might be impacted by the work of agents on a residential market. Agents act as “taste brokers” (Sherman 2011, 202) highlighting specific features of a product to increase value. They use symbolic and cultural clues to assess the value gain from product features. They also make evaluative anticipations about the reactions (and actions) of their clients depending on their social position and their tastes. They draw on the social work realized to classify clients to learn what would suit them and what they would like. This work does not only rely on the amount of cultural capital people already have but on the "cultural goodwill" (Bourdieu 1984) they perform. Although this chapter focuses mostly on the middle-high end of the real estate market, I address in Chapter 7 and 8 the dynamics in the lower end of the market, where status and taste are less prevalent, and where pricing and timing are key.

In the following chapter, I address gender issues in the real estate field, by specifically focusing on how *gender* is used as a *skill* or *commodified* within the real estate work environment. I trace the development of gender from the early days of the creation of real estate as a business and an industry and show how the use of women’s natural and domestic skills *served* as a moral validation to make the marketization of real estate acceptable. In the fieldwork, I observe an injunction towards a careful use of emotions, in between the feminine display of caring and the authority and toughness required to be a salesperson. The discourses around female and male investments are also different: while men say they invest in technical skills to favor the transmission of the market, women focus much more on the domestic skills and the investment in the house as a product. These differences in discourses cannot hide the several logics of *positioning* that goes on into the field of real estate, and that are produced in interaction: women’s bodies are used as

commodities, women need to adopt masculine traits of behaviors, while men profit from feminine skills.

CHAPTER 6. Market through Symbols: Enacting Gender to Sell Homes. Gender Commodification for Market Use

"Every woman should have a real estate license. Be a referral agent, or just do a one deal; it's always worth it. Even if you never thought once about this business, a real estate license can change your life. Many times, the value comes when you'd least expect it. And by that, I mean when a woman is on her own, unexpectedly, that's when the real estate can be a life-saver. In our business, we meet a lot of people who are buying a house because they found the person they want to share their life with and dream of a home where they can raise a family. But the statistics don't lie. Between 40 and 50 percent of us won't be married forever, and, inevitably, that real estate asset is going to get in the middle of a divorce, messy or neat (..)I see real estate as female empowerment at its finest. It's a way of taking control of your life, especially if you've been out of the workforce for a while, or if your first career has plateaued. The kids are grown up and you want a business to fill your days? Or you're a single mom and need a bigger source of income for all the expenses? It's worth it, even for one transaction. A real estate license is something you can always fall back on, even if you do a deal just once a year. If you're great at relationships, real estate is a way to capitalize on your natural abilities for empathy, listening for what's between the lines and helping people find what they are looking for. If you're good at it, there's no limit to how far you can go. Depending on the brokerage model, a one million dollar deal in Manhattan could mean a $29,000 or so check for a real estate agent, and that can be a lot of money for a family. That's one story I hear a lot at my firm: "I'm a single mom and made double this year than last year when I was working at another company, and I now I can spend more time with my daughter" or "I'm taking care of my son, and the extra commission is paying for his private school." The most inspiring stories we hear are from women who spent the first part of their careers in another industry, and then wandered into real estate to knock our socks off! For all you sociable women out there who are longing for a profession where you can enjoy meeting new people and have the ability to earn a little bit of a lot, from the bottom of my heart, I very much recommend looking into the business of real estate and taking the first step to study for a license. Becoming a real estate agent can change your life."

(Stefani Markowitz Berkin, 28 years old, president of Charles Rutenberg Realty New York, 2017)

In Chapter 4 and 5, I have shown that real estate agents conduct three forms of work - *expert work* which consists in mastering and demonstrating expertise and knowledge on the housing market and on houses, *relational work* with professional tools to create and manage the relationship with the customer and presenting themselves in a friendly way and finally *taste work* to match homes and customers. This aspect of real estate work emphasizes the socio-cultural congruence and the lifestyle that the product and the agent emulate - which

are prescribed by the organizations which train them in the real estate profession, in particular by a mentoring system and the advice given by their peers during their training.

In this chapter, I most particularly draw on gender scholarship to see how "masculine" and "feminine" stereotypical role performances, combined with socio-professional norms, influence working activities in the real estate world. Gender scholarship launched important theoretical concerns and extensive empirical studies to assess the gendering of certain professions, and how women navigate between personal and professional space, and inequality within the workplace (Hagan and Kay 1995; Mandel and Semyonov 2005; Morgan and Martin 2006). In the vein of interactionist work, social scientists have proven that gender is a primary frame for interactions as we spontaneously use sexual categorizations to relate to each other (Acker 1990; Ridgeway 2011). Beliefs we hold on gender, through stereotypes and cultural understandings about what is appropriate or not to do, are the basis for actions (Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin 1999). They can be operationalized in many settings including work environments (J. Lester 2008).

While much of the recent work investigates the relationship between emotional, aesthetic and sexualized labor (Bolton 2004; Mears 2014; Warhurst and Nickson 2009), there have been relatively few studies addressing how a particular work setting can influence sales workers to develop salient gendered characteristics to fit expectations during key moments of economic transactions (Goffman 1951, 1976). In interpersonal sales jobs, workers are particularly encouraged to use their persona as their main labor tool. To sell homes, real estate agents are prompted to invest in the products —through the staging, photographing of houses— but most importantly in themselves (Leidner 1991), using gendered attributes to both justify their advantage to perform well on the job (Milkman 1987) and to serve market purposes (Biggart 1989b).

In the above quote, Stephani Markowitz encourages the entry of women into real estate occupations, drawing on the idealized vision of the authentic modern American high-class woman, represented in the *domestic space* as the primary caregiver for her children, and in the *professional world* as a manager of a highly-ranked position. Outlining the natural capacities of women to be both caring moms and successful entrepreneurs, Markowitz

envisions how women can effectively earn financial rewards while participating in work activities considered naturally "feminine" such as socializing and care work.

Real estate agents are located at the intersection of several working spheres. While real estate work is classified by the Labor Bureau as a sales profession, they also exhibit various features of service and care occupations. Real estate activity has to do with selling as real estate workers are intermediaries within the market whose jobs is to make a sale of a house happen; but also with services, as agents provide a service as customers are seen as the ones who are selling their commodities, and agents frame their involvement as offering a service (their fiduciary duty). The entrepreneurial features of real estate activity provide a good arena to analyze the claimed space of opportunities to better reconcile women's personal and professional lives. Away from the precarious service sector and corporate work, women would then be able to combine independence, flexibility, and security at the same time.

Although I draw on literature of service work (Bernard 2012; Bulan, Erickson, and Wharton 1997; Fortino 2015; Hanser 2012; Jeantet 2003; Cameron Lynne Macdonald 2011; Sallaz 2009), I contribute to a burgeoning literature on independence in feminine occupations located between the world of services and of selling (Bruni, Gherardi, and Poggio 2004b), notably market intermediaries whose work on the customer is central (Bessy and Chauvin 2013). I argue that real estate work activities serve as an ideal research site to study how gender operates within commercial relations. First, in the United States, the historical shift from an exclusive male profession at the beginning of the 20th century to a slight majority of women at the turn of the 21st century makes it a good case study to observe the current professional development of women. Second, the synergy between the commercial product and the normative naturalized feminine place of predilection – represented by the meeting of a professional and a personal space embodied in the American home – allows me to investigate the *gendered* construction of real estate as a woman's area of expertise (B. J. Thomas and Reskin 1990). Third, Residential real estate as a professional activity is also at the intersection between domestic and entrepreneurial work, making it a good site to explore the intersection of gender, organization, and work (Bruni, Gherardi, and Poggio 2004a; Henry, Foss, and Ahl 2015).

Many of the agents I followed and interviewed during my fieldwork believe they are suited to become good agents because they are "naturally good with people" and like to "help." Their caring nature would thus make them disinterested service performers rather than "greedy salesmen." While this justification is used by both men and women during front stage performances in which agents work hard to distance themselves from their necessity to make money, men and women use proper gender enactment to do so: men invest in *technical skills* to favor the *transmission of the market* while women focus on *domestic skills* and the presentation of the home as a *product*.

However, gendered professional and market roles are also produced in interactions within a specific organizational context. Gender stereotypical behaviors might become irrelevant or disruptive to specific situations within real estate work. As Leidner advocates in her classic study on insurance salespersons (1991), we ought to look at how men and women are prompted to use their selves in their work to *become professional* or integrate themselves into a profession.

Gender enactments can also vary in professional and commercial interactions along class lines: if the feminine body works as a resource during moments of the transaction, it can only transform in the acquisition of masculine traits within professional and commercial relations. The capacity to transform bodily capital should be thought within the dialectic between gender and social class because only women of the middle and upper classes can mobilize a "masculine" presentation. Men mostly from the middle and high class can also profit from acting with deference and empathy in key moments and from partnering with women. I demonstrate that real estate agents use gender in interaction as a resource, but women and men can appropriate behavior that is not associated with their proper gender enactment.

I start by offering a perspective on the historical and current gendering of real estate, proposing to analyze it as a form of gender commodification. I then present the prescription of self-investment acting in real estate. I uncover the gendered differential investments in work activities while discussing potential opportunities for the professional development of women. Finally, I look at how masculine and feminine behaviors are enacted both by men and women agents who retrieve differential benefits.

1. The Gendering of Real Estate

1.1. The Development of the Real Estate Business: A Matter of Men

The profession of the real estate agent is an invention of the late nineteenth century. The occupation and status of the land are transforming the organization and functioning of communities. Owned by the federal government, the state or the first occupiers in a capacity to exchange it on a market, the land has become the center of investment and major stakes in the twentieth-century United States (Chapralis 1988; P. J. Davies 1963; Hornstein 2002). The transformation of land into commodities has been and is primarily a matter for men (Hornstein 2005). Encouraged by a network of economic elites and increasing opportunities for urban development, entrepreneurs (real estate agents, promoters, brokers and other traders) have worked to create local real estate boards since the early 1870s, New rules and the creation in Chicago on May 12, 1908 of a professional association to defend their interests, which later became the National Association of Realtors® (Weiss 2002; Glaeser 2013).

For historian Jeffrey Hornstein (2005), the successful professional development of real estate agents was the product of their ability to make the group's formation coincide with the entrepreneurial spirit and values of the American middle class, evidenced by the ideology of property at the end of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. Real estate agents developed an entrepreneurial and professional identity by comparing individual ownership and social success in the iconography of financial stability and the "American dream". The 1920s saw the emergence of the "American House" as the object of knowledge and intervention of experts and professionals: domestic economists, planners, architects and reformers of housing. The house became a scientific object serving public policy and is built on a variety of professional fields, such as social work, home economics or housing reform. Everett Hughes, in his thesis on the development of the Chicago real estate chamber (Hughes 1928) sees the creation of the chamber as the primary objective of legitimizing the existence of real estate agents, and transforming a negative occupation (i.e. real estate sharks) into a "respected and respectable" profession by the multiplication of

elements affirming of their "good practices" represented in the codes of conduct and ethics, programs of support in accessing property and narratives of educational value. The figure of the agent is nourished on the one hand by the myth of the individual entrepreneur or the self-made man, and on the other hand by the masculine gallant figure, presented as a man of integrity, honesty, educator, at the service of the weakest, the “good guy” (McFall 2012).

1.2. From the “Masculine” Figure to the Moral and Symbolic Validation of the “Feminine”

According to recent NAR® statistics, the typical realtor is a 58-year-old woman (National Association of Realtors 2016). If real estate occupations were exclusively dominated by men in its beginning, women gradually assumed a growing role. They accounted for only 2% of agents in 1910, but in 1930 they were 14%. The massive entry of women dates to the 1940s when the number of male agents rose by 19% while that of women by 97% in ten years. Between 1950 and 1960, the number of male agents increased by 24% compared with 130% for women (B. J. Thomas and Reskin 1990).

The post-war residential real estate boom created new opportunities for women (Hornstein 2002) partly because the "discourse on masculinity” was “a problematic source of cultural support for the professionalization of real estate" (Hornstein 2005, 322). If men wanted to legitimize their vocation in real estate as a heroic and virile impulse, they had first to acquire the support of women, whose “natural endeavor” was to embody the goods that they sell, the family home.

The gendering of real estate activity partly rests on the reproduction of the areas of predilection in the domestic space revolving around the perceived natural capacities of women to occupy certain social positions based on their "feminine nature". According to historical accounts, women real estate agents asserted themselves in the public sphere by claiming their traditional role in the family and in the home (ideology of domesticity) and in the private sphere thanks to Nancy Cott's "republican womanhood" concept (Hornstein 2005, 323) based on the belief in moral influence in the social and political world. Women have used sophisticated differentiated strategies to enter the realm of real estate by exploiting

their skills associated with "womanhood", including what Hornstein calls their motherhood business model which he defines as the belief in the special role of knowledge in the household economy. In the newspapers of real estate agents' association, women highlight their gendered expertise and moral qualities associated with their social positions as caretakers and guardians of the home.

Articles in the 1920s such as Louise Slocomb's "Women in the Real Estate Profession" emphasized the natural advantage of women in selling real estate due to "special qualities" such as "female intuition, ability to have a sense of detail, or to understand women" (often in charge of household decisions). Given that women are perceived as "housekeepers by nature", these domestic qualities transfer to the sphere of residential real estate. Selling a house becomes more than just a business deal: the female agent has "a personal interest in every home" that she sells, her enthusiasm is "contagious" and is "transferred to her client". This use of stereotypically gendered performances as a resource has proven to be a subtle strategy for these women, whose efforts were influenced from the 1920s by a liberal and individualistic trend advocating that women could exercise any employment, even those dominated by men.

The story of Laura Gordon, the first woman to sit on the Women's Council of the National Association of Real Estate Board in 1931, also illustrates this commonly held belief in women's "natural ability" to sell a place they know and within a community in which they believe, to a family looking for a home in a “good” neighborhood to raise children. This investment in residential real estate was coupled with a moral ambition to combat the deterioration of American values which surfaced in the 1940s in opposition to the construction of social housing.

The encouragement of private property and the moral qualities of owning and living in one's own home is also very present in the speeches of women agents, especially through the figure of the mother who guides children in the right path:

> I believe in my America, the land of freedom, and houses for all those who seek the comfort inherited from the pursuit of freedom to undertake ... I would encourage every mother to infuse in the heads of her children the joys and the privileges of living in one's own home (Creed for Women Realtors, 1950).

The qualities presented as "feminine" ("being alert, sympathetic", "being visionary and having intuition") do not present themselves as a form of competition with men but as natural capacities of women to help with the professionalization of real estate. This essentialist argument allows women to take a place in the male-dominated world of real estate agents, notably thanks to the Women's Council which touts the advantages of women agents.

Another rhetoric that has been advanced by women realtors® is also that it is pleasing to men to be served by women, as the service relationship around the house for sale mimics the relationship in the domestic sphere. Women would then be expected to please, serve, understand and help men while being able to understand them as wives:

> The man likes to deal with a woman in real estate for several reasons. If he has a wife or female relative, he assumes that a woman will know better what they would like. Then, he's made your acquaintance, he's amazed and delighted to find someone who can handle business like a man, and still make him feel like a superior being (Real estate agent Mary Amelia Warren, 1941).

Even in my observations, I noted how service relationships were often marked by the image of service and subordination of women towards men. This allows a male client to maintain an impression of superiority while benefiting from sound advice in good company:

> Amanda is visiting the third house with Sasha, a male client and his male friend, Amanda is asking from far: "So? what do you think about it so far?" He replies by talking to his friend: "ah, I like this one, and it's true that she has good arguments, it's so much more pleasant to work with women, they know what can please us. (field note)

Sasha's commentary is part of a rationale for selling female agents, highlighting the naturalization of gendered skills and the pleasure of getting a man to work with a female agent. The model of the "secretary" (Goffman 1977, 83) makes it possible to legitimize a power relationship in a sphere of work that prolongs the division between men and women in the domestic sphere. The man confides, gives details without being in a position of inferiority.

The importance of traditional gender relations is also due to the peculiarity of the sales situation: the agent must maintain "face" by behaving by normative expectations hoped

for by his or her client(s) (Goffman 1967). The course of market interaction is thus based on the creation of confidence created in hyper-ritualized situations by projections about what the house should be in the middle and upper classes and the roles assigned to them.

The woman agent thus leaves an impression of superiority to the man, for example, that he is in charge of a decision at a given moment. She must also pay attention not to break the order of the couple so as not to arouse the suspicions of misplaced intentions, such as by putting in danger the marriage by seductive behavior towards the husband, or by playing too much the femininity card.

Not only should we think about women's development in real estate as a historical process but also as ongoing, expected behaviors along gendered lines. To understand how gender operates in real estate work, I use the framework of emotional labor to speak about gender commodification, as gender is rendered profitable in market interactions.

1.3. Emotional Labor, Gender Commodification and Dualisms

Coined by Hochschild (1983), emotional labor refers to employees' work practices such as calmness and deference to provide customers comfort and ease and above all to comply with requests from the company (Leidner 1993; A. Wharton 2009). Emotions can also serve strategic purposes, for example in activism (Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2001), and operate as "rules of feeling" in work settings, which are not gratuitous but commodified (Hochschild 1983), sold as services or as commercial relationships (Lhuillier 2006; Pinna 2015). Feelings expressed in the workplace are not only produced through "private acts" but they are guided by management's formal and informal rules. At the basis of exchanges, feelings are an indication of "what's due in each relation" (Hochschild 1983, 34).

Emotions can be thus exploited in market transaction, through what Hochschild (1983) defines as the "transmutation of an emotional system:" "a link between a *private act*, such as attempting to enjoy a party, and a *public act*, such as summoning up good feeling for a customer" blurring the envisioned private and public spheres as "what it is that we do privately, often unconsciously, leads to feelings that nowadays often fall under the sway of large organizations, social engineering, and the profit motive." Gender plays a central role

as she points out the existence of a "womanly art of living up to private emotional conventions" (Hochschild 1983, 34- 35).

To follow up on the blurriness of the public and the private, I develop the concept of *gender commodification* to describe how gender is employed as a strategy[53] to access and maintain a position within the field of real estate. Based on my fieldwork, I establish that gender is commodified in four ways:

1) Historically, the real estate started as a men's business, but as women increasingly started to work in society, a reified form of business maternalism emerged to bridge the masculine domain of real estate, using domestic skills as a justification for women to get access to this milieu.
2) Real estate agents face organizational and collective injunctions to invest the self to build their business. Exaggerating characteristics associated with a particular gender becomes thus a sales technique as the identity becomes even more salient to market products.
3) They develop discourses around their gender and enact those discourses in practice within two different modes: on the one hand, men invest the domain of the market, enacting technical skills and thoroughness, which provides them with legitimacy and authority while women invest the domain of the home, with a proper alignment with adequate taste and knowledge about a highly symbolic matter. These practices come in contradiction as both male and female agents must go against their proper gender enactment to make their business work.
4) Women and men in real estate end up in differential portions of the market, and even if there are more women, men occupy higher-ranked occupations and make more money.

I argue that within work relations, gender dynamics do not disappear but are produced through various gender enactments which are exaggerated for the search purpose (i.e. convince someone to do something). As an important part of real estate workers' activity consists of self-presentation to clients, they have fashioned themselves according to particular traits rooted in gender roles and stereotypes.

[53] I use strategy as Bourdieu (1977) as it is not conscious but embedded in a practical sense and feel for the game, aimed at the achievement of professional and socioeconomic status.

In real estate, gender lies at the intersection of symbolic dualisms which operate to produce gendered discourses and behaviors in the real estate industry. These dualisms operate as symbols or prescriptive ideals towards where men and women should be or tend to be (*table 4*). These are not meant to be real positions but symbols that are attached to gender norms. Based on those dualisms, I study how specific characteristics are exhibited by agents within contexts of real estate work.

Table 6: Symbolic Dualisms Operating in Work Relationships

	Masculine	**Feminine**
Typical dedication	Making money	Making the house
Arena of expression	Corporation	Family
Type of work	Professional work	Domestic work
Adjective for duality	Hard	Soft
Traits exhibited	Aggressiveness	Empathy
	Thoroughness	Caring
	Detachment	Pleasing
Most associated occupations	Entrepreneurship & Sales	Services & Care Work

2. Differential Investments Operating on Dualisms

Goffman (1959) distinguishes *the front stage* and *backstage*. Front stage work is viewed as the publicly visible display of behaviors to a specific audience, and backstage work entails the representation of these characteristics in the absence of an audience. These representations might differ or conflict with front stage work. Within the settings of an interaction with a *performer* and an *audience* (front stage), the performance rests on the control of the images and the information performers give away to their audience. Performers are thus doing what Goffman calls *impression* management. While they ought to convey a specific image of themselves, they have to gain and/or maintain their social position in the field (Bourdieu's interpretation of Goffman (1982)) by complying with the "social role" attached to a "given status."

By listening women talk about their work as well as by uncovering mechanisms or "sign vehicles" used by real estate agents to present themselves to others – including appearance, forms of interaction through body expression, and language – I distinguish

between gendered discourses and gendered practices. I show how women and men agents present their work at the front and backstage, and how they operate and place themselves within the occupational field of real estate, showing the production of inequalities in situ.

I first present how agents are advised to "show themselves, their personality and their tastes," a strategy used to capture the customer. This work of investing in one's gendered self takes the form of relational investment work that is organized differentially for men and women real estate agents: the first insisting on a work of expertise and knowledge of the market while the latter capitalizes on their "feminine" qualities and an "emotional ability" to understand a family and their home. This work of self-sales as Goffman (1959, 1967) had been able to study in his research on service and self-presentation is based on the idea that gender is a salient feature of the real estate agent.

2.1. Prescribing Self-Investment: Proper Gender Enactments as a Sales' Technique

With the growth of the service sector, working arrangements have changed, especially in repeated contacts with users or clients, which require interactional skills, self-presentation, and mastery of face-to-face interactions. These workers range from bus drivers (Schwartz 2011), home helpers (Avril 2014), to insurance agents, or McDonald's employees (Leidner 1991).

As most of the work in sales consists of a "warming up phase," it requires the display of "flattering enthusiasm" and aims at hiding true feelings to comply with the client's sense of self or perspective of things (Leidner 1991, 166). Salespersons "try to change prospective customers' minds while never seeming to argue with them," remaining "pleasant even when rudely dismissed." Sales jobs are based on the building and maintaining of a rapport, a social relation, and this type of job is considered exclusively the domain of women as "drawing people out, bolstering their egos, displaying interest in their interests, and carefully monitoring one's own behavior so as not to offend – are usually considered womanly arts" (Leidner 1991, 166). On the "feminine" space of real estate service, salesmen thus run a threatening risk of improper gender enactment:

> The job of a salesman, which is one on the lower end of the white-collar hierarchy, would seem especially degrading from this point of view. Since success is largely dependent on ingratiating oneself with customers, playing up to others is an essential part of the agent's job, rather than just a demand of the social milieu. Salesmen must swallow insults, treat even social inferiors with deference and keep smiling (Leidner 1991, 165).

The salesperson cannot lose his/her temper and needs to maintain the appearance of being calm as Whyte (1946, 132-133) emphasizes in the following example of a waitress:

> The first point that stands out is that the waitress who bears up under pressure does not simply respond to her customers. She acts with some skill to control their behavior. The first question to ask when we look at the customer relationship is, "Does the waitress get the jump on the customer, or does the customer get the jump on the waitress?" The skilled waitress realizes the crucial nature of this question…The skilled waitress tackles the customer with confidence and without hesitation. For example, she may find that a new customer has seated himself before she could clear off the dirty dishes and change the cloth. He is now leaning on the table studying the menu. She greets him, says, "May I change the cover, please?" and, without waiting for an answer, takes his menu away from him so that he moves back from the table, and the goes about her work. The relationship is handled politely but firmly, and there is never any question as to who is in charge.

In sales jobs, workers are particularly encouraged to use their persona as their main labor tool. The work consists then in investing in oneself, or in selling oneself to sell a home, hence a form of exaggeration of certain traits or fashioning one's public image to market products. Leidner describes how insurance sales workers were "called on to use much more their selves" (1991, 162) than the McDonald's workers she studied.

> Even when gender component is less obvious, workers in all kinds of jobs need to consider how their work relates to their own identities, including their gender identities…the job can be interpreted as honorable, worthwhile, and suitable for persons of their gender.

As demonstrated in Chapter 4 and 5, alongside the knowledge and technical skills presented by the agents as a set of resources necessary to the success of a transaction, the work of the real estate agent consists in making contact, creating and maintaining social relations. If the agent's work is not without evoking the emotional labor described by Hochschild (1983), it has the peculiarity of having to attract and retain customers, making

investments on *the person of the agent* central. At realtor school, trainers insist on the need to meet customers more than worrying about selling homes:

> Do not worry about your sales, go meet people" repeats the trainer at the training session on sales techniques, "it is not about worrying about sales, it is useless, we must meet as many people as possible, use your family, friends, all the places where you have links or an affiliation, the school of your children, the soccer club and even the supermarket and give the figures: "contact 5 people per day and your business is guaranteed (Field note, training session at Desert Realty).

My observations show that agents are predominantly trained to invest in personal relations to manage their sphere of influence. Trainers do not directly refer to gendered classifications of social investment, but they do encourage agents to "find" and use to their advantage their most salient "inherent" qualities, which can be expressed as preference system for a way of life, expressed under the prism of gender. For example, a woman showing the interior decoration of her house and her love for architecture, a man relaying the statistics of the real estate market on his Facebook page.

If the real estate advice given online emphasizes the need to find the "right" real estate agent to secure the "right" home, women often present themselves with an advantage that they describe as "natural". According to about 2/3 of the agents interviewed, women are better able to capitalize on their emotions because of their special place in a society tied to the domestic sphere as mother and wife. Marina explains this gendered division of emotional labor:

> Buying a home is an emotional decision, a process that engages emotions. Women, I think, can capitalize on this a little better. They have more empathy, can better get in touch with people, while men look at numbers, structure. Women pay more attention to appearance and what suits the family. Men, they are more on the practical side while women are more on the emotional side. (interview)

The ability to "open people" seems therefore crucial and the conversation allows Hannah to better know her potential customers. Having empathy, a perceived "feminine" trait and putting yourself in the other person's shoes, as Hannah explains, is a plus:

> My clients will soon sign but it was hard, I love them, they are great but they had a very small budget, and with that, it's hard to find a good home, but you know, when you fall in love with people. You feel things, I take it personally and seriously,

> besides with my personality, I probably showed them all the possible houses of the south-west of the city. (interview)

The relationship of trust is established on the one hand by the agent's ability to convey the market, and to present expertise and market knowledge necessary for the smooth running of the transaction. On the other hand, confidence is driven by the mobilization of salient personal qualities, especially for women agents who exploit their perceived ability to understand family and home to establish proximity. This entails prescriptive work established through the prism of gender, which is superimposed on the gendered division of labor that exists within the real estate market.

2.2. Differential Investments: "Masculine" vs. "Feminine" Work

If in many blue-collar trades, men are expected to respond to images of "harshness, roughness and pride" (Johnston and Marshall, 2005); in the trades of service and sales, work is often associated with servility, deferential behavior and "enforced amiability" as opposed to "a cool pose, which associates masculinity with rigor and detachment" (Leidner, 1991, 165-166). In sum, this requires attitudes and behaviors that conflict with masculine dispositions, manifested in the rejection of emotional labor (Nixon 2009). To align their gender and their professional identity, insurance agents transform the nature of their activities by distancing themselves from the feminine, and by preserving non-mixed spaces of male sociability (Lupton 2000).

While the object of the agent's work, the house, is firmly associated with the female register, the coping strategies associated with its acquisition may also include forms of valuation of an investment and a profitable financial investment. These forms most particularly resonate with an entrepreneurial ethos, associated with the image of a virile man in control of himself, more in line with the socialization of the American lower middle classes. The house as symbolic good (reproduction and social status through taste) is therefore put in the background and is presented as an economic good (a financial investment, a profitable commodity). Through operations of the requalification of the

symbolic domain of activity, these "defensive behaviors" seek the valorization of a male virility (Molinier 2000).

During a house visit with Jason, a 49-year-old, and one of his clients, the interior and style of the house are barely mentioned, while most of the conversation is driven by the search for profitability by 15 years of ownership, and the question of interest rates. While Paul buys a house to settle there, he transforms the residential property into a purely financial operation:

> “You see," said Paul, "I wish I had something that will last for a long time, a good that I can easily sell, knowing that now we will have the best rates, right?" "Yes," Jason replies, "if you wait too much, you are sure you will not be able to benefit from it anymore." "You just have to compare, see if this one is worth more, is that really the ideal place". The ideal location is also materialized by Jason by what he calls the locational equilibrium that involves the housing situation concerning utilities, commercial establishments, transportation costs, and taxes. Jason then reinvests a whole technical argument, presenting successively the impact of cash flow, appraised value and cap rate, as if the knowledge of these arguments allowed him to acquire the authority and the confidence necessary for his customer agrees and follows his advice. The vocabulary of these interactions is strongly marked by the register of risk-taking, knowledge of the market and mechanisms of operation of the investment. (field note)

For men coming from a lower-class background like Jason, it is an opportunity to value a male ethos associated with the sense of good business and cognitive skills deployed to "make money." These masculine interactions are associated with technical and financial vocabulary associated with investment, speculation, and risk. Although they are often condemned by real estate companies in that they encourage speculation, flipping practices consist of investing to renovate a property to sell it for a higher price, maintain the image of a “savvy and smart man” who can make money easily. An agent like Rudy, 27, reflects the revival of popular dignity gained by valuing ambition and financial success:

> Of Mexican parents, Rudy was born in the United States but did not pursue higher education. His father is a construction worker while his mother is a house worker. He worked in a hotel as a receptionist before obtaining his agent's license. I followed him for three months in his interactions with clients. He acts as he is sure of himself, and takes his "personal" skills for granted. During our first meeting, he says: "I am very charismatic, rather nice, people, it pleases them and they open naturally to me." His model transaction is quick and highly financially rewarding: "20 homes sold last

> year" he says proudly. I observe a conversation with Dan during a house visit. Rudy teamed up with him for several transactions. They try to convince a 70 years old woman to give them the house for sale. By investing in the price of the work and selling it, they could then split the profits in half. The lady hesitates, she would rather sell right away, but the dated layout and style of the house make it a rather unattractive property. The two colleagues who know "guys in the building" see in particular a way to extract a surplus of value: up to 30,000 jobs, it would remain almost 70,000 if they can sell 300,000. aside, the use of a language of "strategy" and "expected financial expectations", the desire to make the right calculations to extract this surplus (field note).

These moments of male sociability emphasize the interest of profit-oriented activities in line with the figure of the breadwinner who "must demonstrate a remunerative work skill and have more financial resources than women" (Goffman 1977, 94), thus becoming a symbolic and financial reward for agents, a form of positive masculinity. Many men, for example, register at a golf club to get contacts, allowing them to discuss investment projects and potential transactions. It is about semi-professional relations where the art of the game adapts to business projects or deals and the development of friendly sociability ("buddy-buddy") based on the instrumentalization of strategic relations. While men can benefit from the presupposition of their authority at work, they reaffirm their masculinity in interactions, distancing themselves from the feminine and practicing a form of re-labeling or status enhancement (Simpson 2004). They thus perform what West and Fenstermaker (1995) characterize as doing difference, a practice of differentiation from activities considered to be feminine Pullen and Simpson (2009)

Knowledge of the market[54] also confers a position of authority by the association between expertise and utility of the services of the agent. Training in real estate companies insists on the ability to know interest rates, the market, as well as any type of information attached to new construction projects, the associative, sports and cultural life of the city or community of specialization. One of the recommendations of the trainers is always to wear the real estate badge with their name and affiliation, whether in the restaurant or the supermarket. A supermarket is a privileged place because displacements are made and the

[54] Chapter 4 has shown that knowledge of the market is an important topic for agents who need to work demand, as chapter 7 will also demonstrate.

trainers say they are often questioned: "how is the market?" Agents are also encouraged to recite ready-made formulas, to prepare agents to at any time provide a precise statement of market conditions, such as the financial benefits of a real estate investment, i.e. very low-interest rates. The agent does not sell, but presents itself as the relay of information, using available technology (statistical report on the state of the market, mobile application particularly) as a tool of confidence.

While men and women agents do not appear socialized to differential qualitative investments, in my ethnographic observations I have seen how men exploit this technical dimension much more easily than women and that they make an asset of their "personality:" they know and listen to the market. Ben, a real estate agent, explains that it is necessary to "think and be real", be sympathetic, and also be recognized as a legitimate authority in the milieu: "When people talk to me, they know that I am in real estate, I do not have to say it. They know they can ask me anything about real estate, I'm not just Ben, real estate is my identity." I also observe that marketing techniques of men involve much more often than women the use of geofarming (20% of women while 70% of men used it).[55] Women were most likely to hold open houses closer to the homes as a product.

Women envisioned the house as a product as their domain of competence. How do female agents use gender as a resource? Two third of the women interviewed felt like women could identify much more easily than a man at home. Kate, for example, argued for women's natural abilities to feel the house: they can see "what's missing in the kitchen" or "imagine themselves the bathroom and in the kids' room." While 60% of the women interviewed mentioned their knowledge of the home as a draw to start a career, men never mentioned it.

Among the women real estate agents I encountered during my fieldwork, Nancy illustrates the work of style, decoration done for the staging of a house. It is a place that must be loaded with symbols by setting professional photographs and the use of simple gender codes (blue for a boy's room, pink for a girl's room). Identification with a particular home

[55] Geo farming designates a market technique to gain a specific neighborhood clientele by playing on the knowledge of local territory and inventory. Geofarming involves several techniques: letters, presence in the board of a co-ownership, organization of meetings or evenings of districts.

as a symbolic object conveying a social position and a status is also at the heart of the gendered representations of young women agents who want, like Amanda, to be able to identify with their product and convey an image of themselves through their product:

> This house in Star Pass was surely my biggest commission, yes these checks are very different from the ones I had before, there are big numbers, and it's nice. I set goals to achieve in 1 year, but also, mentally, I want to have a luxury listing, I want to introduce myself like this, I want to sell houses above average I want the customer who tells me, I want to buy a house at $ 500,000, let me show you these, they are a little bit nicer than the one that has undergone the foreclosure and has not had any AC for years (laughs), Yes, sometimes, you come in, and you say to yourself: Oh my God! (interview)

Betty is also working on "staging" as a technique to highlight the product and present it in a way that attracts customers. She uses a professional stager to prepare the house, decorates it and makes it "sublime" according to its terms:

> Presenting a house means highlighting it. I work a lot with the presentation of my listings, it requires a lot of work but it pays, many agents only show the entrance of the house, but it is the least important, I always choose what attracts the most. A photo that will make them want to see the property in reality, either the view or the kitchen or something unique in the house, and that is what makes people come. (interview)

In this sense, gender is used unconsciously to serve market purposes. What I observed with real estate agents is similar to what Kang shows in her study of nail bars in New York (2003), in this type of aesthetic work women thus treat aesthetics and taste as a commodity, trying to exchange it for rewards.

The homology between the house, the object of real estate agents' work, and the symbolic register of the feminine has been and often remains exploited in the speeches of women estate agents. Some women say they prefer, because of their emotional abilities (empathy, listening) and their taste for the household, to work with families and in residential real estate, but they rarely talk about their relationship to the body. The entry of women into real estate has transformed the relationship of men to their practices: men now import commercial real estate practices in the residential world to distance themselves from the domestic sphere and get closer to the register of investment, risk, and profitability.

However, if sales work involves building and maintaining a rapport - a warm up phase that displays a flattering enthusiasm and hides the nature of true feelings to conform to the customer and his perspective, this type of skill is associated with the female figure, which refers to a bourgeoisie conception associated with the white woman of the middle and upper classes, "a property of women of the upper classes who can prove their respectability through their conduct and their appearance" (Skeggs 2015, 195).

These discourses of women's natural qualities to feel the house are most apparent in the interviews I conducted and observed during the open houses of high-end homes, where they are used to validate the choice of being a real estate agent and to present themselves to high-class clients. The discourses appear subjected to strong tensions when audiences vary in terms of professional status. Unlike what I witnessed in interactions with clients, as discussed above, in training classes I saw that women are men are rather socialized to behave strategically to get clients, invest in their selves through relational and taste work (chapter 5) while retaining the highest purpose of financial gains.

While these claimed differential investments may appear problematic, one can argue that unlike feminized occupations such as the secretariat, residential real estate remains for some financially much more lucrative, and provides significant opportunities for women.

2.3. Differential Investments but Equal Opportunities?

The traditional corporate environment is depicted as a man's world (Biggart 1989) and the majority of women interviewed (about 70%) see in real estate the opportunity to escape a male dominated corporate environment. In the case of Christine, she asserts the following:

> I got tired of—in the corporate world, it is still male-dominated. It was very male-dominated. My husband and I were working – we met in the hallways of this defense contractor. He was with the international group and I was electronic warfare. I just got tired of the men always getting the promotions and always getting the money and me doing all the work. (interview)

Even if business worlds are often associated with stereotypical "masculine" traits (De Bruin, Brush, and Welter 2007; Welter 2011; Zahra 2007), women can feel a certain

pride if they have their own space to develop: they become “hard”, “independent”, “take risks” and become “ambitious” (C. S. Wharton 2004, 103). A justification for entering real estate is the seemingly flexible nature of agent work. Women argue they have control over their place of work, and the distribution of their working time. It allows them to feel free to organize their time and their personal and family life at their own pace. Nancy, for example, insists on the importance of flexibility which a career in real estate provides such as being able to have lunch with a friend, or go where she likes during the day:

> Yesterday I had to do a lot of paperwork, generally, I do it on Monday, so I did 3 hours of paperwork at my office, then I took my car, I'm so used to going out. This morning, for example, office meeting at 9:00 am, turn house for sale with 40 office agents until noon, then I go back to the office, I make calls, and there I'm here for this interview, so my day is organized but if someone calls me at the last minute and asks me if I want to go out lunch, I can go, I have much more flexibility to do what I did not do before. (interview)

Agents are not generally considered as employees and present themselves as *entrepreneurs*[56]. They perceive themselves as small business owners, as entrepreneurs starting from scratch. Indeed, I observed an aversion to employee work, which would be to separate oneself from any ability to control his or her time at work. Flexibility, especially for women employees with a family, is one of the major attractions of the real estate training, Maria, mother of two children, shows how she could benefit from the work of an agent to manage her time and take care of her children:

> I was able to have some free time and be flexible, so if I had to work on the week-ends and my husband was home, he could actually watch the children, and I could go out with the clients, it is flexible so you can you know adjust your schedule to your needs, most of the time, I mean they are some time that will come up, you need to do it immediately, generally it was very good because I was able to still be home when the children came home and help at the school when I needed to and go to the soccer games and you know, be able to still have my job as a mom but yeah, also you know starting in real estate... (interview).

[56] While real estate workers are not direct owners of the inventory, they are paid entirely by commission claiming to work only for themselves as they build their business and their social circles. Agents thus receive minimum help from their employing broker (companies) to either find clients or maintained sustained activities.

Michelle describes how her work allows her to reconcile work and family life:

> Other fields are much more restrictive for women in terms of scheduling and flexibility. In real estate, you might pick more, make your menu, in a way, because much of your work is done on weekends, whereas other fields…so if you're trying to raise your children, and your husband has a regular job from Monday to Friday, it could possibly free you up to work on the weekends. (interview)

The integration of women in real estate agents' space helps to render gender issues either natural or invisible. Many interviewees share the idea of a happy mix: the unisex nature of the profession and the fair distribution of tasks according to the knowledge and skills of each. The female agents interviewed do not describe their experiences as harassment or even painful situations. The situation of diversity has imported pre-existing inequalities in relations between men and women (Boni-Le Goff 2012), unlike in the fields of health and school where it could be perceived as a promise of equality (Duru-Bella 2010; Ravelli 2017).

I draw on gender scholarship (Acker 1990; Amott and Matthaei 1996; Fernandez and Sosa 2005; P. Y. Martin 2003) to hypothesize that women ought to develop in interactions some behavioral traits that are perceived as "masculine" (being tough and making money) in the sales of homes. I rely on recent ethnomethodological and cultural approaches that frame gender as a practice of doing gender (Fenstermaker and West 2002; Bruni, Gherardi, and Poggio 2004b). Gender is thus enacted in situations where both men and women position themselves and render their actions intelligible to others. They act to conform to expectations or what is called proper gender enactment.

The multiplicity of relationships and interaction frameworks invites us to consider the interactive moment rather than postulate the pre-existence of gender and class and to grasp how social characteristics are presented and exploited differently according to the audience, participants and the situation. Interactions with customers are characterized by a "stage" work that only captures the particular characteristics of the interaction. To sell the housekeeper and the style of the house, a feminized demonstration will then be privileged while interacting with an investor, the highlighting of authority and expertise will prevail. In behind-the-scenes work with peers or collaborators, agents behave both according to the

norms of the profession of an agent, sometimes trying to euphemize sexual differentiation, and according to patterns of behavior that govern relationships between the sexes: courtesy, seduction, etc.

Because their job is to master face-to-face situations with their clients, service and sales companies encourage their employees to be flexible and adaptable, to "use their selves" and to act as "chameleon" (Leidner 1991) to embrace a customer's expectations. This work of "chameleon" is less mastered by the lower classes as they are less skillfully prepared to switch gender modes, using feminine or masculine characteristics according to the moments of interaction. To succeed in the agent trade, as in the profession of the student in which "the brightest students are girls a little 'masculine' and the boys a little 'feminine'" (Duru-Bella 2010, 205), women are encouraged to masculinize themselves and men to feminize themselves wisely in interactions. Hence the importance of mixing the perspectives of doing gender and doing entrepreneurship along class lines to see how it operates in interaction as Ahl (2002, 346) suggests:

> This perspective views gender as an accomplishment, something that happens within interactions. It denaturalizes the association of masculinity with men and femininity with women, showing the ways that sex (typically thought to be biological), sex category (group membership as a man or woman) and gender (social categories of masculine and feminine) come together in a multiplicity of configurations. Importantly, individuals do gender within interactions with others (and the self). These interactions are shaped by the larger social context. To fully understand how gender fuses with feeling rules, the interactional context must be examined alongside the actions of individual actors.

My purpose is not to make raw observations of the interactions at work or the discursive positions of women and men agents but to understand how, as Arnal (2015) points out, "the interactionist approach to emotional labor gains an insight into the processes of distribution of roles and the conflicts of perspectives associated with them." Thus, the behaviors of female agents are the product of professional socialization that puts forward professional capital belonging to stereotypical "feminine" categories of understanding - gentleness, empathy, understanding, listening. Gendered knowledge also plays a role, with women knowing the things of the house, especially kitchen and decoration, and men the technical specificities of the market.

Far from asserting, as Wharton (2004, 104) does in her study of real estate agents, that women "listen to the stories of their clients and are less concerned with their success than with choosing a house that best suits them to their clients", it is necessary to see how women live in the tension between serving and helping and internal competition for success, as women are integrated into a system of professional positioning as much as men. This analysis helps to explain how real estate agents make gender one of the first aspects of their success at work, thus becoming one of the organizing principles of the market.

When thinking about gender as an accomplishment rather than a naturalized innate trait, it becomes something that can be challenged, redone, undone or done differently during interaction (Butler 2004; Risman 2009). Two ways are discussed by Kelan (2010) to undo gender: by making gender irrelevant for the situation, or by disrupting the mapping of masculinity to men and femininity to women. I show how gender enactments interact with class in different moments of the transactions.

3. The Rewards of Masculinity and Feminity in Market Interactions

3.1. Women as Commodities: Marketing the Feminine Body to Sell

While differential investments are talked about and observed in specific settings, they also have specific effects on the actual distribution of work within real estate teams. Brian, who works with his wife, saw the distribution of "naturalized" capacities as an asset, which makes it easily exploitable for profit:

> She knows a lot of people in the community, she is beautiful, everybody loves her and wants to deal with her, me, I'm only good for the inventory and to understand market trends (observation during an open house).

There are many teams of agents, which often include a man at the head of a team or a couple of agents. The logic of positioning within the real estate industry is often translated on the ground by men occupying positions of leadership (much more than women, about 2/3 of my male sample vs. 1/5 of my women sample). Women, on the other hand, are more often relegated to the role of a simple seller, subordinated by a male broker, in interaction

with the client and more in charge of relational labor. About 2/3 of my sample justify this distribution by the variations of natural capacities between men and women.

Agents' teams are organized along with classic family gendered norms – a male team leader with an army of young women or a couple – which can be used as a marketing strategy. A 27 year-old-agent, Spencer, tells me the story of an older agent, a team leader within Real Prosperity who uses his female agents as selling points:

> He is prolific, he has his very own harem of women. I think about that as a strategy. I do not like him too much, I made a few deals with him, he is not very professional and I think he is successful thanks to his team and all these women, blond and voluptuous, who work for him. Specially, all the men from the Foothills (upper-class neighborhood) say: "I want to work with him, so I can work with all these women" if you know what I mean (informal discussion during an open house).

The body of women, especially of lower status in the field and with lower economic and social capital, is also used to attract customers and sell houses. Real estate teams composed of a man acting as a team leader and several women working as salespersons are a good entry for observations. Observing Bob's team in several types of interactions - team meetings in company offices or restaurants for lunches or parties - illustrates the nature of relationships to the body:

> Bob is a broker, he has a superior hierarchical status to the simple salesperson, he is 58 years old, uses botox to "stay young" and always wears a shirt, a suit trousers without a tie, which gives him a chic yet casual look. His team is made up of 9 women between the ages of 22 and 32, and a 28-year-old man who looks after investors. Their clientele is well off, buying homes between $250,000 and $1 million. I particularly observe the relationships of team members with their clients. One of them, Laeticia, 26, dropped out of high school, did some childcare jobs, and also worked as a secretary in a building company for a few years. She met Bob through a mutual friend, he hired her after she had her exam. In the car, Laeticia, wearing a summer dress with flowers, about 1m70, wedge sandals, makeup, studies the four houses she is set to visit with Sasha. He is in his fifties, is "divorced, but has a girlfriend" according to Laeticia. He wants to buy a house in an upscale neighborhood of the city, at the foot of the mountains. After finding himself in the parking lot of the company's northern offices, he follows us by car. If the interactions are cordial at first, the imposition of Sasha's authority over Laeticia is felt quite quickly, both in the forms of courtesy that he shows, always passing behind him in the house, in him asking questions that could highlight "his knowledge of women" including the organization of space. Making several allusions to his concubine, he asks: "Would you like it"? It makes Laeticia smile. He also tries to make jokes to

> reaffirm his status on her, and comments that easily go from courtesy to aggression: “yes, pretty women like you, you have to please them”. The looks and gestures towards him are also visibly interested, without being explicit, which maintains a form of ambiguity (field note).

Most male clients know the women on Bob's team and see them at some point in the transaction: they are the ones who take customers to visit houses, organize open houses or establish staging or the listing of a house. In the interactions, the young women invest themselves in the "staging of femininity" (makeup, dresses or skirts, smooth hair, wedge heels or heels). The women agents in real estate teams are mostly young and from lower class backgrounds. They do not, unlike their colleagues from the upper-middle class, choose real estate as a second career - to move away from the tumult of professional responsibilities or escape the world of business - but as an opportunity to invest their body as a working asset. This capital of physical attractiveness is intended to be transformed into symbolic capital, by association with women and men of the upper middle class:

> After missing the exam for the hairdressing school, Mia, 24, was a sales clerk at a clothing store before joining Bob's team about 6 months ago. At the agency, Bob is with Mia and a customer in his fifties, Patrick, a respected business leader in the city that Bob knows personally. As she is scheduled to go along with Patrick for the visit of houses, she seems quite nervous because she tells me that this is the first time she finds herself in charge of showing houses with "a client of this importance." Bob slips in discreetly while the customer is absent: "don't worry, you do what we've said, and then you smile, you nod, you go in his direction, we've already talked about homes, it's just that he will want to feel good, it's better for him to go with a woman, he lost his wife a year ago, it's hard to be alone, he has to look." When Patrick returns, he exchanges glances with Bob, and in front of Mia, remarked with a smile: "Yes, she is good, she has many qualities and she will put you at ease" which gives the impression of judgment on her physical appearance and emotional qualities rather than her professional skills. Mia corresponds to a valued female body (tall, slim, blue dress, heels of 5 centimeters, with makeup, smooth hair). If Mia is just laughing, she does not seem to be annoyed by his remarks. She tells me later that Patrick was adorable as he did not stop complimenting her, and that the houses were splendid, "a nice moment" in which she was able to "make herself helpful and useful".

For young and unqualified women from the lower classes, clothing investment and stylized self-representation can function as a small capital, especially in meals and parties organized by their leader as they can withdraw from office jobs (Siblot 2006). Gender is

thus commodified, not directly in the form of a strategy by individuals themselves but as a means to sell and stand out, integrated within the very market they find themselves in. Does this constitute a form of emancipation of women at work or a form of exploitation of the exclusively instrumental nature of the market?

3.2. Acting Like a Man: To Be "Masculinized" to Win

The women I followed feel a strong tension between "selling" and "serving" but position themselves in a professional space driven by the search for profit and the number of houses sold. Discussions between agents that I highlighted in Chapter 3 reveal these dynamics.

Stephany had just started with Desert Realty 3 months ago. During the lunch break, after a 9 to noon open house, she put me in her confidence: she is worried about approaching people. The seeming oppositions between genuinely caring about people and producing to "make it" are introducing tension while working. She does not want to appear "pushy" but she also needs to "make it."

> You know, I need to meet with my manager. I started and was like—I was going to do a manager meeting every week, and then she had to reschedule and I never rescheduled because at that point I was so, like, I didn't know. I felt like 'Can I even close?' I just had no idea. Now that I have two under my belt I feel like maybe now I should plan goals and get realistic about it. Like, now that I have this I think I can possibly do this. So I don't know. I started off saying 'I want to close six deals this year.' But I don't know. Maybe I'll try to make it a little harder. I don't know. Then I also—I don't want to…I know that you can have like…things going and then it can be slow for like four months.

Ultimately, Stephany struggles to find strategies to combine both attitudes into a coherent competitive self, which would align with the ideal typical figure of the realtor®, a managed caring self but also an authoritative and virile figure.

As for hostesses and receptionists (Louey and Schütz 2014), the body and the sense of the relations are often put forward during the transactions with female agents, while the capacity to provide an expert position, to play detachment by taking a step back and humor are most often attributed to male agents. Certain modes of presentation - in particular by the body - which may be useful in specific moments of interaction, will not be useful in others. In particular, women must adopt contradictory attitudes and behaviors, made of "conformity

to the female role (seduction and passivity in particular)" and "academic and professional involvement" (Duru-Bella 2010, 207).

Playing on femininity can, therefore, turn against women of the lower classes even though they are perceived as "just beautiful" and that the relation to a female body maintains suspicion and reduces the whole image of the woman to her physical attributes. Her intellectual abilities, her negotiating skills, especially during real estate transactions, would then be diminished. Without the knowledge of the real estate market, including all the knowledge associated with the investment of a property (geographic location, technical element, market condition), highlighting a "nice house" by a "pretty woman agent" does not allow the acquisition of a lasting professional legitimacy. Some women thus adopt male modes of presentation during interactions with their clients that symbolize authority, power, or emotional harshness.

Maria and Terri are two of the realtors® evoking this tension in the presentation of self in their interactions with clients. In their speeches, they emulate the image of an honest and well-intentioned agent at the service of the customer, but in backstage, they admit a form of sincerity controlled according to commercial strategies: they laugh at their respective customers and put them at a distance with ceremonies that are similar to gossiping around the vagaries of their transactions and their problems. This ability to distance oneself is observed in older women, whose age, status and seniority give them professional legitimacy.

Maria and Terri are part of the same group of agents who organize house visits every other Friday: “Oh, I did not tell you, the client the other day, we had to fight to make him understand the price, often they do not want to know anything" "says Maria, before explaining how she managed to impose herself "in the end, he was indeed obliged to admit he was wrong" before congratulating herself: "you and I, we are strong gals". Maria and Terri both finished their bachelor's degree, one in business administration and the other in creative writing. Despite their respective difficulties to show authority, they have benefited from a network of relational relationships at the beginning and now rely to a large extent on the local prestige they have been able to acquire.

Transactions, then, bring not only financial gains but also rewards around the ability to perform and exceed one's gender. The ability to carry out its transactions depends largely on the home environment, with the middle and upper classes better trained to exploit industrial relations and to use chameleon techniques. If it is to exhibit male characters, it is not a question of completely detaching oneself from one's gender. Empathy is strategically made while demonstrating the necessary authority to take control of the interaction.

A relationship between seniority in real estate and age (which often goes hand in hand) is introduced here. At least 1/3 of the young real estate agents recruited will leave after 1 year, and still a significant part (1/5) after 3 years. From our field, we have seen in many women - often with higher degrees of success among women over 50 years old and with the most seniority - a transformation of their relationship to emotions and femininity to be taken seriously.

Maria, who has worked in real estate for 20 years, says she always felt she had to fight to prove she could do "as good a job as a man". The difference between young women like Kate, who oscillate between the presentation of empathy and softness, a form of classic femininity that allows them to match the sale of a domestic space, can prevent them from concluding crucial moments of the transaction. Terri remembers transactions in which it was difficult for her to win against negotiators who did not think she could "conclude":

> It must have been almost five years ago, I was really struggling with this client, he wanted to sell his house at an exorbitant price, it made me feel uncomfortable, he always questioned what I said he doubted my skills. One day, I find myself discussing an offer on his house, I explain that it is a substantial offer (the first in two months) and that we must see what we can reasonably do, I also have the letter of interested, honest people ... I think that the current does not pass, and he said to me: "Oh yes, you still consider that people are sincere, but they do pirouettes to have what they want, he must be harder, that's not how we negotiate. I was not used to "man-up", and then after that, I learned, I'm more cash, I say right away, I take another tone, I changed too, the way I dress, trust me. (interview)

Women from lower-class backgrounds can claim investment in tasks perceived as masculine (Avril, 2014), such as completing the transaction, not letting go, and fighting during the negotiation. The "man-up" used by Terri reflects the understanding of her client's

expectations in terms of harshness and authority, but her status as a woman also refers to her supposed incompetence in business.

Studying the employees in car sales, Lawson (2000) highlights the difficulty that salesgirls have in knowing how to manage interaction situations: the humor that is close to harassment mixed with forms of gallantry, the inequalities to be attributed to them, areas of intervention or concealment of their emotions. Their male colleagues recommend that they "harden" by demanding the display of masculine characteristics. When a benefit is worn by a woman, she runs the risk of disavowing for incompetence, referring to her hysteria and lack of control over her emotions. The virile culture encourages the promotion of hyper competition and relational hardship at the expense of empathy and attention to the other.

In the world of real estate, the tension between the untouchable woman and the tempting woman (the mother and the whore) takes place especially during the interactions between colleagues and between agents and customers. Unlike the assistant whose body is sexualized, the term lady usually refers to a mother figure of an elderly woman who loses their sexual availability. Some women may also lose their status through their attitude or appearance: they dress and talk about men so much that they become "one of the guys" in the words of Lawson (2000).

3.3. Using the "Feminine" Advantages: Make Femininity Profitable

To gain professional legitimacy, real estate men often behave according to the modeled middle-class figure of the gentleman. About half of the men I followed invest empathy and emotions during interactions with clients, as in the case of Brian. They can also use women within teams like Bob or Brian. During real estate transactions, the conjugal model particularly serves the simultaneous profitability of the symbolic domains of the "feminine" and the "masculine." Although there are no statistics on the number of couples engaged in real estate, this is a common practice in both companies that I studied. I conducted interviews and met at different times in the investigation several couples, including Brian and Cindy, in an open house and a transaction with a couple of buyers:

> I observe two transactions with very different stamps: One, conducted mainly by Cindy with a retired couple, Paul and Linda, whom she met via a colleague from her

> former job. According to Brian Cindy is "beautiful", "smiling" and "comely", what he does that "she get along with everyone", and most importantly, what he says half-heartedly, "those who have money." This capital allows Brian to focus on the relationships with he feels more comfortable with, "I do not like complicated people, who do fuss", "I'm often not comfortable with the relational." "I prefer to be in touch with people who need it." After an interaction with a forty-something Chicano couple, Pedro and Rosario: "I like to show houses of $60,000-100,000, these are different, you have to accompany... you work with simple people, honest...these people come from where I come from, it comes naturally." When handing over the keys, Brian struggles to contain his excitement, he has developed a personal relationship with them, he says that he "sees his parents" (field note)

Brian's Hispanic identity allows him to connect with clients from the same background. However, he partially left this social background by marrying a white woman from the upper-middle class: she invests her relationships in school to recruit new clients:

> On a Friday, I went with them on a fair at the school of their children. In front of other parents, they appear as "a family of realtors": "yes, do not forget, if you have a friend ..." said Brian, distributing sodas and oranges. On the other hand, Cindy talks with a group of moms and organizes the play dates of the following week. The agents are also encouraged in the training to establish social relations in their circles of belonging. Brian goes to the motorcycle club where he is registered, responsible for handling relations to other parents in the soccer club of his daughter, and his wife volunteers at the school to update the listings of parents, allowing them to have access to all email addresses (field note)

An appearance is also a form of anticipation of the expectations of the role of professional. Even if there are no fixed dates, there is always the possibility of an interaction. That is why agents get into "interactive mode" in many of their outings:

> I wear my pin when I go jogging when I go to the supermarket, I must also wear nice clothes, who would like an agent wearing shorts and flip flops? (informal conversation)

The couple teams work in a recreation of the family and conjugal unit in the world of work, based in particular on the naturalization of skills and the "ritual of complementarity" (Goffman 1977, 11). This is a case of adherence to middle and higher class norms in an interaction with the body and the feminine ideal that provides a status, a modern parallel to the adherence of "fashion workers" the bourgeois ideal of clothing, a model of suburban housing and a strong interweaving of status and economic capital

(Zylberberg-Hocquard 2002). The use of the couple is used to legitimize a position and to refer to the reassuring family form, symbolic legitimation necessary to better pass heavy transactions, complex and sometimes risky. The typified configuration of the interaction, therefore, consists of being able to adapt to the one who makes the decision, often couples.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I demonstrated how women realtors have created a space in the real estate market and how through trust mechanisms (market, social proximity, and gender skills) these women real estate agents work the market to align supply with demand. How do agents mobilize gendered resources and how do they try to erase the economic nature of their interactions? The first is to build trust and to "create the relationship": techniques are also put in place for the management of social relations. The relationship of trust is established around differentiated gendered skills that affect the self-presentation, discourses, and practices of real estate agents. As shown, women tend to present themselves as house experts while men tend to present themselves as market experts.

For women to excel in the real estate world, they have to exhibit characteristics that are labeled as masculine while using and negotiating the feminine work (Arnal 2015). It requires, therefore, that these women do double labor, which is particularly difficult to juggle, in which they have to exhibit so-called "feminine" characteristics – to be astonished by the beauty of a kitchen - and so-called masculine characteristics –be aggressive in the conclusion of a case".

The management of contradictory gender regimes produces internal tension for women who juggle between the “feminine side” of the “devouring service” relationship (Monchatre 2010) and the “masculine side” of the aggressive salesperson. Besides the injunctions to take gender as an opportunity for professional women to succeed outside of the corporate environment, the relationships of women to this opportunity is ambiguous: it can on the one hand bring substantial financial revenues to support families, but it also cannot hide the specific gendered dynamics at stake within the real estate work environment in which they come to be: the unequal situation characterized by financial rewards and

positions cannot be dismissed so easily as merely an assumed gender-neutral or naturalized differences between men and women.

This research contributes to deepening our understanding of the sociology of work and the market from a gender perspective. Numerous studies have shown that economic activities are embedded in social relations (Granovetter 1985; DiMaggio and Louch 1998). By reversing this question, one can explore the use of social relations for market purposes, including the place of social and demographic characteristics constructed as gendered resources on the market. I show here that the market players use social relations to “erase” market relationships and thereby the market itself, which in turn renders market violence more acceptable.

Specific questions arise concerning the commodification of emotions. Pacifying a client or bringing empathy, care and comfort during the real estate transaction serve to justify the state of market relations, to "smooth out" the assignation done within the market, and to ultimately hide economic elements from the transactions.

For Hochschild (1983), the concerns do not resolve specifically about "emotional labor" but about the "costs of having it within a system of recompense" (33) as "it affects the degree to which we listen to feeling and sometimes our very capacity to feel. Managing to feel is an art fundamental to civilized living, and I assume in broad terms the cost is usually worth the fundamental benefit." (35). Are feelings mere instruments to be commodified on the market? Are we risking their "spontaneity" and "importance"? We may interrogate the operations of manipulation of feelings to produce more value in the market (Illouz 2007). These are important questions for economic sociologists and sociology of work scholars as to the recent attention between the relations between markets and emotions (Besbris 2016).

Borgerson and Rehn (2004) invite us to examine the mechanisms of production of gendered dualisms, particularly through the barriers existing in the economy of particular organizations. As Davies (1996) suggests, we must take an interest in the "underlying gendered structure". If women feel strong pressure to do emotional "service" work, they are also urged, like their male counterparts, to make money and achieve their goal: they seek to establish their place and obtain recognition from their peers. They can find themselves

deprived of the real estate environment where they should adopt norms of "dominant masculinity" (aggressive individualism, independence, competition, the strength of character), particularly valued to climb the hierarchical ladder within real estate.

Future research should examine the effects of “gender” dynamics (McGuire 2002), care labor economy and the “job polarization” (Dwyer 2013) on the structure of the market. Does not this *supposed* proximity between the feminine and the individual house have any *real* consequences for the distribution of agents? Does the promotion of gendered skills serve as justification for the sexual division of labor? How do we explain that there are only 1/5 of women in commercial real estate and yet women dominate residential property? On average, women earn much less than men and are much more present than men in the residential markets, not to mention the division of domestic tasks and their greater difficulty in reconciling work life and personal life.

In the profession of a real estate agent, the integration of women into real estate has brought divisions in working practices to work, especially in the forms of positioning and relationships between one sex to the other. Women and men engage in multiple gendered interactional registers to gain professional legitimacy. I have discussed how gender interactions produce gender on the premise that gender is a modality of social interactions more than fixed qualities in itself. Men and women can use gender as an interactional resource, but it requires a mastering, of when they should demonstrate proper gender enactments and when they can use "feminine" and "masculine" traits. This mobilization of previously acquired skills depends partly on their social background, which is hinted at in this chapter but not systematically discussed.

In the next part, I discuss more particularly the work done on matching supply and demand, including classifying clients, shaping prices and products qualities. I highlight the role of realtors® in defining values of neighborhood and their contributions to unequal residential outcomes.

Part IV. The Matching of Supply and Demand: Agents' Contributions to Clients' Preferences, Pricing, Location and Inequalities

The third and final empirical part of the dissertation, Chapters 7 and 8 – The production of a match between supply and demand or the contribution to clients' preferences, pricing, and location of the goods – investigates market processes that shape housing inequalities.

In these chapters, I rely almost exclusively on ethnographic material produced while shadowing agents in their interactive work with clients. I also include training material from Desert Realty and Real Prosperity. I discuss the several ways in which intermediation produces inequality and segregation through spatializing (desirable or undesirable areas) and assigning (specific targeting), especially by 1) putting supply on the market from assessing its state to producing it and 2) working the demand from collecting aspirations to translate them into criteria.

In Chapter 8, I most specifically address the "urban" dimension of this process. I include here the territorial dimension and the symbolic and moral component included with the land. I start by presenting several hypotheses on segregation and inequalities in the context of housing markets around institutional racism and market inequality to then address specific mechanisms shaping socio-spatial inequalities.

Introduction Part IV.

> At the *Salon de la Maison Individuelle in Paris*, a buyer arrives, a little embarrassed, accompanied by his wife and two kids; he asks about a house. He is spoken to politely because he has a wife and two kids, he's a serious customer (…) he says to the couple: "Come and sit down." (…) for a few minutes, the buyer, going by what his friends have said or his mother-in-law on lending him money, asks the salesman a few questions, and try and make him compete with other possible sellers, to try and get information and see if there are any hidden defects. The situation turns round fairly quickly; sometimes, by the third question, the buyer is already hooked. It's then the salesman's turn to ask questions: he makes the potential buyer pass a regular examination as to his payment capacities."
> (Bourdieu 2014, 14)

While describing the interaction between home buyers and a salesman, Bourdieu makes a valid epistemological point. While looking at interactions, sociologists need to break away from the truth of the actor and the empirical bias consisting of finding an analysis in merely recorded and observed interactions. In Bourdieu's analysis of the French market for

individual homes, what was at stake in the buying of new homes was mostly embedded within institutional rules shaped by the State, in which the salesmen, instead of selling houses were selling credit to buy houses, based on the social evaluation of clients. In his analysis thus, it seems almost that Bourdieu dismissed the advantages of looking at the micro level.

Why should we even look at how interactions unfold as we already know that specific decisions about buying and selling are shaped by bigger structural and social forces? I take a rather different perspective here by using the contributions of interactionist approaches and especially Goffman. If interactionists have often been regarded as theorists of the micro sociological order, they show that situations envisioned at the micro level are often an expression of a macro-social dimension of social life (Goffman 1967; S. E. Martin 1978; D. Roy 1974). In this Durkheimian interpretation of Goffman, interactions are not mere punctual configurations, but they are closely intertwined with the social order: they are shaped by it, they contribute to produce and to reproduce it (Castel 1990). Goffman offers to think about the social world as a dramaturgy in which everyone plays its role, acquires a "sense of place", which is built around situations and constructed with the repetition of interactions. This can also explain why inequalities based on race and class persist.

Within the residential real estate market in Tucson, the purpose of Chapter 7 and 8 is to look at the interactions between real estate agents, buyers, and sellers in the light of the professional market practices of the real estate agents, having revealed earlier the socialization process of the real estate agents. This aims thus at considering the social order and the interactional order as interrelated. For that, it seems crucial to think about the values agents assess to certain actions and the “categories” arising in the “misfires” of the interaction (for example, expectations that are not satisfied) in relation to the categories of social classification, as “dispensations to the norms” serve to assert them. We should thus considerate the importance of *the social and professional positions* of the agents, both evidenced in material and symbolic elements, the interplay of economic, social and cultural logic acting in reproducing or disturbing social categories of classification.

If positions matter, it is also because they give rise to specific practices or investments within work, by which agents are trying to increase or maintain their amounts

of capital, economic but also social and cultural. The proposition of this last part of the dissertation is to look specifically at the practices of real estate agents by the window of interactions, and the available tools at agents' disposal to shape and control those interactions, as well as the game they are embedded in to maintain or change their position within the social and professional fields in which they act.

The market is not considered as an external element to their practices. It is used both performatively as agents intuitively rely on what is the right thing to be done in the market context and strongly believe the market exists ("the market does not lie") and are very precautious and worried about "disturbing it." Because their ultimate goal is to bring demand and supply to match, they are economically driven to shape the behaviors of market participants (buyers and sellers) with signals on price and definitions of qualities. The seeking of information is realized on practical grounds: it is intended to define the situation, as participants will know what their partners expect from them and correspondingly what they can expect of them. The control of the interactions and the signals the agents send by defining the prices and the quality are thus what they discursively defined as the "right things to do" for the market. Agents also rely on calculations and intuitions to sense how to make money. This is subject to the ambiguous control of the interactions in the market to make money while showing that they are invested in the best interests of their clients, and not of their own.

The specificity of the residential real estate market is also that it is organized and segmented spatially, meaning that similarly shaped and formatted goods will have enormous differences in value based on where they are located in the territory. This place-based value should be also taken seriously as market mechanisms, embedded and reified by real estate agents' work practices, contribute to produce and reproduce market segmentation, and thus urban segregation and inequalities.

I show most particularly on agents are acting on specific socio-professional dispositions that made them produce and reproduce inequalities in two ways: first, they learn to match supply and demand through the calculation of value, how to read, understand and work with specific market tools such as the MLS to make clients embrace a specific action which impacts the quality and price of products. Second, they drive residential inequalities

by specific actions based on socio-professional practices that tend to homogenize neighborhoods, control prices and steer people away from some areas.

Most of the recent scholarly discussion in the United States about the production of residential inequalities has been framed by an individualistic approach, in which inequalities are the results of individual residential preferences for homogeneity (DiMaggio and Louch 1998; Pager and Shepherd 2008; Sampson 2012; Sharkey 2013). This unbalanced attention towards the *customer* rather than the *producer* has been theoretically and empirically driven by the analysis of the rationales and motives behind acts of consumption. Though the rationality of the homo economicus portrayed by neo-classical economics has lost ground in the last 20 years, behavioral economics through the notable work of Kahneman (2002)) and others and the influence of experimental psychology, has entirely focused on individual characteristics, showing how cognitive biases, social norms, emotions enacted at the consumer level impact decision-making processes.

Although these studies have provided valuable insights into actors' constraints in decision-making processes and the perpetuation of inequalities, they do not consider directly the role of housing markets and professionals such as real estate agents. In the 1980s and the 1990s, studies focused on the role of the real estate agent have evidenced processes of discrimination of minority homebuyers, through the steering, preventing minorities to access certain neighborhoods (Foley 1980; Galster 1990; Galster 1991; Yinger 1995, 1998). But these studies are often quantitative and do not get at the specific triggers and mechanisms that might happen as "real estate" are embedded in a socio-professional world. Korven-Glenn (2017; 2018) investigates the production of inequalities through the overt racialized practices operated by real estate professionals. Overall, many forces in interaction shape cities and segregation from household preferences, discrimination practices or institutional racism in public and private sectors (Choi, Ondrich, and Yinger 2005; Clark and Blue 2004). One promising way of looking at racial inequalities is to consider the framework of "racism without racists" (Bonilla-Silva 2010) as well as differentiating between the intentionality of the actions, the actions themselves and the institutional and legal framework in which they operate. I depart from the individual level to get at the practices implied within a certain categorization of the social world in which real estate agents are embedded.

This last part of the dissertation proposes thus to get away from the individual explanations of residential inequalities to focus to rely both on socio-spatial and socio-professional or market approaches of residential inequalities. These approaches permit to focus specifically on the real estate agents' practices to see how they might contribute to increase (and sometimes reduce) the unequal distribution of people in a territory. I pay attention to the interrelations between race and class explaining the unfolding of practices. I most specifically use Goffman in this theory of expected behaviors to understand the stakes within the interactions between real estate agents and clients.

In Chapters 7 and 8, I discuss most particularly the ethnographic work I conducted while observing agents with clients, whether buyers and sellers. I present here a table of the transactions I follow.

CHAPTER 7. Matching Clients with Products: Classifying Clients, Prices, and Qualities

Drawing on a “sociology of market work” originally coined by Cochoy and Dubuisson-Quellier (2013), this chapter proposes to look specifically at the practical dimensions of the professional activities carried out by real estate agents. It carries three principal ambitions: 1) to study the practices and the actors implicated within the act of consumption rather than to focus on the consumer; 2) to understand markets not only as networks, organizations or merely as shared understanding or shared knowledge but to consider them as an institutionalized relational system in which professionalized workers and devices interact ; 3) to address the dimension and the effects of performativity in the creation of markets (Callon 1998; MacKenzie, Muniesa, and Siu 2007).

I aim to uncover the practical operations done to establish value and to arrive at a "match" between supply and demand. With these objectives in mind, I most specifically look at “qualculation activities,” including both the “literary work (qualification) and the “computational work (calculation)” done on valuation, with the help a variety of devices (professional and technological tools) which serve to “equip economic cognition” to create “empirical calculating agents” (Cochoy and Dubuisson-Quellier, 2013).

Buyers and sellers do not hold significant knowledge nor experience of the residential market, hence their “difficulty in gathering all the necessary information to make a fully informed decision,” because they “only occasionally interact with a given market” and “cannot reap the benefits of accumulated knowledge and experience” (Beckert and Musselin 2013). Becoming intermediaries between the market and the products, I argue that agents as workers must "reassure" (Lambert 2015) and make their clients "discover market reality" (Sigaud 2015) to "disinvest" them (Bourdieu 2012). They not only impact the outcome of a transaction but shape the products and the decision-making process, becoming themselves a market device on which calculation must be made (Çalışkan and Callon, 2010; Cochoy, 2013; Dubuisson-Quellier, 2010).

I look more specifically at how real estate agents shape clients' preferences, how they work on demand and supply, with pricing strategies and qualities presentation and adjustments. I contribute to shifting the analysis from how market intermediaries encourage consumers through emotions (Besbris 2016) to how the specific work they perform and the reasoning on which they draw contribute to organize and define the market.

Products are not fixed and defined before the interactional encounter but are part of a work undertaken by agents to classify products and shape their values, acting thus as a device for calculation (Callon and Law 2005). Real estate agents not only shape market outcomes (the act of selling and buying) but actively work to transform both the clients and the products (price and qualities or features). More than using "gut-feelings" (Wallace 2008) and intuitions (Callon 1998), agents embody and transmit the market, which is viewed as a real actor and can serve as an "outside legitimizing force" (Smith, Munro and Christie 2006), making real estate agents, as economists, performative.

1. Managing Clients or Shaping Preferences

1.1. Classifying Clients

To handle transactions, real estate agents are required to identify clients' socio-professional and familial situations. For about 90% of the agents I followed, the work on buyers required to understand both their present characteristics and constraints as well as to draw on their aspirations, what I call "the discovery of the client." Both formal and informal methods are adopted to classify clients: some agents use in-office interviews with their clients to ask specific questions, others hand them a quick survey in which clients need to answer a set of questions.

Through these techniques, they learn to decipher and understand elements about their clients (their professional occupations, their family, their activities and taste) helping them to "localize" them socially. I conducted about 15 fieldwork observations involving first-time

in office meetings between real estate agents and potential buyers.[57] Agents I followed during transactions often refer to this type of assessment as an evaluation of the personality and lifestyle characteristics of their clients.

Armed in more than 80% of the meetings with a questionnaire, agents strategically focus on specific elements that will help them to target the search. Ben, of Hispanic origin, 37, who is an ex Spanish teacher in a public high school, is familiar with buyers. During his two first years, he started as the "open house killer" as he says: "I needed to make money so that was my best bet." He claimed he had probably done about 120+ buyers in his 5 years.

I followed Ben through a transaction with buyers Sarah and Matt for about 1 month starting with the first meeting. Ben told me he had previously spoken with them on the phone, they were a referral from another agent who was good friends with them, but claimed not to have time to "take care of them." Before the meeting, Ben has shown me the questionnaire handed to his clients - the questionnaire asks about their overall social – asking about lifestyle, family, work, leisure – and financial standing and expectations. The answers given to agents can be somewhat very vague, especially with the younger buyers, the newly relocated in town or the clients with less economic capital: I want a "good neighborhood", a "three bedrooms' house," "something nice." Because of Ben's experience, the ways he deals with buyers is quite standardized. I have also witnessed him handle two other buyers Sarah and Matt and Mariana. He tries to close them as soon as possible without seeming like he is, a strategy that previously worked in two transactions but not with Mariana.[58]

Indeed, the discovery of the client engages mostly the social skills acquired by agents to evaluate quickly the social standing, the seriousness and the decisiveness of the clients. Agents do not rationalize such operation as a social classification; they instead establish an informal yet practical useful distinction between clients. They may assess their level of decisiveness, as explained by Pamela, a 52-year-old broker, of an upper class background with more than 20 years of experience in the business: "Some do know what they are looking

[57] I had both access to the interactions, but also the comments provided by the agents while we had some breaks, for example, to print paperwork for the clients, before or after the interviews. I analyzed more specifically the order, the types of questions, the distribution of speech between the agent and the clients, and the overall course of the meeting.

[58] I discuss Ben's transaction with Mariana in Chapter 8.

for, some don't, and some really will tell you that they really don't know, especially if coming from another part of the country," which often translated as "the clients who know what they want" and "the ones who don't." With Pamela, I had experience with two types of clients, John and Magali, who were in their late 20's, and with Sally and Harold in their late 50's. In the first case, the clients were unsure about where and what to buy, and Pamela was able to classify them right away: "don't know" vs. "know."

Classification operates mostly to assess the strategies and the work required from the agents to make the transaction happen. Nancy, Pamela, and Kate benefit from a professional software backing them up in their informal classification, allowing to classify into files. Since Kate has recently started, she is very eager to fill out her list of contacts while Pamela and Nancy do not always use it, but still, have a system of classification up and running to send Christmas cards or birthday wishes. The A buyers as "ready, willing and able to purchase (…) that will be under contract in a matter of weeks" while the B buyers are "ready and willing but who cannot buy now, they have to get their existing home under contract, wait for their lease to expire, or get the cash from their tax refund, etc." At the end of the spectrum, we have the C buyers: "those have no immediate needs. They may have a very exacting situation. For example, if they can sell their property for a specific price, or get a house on a street they have always loved" Ben says at the company's session reserved to trained agents to use this professional software. Agents must then adopt a whole set of strategies and reminders to follow up with their clients, for example, the software sends Kate a reminder for each stellar clients' birthday so that she can send out a birthday card.[59]

Similarly, agents from Real Prosperity such as Rudy and Corey are both using the DISC assessment in order to assess the "personalities" of their clients as a way to not only set up a plan of communication but also rely on interactive scripts corresponding to each: for example, Corey used it to show them homes. Depending on its clients' personalities, Corey strategizes differently on how to preview homes, how many to show and what to start

[59] As seen in Chapter 5, agents are trying to get control over their clientele by finding people with common interests or to create forms of bonding that goes beyond the strict framework of commercial interactions. These systems not only imply to classify clients during a transaction but to create a system to control clients, which clients would be considered for the entire course of one's career, and not as a onetime shot.

with. For example, with Andy, a single man of 35, he had jotted down that he mostly liked to have a good practical kitchen and a dining room, but he also cared for the outdoor environment. He assessed he was a yes or no type of person, so he selected more houses than he normally does for the first preview (about 7) to be sure there was enough to see. With Lisa and Rami, a couple in their early 30's, he was on the contrary, he found out Lisa was mostly very indecisive and that they needed to take time, so he also intuitively told me that he would be a harder transaction, and decided to let them decide first three houses out of about 6 he selected. Not only do agents need to classify clients, but they also need to assess clients' social class.

1.2. Assessing Clients' Social Classes

"Not all clients are created equal," said Kara, a 37-year-old middle-class agent whose mother was a realtor®. During a meeting at an open house, Kara was commenting on people passing by. I witness her trying to assess, a sociologist would do, what would be the "background" of people walking by. When I asked her more about what she meant by "background," she includes a series of clues about who people are, where do they come from geographically but also socially. Clues would be answered with a series of questions: "Are they urban or rural folk?" "What kind of lifestyle do they have" "are they going to go to the restaurant or stay at home?" "What are their activities?" and mostly "what jobs or careers do they have."

With those elements, Kara understood that Anton comes from a rural town of eastern Europe and has limited means, he also lives in Spain and loves the proximity with Hispanics. On the contrary, with Samantha and Will, white buyers from Minnesota, she clearly understood they were very worried about security and did not go out as much, were more interested in local events once in a while, like very "quiet" and average. The agents need to decipher not only the position of their clients on the economic scale of their clients but also their taste, what they sometimes refer to as their "personality" or "profile." Similarly to what Bourdieu distinguishes between the "vulgar," the "middle" and "the highbrow" tastes, agents acquire a very practical hands-on understanding of where their clients stand in terms of economic, social and even symbolic capital.

Although clients with higher social status are often considered more difficult, many agents do not establish any sort of relation between status and clients' style: whether they are "easy" or "difficult." Certain clients are very difficult to handle at times for the agents I followed. Ben, for example, adapted his strategies depending on which types of clients he was dealing with. Sarah and Matt both had a master's degree and were looking to buy a $300,000 house. He addressed point by point their questions, bringing up detailed knowledge while praising their choices and their "successful careers" and trying to create commonality.

Terry and Kate had similar experiences. In both cases, transactions happened with a male customer of higher social class who knew better than them. In one case, the buyer dismissed the work of selection of the agent, and wanted to make offers that were totally extravagant to Terri, a 44-year-old agent, from upper middle class, arts majors at UCLA. Although I had only met them together once, I sense that Terri was not feeling very comfortable with him, he was very assertive and questioned her ability to select the right properties, and to know about the prices. Henri, the buyer, ended up looking for another agent and not replying to her at all. Kate, 33, who had just started less than 6 months ago, was on the other hand worried about handling the transaction correctly, and Max was not particularly dismissive of her but was undecided. Because of her lack of experience, Kate was not aware of the "tricks" that agents like Ben can play with. I assisted in their first meeting, and Kate felt like it was a waste of time, when she got out of the interview.[60]

The client still decided he wanted to buy houses and they went on the following Saturday afternoon visiting properties she had selected. He said he wanted to wait, and he called her about a month later because he had found a house, they met for coffee. They went to see the house, but he wanted to check for more. I followed them on their ride along, it was awkward for her, she was not interested at that point to "make the transaction." She told me she could not say "no" to him because she was young. But as we were looking at houses,

[60] I was initially scheduled to participate in the meeting, but at the last moment, she did not feel comfortable to bring me in. I had the chance though to briefly hear them chatting at the end of the meeting in the hallway and to have her reactions to the meeting.

the client, Max, started to get annoyed, he went even more disengaged as he discovered the state of the market, and ended up “bailing on her” after that.

Due to her new status, she felt bad about the transaction, because she had hoped she would intuitively grasp the "correct" way of acting with him, but could not relate personally which creates a form of distance and then was not able to reply to his objections to each good she presented him with. Instead, she understood later through talking through the situation at the office with more experienced agents, that she could have been more direct with him, and offer him to pick houses himself after they looked at it together, and addressing all the points he was unhappy with, as he could come down to a realization.

Instead, with lower-middle-class clients, and especially during the transactions I followed with more experienced agents – Ben, Corey, Thomas, Terri, Kara, and Rudy – the assertive figure was used as agents seemed to control to a large extent the interaction, asking much fewer questions than trying to go fast into the plan to set up the transaction. The buyers' transaction I followed with Rudy,[61] Abbo and Kintu, a black couple from Uganda, with 4 kids, exemplified this dynamic: The buyers have an appointment at 10 am. At 10:02, we hear the crying baby, voices in the hallway, Abbo and Kintu arrive with their two months old baby, “Hello, how are you, sit down, you want a bottle of water? Yes, thank you” and Rudy starts: “We will see the questionnaire after, first I would like to tell you about the purchase, the process.” Rudy takes out its workbook that he shows to Abbo and Kintu but only uses a few pages, the rest being taken by the buyers to consult once they leave the room. After introducing the course of the transaction with the listing packet in hand, he leaves them in the room asking them to fill out a questionnaire and he leaves them alone for this after all full details about the fact that he already has a mortgage and about the place where they want to live, what they want in the house, trying to find out what they are looking for to be able to go as quickly as possible in the interview "1 hour max, I don't want to spend my whole morning with them.”

[61] I have already interviewed him before and followed him during open houses and with a seller in which he tried to get the woman to work with the company of a friend to remodel the house and sell it for a higher price (which is called “flipping houses”). I describe this transaction more in detail in Chapter 8.

I was surprised to realize how quick Rudy went through the questionnaire after then only highlighting the absence of a loan agent and that they were looking for a 5 bedroom house within the price range of $160 to 180 000. During the presentation of the transaction process, Rudy appears very confident brining up detailed information on the steps of buying. Abbo and Kintu both have some issues of comprehension with English. They try vaguely to ask questions, but Rudy speaks pretty fast that they do not understand anything, so they end up nodding at what he says. He talks about the buying process, in eight steps and the costs associated with buying a house while reassuring his buyers that we can help them pay, it's okay and everything will work out.

He seems like rushing by telling them how the process works like he is delivering a script to control the interaction. In this case, the observation permits to reveal that the trust operating within the middle-high class clients, mostly disappear as agents take in charge the transaction, as guiding figures. Even if buyers seem somewhat confused, Rudy tells me while getting out of the meeting: “Did you see how reassured they were at the end?” as if he aims to signify, “all good, they are under control.”

While it does not seem to go badly, I was surprised by the low level of understanding of the stakes of the transaction within the buyers, and the confidence of Rudy that the buyers were okay. I realized Rudy strategized a plan or a specific game to talk a lot and not to listen to them, contrary to what I observe with the handling of middle and higher class clients by Pamela. Because of their socio-economic status, he had also assumed that either it was not a problem to lose these clients or that they were less confident about their ability to impose during a transaction, and that he would impress them easily. This interaction, which appears to me so unbalanced as the clients did not express much of what they wanted, is the first step towards seeing the house.

1.3. Setting up the Stage: the Importance of Controlling the Interaction

The capacities of agents to handle transactions is thus a factor of both clients' social class, agents' social class and previous socio-professional dispositions[62], which accounts for experiences with working with clients enabling them to develop a practical sense allowing them to effectively handle the interactions. Agents, with a teacher background like Ben, can draw on their capacity to convince, educate or convey. On the contrary, the ones who did not enact relational skills from their previous occupations, such as Corey and Alex, are more likely to have difficulties handling transactions. Indeed, the social class from which the agents come from may determine how they can talk and emulate middle-class taste. The agents with the most social and cultural capital are better equipped. Additionally, if the interaction is perceived as awkward or the agent is perceived through a series of negative characteristics, the transaction may become uncomfortable and may stall all the progressive steps required to go through the transaction. That would thus lead to the fall of a deal.

In the first meeting, the buyers consult as a crucial interactional moment setting the stage for the whole transaction. "To be able to get a buyer, you would need to get them into your office to schedule an appointment," says Martin, a 20-years into the business agent, who is teaching the class "working with buyers" at Desert Realty. "When you get the first appointment for the buyer consultation, you are very likely to get that buyer. So this is a moment where you need to establish control of the conversation, by asking questions around different topics" he writes down on the board: "price" "okay what price range are they comfortable with?" "motivation" "what is driving their decision to buy a home," "location" "what neighborhood if any are they interested in," "wants vs. needs" "what are their criteria?" "timeline" "when would you like to move," "finances" "are they paying cash or obtaining a loan;" and finally "availability": are they already working with an agent?" "These questions are going to be crucial to determine the steps of action. If they need a loan, there will be needs for prequalification." "But these distinctions," he says "should not hold you

[62] Although I did not particularly look at the gender effect, it might also be worth to look at it in further research. More experienced men with less experienced buyers are less problematic indeed, as demonstrate the case of Thomas from which I follow in an open house and that asserted his power over me.

back, you will schedule the first consult, and manage them electronically after, you just need to be really clear on their timeline, and reach out to them in the proper moment."

On the selling side, similar mastering of the interaction is required. During the listing presentation, "One of your key messages is that the entire session is about them and their needs, not about you." An important part of the interaction is the mastering of "when to talk." To hide a form of stress, agents often would try to talk more, rather than let the seller talk. Entering in contact and warming up the relationship, which as many agents anticipate but rarely talk about, can be "awkward." One of the tools agents learn is also to be able to probe the sellers and to listen what they say, rather than investing too much the time to talk. The agents framed thus their role only as guides, hired to fulfill the desires of their clients. They thus emphasize their role as psychologists or coaches, listing listening for 2/3 of my interviewees as the required quality to be a "good agent."

The first meeting at the office or their house is indeed generally the first face to face, one on one contact with the sellers, and even if he/she demonstrates great expertise, the agent does have to come distant, he/she has to personally build something with the client, which I explain in Chapter 4, so the most important thing is "to make them feel comfortable" or what the trainer calls to "get them in a receptive frame of mind." That is why the interaction agent-client is going to determine the whole decision-making process. In this case, it goes beyond the specific demonstration of expertise: "You are an expert, but to get them in a receptive frame of mind usually includes having some basis for a relationship beyond the facts about the market, or the features of their home."

2. Bring Clients in Line with the Market

At first sight, one could think it is quite easy to match supply and demand. Indeed, buyers and sellers often question the necessity of intermediaries since they know the value of their investment or what they might be looking for. But in real estate markets, the informal asymmetries are particularly vivid. Realtors® are embedded in a socio-professional network that created tools and systems of necessary use to search the market. Agents' professional system is designed to create a differential between them and their clients' access to information or a gap between what the agents know and what their clients know. As

demonstrated in chapter 4, this system of closure, though hidden and often rephrased within the professional and ethical vocabularies of “helping” rather than “selling.”

Rather than playing the salesmen, agents take on the role of psychologists or counselors by giving the illusion that clients had the entire control on their choices while, in fact, their work consists in orienting them to discover specific options that can take while confronted to the market, which I call the "discovery of the market." Without realizing it, agents are engaged in a system of disinvestment of the client (Bourdieu 2014).

Rather than the result of an invisible hand (Amir-ud-Din and Zaman 2016; Fligstein and Habinek 2014; A. Smith 1776), market exchange is activated through the agent and a socio-technical professional system meant to retain control of the transactions and to stabilize prices. While clients lack the competence to collect the information they need to read and act in the market, agents acquire socio-professional dispositions through their training and peer' mentoring to act as the "hand" of the market. Even if they hold contradictory beliefs and rely on vague understandings on what the market is, all frame their work as the "educators" or "guides" to enter, acknowledge and understand the shape of the market. Training sessions are moments in which agents are encouraged to communicate on the current state of the market with their clients, for example, if the market is favorable to buyers or sellers. During a training session at Real Prosperity, one of the experienced agents Sam suggests that having few statistics in mind and scripted sentences are designed to make the client embrace the “proper decision:”

> You can't lie, the market doesn't lie, it is what it is, either you have to accept that or you have to be irrational put your home in the market seat and be frustrated by the fact that your home is not selling because everyone else has access to that same data that we talked about, but that usually if you can do that in a way that is not abrasive, you can usually talk the client off the cliff and get them to accept reality (…) I think if you have confidence in what you do, and you can convey that confidence to the respective client, you can bring him from the dark side into reality.

Trainers in both companies insist on the necessity to be ready to talk about the market with clients as well as random people, explaining for example the financial advantages of owning vs. renting, the advantages of the lower interest rates or any type of information that would influence the housing prices and the value of a community or a neighborhood.

This belief in the market as a “thing” echoes the work done on performativity[63] but with the difference that real estate agents are neither economists nor advisors making predictions on the market. In this case, they act less as salesmen showing products than as advisors anticipating on the market, shaping to the same extent the proper actions that clients should adopt to benefit from the market. In a seminal study of a Strawberries' market in France, Garcia-Papet (1986) has demonstrated how a "perfect market" operating under the conditions of atomicity, homogeneity, fluidity, and transparency was the result of collective work in which the members of an organization to restore the "efficacy of the trade" had vested interests in creating the "conditions of competition between the buyers." Indeed, what Bourdieu (2000) stressed is that actors placed in an economic field, embedded within a "sense of the game" through socialization might adopt behaviors which are close to those postulated by the rational choice theory, even if their actors cannot be deemed rational.

Rather than having an invisible hand shaping market exchange, my approach demonstrates that real estate agents shared understandings or beliefs, about what the market is, create the scope of possible actions upon which clients can act without disturbing the efficiency of the market. In this sense, agents act on a shared understanding of markets and economic theory, which is acquired during their training and professional socialization, a form of knowledge drawn on economic reasoning that they aim to transmit to their clients. Being at the center of reasonable judgments to act in the residential market, they thus become a device by bringing to technological, professional and social tools to value goods exchange in the market.

2.1. Professional Tools

Alex is a 28-year-old from a middle-class background, he graduated from the University of Arizona is business administration. His father had a small business. I met him through a friend and started to go with him in many of his first few outings as he had just started less

[63] The term "performativity" coined by Michel Callon (1998) and developed by MacKenzie (2006) and MacKenzie, Muniesa and Siu (2007) was proposed to refer to the participation of economics and economists to the construction of the facts – by “saying what markets are doing, what they should do, and what they will do” – that they claim to only study.

than 6 months ago. The recruits have a variety of techniques to get clients; from what I explained in chapter 5 about the social networking to holding open houses to meet buyers or to call FSBO (For Sale By Owner), properties whose sellers decide to sell without agents. These are particularly reached out by experienced agents listing agents hold a "higher reputation" than buyers' agents. The seller is the one who pays the 6% and then the listing agent redistributes to the buyer's agent. Alex had told me he needed to "get out there" and "make it." I went with Alex for the first listing presentation he had with Karine, in her late 40's. While giving a listing presentation, Alex used the housing report as a tool to make the clients understand the strategies around pricing around what is available in the market:

> Here's the housing report. So I just wanted to show you guys. We're a really low inventory market now. What that means for you is you can see you're right here in 85741. We're seeing price increases in these zip codes. The reason being is because we have—we can see your price range in your price racket here. It's a seller's market, easily. The lower the number of months of inventory, the more of a seller's market it is. What does that mean? It means how fast stuff is turning over. Obviously, anything below six months is a seller's market. Stuff is selling fast. Above six months, it's lagging. You can see these high price ranges. In the northwest and specifically in this area, it's a buyer's market. You can see right there that it's a really good time to sell. So you do this and this, you will sell quickly. Lastly, I have a kind of a thing that appraisers use (…) You have to sell the house two or three times. You have to sell it to the buyers, the buyers' agents, and the appraisers because the appraisers determine the value. Two out of three homes I've sold I've used financing. That's why you don't price it at half a million dollars because it's going to come back at $170,000 or something. This is what appraisers use to adjust the price.

Like a consumer report, the housing report serves as to classify and define market goods through a "criterialization activity" establishing a ranking, rating or ordering of goods underlining specific features and attributes upon which the client is going to build preferences (Mallard 2000; Cochoy and Dubuisson-Quellier 2013, 5)

Agents also rely on the development of professional and technological tools for which real estate professionals retained exclusive control. Through their affiliation with the NAR®, realtors® can access a more detailed MLS sheet providing valuable information to select goods. Websites such as Trulia and Zillow also have information, but it is rarely

accurate and up to date. Without the hiring of an agent then, customers are restricted in their use and understanding of technology.

Discerning good and bad elements of quality in the house based on an MLS list sheet is quite impossible for a regular buyer. The wording, for example, can deceive the client: "cozy" usually meaning "small" and beautiful stunning pictures might deform product quality. Agents use the MLS as a "database" and a signaling device to foster the interests of other agents and their clients to physically visit the house. The MLS serves more as a packaging or marketing tool (Cochoy 2002a) than an actual dispositive to assess the quality of the house (Karpik 2010).

Agents also benefit special access to the Multiple Listing Service (MLS) and have developed applications that permit buyers and sellers to navigate supply and demand. Besides, both the seller and the buyer are not an expert in the product they sell or purchase, so thus they rely on a market intermediary to attest to the quality and the conformity of the purchase. There is an important amount of uncertainty as the buyer is concerned the seller is hiding part of the issue with the good to hope to get the best value out of it. The seller is concerned by the buyer wanting to decrease the price to its advantage. The "smoothing" of the transaction, thus rests on the acceptance of the "correct value" to the paid for the "amount of quality" that the good offers.

What real estate agents are trained to do is to operate a match between buyers and sellers, but they have to develop an understanding of the current market situation. Besides the technical tools such as the MLS, the market search is made possible by the informal knowledge of the inventory (which houses are available and where) given both by their continuous search for goods (sometimes gathered through office mates during team meetings in which they advocate for the goods they sell).[64] Keeping a very detailed knowledge of the inventory helps real estate get a very detailed grasp of what is currently going on in the market.

[64] By observing techniques of selection through the MLS, I find that to search for goods, agents most often use the location (tracing a specific geographical area on the screen), the price (a range) and the size (evocated in the number of bedrooms). This work requires specific localized knowledge about the territory, its neighborhoods, and its submarkets. I describe more in detail in Chapter 8.

Using the MLS and the "comps" (comparable goods that have sold in the neighborhood over the past 3 months), to assert their power, agents such as Rich are also aiming to smoothly bring clients to admit that they are wrong, for example, that they cannot get as much as they want for their property and that there is only one good option. Clients' wants must be brought in line with the market. The work of agents consists thus in transforming the client, to "disinvest him" as he "discovers that what is measured out of him is his social value, he arrives with dreams and leaves with reality" (Bourdieu 2014, 34).

2.2. Shaping Preferences

This close monitoring of the preferences, that are scrutinized and hierarchized with the guidance of the agent, permits the agent to translate practically in criteria operationalized in the market. One challenge is always to make sure the clients feel and appear at the center of a decision, and that they feel significantly engaged in their project. This is particularly touchy as they could be accused of driving the outcomes of transactions by the regulators.[65] During interviews, about 40% my interviewees mentioned it as a real issue using the following sentences: "You should never appear as the source of the decision, they have to make their own," "I don't want to advise or be the advice giver," "it's your decision." The expectations should be set up for both parties, what I expect from my clients, and the work they have to do." But as Pamela did with some of her clients, agents indeed guide clients through the specificities of the market, always regional, as if they were "out of town buyers":

> They really don't know, especially if coming from another part of the country, they don't know, because our style of home is a lot different than other places in the

[65] Agents I interviewed about the relations with clients' decisions discursive underlined the primacy of clients' desires and projects, while often talking about people's inconsistencies in having clear thoughts about their decisions. While this could be dismissed as professional ideology, it comes from a prohibition to steer established by the 1968 federal fair housing laws. At the real estate school, agents mostly learn not to discriminate around the protected classes on the bases of race, color, gender/ sex, handicap, religion, familial status, and national origin. Instructors exemplified cases of steering and lawsuits. However, they also know they cannot prohibit access to neighborhoods or give racial statistics because HUD can blindly call agents pretending they are looking to buy in an area "free of Mexicans" for example. They can have their license taken away if they do not answer properly. Mostly because of HUD control and frequent lawsuits, agents are aware that they should be careful in giving information about neighborhoods. In less obvious settings, such as friendly direct conversations, they also walk on a thin line, seeming that they do not orient choices while they are at least partly doing so because of the professional expertise they claim to hold. I discuss steering more in detail in Chapter 8.

> country. People say, I don't want a flat roof, well, if you take care of the flat roof, there's nothing wrong with it, you know, there are not always going to find another type of roof, because, in the 50s, 60s or 70s, they were so many flat roofs, you just have to make sure it's been maintained, so those are just really just to inform people.

Agents are also supposed to make clients conform to the specific context of a social and geographical environment. For example, being in Arizona is not like being in the Midwest in terms of constructions, styles, requirements. When talking about the styles of the roofs or the specific natural conditions of the region, Kara tells me about the desires of people to get grass:

> People want grass, people don't understand why there is no grass here. people from another part of the country, they want grass, but I tell them, well, this is how much it will cost for your water bills if you had grass, and then you have to explain that it needs to be over-seeded or you have to have your winter grass, and summer grass...people will realize quickly that they don't want grass or they get fake grass...it's artificial turf but it looks real (laugh), some of them are bad and they glitter and some are very good.

Indeed, I observed interaction with a snowbird wanting to buy a house, he explained he wanted grass, and she taught him into changing his mind, or thinking about it, based on the incredible amount of costs it represents. While giving this information, she is also shaping the decision process of these particular clients. Indeed, if at the beginning, it was one of its most important criteria, he finally came to realize that she was probably right and he had to end up his idea of having grass.

When working with people who could not decide on a house after Pamela did all the work required to understand what would most likely "fit their needs," she told them to start building their own house. While other clients, John and Magali, who are in their late 20's and wanted to buy a mid-size house in the Foothills, Pamela draws on the restrictions in certain neighborhoods as people cannot do what they wish but have to comply with certain norms, very common in Arizona subdivisions.

Similarly, Kara explained Lucy and Ryan as they express they do not know anything about the "type" of communities they are eventually attracted to. In this case, Kara brought specific elements to help Lucy and Ryan navigate their decisions:

> Even with minor changes or some minor changes, because you will never find the perfect house, the pink color isn't going to be right or the plants are not going to be right or the floor isn't going to be right, but if the bones are good and the floor plan is right, you can make those changes at minimal cost, they are lots of things you can do. So that's the other thing you need to be well advised in a lot of those areas of what you can do, and what you cannot do in some subdivisions, like if you're in a cooking cutter division, if everybody has to tear blue doors, you're not gonna be getting a red door hahaha.

Many agents during the transaction informally discuss with their clients if the market is a seller or a buyer's market at their price range. The discovery of the market needs to be carefully handled by agents because they thus risk losing the transaction: if buyers are not prepared for seeing houses of those particular features in a particular neighborhood at this price range, the agent might end up "wasting" a significant amount of time and energy showing houses that are not fitting the "wants" of the buyers. As Pamela highlights based on the recalled experiences of her beginnings in real estate:

> You need to ask, cause otherwise you will just start showing them things and hear those people, up to a hundred houses and why isn't finding what they're looking for, that does not make sense to me, so if you're looking at hundred properties you're obviously not ready to buy cause if you've looked at a hundred homes, there's gonna be something.

While following Kate in her first transaction, she was able to convey the "room of possibilities" to her clients only by showing them what is possible to purchase. In one transaction, the clients have very detailed opinions on what was good or not for them, and Kate had to progressively educate them to the reality of the market. Laura and Andre, who are from Brazil, contacted her through her husband's boss who is Brazilian as well. As they were new to the city, Kate had to explain a little bit the "vibes of Tucson" although she tried to share this commonality of "outsider" as she also recently moved from Chicago. After she started to get to address their specific needs, they wanted at least 4 bedrooms and something in a "nice part of town." They had about $300,000 to spend. Kate was happy because she

knew the check would also be nice. While at the coffee shop where Kate and I met Laura and Andre for the first time, they mostly talked about the city and started to create abounding. She said she had an idea of what they were looking for, and provided some directions. After chatting with them, we went back to the car, she told me: “they don’t know the place, so I need to show them what's available, help them understand where their compromise point is so you start out with a very wide funnel and you go down.” She wanted to go look at different parts of town with them, so she quickly looked at a few places in the East, where we were to show them, and we went there with them. Although she did not directly shape their preferences, she oriented and pushed for the houses' visit.

Like about 2/3 of the agents I interviewed, Kate believes that buyers often cannot really pinpoint what their wants are, until you practically show them: “sometimes people think they know what they want and you show them exactly what they want, and this isn't what they want, but they did not know that." The process of discovery includes a sort of journey that starts with a dream, continues with compromises while faced with reality. As Kara once pointed out after buyers Lucy and Ryan were disappointed: "Well, what their dream is, where reality is, and where is the compromise. And hey, we didn't think of this, and maybe this is better."

2.3. Finding and Showing Homes

In the observations I conducted about transactions, in 18 instances, I observed agents search homes for clients. I distinguish two approaches to finding homes. One is encouraged by the most successful agents and emphasizes a strategic outlook to voluntarily restrict to 3 or 4 homes shown to clients.

When Rudy explains his technique for showing homes, I can see that he does not want to lose time so it effectively factors in time management. There should be a selection of three homes, especially if the buyers are not interested in looking by themselves. If they are, and they are trying to get passed the agent, the task is more difficult, but the agent should always be able to make sure he is in charge, without making it seem like it. A prototypical form in which that can happen is to make people go down from their selection. “So, you

went to see all these houses, and select. You've told me this and that, how would those fit exactly? Okay, so we are down to 3 houses now…"

Another approach which is not rationalized time-wise is to show all the homes that might fit with the clients' desires, and as many as 8 in one preview tour. This was the case of Corey when we went touring condos with his friend Emiliano. The friend selected 3 and Corey 4. It ended up being so much time waste that both were so tired and could not remember the features of the first one when they got to the 5th condo.

While observing Donna, a 60-year-old broker of working-class background with 15 years of experience, a similar scenario came up with these out of town buyers. As they visited one Saturday, she had printed a list of 8, completely unable to shortlist the houses. The disorganization did not seem to be helping. Her sheets were getting all over the car, and she seemed quite nervous about getting them in the right direction. While she was driving, and the buyers were following her, she tells me: "well, they are out of town buyers, and I do that as a favor for a friend of mine, but I feel like they are not ready."

By telling me that, she acknowledged it was a form of favor that she could not refuse, but she still in the car on a Saturday to drive them to 7 different houses, one was not on the market anymore. Visiting a house is quite a time consuming, with the driving plus the time to look at the house, it takes about 45 minutes minimum so viewing seven houses might take anywhere from 4 to 5 hours where the agent is not getting paid, nor given any guarantee of any transaction. Also, it is very exhausting and requires cognitive capacities to retain information and to be able to compare all the goods.

For Rudy, proceeding this way is inconceivable: "It's excluded I would do that for anyone, this is my time, it's precious if you don't respect that, I don't want to serve you. Too many agents are not putting those boundaries he tells me. But while I followed Rudy in many transactions, I realized he did not care much about the income that people make. If they wanted to buy something, there was always a way around if they were working specifically, they would have to assess their income in 2 years but did not need a proof of a stable income as much as I originally thought when I started this research.

Additionally, Rudy was dedicated to making transactions happen fast, and tried to draw lines between business and friendship. He would not take much time to listen and chat

with the buyers. But Rudy had built a pool of clients, while it is often blurred for the younger agents who are in desperate needs of clients and do not know how to handle them, or from older female agents, who feel like real estate is both a professional activity and at leisure, and get some rewards out of visiting homes, especially for the fancy ones.

The challenge thus for the agents is to assess how much they are going to show about the supply. The strategic move is to manage clients in anticipation and to streamline in advance to pinpoint to goods that clients are going to like. Not only do they need to deal with the amount of supply or goods they are going to show, but agents need to encourage buyers to make "decent offers" as the price is considered a signal of the buyers' interest in the property.

While sellers are getting ready to list comes a moment of realization and confrontation with the market, in terms of price, competition, location, condition, and timing. These five elements are part of the essential strategies that the agent need to make sure the seller understands, in order to what I am going to discuss more in details below, the fact of "pricing right" and how to get to a certain price, based on the knowledge – which is disseminated by the agent – of the market: knowing the statistics and the inventory then comes as a great "tool" for agents to thrive in appearing competent and knowledgeable.

In all the transactions I observed, with Patrick and Rudy, for example, agents used this moment of realization to their advantage. After the first buyer's meeting, they scheduled a second meeting where the agent shows the clients' houses that will meet the defined expectations addressed in the first meeting. The clients will look at them and try to rate them before discovering the price range. The discovery of the price range acted as a medium of comparison between the different houses. The agent's work consisted of highlighting the different features, characteristics (location of the house included) that will make the value change, and little by little, force the client to rate on a practical level what it would sacrifice to get to a deal.

Clients are thus offered two possibilities: 1) they should either lower or tone down their level of expectations, by ordering/ classifying what is the most important and non-negotiable for them and what is not as important as initially thought of; or 2) they should revise the price they are willing to put to get as close to what they initially thought of. I did

not expect that, but in the 9 times the price range had gone up from the prequal, agents were able to negotiable with the lender to get their price range approved.

2.4. Handling Tensions and Uncertainties

However, clients' perceived lack of information about the state of the market may foster tension and uncertainty. In the case of a transaction with agent Patrick and clients Samantha and Eric, very assertive in their project, the couple wanted to buy a 4 bedroom house. Patrick discussed during the first and the second meetings how it would be impossible to find out something that fits their "wants" with their "price range." Only to the extent that they can sacrifice on the good' features or the price, they will be able to make the transaction work. With the guidance of an agent, they learn to discover the market, what are the prices in certain areas, or they are willing to get less in a nicer area or they are willing to get more in a much less nicer area.

The reality check thus comes better when you make them realize the market is exterior and cannot be changed, as Patrick says. It has nothing to do with them or with the agent, but with a state that no one can change has to be accepted within the process of the transaction:

> Most people are great and appreciative and fun and there's a lot of obstacles in a real estate transaction and you really have to be able to negotiate and compromise, and people react emotionally, and you have to be able to give them space but still keep guiding them or making sure they are aware of what their alternatives are, you know, it can be really bearing on the realtor, because you hear from the client, from the other agent, you're trying to work it out.

The management of expectations while discovering the market is crucial for the entire course of the transaction. The discovery of the market can indeed have drastic consequences into the clients' certainties about their original plans which include finding the "dream house" or "selling for the highest price." How do then agents transform the uncertainty inherited from the transaction to their advantages? How do they turn people's clues and expectations into a specific mindset, turning into practical actions, making the transaction go through? If the "good agents" have a "feel" for what can suit people, they can also orient them straightforwardly, asserting their authority without appearing to do so and

close on them fairly quickly. Half of the agents I interviewed pride themselves for being as assertive and questions-oriented, as they believe they care about their clients that way, priding themselves to provide the best service. They develop also intuitive feelings about how clients are going to behave following social likes and dislikes.

Training programs are specifically designed to handle clients' negative perceptions, which manifests into what real estate companies call "clients' objections." 75% of the exercises are designed and focused on getting agents more confident about their knowledge and their convincing arguments to make their clients feel reassured and confident. At the Real Prosperity training, agents are provided with scripts to handle objections and to make the clients change their minds. As was Alex doing with FSBOs, there are often moments were the agent need to sell agents' service, what is indeed the value-added?

Agents should prepare to confront and handle clients by anticipating and elaborating specific responses to the objections made by clients. For example, if your clients feel like they need someone more experienced, says one of the trainers, you respond something along those lines: "Agents who have been in the business a long time have already made it. They don't keep the hours that I do. Your business is way more important to me. I can give you all the attention you deserve, and if I don't know the answer, I am smart enough to get it for you."

During the interactions I followed, I had about 10 instances in which the buyers did not like the houses are shown by the agents, felt desperate about continuing to look. At those moments, the agents I follow either play a crucial role in motivating the buyers again or did not handle it that well and out of 3 times, 2 transactions fell apart.

Kara, who now claims to "hold significant self-confidence", does a sort of check: "Are you really into it? I don't see you convinced…because we can do differently, you would have the same choices, but we can look anyway." Like Pamela, Rudy, Patrick, Thomas, Donna, Sonia, Kara portraits in the course of the conversation the different options that buyers have. They frame the unfolding of the transaction, not just by understanding what is acceptable for their buyer but why conveying this acceptability in regards to needs and wants.

If there is a lack of control of the interaction from the agent, transactions may become draining for the buyers, even risking the completion of the transaction. For example, Kate is not sure about how to lead, she is often stressed out about what to do, but her caring presentation of self conveys a sense of sympathy. It might work for less experienced buyers, but not for others, so that is also highly dependent on the stakes of the transaction, and thus the type of market and populating involved within the transactions.

If the buyers are not necessarily convinced of their purchase, then, the agent may be at risk of a last-minute cancellation or later on complaints. Corey for example, could not handle Martina and Stephy very well. These two single women wanted to buy a house with separate living spaces so that they could invite people over. They had high expectations while starting the search, but it turns out the house they had in mind never really existed in reality. Despite his trying to explain to them that this type of house did not exist, his answers in front of them felt pretty short and did not have many arguments (mixed of market knowledge and seeing the "bright side" of the market), and they ended up not buying from it, after he showed them about 20 houses. In this case, Corey then was making comments about the fact that he did not handle them correctly. Corey was one of the agents I met that later went to work on a team. He often complained about the difficulty he had to be good or to have good "people's skills" which to me explain part of why this transaction failed.

In the other 7 instances, buyers started with a lot of apprehensions and had very low confidence in their capacities of buying something they would like. In these instances, the development of interactions was positive. As the clients feeling pretty much not very confident at the beginning, they discovered little by little neighborhoods and goods that they felt confident they could buy. The real estate agent played an important role in fostering their desire to buy this specific good in this specific neighborhood. For example, Brian, 39-year-old, born of Mexican parents of working-class background, had these Hispanic buyers that were not sure they could even afford something and ended up in a middle-class neighborhood in the South where they felt they could not even end up. In this case, both the coming from the clients and the handling of the agents, guiding them and playing a "father"

or "mother" figure, reassuring when they were doubting help significantly about making them sure of the purchase.

The most general development was the management of expectations and feelings by carefully preparing the buyers to what was going to happen, requiring a mix of attention on the one hand, and a mix of authority, playing on what was to be sold and what was not as important so that the buyers could "let go" of it. As Leidner (1991) mentioned the insurance workers, real estate agents have to be "chameleon" as not all buyers are the same, and they should handle people differently.

One of the techniques used by the agent is to convey elements of certainty about the house or the purchase in general, even imagine scenarios in which buyers can project themselves in the case of the transaction I followed with Kara, Kate, and Patrick. Rather than pushing directly people, they use soft techniques to try to assess first the confidence of their buyers, and then to reassure them and provide counter-arguments in the conversation of why this is still a good decision.

By assessing clients' situations and bringing market discovery, agents bring buyers to discover the state and the expected form of the supply what to do about it while they bring sellers to discover the state and expected form of the demand and what to do about it. Besides presenting the market in a specific light engineered to make clients realize the potential of the products and the prices, they actively contribute to defining the state of supply and demand of the market. Agents transform product features and transaction outcomes. While agents make clients "discover the market," they instill in buyers and sellers economic reasoning. They do not only work on clients but also work on setting prices and shape qualities, in operations, including on the one hand, the assessment of value through defining products' qualities and calculating ("qualculation") (Cochoy and Dubuisson-Quellier 2013) and on the other hand, using pricing techniques which "reduces all qualities to quantities" as "the market commensurates what is considered to be incommensurable" (Velthuis 2013, 3).

3. Setting up Prices, Shaping Qualities

While the work on demand and supply starts with the management of clients and the preparation of buyers and sellers to the market, real estate agents make the market by specifically work on assessing and demonstrate value through the shaping of supply and demand. They impact both quality and price and make the two play against each other to change the shape of one over the other. For example, if the quality of one element of the house is lower, then we can use lower pricing to acknowledge or signal it. The price of the home can be raised if significant remodeling is being done. Agents are first trained to establish value. This training is acquired at the real estate school, but also at the companies. They then learn to "transform" the state of supply and demand, through marketing, finding homes and pricing right.

3.1. Departing from the Law of Supply and Demand to the Professional Control

In the justification agents employ in front of their clients, agents focus on the theoretical model of the "law of supply and demand" which is most often pretty much diffused among the educated buyers and sellers, and is a safe bet to explain why they need to make this or that move while pricing or making an offer. Prices are thus either characterized as real or fake reflections of the market. They fall outside of the "market realm" for example, if they involve a favor such as an arm's length transactions with a relative, or if they are atypical such as foreclosures. They thus believe in a model of law and supply while creating their conditions from its operations.

Except for Thomas, who had a social sciences background and was eager to think almost like a sociologist while being reflexive with me on agents' practices, the agents I shadowed either assumed the model of supply and demand operated similarly in real estate than in other markets. 80% of the agents had little economic background and saw it as a big black box. The most educated agents (with a bachelor or master's degree) defend the idea that they heard at the real estate school that buyers and sellers meet and agree on a price. Thus, the general discourse was indeed similar: only buyers and sellers determine and set

up the prices, and because both demand and supply fluctuate, then that is why value fluctuates. This reasoning seemed even easier to justify in light of the housing crash: the bubble partly happened because too many buyers bought houses, and not enough sellers were interested. The reasoning of the crash revealed many more complexities that economic sociologists have tackled[66].

In the model of perfect competition, buyers and sellers are free to enter and exit the market, information on price and quality is transparent and there is no interference of specific buyers or sellers to influence prices.

If the law of supply and demand is so powerful in the minds of real estate agents, it is not because markets operate perfectly or that individual actors are rational, but rather than they develop a model of thinking, based on their practical understanding of their social work, in which they become attached to the idealized version of market functioning, as it is attached to efficiency. In this part, I demonstrate that the actions to set up prices and shape qualities are made to conform to a normative model of efficiency, which conservatively assesses what actors are supposed to be doing while exchanging goods. Setting up prices and purchasing goods with qualities is not the operation of the invisible hand but rather the result of both a structural and relational system of coordination, managed by the real estate agents.

Instructor at Star Realty, Mike reinforces the idea that determining value is actually very difficult and is not set up once for all, it is determined in relation with the state of demand and supply, but also negotiated in interaction. The unfolding of Mike's demonstration is a good example of the grey areas surrounding value, as agents are not finally aware of how it is produced, or exposes the ambiguities that do not translate well into the law of supply and demand.

Studying the York housing market in the UK, Wallace (2008) demonstrates that agents and developers rely on emotions for many of their work practices, saying they use their "gut feeling" and their ability to "know the market" and assess whether it "felt right"

[66] It is not the purpose of the dissertation to discuss the actual mechanisms which trigger the prices to drastically go down. I here rely on the explanations of agents towards the pricing mechanisms and how it operated differently than what they portray in front of their clients.

or wrong. Rather than formal knowledge and assessment, these agents relied on their experience in the market. Instead of “intuitive responses to market signals” (Wallace 2008, 259), referring to their “sense and sensibility” (Entwistle 2002, 3), real estate agents, placed into both an economic and a professional field, come through the progressive socialization to integrate ways of thinking and acting (Bourdieu 2000b), but since they cannot pinpoint nor economic models nor professional rules, they appear to be relying on their emotions. But the sociologist needs not to fall in the trap of actors’ discourses in proposing an analysis of actors’ actions.

During at least three moments during the class, Mike attributes the determination of market value for the buyers: relying on a mix of intuitive feelings and general knowledge about the products, or what he calls "knowing" when "you see the value." He uses the example of a Louis Vuitton vs. a Kors bag to demonstrate his point. Mike uses the difference in price to demonstrate that women actually – because of their taste and what they are willing to pay – define the prices of the bags, whereas it says for other people – like men – they would not "value" it as much. The demonstration of Mike aims to show that value is relative to whoever is willing to buy a product, so some people will be attributing a high value to a swimming pool whereas others won't.

This explanation of “it depends who values it”, and the attribution of general principle like: “a pool is worth 10 000." This definite set up of "value" is used for attributes of a property, such as the pool, the kitchen and the garage. Agents convey that to the sellers while arguing that it is often contentious, as, for some buyers, a pool is going to be a plus while for others it is going to be a minus.

If the law of supply and demand cannot account (or at least fully) for what I observe in the market, it is first because real estate agents do not touch it and cannot explain why they act the way they act. First, they have difficulties making their actions coherent. Second, the exchange is highly ritualized and routinized by systems of control, operating at the level of the professional field (Velthuis 2013). For example, calculating the price of the goods obeys to historically situate decisions. In the next section, I highlight the method to calculate price and to assess the value.

3.2. A Method to Calculate Price

The principle of comparison is at the core of the assessment of value. To determine the value of the goods, comparable goods should be selected in the market, i.e. other products that are similar in size within the same geographical area. The goods compared should be regular goods. While agents are taught to believe that only buyers and sellers determine value[67], they are taught several methods to establish value while giving primacy to the comparative approach.

Mike is implicitly suggesting the rule of the comparative approach of price in which "abnormal properties" are excluded, i.e. they should not be included in the calculation of value, even if they do exist in the market. What are "normal" and "abnormal" properties according to make? Not only goods must be fairly similar within the same location,[68] but the transaction also has to take place within a similar timeframe and with strangers. When comparing goods, the agent cannot include arm's length transactions (dad to son, brother to sister) or favorable deals. Mikes gives a funny concrete example of how there are many abnormalities: "If this couple has to sell their house quickly, maybe they have to move fast to another job, they will not get the highest dollars. If I sell my house to my son, it's a relative, so because it's an arm's length transaction, there will be a conflict of interests, the mother in law will have a higher rate (laughs)."

Agents' work on assessing value should then be attentive to non-conform prices in the market as they often signal an abnormal situation that does not make for a good comparable:

> Let's be serious one second, you can call the agent, if you see that one house with a price that does not align with others, call to find out why, it might be a red flag to show, for example, it sold in one day, it was an inside sale, it was one day in the MLS, it wasn't really in the market, it could be that the son bought it, that they sold it to their friends.

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[67] "Market value is made of willing buyers and willing sellers, that are knowledgeable, in other terms, they're not forced to sell, you should not take into consideration foreclosures, short sales or the ones selling very quickly because they do not constitute the market, there should be no duress or no arm's length transaction for a favorable price"

[68] But each should also thus resemble each other in a specific area of comparison, which is always defined by geographical proximity

"Abnormal transactions" include all the properties that do not constitute the normal definition of market transactions, and which results generally in an automatic consequent drop in pricing. These include both arm's length transactions and distressed properties sold in the market. The "abnormal properties" cannot be compared to "normal properties," Mike tells us:

> So I repeat, no arm's length transaction, so foreclosure, no sales between relatives and no condemnation procedures. These all affect the value of the neighborhood, though, for example, in 2010, 87% of the duplexes in the central part of the city were in foreclosures, it had a huge influence in the neighborhood.

Market value is also not only a meeting of the minds between buyers and sellers, but rather define within socio-professional systems designed by real estate and lending actors, and most particularly between the real estate agents, the banks and the appraisers. Mike insists most particularly on the appraisers:

> Okay, I wanna come back to appraisers, what do they do, basically, they are hired to determine the market value, appraisals are done for the banks, as a risk management tool for the banks, the more buyers you have the most accurate the price is going to be, because there will be a lot of activity in the market.

The appraisal plays as a backup in the assessment of value permitting for the bank or the lender to attest to the value of the house. This double assessment also includes that the prices are verified by both the real estate agents and someone that has on paper not stake in to make the transaction happen or fall. Appraisals are indeed critical to make the transaction go through. Of the 20 instances, I have witnessed appraisals, they came back 17 times in the same accepted range, but I had three times in which they did not. In a transaction with Rudy, the house was priced at $200 000. The sellers ended up selling at a lower price. On the other hand of the transaction, Pamela had the buyers wanted to go away, as she explained, my buyers would not want to pay higher, "Who is going to want to pay above the appraised value. What buyer is going to say 'I want this house *so* much.' No one." The buyers were still set on the house, but they would not want to pay more than the appraised value, and in this case, "not going to pay $200,000 for a house that's only worth $180,000 to the bank." The sellers then agreed to it because they wanted to sell: 'All right. I want to

sell the house. I'm going to come down to $180,000 and sell it at that price.' The buyers ended up paying $180,000 for contradicting the idea that only sellers and buyers determine the prices of homes, as both the agents and the appraisers set up what is accepted to price it at." In another instance, the transaction fell through as the sellers did not want to sell it at the end and preferred to wait a better time, even if the agent used the tricks to convince them. Finally, in the last instance, the buyers walked away from the transaction.

While most of the transactions have a mortgage, the appraiser is going to look at the house and determine an estimation on value, while the buyers and the sellers are finally going to agree on a market price. But if the house does not appraise for a certain price, no transaction is going to go through mostly because the bank would not agree, so it is highly unlikely that the market price differs from the estimated price:

> The market price is what you actually pay for it…you don't talk to the appraiser before the contract, the appraiser is going to look at the contract, the market and the non-market value, are their furniture, amenities…etc…it can be in the range of $159,000- $180,000, the listing price is $172,990. The appraiser determines the market value, it is an estimate, buyers and sellers will ultimately determine the market price.

In an informal conversation with Thomas, he was eager to explain a sale is not only a meeting between buyers and sellers so that the sales does not only happen one time but three:

> I would say that in real estate you would sell the product—in this case, the home—like, two or three times. Here's what I mean by that—one: you have to sell it to buyers who are out there looking. They don't have a realtor in mind and they're just looking on Zillow or whatever. Number two: you have to sell it to the buyers' agents. So the agents that have these buyers, 'Why should I bring my client to your house?' We also have agent remarks, which are private for just agents to see. To see those you have to log into the MLS and it'll say 'this house will be great for your investors. This house is not only remodeled but it could cash flow.' Or 'If your clients are looking to live in one and rent the other' or 'it's got a home protection plan on it.' So you kind of have to sell it multiple times. I guess the third time you have to sell it is to the appraiser, to make sure the value of the house is—the price you list it for is not overpriced. Ultimately, two-thirds of the buyers out there are using financing to purchase homes. A third of them are using cash.

Indeed, in my observations, I also witnessed interactions that transformed significantly the final price.[69] Prices become collective agreements barely engaging the buyer and the seller (dispossession of their capacities to choose prices) as the agents tend to believe which conveying the law of supply and demand. Instead, pricing mechanisms and strategies are set up by a professional system, which agents learn to know and to use, but that remains largely a black box.

The types of methods to assess value are discussed more in detail in the class. What is striking from these discussions is that if two methods are cited, there is only one used in practices in the field. Why teach the second one? Or why never use it thus? The comparison approach or market data approach is based on a lot of buyers and sellers in the market. The market needs to be active to make this method valid. The method works with 3 'comps' (comparable goods) minimum and within maximum 3 to 6 months of being sold, explains Mike. The reason why you need three is that you try to find one is under, one that is superior, and one that is about the same as the "subject properties." Then adjustments are going to be made for the size of the home and the price.

"Buyers give us that sale's price" and then we are going to adjust. "Let, for example, take the example of a property: one is sold as first listed as $230,000, and doesn't sell for 4 months; another agent takes the listing at $220,000. The seller receives an offer for $199,000 but the seller does not want less than $210,000, so they make a counteroffer". There is a whole process of negotiation going on. In this case, "the agent stayed up 4 nights in a row to make it happen," Mike says.

Prices can take three modalities – "good, great, not good" – because prices send a signal for quality but also of conformity and behaving properly and respectfully to other players. Below is an example he draws on the board to see how you will assess a price. In this case, the market is going up. You can categorize even by stating if it is "great, good or not good." For appraisal purposes, appliances, space or rooms should be quantified in comparison to the average, determining for example how much departure there is from the

[69] I had originally planned to provide more data on the observations of negotiation on price. This is going to be included the development of an article I'm drafting now for a journal.

average kitchen. Location, as assessed by the neighborhood, is also understood as "average, superior or inferior."

Table 7: Method to calculate the price of the good

	Subject Property	**Comp 1**	**Comp 2**	**Comp 3**
Sales in $		$250,000	$238,000	$270,000
Date of sell		Recent $0	3 months ago + $5,000	6 months ago + $9,000
Location	Average	Below average +$7,000	Average +$0	Above-average +$10,000
Financing	New Loan	New Loan +$0	New loan +$0	New loan +$0
Features	Pool	No Pool	No Pool	Pool
Special Condition		None	Divorce + $10,000	None
Total		**$275,000**	**$278,000**	**$269,000**

Mike takes the example of Rita Ranch, where there is a total amount of sales in 20 subdivisions. If you know that subdivision 9 is better, you need to adjust the location in your research. The extra garage, for example, would be worth + 7,000$ while the divorce raised the price to $10,000 assuming that both persons want the greatest value out of the home.

The location does not only include the neighborhood. Over time, nobody wants to be close to the school as a house value can decrease up to 15% if you just leave just across the street from the school, Mike argued without being too specific about it, imagining the annoyance and the kids come into play.

The least adjustments from the comparisons you have to make to assess value, the most accurate you are going to be able to draw value.[70] Besides the research needed on the goods present in the neighborhood and the comparable (relatively similar good who sold recently), the agent should look at the tax records as well as walk through the house to evaluate its actual features. If there is something odd with the floor plan, for example, it

[70] This tackles on a principle of homogeneity I will discuss more specifically in chapter 8.

should be reflected within the prices. If some features are transformable, the agent would generally advise the clients to modify it before putting the house on the market.

To assess value, one must calculate the price based on comparable goods. Thomas while with Stephan and Jane on a listing appointment educates them to price well. The clients communicate the price, but Thomas wants to make sure they are comparing goods that can be compared:

> Based on what I saw in my props. I thought it was priced pretty good. It was in the range of a comparable sale. There's a couple of things that sold recently. One was a distressed property. It was a flip. KMS Enterprises. I know this guy who does all these flips. That one is probably a good comparison because he always over-prices those things and they just sit on the market for a while. Basically, he does new flooring, new windows…new paint. Basics. Because you know how investors are. They want to make some serious money. They do a flip…so what I like to do is I'll just go really quickly through what I do to sell homes and then I'll go over a marketing plan. Then I'll go over the CMA—Comparative Market Analysis. So it is important to price at home in the proper price range. If you price it too high you can get more money, but it can sit on the market. The longer something is on the market the activity decreases. This is also a really good thing to visualize. Here are market value and the percentage of buyers that look at the property. Obviously, you don't want to price yourself out of the market. I don't think you have so good job there.
>
> Here's my comp analysis. Here's my range. Especially $170,000 to $185,000. Here are the comparable sales. This one is a sale for $148,000 on Long Moore drive. It was 115 square feet and only 45 days. Here's another one that was on the market for a little while, but it's now pending. We don't know what that sold for yet. It was priced at $130,000. It is a short sale. It went active capo last month, which means it went under contract. It came in a set purchase. Those are the two I've used. Again, this is quick and dirty because I hadn't seen the home yet and seen the features and that you've updated it.
>
> If you'd like to do that, sometimes I like to do that for my sellers. I show them homes that are active in the market currently. Those are your competition, basically. So you want to be the best. You want to be the home that is the balance home, where it's like—this home makes the other homes look better. So you want to make sure that your home is priced right. The rest of the stuff is tax information.

Brian demonstrates the importance to his clients to consider widely the elements that impact the construction of the price of a good. It aims to get them familiarized with the

strategy needed to evaluate a home and get at a certain price; it's about "the company, the service but also the product."

> I've been amazed by how much I learn about, you know, material in the house…outside of the house…all of the construction, and like…because you guys need to know a little bit of the house itself—the product." So then Brian asks the question "how do you make a product look okay for the price, you know? Because it is —let's say you are $150,000 and it's not a $400,000 home...Cheaper but you'd still have to demonstrate the value of the product. So if you're like, leasing the house, 'Your product needs to look good to be sold.'

In Brian's discourse, prices should be derived with proper alignment between the potential price of the good and its 'original value.' Prices are not there beforehand though, according to Brian, as there is a work done by the agents to make the quality of the good appear. The good must thus be inspected, prepared and transformed to be sold in the market.

3.3. Prices cannot be Set up Without Inspecting the Good (Quality and Conformity)

To establish the value of a good, agents not only look at comparable goods through the MLS but look at the goods themselves. Being in the house to "walk through it" is a required step emphasize at the school and by the trainers of the companies, to judge and evaluate both the floor plan, the shape and verify "nothing come out as odd" as remarked by Kara. "Tax records or other sources have given you facts which may or may not be accurate. Your eyes will help you verify what the property consists of (e.g., arrangement and number of rooms, appliances and fixtures, and other features inside and outside). It is information you must have" says Greg.

The strategy used by experienced agents such as Donna, Patrick, Pamela or Thomas during listing presentations is to ask questions to the seller to foster their engagement in the selling process. They use the seller's opinion on value to highlight the qualities of the goods and to anticipate the expected buyer looking at the good. While in front of his client, Alex is trying to emulate that format of the listing interaction:

> Alex: What are some of the reasons you purchased it in the first place? What are some of the things that attracted you?

Woman: I picked the pool and then found the house.
Alex: That's good to hear because even in my neighborhood it's all single families. It's always depressing when a for rent sign goes up (…) So you bought the home because if the school district and because of the owner-occupancy…safety…what are some other things that may be attracted you to it? Because that helps me when I'm talking to my buyers.
Woman: The large bedroom. That second bedroom—the pink one—is huge. So really, the space of it. We re-did the pantry. We expanded the kitchen. Got rid of the hallway.

An exercise handed to agents at Desert Realty consists of asking sellers the following questions: "1. What do you like about your house? 2. What are your five favorite features? 3. What are your five favorite things about this community?" These questions are either about the qualities of the good – things that you like about the house – or the surroundings, community or neighborhoods – things that you like about your community.

To make clients get into a "receptive mindset" one of the strategies is to "praise their houses" or to flatter them with sentences such as a) You have a very welcoming entryway. I love your artwork, b) That half-bath near the entryway is a feature a lot of buyers like. Did you know that? Or even to suggest remodeling or adjustments to their houses: c) The front of your home is critical for curb appeal. Are you willing to invest in sprucing up your yard? You'll be glad you did. It's the first thing buyers see, and first impressions really count!" Agents would ask additional questions to their sellers so that they can evaluate their strategy: "Do you want to sell? Why are you selling?"

3.4. Agents can Influence Prices by Changing Qualities (Staging and Remodeling)

Staging the Good to Get Most Value

While the MLS permits to tell the state of the supply, staging is going to help the good "show better" and there are tricks to make buyers come into your house. Through staging, the property can demonstrate its value, being "dressed" as Cochoy (2002b) explains for the supermarket packaging. This consists of making the best appeal to an "expected clientele" or in general to the "middle range taste" of the market segments. One of the first

predicaments of the agent is to remove any “personal” elements including photos or “weird paints” to make it appear more neutral and is the standard recognized by an average buyer.

Nonetheless, there are specific social and symbolic elements that are drawn as "elements of taste." For example, the white or grey of the walls is supposed to be a requirement to sell, because it increases the light in the room and makes it for everybody to project. But these are not the only elements: most rooms should be designed to be a "good living room," a "good kitchen." When there is a feeling that something is odd, whether the floor plan or the way the rooms are designed, then, this is going to be often a negative unless the agent can find a "useful" purpose to the room in question – "this little den is perfect for an office." This is how it can be working sometimes. Staging the home is an essential part of the process of home selling because sellers have to present the good as it would be most appealing to buyers. Staging can even be done by professional stagers in case of expensive goods.

One challenge to selling is to make the seller being emotionally detached from their home according to Patrick. He is giving a little bit of a lecture where he even references the image of the “seller” to probe what it expects Sharon and her husband to do to sell: "The thing is looking at the home it's the hardest part for sellers. They look at their home like it's just a product. Like you have to disassociate like 'This is not my home anymore. It's just a unit. Just my money sitting in this home that I want to extract from this home. It's imprisoned and I need to take that money so I can live my life. So start doing that and get into that mindset." Staging thus is designed to affect the seller's mindset, requiring detaching from the product. The realtors® I followed in interactions with sellers had to do with about 80% of the sellers. Indeed, 20% already had a proper mindset and had previous experiences in selling.

Based on many real estate transactions are the presentation of goods or staging. Realtors® are trained to address those issues. In the companies where training takes place, the agents discuss the problem of goods' valuation, notably through what they call "presenting the good." In chapter 16 of the booklet provided by Real Prosperity, a training session called "Make it Happen” details how to make a good presentation.

First, the photographs need to be taken with certain light and depending on the price of the good, it might be encouraged by trainers to get a professional photographer to take pictures of the house. Agents working on the middle-high range of the market believe it is crucial to be staging a home. Expensive houses above 500 000 are in all my observations are being staged while lower prices are often only being photographed. Agents may encourage middle-range prices between 200 and 500 000 to be staged at the fees of the sellers. Patrick demonstrates to his seller, Sharon, the importance of the look and what it conveys: "if you need that we can hire professional stagers for you. I was just mentioning neutral colors." So "no bright pink hehe," the woman says and both laugh, adding she does "like a lot of non-whites." Patrick adds: "This kind of reminds me of IKEA. It's got an IKEA vibe. Kind of Swedish." Sharon replies Nice! I'll take that! I've never been to an IKEA before, but I like it" "Kind of a modern Swedish interior! Put some IKEA chairs right there and get some good staging going on!" Patrick says.

For the agents I followed, working on the middle-high range prices and for about 70% of the agents I interviewed, staging can indeed permit to get more value out of the house. While giving a listing presentation, Corey explains to Eddy and Nina: "homes that are staged sell for more money and sell faster. I was just talking to a professional stager because I have one listing that is kind of lagging on the market right now. We need it sold so I'm going to hire a professional stager for that one. Obviously, curb appeal is essential and in this home using neutral colors.

In the transactions I observed, staging appeared to be modeled after the middle taste because sellers try to reproduce and target buyers' average taste. Much of what goes in the interaction on in the middle-high market is the "adequate" reproduction of a form of distinction, embedded into the aesthetic judgments on what is beautiful or not, appropriate or not as features of the house, as the example of Sonia given in Chapter 6 highlights.[71]

[71] It operates specifically in the middle and high-priced market and does not necessarily hold true in the lower-end of transactions where the product's lack of qualities are euphemized or the product is targeted to a specific audience, whether poorer clients ("proximity to bus stops" signals that it is destined to bus users or people without a car) or investors ("ideal investors" signals that they would be able to rent it high and take the most advantage of their investments).

As Jessica and Matthew with Kara, the particularity of the housing transactions I observed is that they enact a ritualized staging of a middle-class ethos, akin to the formatted "middle-class interaction" described by Goffman (1959).[72] To convey products' value, agents portray an idealized, stereotyped, simplified and normative image of the home to appeal to the middle buyer and seller. The presentation of the good operates within a commercial reality whose staging codifies and ritualizes the representations of individuals by bringing them back to class and gender relationships (Ariztía 2014). Most particularly, the conservative moral behind the representation of goods is often highlighted during the transaction: the display of traditional categorization such as "the pink girl's room" and the "blue boy's room" play out as social projections, in which the use and function of house spaces are clearly defined. Taste work can also highlight elements to imitate the taste and practices of the bourgeois, such as the wine cellar or the whiskey bar that works as the materialization of the masculine ethos.

Taste emulation and anticipation thus function as an assertive and reassuring mechanism to produce a "marker of class" as goods are the materiality in which status is embedded. Symbolic is embodied in products like houses, which reveal the material inscription of symbols into the material and physical: "the taste classifies, and classifies the one who classifies" ("*Le gout classe, et classe celui qui classe*"). Those lines of distinctions are operationalized as tools to calculate, to distinguish between the "beautiful" from the "ugly", the "distinguished" from the "vulgar" (Bourdieu 1984, VI). Middle taste then is the "good cultural will" relying on an imitation of the sense of distinction of the higher class, but with the permanent tension produced by the fear of acting as the lower classes and to appear vulgar. Thus, agents intuitively and practically draw on the desire to elevate one self's in the social ladder and to show the proper signs of distinction to integrate the higher classes.

[72] This operates mostly in the middle-low and the middle-high market. The high-end market is featuring atypical goods in which a form of creativity and weirdness can obey to high taste emulation as well. For the vast majority of goods, though, the middle taste is found. I did not observe a lot of transactions in the lower market, hence the limits of my analysis. But those goods get generally presented in the MLS for investors or are not conveying a particular taste, but are more practically described with hints such as 'in working conditions.'

Presenting a product is thus a moment in which qualities are (re)defined. Showing financial products to clients can change the qualities of the products while interacting with financial planners and engaging technical and personal qualities (Vargha 2013). Additionally, prices can be considered as "cultural entities" as "price mechanism is not just an allocative but also a symbolic system: impersonal and businesslike as prices may seem, they are the numbers artists, collectors, and dealers live by" (Velthuis 2013, 3–4, see also Friedland and Alford 1991, 247).

Suggesting to Transform the Good to Get Most Value

To go ahead with selling the house, prior research is needed to evaluate the house. The evaluation comes as the first step in the process of getting the house on the market. For newer agents, the temptation to present knowledge in a rushed lecture mode is often ineffective as demonstrated with the listing presentation of Alex with an FSBO woman in her 40's, which appears quite determined to sell it by herself. Alex wants to engage the conversation about where she is from and the kids she has but she only answers quickly and by a yes or no or shortest mode. The conversation then shifts to the good itself. Having looked at the outdoors space while giving his speech, Alex jumps on the suggestions surrounding the room and the backyard.

> Alex: This room might need some new paint and—does this have a track in it? You might want to put a door there or something.
> Seller: Oh yeah we're still working on getting this market-ready.
> Alex: Definitely. It's a seller's market again. How long have you been selling it yourself, right now?
> Seller: A week.
> Alex: Let's take a look at the yard and the landscaping. <go out to yard> Yeah. We'll just do some patching. Like, patch the holes. The paint looks like the main thing. Paint Kings has a really good deal. They'll do a full house for like, $1200.
> Seller: That's cheaper than our painter.
> Alex: Well, street-wise it looks pretty good. Just maybe a little paint here and there.
> Seller: This used to all be rocks. I dug out all the dirt because it seemed like such a waste of space. We haven't gardened in it yet. So it's prepped to have soil put on it. I mean, my husband did a little gardening right there, but that's the concept behind it. Whatever the buyer wants it to be, it can be.

> Seller: Sure. I hear that all the time, yeah. I would maybe put some rocks down and get some landscaping down. I mean, you don't have to, but—other than that, though, it's pretty clean out here.

Even if Alex is not getting to get the listing, he is talking about how to make the listing better, how to work on it, and how to make buyers want it. Alex is listing all the details which will make the listing look "market-ready" and presentable to buyers, meaning if the buyers would want to project themselves into this good. Both the woman and Alex do not seem to hit it off with the required trust for Alex to be working with her. The seller even seems a little bit annoyed by his "confidence" even if at the end, things go smoother and open-up a little bit.

The presentation of products is the stake of all residential housing transactions. This operation is highly relational because it involves relying on anticipated behaviors and tastes, to twist the presentation of goods with language and materiality that are valued by people. Agents thus play into transforming the quality of the good through various operations of requalification.

3.5. Pricing Right and Creating a Bidding War through Offers

While making a pricing recommendation, all the agents I observed presented the thought process behind the calculation. In four instances, agents recommended price brackets to their sellers to foster competitive incentives as the agents were suspecting the good would be "hot" in the actual market context, or what Ben calls a "bidding war" and a "competition around a good":

> You want to create a bidding war. That always works to your advantage. You ask someone 'Do you want to—' it's like an IQ test. 'would you rather have one offer to look at or three offers to look at?' Hopefully, if they're sane they'll say three. 'Okay, do you want to price your house to encourage multiple offers?'

"Range pricing" was not done extensively, but praised by about 20% of the agents. In this case, they write "Seller will accept offers between $190,000 and $210,000." Ben explains thus what is at stake:

> That's called range pricing. What that means is the seller has created a—it's kind of like eBay. They create a range that they're willing to look at. It's confusing to buyers

> because they're like 'I'm going to start at the lower end of that range.' Range pricing is good because I always tell sellers 'Fixed price negotiates down and range pricing negotiates up.' What I mean by that is you get one price, then everyone is—if you're a buyer and you're the same, why would I start at that price? I'm going to start ten thousand under it.' But with range pricing, you could potentially have three buyers that look at it like 'Wow. What a good deal.' I'm going to offer a little bit more because I'm competing with two or three other buyers.' It's a competition to the seller's advantage to disclose if there are other offers on the table. It's obviously not at their advantage to disclose the price of the other offers.

Terri advised sellers Alicia and Ted to revise their pricing and put it on the lower level, this pricing strategy was used to create attractions as Terri rationalized in front of them: "Do you want to price your house to sell or do you want to price your house to not sell—do you want to price your house to sit on the market?' You have to price the house—because ultimately what you price it is not necessarily where you're going to sell it. You know what I'm saying? You could price it even under the market. What happens is that creates a feeding frenzy. Everyone is like 'Whoa, that's a big deal.' And then you have leverage, created because a lot of people are going to compete." With her convincing demonstration, they decide to change their minds about the price.

Prices act as signals l in the market. Velthuis (2013, 4) demonstrates, for example, that decreasing prices in the art market should be avoided because they affect dealers' legitimacy, reputation, and status in the eyes of the buyers rather than the eyes of their peers. Similarly, in the real estate market, signals are often operated as a mean of communication from the seller's agent to the buyer's agent, rather than directly from buyers to sellers.

When the sellers are pricing, they send a signal on the good to the buyers, which are going to read it through the guidance of their real estate agents: is it a good price for the location, for that type of good? Is it too high? Too low? Priced right? Why? Buyers send a signal to the sellers by making an offer. Offers that are very low compared to the asked price might be considered, but only if there is no competition.

In a contemporary study on used cars, Akerlof (1970) shows that a low price might be associated with or signal a low quality and trigger buyers not go to buy it, while a higher price might seem suspicious and raise questions about its quality (Beckert and Musselin 2013). Price may thus operate as a signal for quality. On the Carpentras market, for example,

de La Pradelle (2006) showed that the seller is unable to find a buyer if the price is too low because it indicates poor quality of the property. The uncertainty of the quality of the goods makes real estate markets operate differently than what the model of perfect competition theorizes.

Agents insist on the definite importance of “pricing right;” they educate clients to progressively come to realize that pricing right is the most economically rational strategy. The following type of discourse: “you have to price it right, otherwise it’s not gonna sell, it’s gonna seat and you’re going to be frustrated” is indeed common during the transactions between agents and their sellers[73]. Agents thus act on a specific practical sense (Bourdieu 1990), which is designed to appear unquestionable because it is felt and experienced, and ultimately works as an argument of authority because their expertise on pricing is viewed as legitimate.

Signaling operates during the moment in which an offer is made by the buyer's agent to the seller's agent: the price proposed for the house operates as a signal for the "intentionality" of the buyer - whether he or she is serious about buying and highly motivated by the product. Offers would thus be classified by the seller's agent, depending on how "serious" they are, defining an informal code of "respect" to the seller through a scale going from "ridiculous", to "honest" and "really generous." The more offers received, the more the agent can play out on the competition. Agents react also based on the anticipations of the negotiation process: "I can work around that." The offer not only plays out as a signal to assess the quality of the buyer but also come to acknowledge and value the client possessing the house.

Prices are also closely intertwined with timing. In the first days the house enters the market, i.e. is advertised on the MLS, there are very high stakes as it shows up as "new" and every agent whose client is searching for comparable goods is going to receive notifications, seeing it through an inventory feed. The presentation of the product, through its features and pricing, is going to send an immediate signal of desirability, prompting the real estate agent to make his or her buyers pick or not this good. If the product is priced too high in

[73] I discuss in Chapter 7 more in details how agents influence their clients to revise their pricing.

comparison to a similar good, it would send a negative signal that might discourage the potential buyers (or the buyer's agent to even consider this a "good" choice). If it is priced too low, then it would also signal a problem with the quality of the good.

During the unfolding of transactions, I observe first-hand how agents actively encourage clients to revise the price of their property: Patrick, about 20 years of experience, is meeting at the property of Janet and Herb. During the car ride, he seems confident that they are going to come to their senses, “they originally wanted to list it at 250,000, I didn’t contradict them on the phone, but now, I’m gonna show them what the “comps” and the sales stats say.” At their house, Janet and Herb voiced their concerns. After listening, Patrick aimed to reassure them: “I completely understand your concerns. I wish I could say we can list it for more, but as of right now, I think it is a matter of time, you want to be out, right? You want to sell? Let me show what the market says…" After discussing the issue, Patrick can set a range price of $240-245,000 for the house.

Agents must also ease the reactions of the seller and to strategically prepare a counteroffer, gathering clues on the reasoning of the buyers and anticipations on how they would react. In their negotiation skills, agents try to know what other agents think, sometimes a buyer’s agent even advises their clients to write a letter to advocate on their specific situation, thus flattering the seller by stating why and what they really like about the house to convince sellers to negotiate on the price.

Overpricing can be a problem with sellers, as transactions with Terri demonstrate. In the discovery of the market, sellers must conform to downgrade their prices, as Alicia and Ted had to be doing. "You've got to do a lot of work with the seller to make sure he knows…even to have them come down. They always want more money so you have to counsel them to not overprice their house. The role of the agent thus is to turn them down away from "overpricing" to guarantee the fluidity of the market."

Conclusion

How are judgments about products – in my case houses –constructed? Acting on strong beliefs of what the market is, agents orient buyers and sellers in their preferences, in the

definition of qualities that are valued and in their pricing strategies. Although they claim that they only care about the needs of their clients, agents carry out constant work to get their clients' financial means to match with their decisions, by making their clients' wishes conform to market reality (Bourdieu 2014). Agents rely on the economic and social capital of their clients to classify them and strategically adapt their work to this classification, they learn to read clients and develop arguments that clients would be sensitive to.

The agents transmit information about the market, the neighborhoods, and the goods available. They also have access to a network of professionals in the real estate industry. Protecting themselves from the consequences of their "opinions" on potential passives, agents work to give the illusion of presenting a plurality of information, guaranteeing their neutrality. They ensure that market and neighborhood comments, presented as neutral, based on statistics and inventory status, are passed on to clients – they must be appropriated by clients – which permits in return the transfer of judgment from on the value of a property to the clients.

Being the intermediaries between the market and goods (houses), agents have a strong position to get buyers and sellers to buy or sell properties. Beyond the function of "reassuring" (Lambert 2015), their work consists in highlighting the value or the worth of goods, having as a reference authority the market, as an "exterior" with legitimating force. This matching of value and taste (reinforced or created by the agent) is conditioned by the borrowing possibilities of the client, which establishes the economic value of the customer. Agents have indeed a powerful position to bring buyers and sellers to buy or sell a specific good at a specific price. In Chapter 8, I focused more particularly on the dynamics of extracting value from the place, discussing socio-spatial matching and the production of urban inequalities.

CHAPTER 8. Extracting Value from Place: Socio-Spatial Matching and Urban Inequalities

"Attention salesmen, sales managers: location, location, location, close to Rogers Park."
(1926 real estate classified ad in the Chicago Tribune)

> "Under all is the land. Upon its wise utilization and widely allocated ownership depend the survival and growth of free institutions and our civilization. REALTORS® should recognize that the interests of the nation and its citizens require the highest and best use of the land and the widest distribution of land ownership. They require the creation of adequate housing, the building of functioning cities, the development of productive industries and farms, and the preservation of a healthful environment. Such interests impose obligations beyond those of ordinary commerce. They impose grave social responsibility and patriotic duty to which REALTORS® should dedicate themselves, and for which they should be diligent in preparing themselves."
> (Preamble to the Code of Ethics, Realtors®, 1924-2017)

Cited above is the introduction to the NAR Code of Ethics written in 1924. Two versions were presented. One by a realtor from Atlanta, Georgia which was judged classic and formal:

> I, a member of the National Association of Real Estate Boards, accept as the primary requirement for engaging in the Real Estate Business that my first duty is to the public whom I propose to serve, and the protection of whose interests must always be my first consideration…

The other one, written by Arthur H. Barnhisel, a realtor® and Presbyterian minister from Tacoma, Washington, in contrast, emphasized "social responsibility of the association" and all its affiliated members. The latter proposition won the vote of the National Association's Board of Directors and was adopted in June 1924. According to NAR® archives, the code was disseminated to, and widely displayed in, real estate offices around the country. Cyrus Crane Willmore, NAR president in 1943, evoked the importance of the preamble:

> Property ownership is fundamental to our way of life. The first five words of our Code of Ethics should be impressed upon the minds of every man, woman, and child in our country. They are, 'Under all is the Land.'

Today, some may dismiss the principles of the code of ethics as they highlight a rather old and idealized mission of the realtor®. However, my dissertation shows that agents, along with providing access to both residential and mortgage markets, often act as "educators" teaching their clients to make sound financial and economic decisions. They mediate the relationship with credit institutions while aligning clients' preferences with the market, their social status and their place of residence. The access (or exclusion) depends in part on the financial situation of the client (Bourdieu 2005b). Social and cultural competences are required to navigate the search, which is shaped by the classificatory system (operated in practice) of market intermediaries.

Agents are also not mere facilitators of transaction or unanimated mediums of exchanges, as housing goods are not mere commodities. Embedded within economic, social, emotional and symbolic meanings (V. A. Zelizer 2010), for many, buying a house is the most important investment of their lifetime as well as linked to status, taste and emotions (Besbris, 2016; Bourdieu, Bouhedja, Christin, & Givry, 1990). A house is an investment not only because of its economic cost but also because of the reproduction strategies it involves: "The house is inseparable from the household as a sustainable sociable group and the collective project of perpetuating it" (Bourdieu et al. 1990, 6).

In Chapter 7, I examined how real estate agents shape supply and demand via mechanisms that influence transactions: they use seduction techniques to build confidence and to convey information. They learn to decipher what people want, trying to make it "fit" with the market and their professional strategies. The present chapter shows that these practices are not the same as all clients or in all territories. Market value (and the construction of it by intermediaries) is highly situated, as the history of private property is linked to exclusion and racial inequalities (Brown and Smith 2015). "Location, location, location" is a repeated mantra for real estate agents ("You can buy the right home in the wrong location"). That is, home values are intertwined with place, location, and geographical space.

Residential real estate markets are usually characterized by boundaries. To speak of the New York real estate market is to highlight the constraints of housing distribution and pricing in the area. But once people start to search for a good, they must define where it is "acceptable" or "possible" in New York City to buy a good that corresponds to their living standards and budgets. The area in which one lives is not just a mundane statement on one's residence. Rather we attribute social characteristics based on residence. We wonder: How do they feel about it? How does this influence their life outcomes? One feels surprised when one's interpretations, feelings or anticipations on where someone should live, are not met. Perhaps some might assume an old white woman dressed elegantly would reside in the Upper East Side and not in the Bronx while unsurprised a young black male would live in the Bronx. Interactions, even as one on one exchanges, are social forms, as they exercise an external constraint upon the individual.

In my fieldwork, I investigated a different sort of real estate market, where the social imagery is probably less vivid and well-known as in New York, but one in which spatial boundaries are superimposed on social boundaries. In meeting new people, it is frequent to ask: "where do you live?" Responses to this question might generate surprise should the responders' social status not align with our prejudices. That is, the "geography of status" denotes not only the buyers' understandings but also the representations, expectations, and actions of market intermediaries.

My work primarily focuses on the schemas and tools real estate agents draw upon that shape how clients choose a location. I document a sense of the game (Burawoy 1979) based on the accumulation of economic and symbolic capital (Bourdieu 2011) and on the expectations and anticipations on how clients will think and behave (Goffman 1967). The actions of real estate agents are not guided by individualistic strategies but embedded within a socio-professional world of routine interactions whereby organizational norms and professional practices intersect, align, and overlap.

Drawing on Goffman's analysis of performance and expectations (Goffman 1956), my analysis contributes to supporting the thesis that mechanisms of inequality are not only driven by institutional aims but of our perceptions about people and territories and how symbolic values translate into economic values. In what follows, I present the theoretical

perspective from which I build my argument. I then explore three dimensions: I document how agents select information about neighborhoods and their population demographics. I then detail how neighborhoods and clients are classified by real estate agents and how economic and symbolic values come to be aligned. I finally discuss how real estate, by making a profit on value, shape neighborhoods.

1. From Overt Discriminatory Behaviors to Embedded Market Practices on Value and Space

Discrimination in housing markets has been a central topic of investigation in American literature. Most of the literature focuses on the nature and extent of discrimination in residential real estate and mortgage markets. Both redlining[74] (the behaviors of mortgage actors and steering)[75] and blockbusting[76] (behaviors of real estate agents) reflect the financial and social exclusion of racial and ethnic minorities from the market.

Regarding racial discrimination in the housing market, sociological debates center on the negative impacts of segregation which disproportionately affect the poor, working-class, and people of color, via concentrated poverty, lower levels of residential mobility, and lack of access to social and economic resources. To understand these mechanisms, and beyond individualistic explanations (i.e. individual preferences) (Farley, Fielding, and Krysan 1997; Ellis and Wright 2005), researchers shifted the unit of the analysis to external factors (Crowder and South 2008; Korver-Glenn 2018b; Massey 2005; Massey and Rugh 2017). For instance, Sampson (2012) explored the role of neighborhood effects that analyzed the role of neighborhood resources in segregation. Although important, the neighborhood

[74] Redlining is both a practice and an outcome: it is "a discriminatory practice by which banks, insurance companies refuse or limit loans, mortgages, insurance within specific geographic areas, especially inner-city neighborhoods."

[75] "the discriminatory practice by a real estate agent of maneuvering a client from a minority group away from considering a home in a white neighborhood."

[76] "The profiteering real-estate practice of buying homes from white majority homeowners below market value, based on the implied threat of future devaluation during minority integration of previously segregated neighborhoods" or "the act or practice of inducing the sale of property cheaply by exploiting the owners' fears of lower prices if racial minorities live in the area"

effects perspective omits the role of institutional actors and housing market practices that contribute to racial residential segregation, residential mobility, neighborhood decline.

Moreover, researchers often fail to look at the “invisible mechanisms,” or what (Giddens 1984, 30) labels as the "unacknowledged conditions of action," that lead to "unintended consequences" or unintentional actions. Today most race scholars agree that overt racial discrimination need not be evident to reproduce racially segregated neighborhoods (Bonilla-Silva 2010). Rather, many contend, contemporary racial residential segregation is a direct result of, both, of past federal policies and white residents’ interests:

> This separate habitat, which Whites - but not minorities - generally considered to be the consequence of their personal choices on the housing market, is in fact the product of some public policies and administrative practices, as well as a series of phenomena stemming from historical discrimination such as forms of private discrimination, reciprocal fears, inequality of knowledge and networks, and various constraints on these so-called "choices". All of this perpetuates residential isolation even in the absence of active discrimination. (Orfield and Gándara 2010, 96)

Urban development does "not develop out of an inevitable and unalterable structural necessity, but rather in a contingent manner" resulting from "actions were taken by individual decisions makers in various class, race, gender, and community-based groups, acting under particular historical circumstances" (Feagin and Parker 1990, 12). The real estate industry should also not be regarded as passive or purely driven by the demand of households but as an active shaper of urban development and residential inequalities.

In the United States, the real estate industry consists of various interest groups: developers, homebuilders, mortgage companies, banks, lenders and real estate agents (Gotham 2002). Aalbers (2011, 40) calls on us to look beyond the “usual indicators of change such as average income level, resident mobility (housing turnover) and the mix of racial/ ethnic groups” and “dig deeper to uncover the actions of real estate actors.” The real estate industry does “not (exclusively) respond to customer demand as ecologists argue, but provide incentives and opportunities that pull and mold behaviors, locational preferences, and choices of individual customers” (Gotham 2002,87) as well as play a “major role in transmitting information” (Hodgson 1988, 178; Bernheim and Meer 2007). In fact, real estate actors and investors can precipitate, accelerate, and shape the market, by

"overreacting to early symptoms of decay," through structuring actively (milking, speculation) and passively (redlining) neighborhood decline (Grigsby 1963, 235; Bonneval 2014; Grigsby et al. 1987; Levitt and Syverson 2008; Korver-Glenn 2018) becoming "not merely automata of the price mechanism, who steer the *natural* operation of the market, but should be taken seriously for the power they command in the initiation or structuration of a neighborhood decline" (Albeers 2011, 42).

Real estate agents also often introduce their buyers to lenders. Allocation of buys depends on formal and informal rules of operation governed by economic principles (Bolt, Van Kempen, and Van Weesep 2009; Harvey 2010) and financial retributions, having consequences on urban development patterns. They can for example create "a new submarket…by displacing a middle-income white population by a process….dubbed an urban "blow-out" (Harvey 2010, 133). In Harvey's perspective, capitalism refers to the production of an abstract space associated with economic value[77] and defined by homogeneity and hierarchy.

In this chapter, I focus on how a group of specific market actors, whose work is embedded within professional rules and oriented towards decisions and actions, *work the value of the market*, resulting in intended or unintended outcomes that keep people away from a territory as well as reproduce neighborhood decline. Thus, I empirically explore the relationships between market value, race, and inequalities in the housing market.

I contribute to counter the argument that markets are natural. "Culture is most effective when disguised as nature," as the economic and urban economics vocabulary is full of words that are naturalizing the actual social dimensions of the process. Neighborhoods are thus imbued with vocabularies of "natural operations" which include "succession," "life cycle" and "filtering," aiming to separate the theoretical thinking on the neighborhood from its social analysis (Bauman 1990, 157).

To address the role of real estate actors in discrimination and segregation requires a critique of assumptions rooted in neoclassical economics which posit that: 1) actors have complete information; 2) information is free; 3) All actors act in the same rational way

[77] In Logan and Molotch's view (1987), the use is defined by the exchange value.

according to exogenously given preferences; 4) actors are oriented towards profit or utility maximization; 5) state intervention alters the workings of the market; and 6) market equilibrium as a result of market forces. For example, the question surrounding the economic rationality of market actors, even with the refinements of Herbert Simon's "limited bounded rationality," does not just refer to a lack of information but also to the diversity and scattering of information, which makes it hard to process and use. To diverge from the neoclassical economic requires the categorization of social processes in the market as well as the roles of real estate intermediaries as information conduits who shape clients' decisions in selecting areas.

Not all goods are created equal. Housing goods include unique inherent structural features (their "looks," their structure, and design) but they are also attached to a land. Although a house, as a material structure, is a commodity, its value as a commodity is related to the value of the land:

> Land underlies all real estate. The use of land, the desire to acquire it, and the need to regulate its transfer were among the fundamental reasons for the development of states. But the land is also at the base of both power and wealth. Because land transaction administration and land surveys established the security and value of land, not only did land become a secure investment, but it also became possible to borrow money based on the value of one's land. (Albeers 2011, 81)

Few markets thus contain these two dimensions of value, being the product itself but also the product being embedded into its location. Housing markets are permeable. Unless someone wants to build a house from scratch, the stock of goods is already there – it is a resale market, like a vintage clothes store, where the goods are already available. But uncertainty about a neighborhoods' value is complex and market actors must provide additional information to buyers.

Products are thus evaluated in terms of space and quality and price and values are estimated. Comparing neighborhoods' prices and values provide a window to identify and analyze inequalities between neighborhoods. Spatial hierarchies can inform the principles of value in market operations. As seen in Chapter 7, market value is central to the operationalization of residential markets. With the comparative method, agents link location-based economic goods with market trends in the area. Thus, value is linked to value

projections, and perhaps more so when values are expected to increase. What, then, beyond the supply and demand affects market value? How does geographic location affect a neighborhood's market value? As noted earlier, the real estate mantra "location, location, location" implies the crucial importance of location as real estate agents and experts consistently state that "homes can experience large increases or decreases in value due to nothing other than their location" and that one "can buy the right home in the wrong location" (Weintraub 2018). Unlike a house, that can be remodeled or refurbished, location is not changeable.

Behind economic value is a symbolic value that infers the significance of geography of status. If urban segregation remained virtually the same between 1970 and 1990 in Tucson (as indeed in other major cities like New York, Chicago, Denver, Phoenix, Houston). The metropolitan areas where segregation has increased the most, as in Los Angeles for example, there has been a rapid population growth related to immigration. This increase in the Hispanic population was accompanied by an increase in the isolation rate of Hispanics in Los Angeles especially in the period 1970-1990, and Phoenix and Tucson in the decade 1990-2000, where the Hispanic population the state has strongly increased (from 18.8% to 25.3%), reaching 42.9% and 42.5% respectively in Phoenix and Tucson as of 2018.[78]

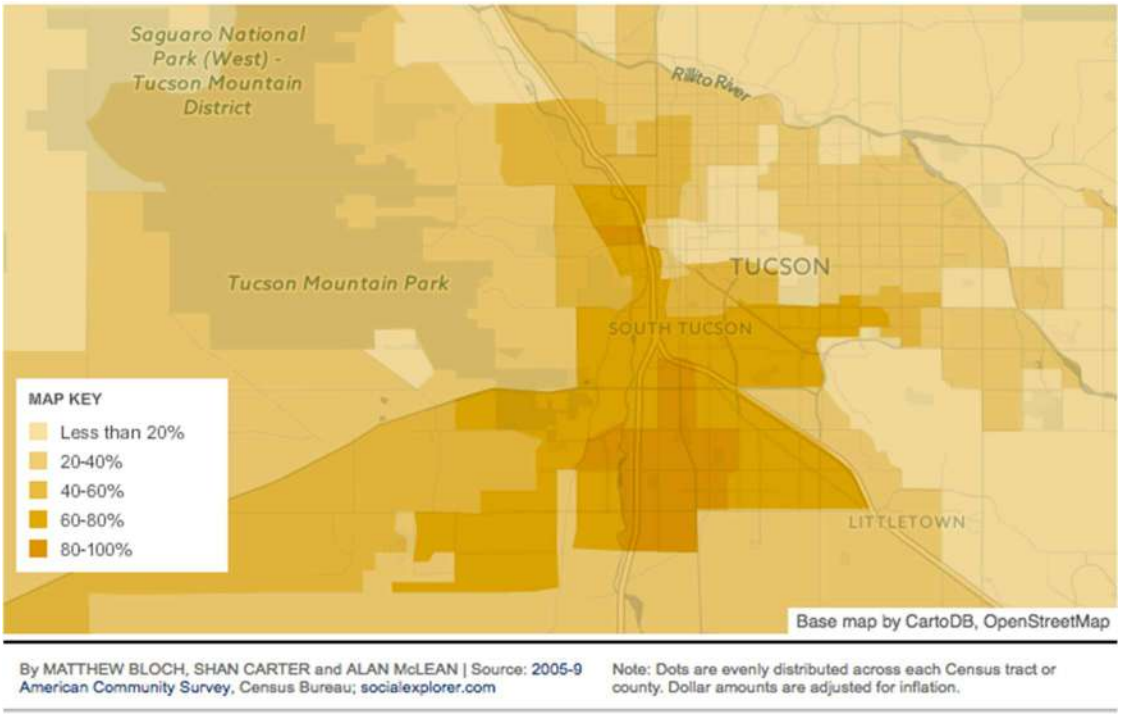
By exploring the census tracts (*3801 shown here*) in the Southern part of the City, one realizes that there are neighborhoods more than 80% Hispanic (*Map 1*). *Map 2* shows the ethnic distribution of the residents of Tucson, we see here than the White population is mostly widespread in the Northern part of the city, the limit to be considered is downtown, which has been consistently booming and a heated market in the city for 10 years. The urban density starts to be much lower North of River Road. It corresponds to the highest prices of the City with views of the mountains.

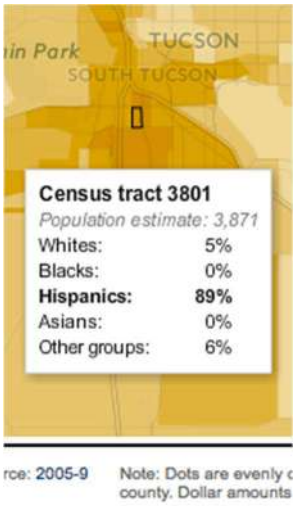
In comparison, the following map (*Map 3)* shows the distribution of poor households in the territory. If poor households are consistently more than 40% in the Northern and

[78] This is based on an estimation compiled by the US Census Bureau as of July 1, 2018. https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/phoenixcityarizona,tucsoncityarizona/RHI725217

Southern parts of the city north and south, although there is a richer area around the University of Arizona and Sam Hughes neighborhood.

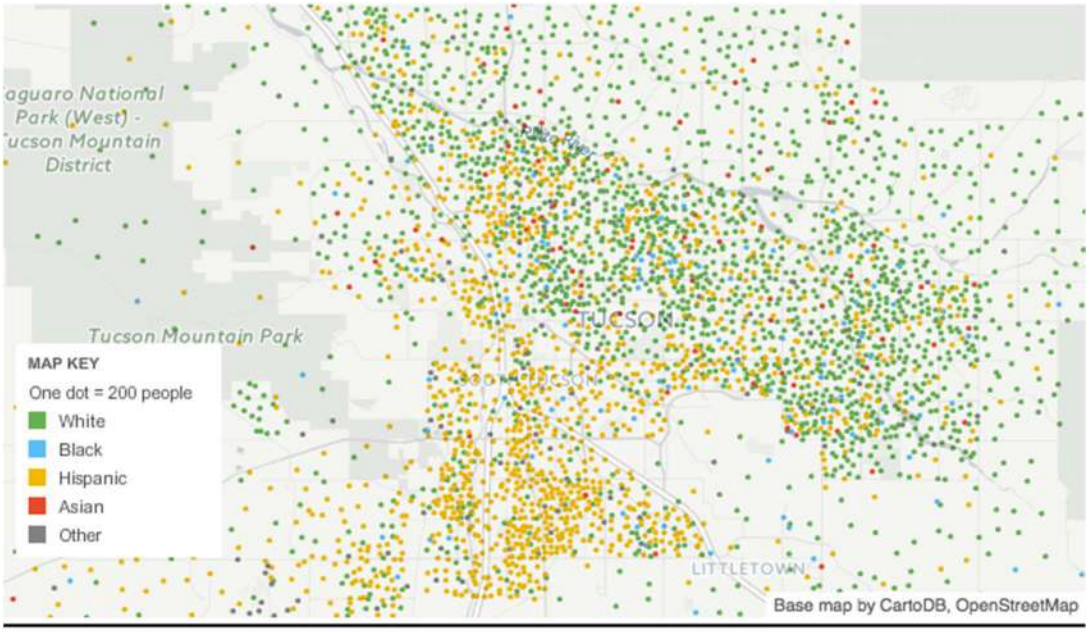
Map 1: Hispanic Population in Tucson (% population per census tract)





Concerning urban segregation, one could summarize the situation in this way: The North is white and the South is Hispanic, the poor are spread in the North and the South except after the delimitation of River Road, the poor in the North are white and the poor in the South are Hispanic. One can say thus that there are both income segregation between the extreme North and the rest of the city and ethnic segregation. Neighborhoods with a very high concentration of poorer Hispanic households are also geographically much more distance from the richest White populations (North of River Road).

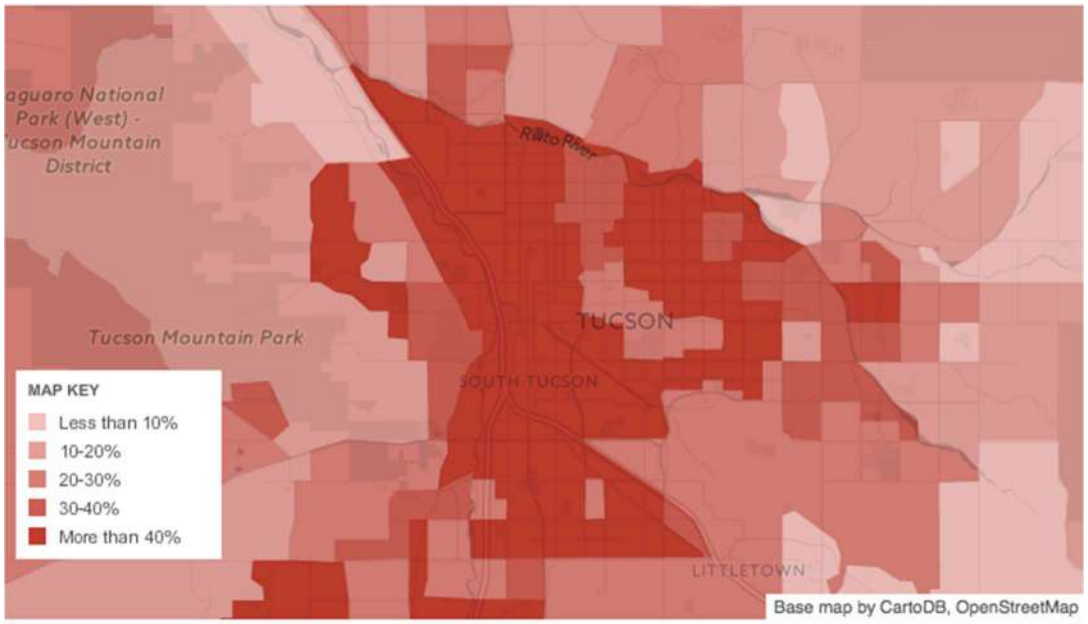
Map 2: Racial and Ethnic Distribution in Tucson



By MATTHEW BLOCH, SHAN CARTER and ALAN McLEAN | Source: 2005-9 American Community Survey, Census Bureau; socialexplorer.com

Note: Dots are evenly distributed across each Census tract or county. Dollar amounts are adjusted for inflation.

Map 3: Percent of Households with an income under $30,000



By MATTHEW BLOCH, SHAN CARTER and ALAN McLEAN | Source: 2005-9 American Community Survey, Census Bureau; socialexplorer.com

Note: Dots are evenly distributed across each Census tract or county. Dollar amounts are adjusted for inflation.

My goal here is not to directly assess scientifically the variables that explain urban segregation in the city of Tucson but to offer to look at work practices rooted in socio-spatial distinctions. Access to information (or lack of) may perpetuate inequality. I show in the second part that the real estate agents, by giving information and shaping agents' preferences, may in some specific cases shape the access of individuals or households to the territory. This is especially the case for clients, who do not know the area and where the agents function as spatial brokers in evaluations of territories. Within specific professional and commercial strategies, they also rely on expected market values (which are to a great extent spatial) to increase their financial power.

2. Informing and Classifying Clients

2.1. Prohibited Information: The Imperative not to Communicate on Neighborhood Statistics

A series of criteria typically outline the most desirable locations. Yet, due to a history of racial discrimination in the housing market, agents are regulated by HUD in the information they provide to buyers when deciding to live in a territory. In the field, I found that agents knew that they could be audited by HUD representatives to practices align with the organization's guidelines. Being aware of this, they were cautious when potential buyers cold-called them without referrals to inquire about neighborhoods.

In one case, I followed Thomas, a white real estate agent in his 50s, during open houses and several transactions. Thomas was born in Palo Alto, holds two MA degrees, one in Political Science (Stanford) and one in International Relations (Berkeley). He lived in the Central African Republic for 4 years where he worked in a humanitarian aid program. He was married with a 15-year-old son. He liked to talk to people and having conversations about almost anything. He liked to drink beer and play tennis. In a discussion with Bob during an open house, he mentioned the fact that agents need to be careful now because they were not able to communicate on the characteristics of neighborhoods:

> I like to talk with people, when it has to be fun you know, and I pretty much like to talk about anything, well almost but after you show them the houses around, you get

> a sense of them, but there is one thing…do you know the fair housing law? So you cannot say anything about a neighborhood, let's say I have clients coming up and saying so "what's the best part of town." I can refer them to facts but I cannot tell them so the Foothills is the best part of town and South Tucson is really bad, because we are supposed to inform but not to guide like that, so I tell them that legally I'm not able to tell them but that they can look it up online, they can see the school district, the crime statistics and everything. But, for example, one time, I had someone saying: "I don't want to live near Mexicans so can you make sure they are no Mexicans around" and I say that I was not allowed to do that, anyway if I was telling him some judgment or influencing him with my judgments, my license can be revoked, I mean once in a while I would get these call of a potential buyer that asks me if I can provide some information about a neighborhood or where is good to live in town, and some questions about my feelings or judgments, and it's made by the Office of Fair Housing, and they can take my license, so I don't ever say anything, I cannot. There's an ad on public television where a person asks a realtor to rent a house with a Mexican name and accent, and the realtor says: sorry it's already rented, then another person called the same realtor with an Indian name and an Indian accent, and the agent replies the same, sorry it's rented, and a third person with a typical American accent named "John Smith" calls and the agent replies that the place is available for rent.

My fieldwork uncovered that agents were knowledgeable about the historical and contemporary forms of discriminatory housing practices yet believed that it was less present today. I was thus surprised that only three real estate agents discussed discriminatory housing practices during my interviews. The majority did not seem too interested to talk about the topic. When I brought it up many saw it as a remnant history as nowadays, "nobody really discriminates based on skin color or national origin anymore." Aligned with Bonilla-Silva's findings (2003) of racial color-blind discourses used by whites, I found similar rhetorical strategies with the real estate agents I interviewed and shadowed. Many either rejected the idea that race was irrelevant or attributed racial segregation to laissez-faire market dynamics, reflecting Bonilla-Silva's notion of abstract liberalism in contemporary discussions of racial inequality.

The construction of what a "good" neighborhood is, should be situated within the broader context of unequal access to schooling opportunities and a stratified system of living arrangements. This information is known and signaled in conversation by real estate agents, often without even realizing it.

2.2. A Social Form of Steering: Handling Information in Conversations

The handling of information is of central importance in steering and is also at the core of the market matching behaviors I highlighted in chapter 7. By law, agents are not allowed to give any information, representation, or cues on neighborhoods, in terms of social demographics, crime statistics, or evaluative comments. However, in practice, the informal setting of a conversation makes it difficult.

I followed a buyer's transaction with Alex, 28, white and newer recruit at Desert Realty. I was surprised to witness how he operates a pre-selection of the zones in which his clients could potentially live. Sandra and Jeff, a white couple, had a budget of about $400,000 and were looking to buy a 4 bedrooms' house. They had just moved into town and did not know much about the territory and were recommended by another friend that is an agent back in Minnesota where Alex has many relatives. He meets them at the Desert Realty office and shows them a map of the territory on screen. Alex highlighted spaces that would be great for them: "you can go North of River, that's where the nicest homes are." Technically, he does not give any information about the racial composition of the population, but fits the definition of Galster and Godfrey (2005, 8) when they talk about the three types of steering:

> Agents can engage in steering in three (non-mutually exclusive) ways: through inspecting, recommending, and editorializing. They can *inspect* homes in person with clients, *recommend* homes to clients from MLS or other listings, and they can *editorialize* (provide gratuitous positive or negative evaluations) about certain areas the client should or should not consider.

Qualitative sites such as housing interactions between real estate agents and their clients can be used to assess to which extent Goffman theory operates in a variety of situations and across social classes. The real estate agent through the ambiguity of role definition between seller and servicer thus is particularly fertile terrain of investigation for the specific *revealing situations* that Goffman talks about. The waitress must control the interaction in a way that they appear both assertive and inferior to the client (Hughes, 1958). The seller must quickly decipher the social class of the client to assess his best behaviors. Here enters thus the social and racial characteristics of the clients to judge and assess actions,

contrary to the model of Goffman in which he mostly focused on situations in between the middle class.

During clients-agents' interactions, I witnessed different behaviors whether the agents be with high class versus lower-middle-class clients. With Sandra and Jeff, a couple from North Carolina who had high economic and cultural capital, both working as professors at the University of Arizona, Alex adopted a deferent attitude and recommended them right away to look at houses within Sam Hughes, a very popular area for University professors. It seems like because of their budget ($400,000) and their social class, they were automatically assigned to that specific part of town which fitted their original criteria of being a friendly neighborhood and not too far from the University. In the case of Cristina and Fernando, Hispanic buyers, they had only about $100,000 to spend. While they express their desire to live closer to a central area because of their jobs in maintenance and nursing, Alex did not show as much deference and seemed more confident in driving the interaction, he suggested they would be better off in a bigger place that was further away.

This case of *information steering* – defined by Galster and Godfrey (2005, 5-6) as "spatial patterns of home "showings" (i.e. homes inspected and homes recommended) that differ between minority and white home buyers in the number of areas represented"- is rather subtitle because agents intuitively know the inventory and look with clients online through the Multiple Listing Service. The system of coordination prompted both by social expectations and learned market behaviors, suggests the importance to be attentive at the interaction between the social standing of the clients and of the agents, as well as the classification of the neighborhood.

Similarly, Lucy and Ryan, clients of Kara, were initially clueless about the "types of communities" they will be attracted to. With her knowledge of the territory, Kara locates their search within a small radiant that will correspond to the proximity of I-10 to go visit their friends in Phoenix and in places they had heard were handled by other agents in their office.[79] Every Wednesday at Real Prosperity, agents advertise their listings, and the

[79] In Arizona, dual representation or agency is allowed. It means that agents from the same brokerage company can represent both the buyer and the seller. Typically, this includes two different agents, that might not even personally know each other.

previous Wednesday, two homes were showing close to the same neighborhoods. Kara met the clients on the previous Monday, and these two houses seem perfectly in their range and budget. She had also selected the other two houses in the same area. Although they are supposed to offer a wide variety of perspectives to their clients, one of the constraints of their job is that they need to make transactions close to getting paid, so they often handpick elements from the buyer to match them with their current information of the "good listings out there." Because they trust agents in their office mates, I have seen happening in other two instances Real Prosperity, with Donna and Bob, the team broker, who I observed did that most particularly, directly asking office mates. Although agents do not refuse to cooperate with agents, they also know which transaction is going to be smoother based on who is the agent in front of them.[80]

Some of the interactions I observe could also be qualified as *class steering* – defined as "spatial patterns of home showings in which areas shown minority home buyers have lower socioeconomic status (lower incomes, homeownership rates, property values, etc.) than areas shown whites, on average" and even *segregation steering* – which represents "spatial patterns of home showings in which areas shown minority home buyers have larger (or growing, or more proximity to concentrations of, etc.) specified minority populations than areas shown whites, on average" (Galster and Godfrey 2003, 5-6). Steering can deter neighborhood integration and conduct lower classes into lower-class neighborhoods. This happened on several occasions with Bob, leader of the team in Real Prosperity, but often claimed to be attributed to information about the listings and the capacities of the candidate, rather than on the selection by the race of the clients. One Hispanic client they had were indeed asking to be shown houses in the Northern part of town but their budget seemed out of the range for Bob, but here, I also doubt that he made the research he should have been doing. Indeed, he could probably have found something smaller that they were looking for or a condo for their price range.

[80] Reputation seems to play an important role in the cooperation dynamics of the residential market. While I did observe minimal direct competition between agents, I witnessed in my fieldwork, although I did not focus my observations on it, the importance of reputation and behaving ethically, the importance to be known as a good agent.

I realized that claiming to steer can only be easily proved when discrimination seems obvious. In most of the cases observed, the interactions between the clients' budgets, desires – which relies on a series of characteristics including where they work or like to go, and where they feel good – and the agents' knowledge of the inventory may not even appear clearly as a form of steering.

Additionally, class and racial characteristics also interact. In interactions, clients should then just be evaluated not only through their race or the color of their skin but along their class characteristics. For example, with Laure and Andre, Kate's Brazilian upper-class clients coming from outside the country, which can be defined as black but concerning their color skin tone (Monk 2016), their race was not an issue. They were well-educated and had meant that they were completely out of the stigmatized Hispanic poorer category. Along with the classification of clients along race, gender and class lines, I show in part 3 that steering can also be realized on the lower end of the spectrum, by deciding to invisibilize neighborhood.

2.3. Classifying Clients along Race, Gender and Class Lines

Because agents-clients' relationships are based on a one on one, and that the agent has great discretion about what he does with his clients, there are rules of expectations related to gender and class. Not only do they classify clients based on what they need, but there is also a process of trying to find out who these clients are, and how they can "direct" their needs. Even if the discourses are always framed as "satisfying the needs of the client," it often comes down to how well is the agent able to make the market fits with the financial capacities or status of their clients. Gender and class do not operate as direct discrimination factor but they are present in the dynamics of negotiation and relation to the agent.

The agent is not behaving the same way when he is in front of a class inferior and a class superior. High-class clients benefit from the knowledge, cognitive capacities and resource to search for alternative information. They may be very demanding and difficult to deal with because they are harder to please and are fuller of affirmative predicaments. On the other hand, people with lower social status are more likely to go with some sort of flow, and the agent might have bigger authority on them.

The search for goods is thus a very precarious process if the clients do not necessarily know where they want to leave and are new to the market. On the other hand, when buyers already know what neighborhood they want – this happened with Pamela because I observed buyers that were university professors and knew they wanted to leave in Sam Hughes, they actively targeted this area, so thus the information exchanged about the neighborhood could be considered less important as they already knew about it.

What I observe was the mix of class and race factors to bring people to realize that "good choices" comply with their social standing, which interacts with their race. On the one hand, the idea that people of a certain status need to comply with the expected benefits. If you are a professor at the University of Arizona, you need to buy a good which will bring you a certain status. The agent can verify the status by probing on a good decision. Where there is compliance with a neighborhood that fits the expected class, then there is a limited issue, but when there are dissonance and a lack of compliance, then that is when the issues can arise.

I claim that we cannot understand race separately from class and that in fact, class clues in interaction with race will orient the research of the home rather than the race itself. The fact that a lot of Hispanics are still discriminated and shown fewer houses (see Paul's article) is not something nor it is meant to diminish this argument, but to my extent, this has to do both with the structure of the market, the meeting between the perceptions of agents on the market and the perceptions of the agents on their clients, which ultimately should be matched.

I followed a transaction between Ben and his client Mariana, a 28-year-old Hispanic buyer who graduate from the University of Arizona and is working at Raytheon. We met at Ben's office. One time, I went with her back to her house and we stopped to get coffee on the way. She started telling me that she felt from Ben a "gentle pressure" not to buy where she wanted to. Mariana grew up in a Hispanic family in the southern part of Tucson in a zip code that is characterized by 90% Hispanic. Although her colleagues from work told her to hire a real estate agent, she told me she never had experience with one. This situation made her a little bit hesitant at first when she met Ben, who was referred from a colleague. Ben proceeded to the assessment of her lifestyle and asked specific questions about what she

liked to do, but did not refer to her family. Indeed, being close to her family seemed more important to Mariana than being close to work. When he asked if she had looked at houses, she said she has just seen a couple in the Southern part of town. While Ben should have followed up on this part of town, acknowledging that this location was important to her, he sought to impress upon Mariana an alternative logic. He seemed invested personally in her choice, saying vaguely something along the lines “I mean, with what you do, you can afford a nicer home,” which meant in other terms a better neighborhood. He made further arguments on the standing of the market, stating she would be better off central rather than South. While Mariana was at first not 100% sure about this, Ben proposed to look at few houses in a more central location that could fit what she wanted.

After visiting three houses on the later week, she decided she preferred to stick with her original plans, but Ben was still subtly pushing for other goods in a more central location. What can explain a form of subtle push towards another location? Ben felt highly committed to make the transaction work, irrespective of Mariana's preference for property location. Theoretically, he should try to find whatever location Mariana really wanted. But based on social expectations on acquiring the maximum value property she could afford, her specific social position (having graduated from a MA degree and associated from her salary to middle-high lifestyle), Ben highlighted a project of what she "should" expect from life, i.e. where she should stand residentially to conform with social status. One of the hypothesis of the development of that transaction – Mariana ended up buying a house close to her parents without a commission and through familial networks – is that agents not only make judgments about what should be appropriate to do for their clients based on the actual market, they also project onto their buyers and sellers a sense of place, a certain point between an economic rationality and social positioning that determines what constitutes a good or bad decision. This indeed makes it impossible to separate economic value from social value of places, as once social status should be reflected both in a higher symbolic and material good and location, but also the anticipation on economic value which reflect the expected gains one can make from this material and symbolic good and location. In this case, Ben acts with deference (Goffman 1967) towards Mariana but trying to praise her through compliments and appreciations and highlight the social status she has achieved.

How can we analyze the reaction of Ben to Mariana? Goffman (1956) explicitly talks about how individuals search to acquire information about others and mobilize information such as "socio-economic standing or status," "the idea that he has of himself" or the "dispositions toward them," "competences" and "honesty." The seeking of information is realized on practical grounds says Goffman: it is intended to define the situation, as participants will know what their partners expect *from* them and correspondingly what they can expect *of* them. With this information being clarified, they would thus know how to behave according to the responses they want to obtain. Anticipations and predictions thus play a fundamental role in the fabric of the social for Goffman. Each participant to the transaction must thus give, intentionally or not, an *expression of himself*, and others should retrieve a certain *impression* (Goffman 1959). Ben uses explicit clues used from directly talking to her - Mariana telling him where she worked at, what degree she got - and indirect implicit clues such as her way of talking, the way she dressed, her physical appearance carrying out symbolic meanings to assess information. These explicit and implicit clues are thus translated into social status signals, which trigger ways of behaving or "lines" that will be consistent with the piece of information (Goffman 1951).

The situation of interaction not only reveals social structure but also its fragile social order: it is because individuals are at risk of being mismatched as well as neighborhoods being at risk of declining that intermediaries acquire a brokering role. In this interaction, they contribute to the preservation of the social order, reinforcing it by matching people, houses and locations. If clients are not to be considered as having no capacity or room for maneuver or to act against an agent's recommendations, I observe that when presented with opportunities (presented as facts that must be acted upon), clients from lower socio-economic positions were not necessarily able to stand up efficiently to discuss and assess their "best interest" and ended up following behaviors expected from them by real estate agents. This was evidenced in the case of Rudy with his first-time homebuyers from Africa who were unfamiliar with the area, lacked English knowledge and cultural competence to navigate their search. For clients who are familiar with the territory, the agent might just reinforce desires or provide access to the inventory. However, for the ones that are unfamiliar and less equipped, the interaction with the agent would assign them to specific

places. With all types of clients, the agents contribute to highlighting and making certain spaces visible and invisible. Not only do they contribute to orient people in their choices, they also must match people and neighborhoods through assessing neighborhood value, targeting and highlighting residential spaces.

3. Assessing Value and Classifying Neighborhoods

3.1. Targeting and Highlighting Residential Spaces

In the specific case of choosing homes out in specific residential locations, I demonstrate that the perceptions agents have of the social classes of their clients might orient them to pick homes in neighborhoods that they envision as commensurate with those perceptions. Since the adequate fit between clients, homes, and neighborhoods is core to their work, agents see it as part of their duty rather than a form of information steering. In this sense, I assert that agents may strongly foster transactions that align the social status of the clients and the neighborhoods in which these clients should live and oppose transactions that do not align or are not conformed to that alignment as demonstrated in the case of Mariana.

Agents specifically target or highlight areas in which its clients can (or cannot) live, based on their spatial understanding of the inventory (goods available to buy) and their assessment of the social positions/ lifestyles of the clients. For example, the agent only selects an "urban area" for a search for houses with targeted criteria because it is justified by saying that he knows the inventory and that it is there that the client can find the best inventory (future profitability, location, type of goods ...). Agents can ask their clients to select areas on a map that might suit them; interprets at their will the places that would most appropriate for their clients. These areas can be targeted for specific buyers, of lower socioeconomic status, and are often considered "inappropriate" and "dangerous" for the rest of the homebuyers. It is thus a different approach depending on the economic status of the clients.

The interpretation of agents' steering behaviors though could also relate to the intuitive feelings on the state of the market, and the fact that Sandra and Jeff would likely not find what they are looking for in a 400,000-dollar home in some areas of town, while

Cristina and Fernando would not find a 100,000-dollar home they can afford in this particular area of town. One can say: agents thus only based their actions on knowledge of what the market can give to their clients. Practically though, they should not highlight specific areas but should base their recommendations on assessing clients' social positions, work constraints and lifestyle, proposing several areas to be chosen from, without given any clues on the space of possibilities. However, this may not be reasonable or possible in the social setting of an informal conversion. I notice in the transactions I observed with buyers that agents never mentioned the crime and school statistics of an area. Patrick was asked by his clients to provide information in this respect but did not clearly state that buyers were required to go through the information on their own as they could not discuss such matters.

For example, the transaction of Corey with his buyer – a 60-year-old man who repeated he wanted to be sure not to live close to Mexicans – failed because Corey did not feel comfortable with the buyer's attitude and decided not to continue. In my observations, at no point did I find any agent openly discussing race or espousing racist views or jokes. However, in informal conversation, much of the information communicated related to the qualification of the territory, the areas and the neighborhood as buyers were eager to exchange on the specific access to amenities and resources that supposedly make the neighborhood good. Agents never disclosed any information, even when faced with potentially racist jokes about living in a specific neighborhood.

In their study, Galster and Godfrey (2003) establish the "labellization of the data" (whether the information provided by the agent was positive, negative or neutral, i.e. "merely mentioning the "fact" without apparent approbation or denigration" (18). Although comments were classified neutral, they still give information to the buyer that is technically prohibited by HUD. This raises specific questions around the capacity of clients to "detach" from these judgments and thus to carefully assess their impact.

In my fieldwork, I did not observe comments being made openly about neighborhood race or ethnicity, but the categorization of the neighborhood is exemplified in what happened in the case of Mariana that I highlight below. Information steering is one type of steering that particularly resonates with our analysis. By paying attention to which types of information were communicated to the clients, I observed that agents acted within

the vast array of professional norms, state regulation policies and market injunctions. Additionally, agents' behaviors are shaped by the over-representation of criminal images and dangerous neighborhoods, which appeals to even the most liberal and progressive elites. It is not only agents who have thoughts on neighborhoods but also buyers, as they use euphemisms to represent the space they live: "not the best neighborhood" so "as a couple, we will not want to live there." What I thus document in my fieldwork is not so much the action of orienting lower classes to specific neighborhoods.

This analysis confirms to some extent studies that have highlighted the centrality of judgments on which kind of neighborhood would be appropriate or not, determining whether or not people want to live in a given place (Bernheim and Meer 2007; Bruch and Mare 2006; Feins and Bratt 1983; G. Galster 2001; James, McCummings, and Tynan 1984; Pearce 1979; Roychoudhury and Goodman 1996). Studies were done by Ondrich, Stricker, and Yinger (1998), Ondrich, Ross, and Yinger (2001), Turner, Struyk, and Yinger (1991) and Yinger (1998) sponsored by HUD evaluated not only the *qualitative mechanisms behind the steering* but to *quantify the extent of this phenomenon nation-wide.* They concluded that 12% of steering was done on the ethnic ground, with a slightly lower percentage based on class. The overall steering index was thus around 20 percent (Turner and Wienk 1993). But depending on the tests itself, it could sometimes show higher levels of steering: white people would gain more access in a predominantly white neighborhood than minorities if real estate agents had access to the whole Multiple Listing Service (Oh and Yinger 2015).

Galster and Godfrey (2003) indeed highlight other comments from real estate agents, closer to what I observed during transactions with buyers. In their study, comments did not address directly the racial and ethnic fabric of the neighborhood, but rather were related to the quality of the neighborhood in respect to whether it was a "safe" and "good place to live," or a place someone wouldn't like, "unsafe". A surprising finding for them was the relative absence of comments on school choices (less than 5%). Because of fair housing laws, agents are not allowed to communicate on neighborhood or school statistics but can orient home buyers to the specific government-sponsored websites to find out about the school and criminality scores in their area.

3.2. Conform to Neighborhood Expected Value: Maintaining Separation and Homogeneity

At the beginning of the century, a key rationale for the valuation of the property was that mixed neighborhoods were expected to be detrimental to value. Neighborhoods were thus better preserved by keeping populations separated. Starting in 1910, several states and cities used the economic argument to pass racial zoning ordinances. Real estate literature did not portray a natural hatred towards 'colored' people or advanced a cultural argument but advocated for the principle of separation as a necessity for economic preservation of value, as illustrated in a real estate textbook:

> The 'colored' people certainly have a right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness but they must recognize the economic disturbance which their presence in a white neighborhood causes and forego their desire to split off from the established district where the rest of their race lives. (McMichael and Bingham 1923, 181–82)

Entirely white at the time, NAREB (National Association of Real Estate Brokers) members defended segregated patterns of land and housing distribution as they saw residential segregation as "both a business necessity and a moral absolute." Starting in 1922, the publication of their Code of Ethics (as well as real estate textbooks) stated that "the purchase of property by certain racial types (was) very likely to diminish the value of other property." The article 34 of the 1928 Code of Ethics demonstrates the belief in the association between value and race:

> A Realtor should never be instrumental in introducing into a neighborhood a character of property or occupancy, members of any race or nationality, or any individuals whose presence will be detrimental to property values in that neighborhood.

Agent and lenders believed until the 1960's at least that introducing a "racial group" to a white neighborhood (resulting in what we called a "mixed neighborhood") would endanger the values of the houses of that particular neighborhood[81]. As a result, two different markets were created: one white and one black – "the white market was cultivated"

[81] In the 1950s, a savings and loan officer declared the following: "We make loans to colored people in established areas only. If they were introduced in a new area, property values would fall 50 percent."

whereas the “black market ignored.” After the 1950s, there was a significant change in the perceptions in the real estate industry. The article in the Code of Ethics stating that introducing 'people of color' in an area was detrimental to value was discarded, but the prescribed behaviors were still to keep people and elements out of affecting property values. Some even argued that the so-called "infiltration effect" could be beneficial to property prices.

The Code of Ethics remained in effect until 1974, when a law on fair housing passed to disentangle race from value, affirming a duty not to discriminate based on nationality or color. As article 10 of the 1974 Code of Ethics states:

> The REALTOR® shall not deny equal professional services to any person for reasons of race, creed, sex, or country of national origin. The REALTOR® shall not be a party to any plan or agreement to discriminate against a person or persons based on race, creed, sex, or country of national origin.

Even if the housing law prohibited discrimination, the principles behind segregation remained somewhat vigorous, especially the separate market principle[82]. Separation acted in the construction of new housings designed to favor white occupancy in the suburban areas where blacks and minorities were mostly abandoned to inner areas. Similarly, mortgage companies were acting as a "silent partner" to establish and maintain market separation: they were either closing their eyes on discriminatory practices of real estate actors or even refusing to finance builders who wanted to provide loans in integrated neighborhoods. The arguments behind discrimination were not based on a moral stigma but based on economic reasoning of decreasing value. Even if no study evidenced directly the link between introduction of minorities and value, the problem of the myth of "decreasing property value" or "infiltration effect" acted as a self-fulfilling prophecy: "When this myth becomes the basis for action, however, the economic forces of the housing market can become so distorted as to make the myth a reality" (U.S. commission on civil rights of 1973, report on Fair Housing Laws).

[82] See http://www.law.umaryland.edu/marshall/usccr/documents/cr11042.pdf

What I observed is that value is not limited to perceptions of race and neighborhoods, but on expected value and desirability of a specific good conveyed by the agent, which may prompt actions of the seller. For example, agents discourage clients from doing "too much" work in a house before selling it, because they need to comply with the market, i.e. a reward to homogeneity.

Real estate pricing is based on appraisal techniques that reward homogeneity: goods must be similar. To which extent does it apply to its population as well? If the houses are not comparable, then there is an issue to determine value, and that is why with this complication, residents are told not to upgrade before selling, or not to be the "most expensive house" in the block, if they care about "their value." The value would thus be an eminently relational process: it depends on various professional standards, anticipations and economic principles that are driven by the social world in which real estate agents evolve.

I followed the interaction between sellers Eddy and Nina and Corey, who has been in the real estate industry for about 6 years. The sellers expressed motivations to do some work in their house to "sell it better." While observing at an appointment with them, Corey told me: "okay, so, with sellers, you always have to turn them down on their expectations on how much more they can get from some work or remodeling." He then goes on to explain how they can be enthusiastic about showcasing a brand-new house, but he advises them to reconsider. According to Corey, unless the agent is in charge of redoing the house completely through a professional company, the best way to sell is to make some minor adjustments and to stage it well. While one can think this has nothing to do with the overall location of the house, I discover at the meeting with the clients that Corey brings another logic concerning the pure pricing of the product. Indeed, while Eddy and Nina talk about their plans to redo the kitchen and update it, Corey tells them to "go for it." When they start talking though about adding features outside or wanting to transform the overall structure of the house, he gives them a more straight-up answer: "you know, you have to be careful." He had explained earlier the importance of maintenance, which was also obliged by the HOA policies to garden and to only put in the garden certain native plants. Not only maintenance was guarded by the HOA, but also the specific transformation to the structure, shape, and color of the house. Real estate agents often highlight the rule of homogeneity saying to

sellers: "you cannot be the best house on the block, because that is not as attractive to the average buyer, you should not be the least attractive either, but you should observe compliance in the features and the models of the other houses in the block. Even if Corey did not mention the "homogeneity principle" in front of clients, he attributed his reasoning to the "selling argument." The agents I followed greatly discouraged sellers who to engage in lengthy and costly remodeling unless they want to upgrade their goods to the level of others. Otherwise, agents claim their investment would not be payback in terms of price augmentation and desirability, as the principle of homogeneity and similarity should be respected.

I also observed similar interactions while with Thomas and his buyers, who were given choices between two houses and they needed reassurance and guidance on which one to choose. He tried to envision them into reselling the house: he highlighted criteria by which buyers would operate a more economically rational decision. The proximity to a good school might have appeared as a plus, but could indeed rapidly transform into a minus. "Kids are noisy," he said. Also, the house looked more "extravagant" as it was redone if a "weird way." Based on an average middle taste that I describe in Chapter 7 and the anticipations of what sellers would like, the decision to go with the other more classical and mainstream within the neighborhood.

If that works for the middle range of the market, it does not necessarily work in the high end. Kate worked with sellers Tom and Priscilla. She was shy in guiding them towards the decision they should make about whether or not investing in inserting a bathroom instead of a small room. During transactions, but also at the real estate school, real estate agents frequently discuss with their clients' functional obsolescence. They warn that obsolescence cannot easily be changed, but greatly affects the desirability of a product. Kate's sellers Tom and Priscilla were faced with the outdated design of their house. Kate told them it would bring the value of the house down. They live in a neighborhood where most houses exhibit an average of 2 or even 3 bathrooms while their house only contains one because it was built before the other houses. Kate was reticent to proposing adjustments while other agents like Rudy work closely with companies, which offer this type of service. The question then concerns the costs vs. benefits of adding a bathroom. They ended up not listing their house

with Kate as she did not seem to be too helpful with their questions about the remodeling. Even if the question of updating might appear trivial, it also triggers questions around the principle of goods similarity within the same blocks or neighborhoods.

The reinforcement of market logic in various areas of social life has prompted to consider how market mechanisms per se, which are performed in a modeled version of the economic ethos of market actors draw on inequalities as well as produce even more inequalities. The neoliberal society fosters in its core the logics of separation and inequality, putting "prestigious spaces" as the forefront and discredit "ghettos" and poorer neighborhoods as dangerous:

> The fear stems from a neoliberal perspective that places cities and their broader regions in the constant global competition for investment capital. This perspective frames some urban spaces as ideal areas of progress and others as unwanted frontiers that can harm the entire metropolitan area (Adelman and Mele 2014, 160).

This differentiation has concrete effects as demonstrated by the work of Sampson (2012) on neighborhood access, making the sentence "your zip code might be more important to your health than your genetic code" resonate with the embedded logic of separation and hierarchies within neoliberal capitalism (Harvey 2018). It offers an argument for why some territories are completely left behind or abandoned by both public and private actions.

3.3. Judging the Neighborhoods: “Bad” vs. “Good”

Appraisers and agents, as both social and professional actors, emit opinions on value. An appraiser is set to emit a judgment of value, a professional opinion on a property concerning a neighborhood. The judgment of value can be influenced by the social perception of its residents, especially if the appraiser is convinced that their introduction would set a negative spin on values. Additionally, the comparative approach on value sets up a "mimic effect" as the value of one property is influenced by the others of similar status nearby.

Researchers even calculated that after a certain point, the neighborhood becomes "colored" and the maximum cap should be less than 20% of a minority, to maintain the equivalent market value of the goods. The argument behind it is the following: "If the

neighborhood becomes 'black,' then it becomes less desirable ('white flight'), and drives the price down. The question of desirability is thus at the center of the preoccupation of real estate because they assimilate desirability with prices and value. This gives us hints on why social perceptions of real estate still matter. Agents rely on their perceptions of both a neighborhood and the market activity in that neighborhood, to make predictions on houses and neighborhood value. Lenders and appraisers also are doing and checking on the same predictions. This system of coordination thus based on expectations by market intermediaries is thus central as they tend to hint buyers to behave conservatively once it comes to financial and economic decisions.

Certain spaces are not mentioned by real estate professionals, they simply disappear from the map of possible neighborhoods to choose from. I call this the invisibilization mechanism. Considered "inappropriate," these spaces (this is the case of the South of the city, for example) completely disappear from the map of residential possibilities. Agents do not present them as potential places and customers do not necessarily know them, even though their place of work could correspond to buying property in the south of the city. These spaces are therefore not mentioned by real estate professionals.

While agents define areas where clients might want to look at, they also deter them from looking elsewhere. Rudy, like 90% of the agents I follow, uses a city map to highlight the potential areas:

> I like to have my city map and I want them to map out an area for me where they're looking. When it's a mapped-out area, it's as simple as this. Look, these are all of the new listings for today. I can tell right away if they're looking for somewhere, let's say, in the foothills. You can go to all four corners of town.

In the meetings, I observed with Rudy's buyers, he walked in the appointment with a map of the city. When the clients do not know where to live, the usual interrogation of Rudy revolves around the physical location of their workplace. Objectively, the clients are closer to the central and southern parts of town. But after engaging a discussion about their needs (size and feature of the house mostly), Rudy highlights pockets of the territory where he knows there will be an inventory. After engaging a little bit with the map, the clients are mostly listening, he tells them quite directly: "well, North of River is where you have to be."

He points out different directions, but in his perspective, for example, the South is non-existing. This can be attributed to his knowledge: Rudy knows there is nothing to be sold there, no value to be extracted, i.e. no inventory; along with what is revealed more specifically in a formal interview setting: Rudy, like about 90% of the agents I talked to about this issue, is afraid of having clients complain about the neighborhood is a bad place to live, or even to resell their houses. The South of the city is most commonly considered in Tucson as a poor Hispanic and underserved area. When we look at the 2010 US Census Bureau statistics, more than 40% of the population is Hispanic in the city of Tucson but in the South, some zip codes are as high as 85% Hispanic (*Map 1 and Map 2*). Crime statistics also show a higher crime rate than other central and northern areas in the city, ranking over 4 times the national average.

This division between places can create alternative ways of considering neighborhoods: whereas "neighborhoods may be "written off" by banks or landlords (abstract space) (they) can be considered desirable living environments by others (social space)" (Albeers 2011, 41). What I observed, though, were judgments directly made on neighborhoods, classifying them as potentially "okay," "great" or "not good at all." Neighborhoods acquire the status of social entities, through reputations and trajectories (Sampson 2012).[83] This informal categorization operated by agents is indeed impacting the way they orient their clients and how they define a specific area in which people should leave. In several instances, agents either subtly discouraged people from entering certain neighborhoods or decided not to consider a specific area even if the area could satisfy the needs of the buyers, or if the buyers work significantly close to this area. Not only do agents operate on the classification of neighborhoods, but they also engage in a game revolving around profit.

[83] For that neighborhood decline exists, one must consider how a group of powerful actors define abstractly a neighborhood impacts, to use the vocabulary of Sampson (2012), the "trajectory" of a neighborhood. Jane Jacobs (1961) recalls the story of Chicago neighborhoods in which residents threaten to withdraw their money from the bank to protest redlining. The concept of "voting with your feet" also illustrates the phenomenon of "moving out."

4. Acting to Profit: The Game on Volume, Value, and Timing

Before the housing laws passed, some realtors® organized to curtail segregation and discrimination; not because of moral considerations or impositions from the federal government but because of the search for profitable markets. Here, can be introduced the concept of performativity (Muniesa and Callon 2008). Performativity scholars argue that sciences and theories are not limited to represent the economic world, but to create it as well, by "realizing it," "provoking it" or "constituting it." For example, in economics, the study of markets has shown that the construction and maintenance of expert knowledge are not just separate from the conception and the operationalization of market activities, but it is taking part directly and indirectly through technical devices.

Real estate agents are also driven by the acquisition of a socio-professional capital that goes through the acquisition of economic capital and the strategic finds of the best possible transactions to have in a lower amount of time. Because of these goals, agents are engaged in a search for desirable transactions, which might be of higher value and less frequent, or who might be of middle value and more frequent. However, a house that is worth less than $100 000 is going to remunerate only 3% of the whole transaction price, which equals $3 000 minus taxes and fees taken by the real estate companies. For most agents I interviewed, this seems a lot of work for such little pay at the end. If agents do not work in some neighborhoods, it is also because the prices of the houses are too low. Agents do not generate enough income, which also contributes to increasing the inequalities, because they are less flow and the goods are not seen, nor improved.

4.1. Acting Differently based on the Value of Each Market (Low vs. High end)

Lower Level of Service in Low-priced Areas

As evidenced by Harvey (2010, 128, 133), the profit to be made is higher in some neighborhoods compared to others:

> The commercial institutions clearly prefer to operate in the higher price ranges because servicing costs on mortgage loans are constant, which means that the larger the mortgage the greater the profit margin for the institution servicing it (…) The

> financial institutions, by denying funds to certain groups in particular areas and channeling investment to preferred speculative borrowers, created a decision context in which speculative activity was almost bound to succeed. In doing so, a new submarket was created by displacing a middle-income white population by a process I have elsewhere dubbed an urban "blow-out."

Another transaction I observed with Kara was with Anton on the Southside of the city. Anton was introduced by a friend of hers from the University of Arizona; he had found a $48,000 home on 32th street and 3rd avenue. This is not an area in which real estate transactions are booming, contrary to downtown. Indeed, one can evaluate quickly while looking at active houses on the market than the south of 22th, the market becomes much less active and only a few properties are available. Prices are much lower on average than in other parts of town. The house was not in very good shape, but Anton wanted to buy it quickly and seemed to use the agent only as a means to get into the house. Kara insisted on looking at other properties before buying, as it is not "like you pick up bananas at the store." Anton had already his mind set up while Kara was clearly not convinced about the property.

Even if at the school and companies, instructors repeated several times that agents "don't need to like the house to sell it," I argue that it is mostly because Anton had some previous social and culture while having a much lower economic capital – at the time, he was a musician for a local band – that he was able to maintain his decision. In this case, the agent did not showcase the good, but still acted upon proper alignment of class. Kara even tried to discourage Anton to make the final decision. Kara also told me she felt a little bit like the transaction was a waste of time. After taxes and fees taken by the real estate companies, Kara would be left with only about $800 for the transaction, something that most agents would have refused. Since she considered Anton as a friend, she did not want the deal to fall through and considered it as "just okay." The transaction also went on longer than expected because some issues were discovered, and the house did not appraise for the agreed price. Kara felt pretty disengaged from that transaction as she had no monetary incentives to make it work, nor a form of connection with the good and territory she was selling.

This indeed applied to most of the lower-priced Latino markets of the South of the city I came to observe. If no investments are made, and houses are priced very low, some are even exchanged without an agent, there is a considerable miss to win. There will be no investment or geo-farming until the brokers and the investors anticipate their return on investment.[84]

Attraction Towards Higher Status Goods

Indeed, the most successful agents I followed and interviewed do not specifically go after lower-priced property but are also much more interested. As Amanda and Nancy's behaviors demonstrate, the majority of agents is attracted to showcase higher priced properties because they "feel better" in them, thus the prestige of the good contributes to increasing also the prestige of the agent, creating a disparity in the market, and a de facto differential treatment for goods that are classified as "low" and "high." As illustrated in Chapter 6, Nancy and Amanda portray themselves caring for such high-class goods, and catering to the needs of those "kinds of clients." They claim their goal is to get the "fancy clients" to get the "fancy products." They retrieve a positive sense of self, whereas working with higher goods does not permit them to embody such status.

Nancy, for example, likes to wear a nice dress and high heels, but it only feels appropriate when working in the middle-high range of the market. Nancy, who had a lot of high priced homes, feel for the good, she cherished the photography, staging and the architecture as she can find in that type of work the equivalent of working in the luxury sector without being a model or a designer. She values in this type of work the aesthetic that makes her becomes similar in status that her product.

Returning the Negative into a Positive: Targeting Investors

[84] At the lower end of the market, I can only rely on preliminary hypotheses as I would need to observe more transactions and adopt a different sampling strategy.

Even when agents do get listings in the lower end, they, in general, advertise these properties on the MLS as "ideal investors" rather than for a family. They do that because they can generate income in much less time, are investors in the low-end market usually have cash, there is no need for an appraisal, and they are very knowledgeable about the properties, and know how to handle the transaction. They also operate on time, so they would want to make the transaction close as soon as possible. Thomas, who has dealt with some investors at the lower end, once told me: "It was basically the lowest amount of work I put in the transaction. The guy already knew much of what was going on, the deal was set and clean."

These investors would go and rent the houses at higher prices compared to the prices in which they bought the houses. Their specific targeting of the ideal buyer for a place is also trying to capture specific buyers, and in general trying to capture the agent of the buyer himself, which must anticipate which goods he is going to show to his clients. For example, "milking" consists of raising the price of the rents while cutting costs and expenses in maintenance. This can have a drastic impact on underprivileged neighborhoods, but that is the way investors make profits from these neighborhoods.

In this part, I highlighted that the strategies agents adopt to work on the market depend on the type of market they work in, whereas their expected return on investment is high or not. Agents can play also on timing and volume to counterbalance low priced transactions.

4.2. Volume and Timing: Fast-forwarding the Transaction or Making "Big Money"

Agents are indeed very concerned with getting their volume in. While some that I interviewed like Rudy do not hesitate to talk about numbers – they are monitoring closely their volume of sales, and have a "business plan" for the year – others, like Matthew and Kate, refuse to talk about the financial part of their activity as they worry to appear greedy.

Although they shy away from talking about money,[85] they also do emphasize the importance of not being treated like an idiot, of being paid for the work they do, etc. and

[85] I did collect some information on their annual income but had difficulty to obtain consistent responses. I know that the access to local data from the TAR® would be crucial to assess the real income of the agents I

about the financial success that hope is going to come as a result of being a "good agent." Rudy was introduced by Peter, who told me first: "you will see, Rudy is our top newer agent, he got an award last year about his entry sales volume." The agents agreeing to be observed were among the most successful in their niches or companies. Because of the relationship between transactions and financial rewards, I expect the theme of financial rewards and production to come up during discussions and informal conversations in the car on the way to meeting clients. On the second day, after observing Rudy's meeting with potential buyers, we talk more specifically about what he does during the day. I want to get a sense of what a typical working day looks like for him:

> Every morning I look at my numbers. These are my transactions for the year. This is a big spreadsheet of every transaction I had, or have, and in which stage it is. I look at my numbers and see how close I am to my goal. Right now it looks like I'm quite a bit off." I ask: "What's the goal?" "The goal is to have seven pending transactions, two active listings and six closed but my goal is to have sixty transactions. Right now I have about a million dollars in escrow, but I want to have, by the end of the year (*the interview takes place in April*), at least twelve. So I have a lot of catch up to do." I interject, "but we're less than half of the year, right?" "Yeah, I know, we just started but I still get stressed, though. I have my listings totaling $605, 000. If I put those two together it's close to two million, but it still puts me almost at about seventy or eighty percent away from my goal." "Okay," I say, "how many millions of sales then?" "Twelve. That's what I've added it all up to. My business goal right here is" "What would be your income of that?" I add, "Income after takes. Mmm, a hundred and fifty-eight. $11.6 million in volume is really good. But I just aim for twelve. So if I go to twelve I'll definitely hit the goal. So you're basically looking at my business plan for the year. This shows me everything. My goal is to hit $350,000 in gross calculated income, so that's really what I'd be making if I didn't have to pay taxes or expenses. Fifty percent of that comes from buyers and fifty percent of it comes from listing. My average price point should be around $220,000. If it's not, I'm going to have to play a little catch up. My buyers are a little bit lower. A lot of the buyers that I work with are first time home buyers. They're usually around 150. Then I got a referral income at $5000. I've already exceeded that. That's just other agents giving me business.

During this conversation in his office, Rudy targets the sales volume more than anything else. He is strategizing to get to the number of twelve million in sales, estimating

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interviewed and followed. I nevertheless obtained one document showing the income of the first 100 agents in the city.

the number of listings and buyers he would need to have to reach it (60 transactions at an average of $200,000 each), as well as the additional income such as referral which is what he gets to refer someone to another agent.

Both real estate and mortgage actors work on allocation of mortgage, coordination and matching with formal and informal rules which are institutionally designed towards the economic interests of the players (Courchane, Surette, and Zorn 2004). Each company has a designated broker, who is receiving the payment of the transaction. Then, the designated broker redistributes to the agent a percentage of that payment. They encourage agents to produce, to set up goals as described in Chapter 3, but also foster certain modes of behaviors for profit to be made.

The calculation of the commission varies depending on the price of each transaction: The highest transaction prices, the least transactions are needed. Even if technically one could think there is a relation between transaction prices and work required to get the house sold, each transaction is indeed different, and a $100,000 foreclosed house would necessarily involve more time and more work than selling a $500,000 house that has generated attraction for buyers. Thus, one of the ways agents can know how to get the most dollars out of the transaction is to focus on the middle-high range of the market, multiplying for example by 5 their actual pay. For example, Rudy notes that his buyers are the first time, and they are usually around $150,000 while his listings are a bit higher. When an agent gets the choice, he is encouraged to work for higher-priced homes: let's say if you have a listing at $700,000, then you get 3% of this amount before taxes, which is $21,000, while if you are talking about a $150 000 home, it would only be $4,500.

Known to do higher-priced properties, Ross, who I interviewed and talked to regularly, gave me the example of Ricardo, an agent that did what he calls with euphemism "lower-priced properties." As Ross mentions, "you have to be discreet about it if you talk to him, he does not like we say that." Indeed, I met him during one class in Desert Realty and while talking about the commission, Ricardo said he won't work for under $3,000, so the 3% becomes higher if the house is priced less than $100 000. He did not want his income to be reduced so he obeyed this rule. For Ross, this type of agent was rare. Ricardo focused mostly on getting the most of these properties out to investors, as well as flipping houses. I

understood that the way he was treating housing products and overall the way he was doing business greatly differed from the middle-high market although he refused to be followed. Because of the "lower status" of the goods, he was actively targeting, he mostly sought out to do numbers (as many as he can). He had a different discourse than many agents I interviewed, especially women like Amanda and Nancy, for whom goods themselves appeared important. Goods should be cared for, and act to increase their professionalism and their status by properly handling them. In the case of Ricardo, goods seemed to be mere ways of generating money, and he often advertised his goods within personal networks of friends who knew investors, and "cash buyers."

There exist also situations of simulation and cheating to transmit false information in order to obtain buyers or sellers to act more quickly. Not disclosing a fact of the property can lead to an earlier date of closing or can avoid the risk of cancelling a transaction. Situations can be strategically maneuvered to obtain a certain goal. In a specific professional or work context, market intermediaries, such as real estate agents or waitresses in Hughes' example (1956), can use a variety of tools to control the interactions such as "tact, savoir-faire, diplomacy or social skill." Participants can either avoid contact by changing the topic of conversation or the directionality of the interaction; they can correct or repair if there was an offense to stabilize the relation. In the case of the realtors®, two strategies might be adopted: the avoidance process, deference towards the clients or demeanor (Goffman 1967).

I also observed an incentive to show fewer homes regularly. The interaction makes it in favor of the agent is the person is of lower status than showing fewer homes are even a function of how the agent wants the transaction to go: The fewer homes you show, the easier is to get the closing goes fast. Statistically, it may be that Hispanics are shown fewer homes, but the explanation towards why also matters. Certain clients might be shown more houses because they are asking to be shown more, and/or they are willing to get more options. In summary, social class can play an important role.

4.3. Inflating the Value of Houses: “Flipping Houses”

Studies on zoning demonstrate the shift from racially oriented zoning ordinances to more invisible or blind ways of favoring one population or race over the other, for example, with

industrial land use and higher-density (Shertzer, Twinam, and Walsh 2016). The intersection between white mobilizations, collective actions, and household preferences is highlighted in phenomena like "blockbusting:"

> This term was used to describe the process by which ghettos expanded in American cities. Real estate agents would select a promising area, usually adjacent to an existing black neighborhood, acquire a few properties, and rent them to African American families. The ensuing panic amongst the remaining white residents allowed realtors to buy the remaining properties at a discount and divide them into cramped apartments for additional black tenants (report by Shertzer, Twinam, and Walsh 2018).

Although I did not observe the practices of blockbusting, I observe what real estate agents call flipping houses. What is seen in my fieldwork is the action of certain realtors® acting as investors who buy real estate and sell it back. The practice of flipping houses, although controversial in Desert Realty, increases the value of a property and little by little, might affect the value of the whole neighborhood. Work on the subprime crisis reveals that minorities were impacted much more than whiter from the crisis, and notably because of the bad loans they were given. Access to credit was guaranteed, but to people that did not have the correct credit score and could not repay them. Some have argued that there was a real hunt for newer potential clients and that the marketing towards lower classes and poorer minorities explain also part of why they were the most affected.

Agents can also realize what they call in the jargon “flipping houses.” Also, this practice is not encouraged at Desert Realty and Rob is arguing against it, I had interviewed about 12 real estate agents, and followed 2 agents that actively pursued “flipping endeavors.” Indeed, I also realize that an agent I interviewed that became a millionaire started with flipping.

Flipping houses is a practice that is common among many real estate agents in Arizona. In Desert Realty and Real Prosperity, the instructors, and especially the older ones, do not favor this type of practice. At some point, Greg talks about the fact that he used to have a business with his dad to cater to flip homes with some realtors, the supervisor of the training is embarrassed: well, yeah, it exists but it’s not good…” Rudy works for Real Prosperity, I followed him in one of this plan to get an open house. In the car while riding

to meet his associated before the meeting to visit the house of a client that could potentially be a flip, he says that he got his first project, he got the "Decimated Real Estate Designation."

In mortgage markets, redlining is not done directly in relation to the social and ethnic composition of a neighborhood, but rests on the idea that business (and consequently profit) is averse to risk. It stems from a "hierarchical representation of space" stating that the "lender wants to limit the risks[86] in an area that is deteriorating (abstract space)" where "the lender discriminates against a whole class of risks rather than distinguishing among individual risks" (Albeers 2011, 41). Thus, the way real estate agents work on the market is highly dependent on the profit which can be made in this specific market (lower vs. higher end of the market). The differentiation of risk thus is likely to generate differential profits depending also on the values of the houses, which can vary drastically from one end to the other end of the market.

Conclusion

The particularly of housing goods valuation is their location: housing goods have a spatially embedded value in them: a value that can be defined economically and socially, and which agents are trying to professionally act upon. Within a product like a house, location operates as a signal for social position. In Chapter 7, I looked at agents' participation in the transformation of preferences and products. In this chapter, I show that real estate agents both condition the entrance to the neighborhoods and the entrance to the market, as well as shape neighborhood value by trying to increase value and to bring value to equate the perceived state of the market. Their actions on clients and neighborhoods contribute to actively shape inequality between places but mostly indirectly. Analyzing agents' practices as professional goals and social expectations allow refine the understanding of how discrimination, segregation, and inequality can be maintained despite the absence of conscious and obvious discrimination.

[86] Risk is also accounted and internalized within market devices which are used to evaluate risk and help design credit scoring instruments such as credit risk management, profiling, credit scoring and any other operations of quantification.

In “Good Neighborhoods, Good Schools: Good Choices of White Families,” Johnson and Shapiro (2003, 175) provided extracts of an interview with Laurie “a parent” who “lives in a white suburb of St. Louis with her husband and three children:”

> I think certain neighborhoods are better, and your children will have a better childhood and a better educational background because of where they go. But it's not right, but I think everyone should have the same opportunities my children do but they don't" the interviewer asks "Do you feel like race has played a role I any of the decisions you all have made" and Laurie responds: "I have to be honest and…I'm probably wrong for even saying it, but truthfully, it's in the back of my mind, yes…but if there was a nice black family who my husband worked with at General Electric and they bought the house next door to us and had the same values and the same desires and goals that we had, I wouldn't be afraid to have my children carpool and sit by them. I guess I am a racist deep down inside, and I feel guilty for admitting that, but those poor inner-city kids whose parents are on crack and who don't care about them and don't feed them and have drugs and guns lying around them to bring to school, I'm afraid of them. And maybe I want to shelter my kids until they're older and they can handle it better. When they're young, I don't want them to be exposed to that type of situation. And I don't want my kids being shipped into a school like that. I feel guilty because I'm not doing anything to make their life better and try to help them. I'm hiding out here in my little nice neighborhood and my little private school and I'm like sticking my head in the sand and pretending like these problems don't exist.

This story highlights how “racialized beliefs and actions” are embedded within household choices of where to live, evidencing strategies of social reproduction: parents want to give children the best possible education with the best possible school in the best possible neighborhoods, and these strategies are embedded within material and physical dimensions of highly segregated areas.

A sociologist that would be critical to the analysis I just presented might say: why should we care about real estate agents when households are the main drivers of residential outcomes? I have aimed in this chapter to demonstrate that agents are not a mere empty device that passes on peoples' residential choices, but actively either reinforced or shaped decisions and perceptions on neighborhoods. Even when not in the presence of groups, they rely on a social form of "middle white buyer" making them shy away from introducing any white buyer to a non-decent neighborhood. Inequalities thus are also fostered by perceptions

that are produced and reproduced in interactions, with verbal and non-verbal clues that tend to assume conformity in the behaviors.

The contribution of this chapter is to highlight how classism and racism are taking shape in various dimensions and are reflected both in the discourses and the practices of real estate agents, without realizing it but also contributing to highlight that "good choices" becomes per se unequal. I contend there is a social form of housing interaction composed of expectations from the agents towards clients' neighborhood choices. These interactions are shaped by reproduction strategies and social status, which is eminently enacted in residential locations and spaces. Space comes to play the role of a reminder to the hierarchy of social status. It is thus through the specific location that social status and place of residence are rendered coherent, and to a bigger extent than the good itself. The case of Mariana highlight that real estate agents may refuse or at least feel reticent to introduce customers in undesirable spaces, in particular, because their social status was not in conformity. This result contributes to highlighting how the steering is not necessarily to deny access of minorities to white neighborhoods, but also to strongly resist the integration of higher status individuals into low class and ethnic minorities' neighborhoods.

Since my study focused entirely on real estate agents' work on buyers and sellers, it is highly likely it does not capture the unequal outcomes for people that would be de facto excluded from the financial system. I demonstrate briefly how this plays out in the work they do with investors, trying to "showcase" goods for a specific audience, including investors. But the practice of flipping also rejected in the real estate companies is also important.

Conclusion

> "90% of all millionaires become so through owning real estate. More money has been made in real estate than in all industrial investments combined. The wise young man or wage earner of today invests his money in real estate" (Andrew Carnegie, 1835-1919, industrialist, business magnate, and philanthropist)
>
> "Buying real estate is not only the best way, the quickest way, the safest way, but the only way to become wealthy" (Marshall Field, 1834-1906, business magnate, entrepreneur and philanthropist)
>
> "The major fortunes in America have been made in land "(John Rockefeller, 1839-1937, industrialist, business magnate, and philanthropist)
>
> "Real estate cannot be lost or stolen, nor can it be carried away. Purchased with common sense, paid in full, and managed with reasonable care, it is about the safest investment in the world" (Franklin Roosevelt, 1882-1945, politician, 32nd president of the United States)
>
> "The best investment on earth is earth" (Louis Glickman, 1905-1999, Real estate investor and philanthropist)
>
> "Owning a home is a keystone of wealth, both financial affluence and emotional security (Suze Orman, born in 1951, financial guru)
>
> "Now, one thing I tell everyone is learn about real estate. Repeat after me: real estate provides the highest returns, the greatest values and the least risk" (Armstrong Williams, born in 1962, media mogul and entrepreneur)
>
> "If you don't own a home, buy one. If you own a home, buy another one. If you own two homes, buy a third. And lend your relatives the money to buy a home" (John Paulson, born 1955, investor, hedge fund manager, and philanthropist)

Over the 20th century, buying a home has become one of the materialized milestones of the American dream (Belsky and Belsky 2013; Callis 1997; Chevan 1989; Rohe and Watson 2007). With the subprime mortgage crisis, the benefits of homeownership for the low income have been seriously questioned, in the wake of predatory lending (Saegert, Fields, and Libman 2009). With the slight drop of homeowners, some even questioned if households would thus prefer to rent. Meanwhile, investing in real estate has been at the center of the making of real estate tycoons' fortunes. Being at the center of a system of belief around wealth, reproduction and inequalities, real estate deserves sociological attention. As highlighted by the above quotes, American entrepreneurial gurus often spoke about their

belief that the superiority of real estate assets lies in the financial rewards attributed to investing in real estate.

When I started this fieldwork, I did not quite know much about real estate bubbles, except the tremendous impact of the 2007-2008 financial crisis. In comparison with the securities market, real estate assets would seem at first sight to be rather protected from speculative logics: the weak liquidity of real estate markets being associated with the significance of transaction costs.

However, real estate markets are also highly exposed to speculative bubbles. Lawrence Yun, chief economist of the NAR® argued at the end of 2018 that home sales were at a record high level with price gains in 90% of markets nationwide and the lowest foreclosure rates in 10 years. Even if mortgage debt was "near a pre-crash high," Yun reassured that it was no cause for concern (Yun 2018, 2019).[87] But some controversial economists believe that once prices start to fall, a bubble might burst (Stockman, 2019).[88] The first European crises in the 1860's showed that financial and real estate markets are intrinsically related. Real estate goods are also unique, including both a physical territory and a material fabric, which makes them hard to evaluate. Besides, real estate markets are organized by institutionalized networks of people working in them, including the various jurisdictions at the local and national levels and the various occupations in the industry generating income from the market (Nneji, Brooks, and Ward 2015).

Traditionally, several causes have been highlighted to understand the imbalance between supply and demand, including structural mechanisms, economic conjecture, budgetary conditions and behaviors. For example, the theory of rational expectations postulates that anticipation in rising prices fostered market rush. An alternative explanation,

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[87] Mortgage debt nears a pre-crash high but that's no cause for concern, November 20th, 2018 http://www.nar.realtor/newsroom/op-eds-and-letters-to-the-editor/mortgage-debt-nears-a-pre-crash-high-but-thats-no-cause-for-concern;
Lawrence Yun, "Boom or Bust for Spring Homebuying," Forbes, March 14th, 2019 http://www.forbes.com/sites/lawrenceyun/2019/03/14/boom-or-bust-for-spring-homebuying/#7c4f97864246

[88] See the three recent articles written by David Stockman "Fake Boom, Fake Budget" at http://davidstockmanscontracorner.com/

popularized by movies such as *The Big Short* (2005), suggests that market workers, including bankers, loan officers and real estate agents were moved by greed.

The dissertation proposes to contribute to bringing an alternative explanation consisting of a sociological immersion into the world of real estate agents as market intermediaries, arguing that they are not a pure receptacle of market logic. Indeed, I was inspired by sociologists such as Michel Abolafia (1996) or Olivier Godechot (1998) whose work on financial markets showed that market behaviors are moved by various rationalities, embedded within institutionalized, technical and professional systems.

As their income relies on the prices of goods, real estate intermediaries have interests in generating more value and in driving the prices up. Buyers and sellers are also driven by a common belief that prices are constantly rising, and hope to resell their properties for more money later on, increasing their own financial capital. Market intermediaries' knowledge of real estate markets is also rather ambiguous, even if widely shared. With the goal of transforming clients, market intermediaries inculcate an economic rationality to the public, to the customers or to their clients. To match people with goods, they rely on learned routines and use specific devices to evaluate the probable prices of goods (Favarger and Thalmann 2008).

What is behind the 2007-2008 has multi-sided explanations, but I argue that understanding the belief and logic of practice of real estate agents helps us a long way to better analyze markets. Even with the crisis, the main culprits were the bankers and Wall Street who got greedy, and not many questioned both the professional and market logics surrounding estate assets' acquisition? Why does it seem such an unquestioned perceived way to achieve wealth? I locate my understanding at the level of the real estate agent, as a professional worker who learns to be socialized to a specific economic rationality and an entrepreneurial spirit through personal and financial growth.

In conclusion, I highlight first the specific contributions of my dissertation to the study of markets and inequalities. I then look at the limits of my methodological and theoretical stands and propose alternative approaches to further the research.

1. The Significance of the Real Estate Agent: Middle Class, Wealth and Reproduction

As the home became the "crucial site of both consumption and middle-class identification in the early twentieth century" (Hornstein 2002, 613), the rise of the real estate agent, perhaps more than any other occupational category, is attributed to the development of middle-class lifestyles and values (Hornstein 2005). The American real estate agent was set to act upon and embody the developed taste and manners and sense of the existence of the white middle American, an American dream prisoner of "boutique lifestyle" in "sumptuary suburbs" (Davis 1986).

Embedded within the pursuit of happiness for the middle class is the capacity to access homeownership and be able to make it financially. In *The Dignity of Working Men*, Lamont (1992) highlighted the categorization established by lower-middle classes around morals, success and wealth. She demonstrated a tension between their traditional values – including integrity, personal discipline represented in the valuation of sincere, responsible and hardworking individuals (21) – with their dreams of prosperity (118) – praising "smart" people (106) with "goals and leadership" (120).

The narrative of Paul West, "an insurance salesman with a high school degree," given by Lamont (1992), reminds agents' discourses around the moral superiority of self-reliant individuals, despising "people who have no control over their lives, who are just a doormat or a dishrag. Somebody that just does what everybody tells them to do. People who don't know what's going on in the world…They are just victims."

The fear of being a loser and the desire to "make it" is strong among the lower tiers of the real estate agents I interviewed. Those who can draw on a business or familial capital are already assured they are going to make it, but the other ones need a strong moral push to engage in real estate work. In their version of the American dream, anyone who is at the bottom can rise to make it to the top, as figures of venture capitalists and entrepreneurs might represent: "In a typical pioneering style, Trump embraced the challenge of creating a product for a market that nobody else dared to enter. Trump believed the market existed and he was confident that the wealthy would flock to this spectacular building" (Ross 2005, 113).

As everyone wants to make it, not everyone is "making it" as real estate agents' and investors' incomes are highly variable. However, the belief system around the possibility of "making it one day" might work to keep the desire to grind alive, and make certain people profit from the work of others. An example of this newly rich real estate figure of the Tucson real estate market is Ricky. He was born in Mexico and was a professional soccer player, before entering into real estate. When I started my research in 2013, he only had a team of agents in Tucson. In 2018, he became one of the wealthiest real estate figures in Tucson. He earned more than 351 thousand Instagram followers and showcases himself with private jets, boats and luxury cars, traveling and staying in the places where the *nouveaux riches* typically go – including, among other destinations Los Angeles, Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Monaco (*Picture 8*).

The figure of Ricky probably highlights less of the working class's hard-working ethos than the middle-class desires to live like the rich without working as hard as the poor. Indeed, the existence and rise of financial freedom movements such as FIRE (financial independence, retire early) on the one hand and the retained pressure to present as a "workaholic" have been documented in various strata of American society as evidenced by New York times articles.[89]

[89] "How to Retire Early in Your 30s with $1 Million in the Bank" of September 2nd, 2018; "Why Are Young People Pretending to Love Work?", January 27th, 2019

Picture 8: Sample of Ricky Aranda's Instagram Travel Posts

The vocabulary of real estate agent revolves around "creating a business" rather than "having a job," something similar to what Ricky discusses with self-help you tubers such as Casey Adams's rise of the young podcast: "People have to remember that if you work in a business that only pays you while you are there, you have a job, not a business"[90] through advising to aspirants to *nouveau riche* lifestyle to "build leverage through systems and people," to "delegate" to "have others run the business" while he is gone.[91] Similarly to Ricky, rising financial self-help guru such as Suze Orman and Robert Kiyosaki teach people

[90] Episode 019: Ricky - Real Estate Investing Secrets, January 2nd, 2018

[91] Running an Empire from Afar, August 22, 2018, http://www.influencive.com/running-an-empire-from-afar/

to become financially educated so that you would develop systems to earn passive income (Fridman 2015).

For some excluded from financial and economic gains in the marketplace, real estate provides the easy back door to a wealthy lifestyle. America's wealth obsession has been also indeed documented by the two-decades-long work of journalist Lauren Greenfield, in her photo reportage and movie *Generation Wealth* (2017-2018) and documentary *The Queen of Versailles* (2012) investigating a family who started to build an exact replica of the Castle of Versailles in California and ends up bankrupt with the 2008 crisis.[92]

Although I am not pretending Ricky is the typical real estate agent, I am drawing on an extreme case to show that behind real estate money is the desire of the agent to build wealth, self-worth and to achieve familial stability, and to transmit this wealth to his or her heirs.

With the example of Ricky, I highlight one of the possible relevance of further research on real estate market intermediaries to explore the relational dynamics of wealth, reproduction and middle class in the United States. My research also proposes to theoretically integrate work on dispositions and expectations, and to explore possible intersections between Bourdieu and Goffman.

2. The Significance of Bourdieu and Goffman Encounter: Dispositions meets Expectations

One important contribution of the dissertation is to point out the fruitful integration of Bourdieu's work on the sense of practice and Goffman's analysis of role-playing and self-presentation to conduct the sociology of the market work.

Departing from Bourdieu's *Social Structures of the Economy* and integrating Goffman's contribution, I take the stand that looking at interactions does not necessarily make us fall in the trap of the ethno-methodologists, taking everything at face value, without contextualizing discourses. With the three breaks highlighted by Bourdieu in *The Logic of*

[92] Cf. New York Times, "Follow the Money (Then Take a Picture)," August 3rd, 2018.

Practice (1980) and taken by Burawoy (2018), the goal of research was to first evacuate the subjective logics of the actors to draw a real sociological inquiry, and while considering the objective structures in which individuals act, to come back to their situated explanations, make them talk while they do, explain why they take certain stands, what relations indeed can we make between their social positioning and their attitudes, their actions, their tastes.

I mostly draw on Bourdieu's work on the Kabyle peasants, in which he developed his theory of action around the practical sense acquired by individuals. By integrating Burawoy's sense of the game (1979), I first investigate the inculcation of dispositions. But the specific role and position in which the real estate agent acts do make him hold a specific role in society. Similarly to the early interactionist studies on doctors and on specific occupations (Howard S Becker et al. 1961; Bucher and Strauss 1961b; Goffman 1959)[93], I understood the actual significance of Goffman to the study of market intermediaries as they are located at the center of interactions: interactions in between themselves, with the public, with the client, with the market and the territory. As social beings, we are all embedded in a multitude of interactions and roles – as parents, as teachers, as lovers, as workers – but within the importance of the economy and the strategic position of the real estate agents, it takes a broader significance to uncover the social fabric of economic transactions and the production of inequalities.

Controlling the interaction becomes then central in housing transactions because the risk is that transactions fail at any time. Intuition and authority, playing honest and direct, enacting both deference and demeanor through dispositions and skills, is at the core of the brokerage role.

By integrating Bourdieu's logic of practice (1990) with Goffman's interaction rituals (1967), I showed how inequalities are inscribed in intermediaries' practices, as socially, professionally and market-driven. I demonstrated that agents socially classify individuals according to expected behaviors. That has real consequences in how they are introduced or not to territories, and in what places they might envision people to live. Professionally, they are driven by norms that make them want to position themselves in certain ways. They

[93] Numerous examples are taken about the waitress, the salesman or the psychiatrist in Goffman's work.

cannot break informal rules without feeling out of place and they may also risk their reputation, which tends to foster conformity within their behaviors. Relating to the market, their practices are orienting oriented towards extracting and generating value so they are encouraged to carefully understand shape the qualities of the products to sell them and to raise the prices.

This theoretical integration thus aims at proposing a sociology that looks at logics of practice in interaction, depending on how individuals, embedded in a sense of the market game, enter transactions and perform depending on their social, professional market roles, and the audiences with whom they interact. I thus urge the market and work scholars to integrate both Bourdieu and Goffman in their respective studies. My research also seeks to address how market intermediaries such as real estate shape markets and inequalities.

3. The Real Estate Agent as Market and Inequality Makers

In *Trump Strategies for Real Estate. Billionaire Lessons for the Small Investor* (2005), George H. Ross, executive business George H. Ross, executive business and legal advisor and, personal friend and legal advisor to Donald Trump, co-star of The Apprentice, intends to "explain the strategies Donald Trump used to make his real estate fortune, and how small investors can apply them to investments of any size, right down to a one-family rental property" (p. XII). Although Donald Trump cannot be classified as a real estate agent, the book shows how small investors are indeed connected to the real estate business, including real estate tycoons and lawyers whose work contributes significantly to producing the economic world in which we all evolve (*Picture 9*). The advice was given to the small investors indeed are all destined to produce value in the market:

> The key principle here is "spend money where it can be seen (…) Small real estate investors need to ask themselves, 'What can I do with this property that no one else is doing – to make it distinctive?' The answer is to try to get away from the commonplace and give tenants and buyers more than they expect. You can often do this by adding small, but impressive upgrades to your property. This requires vision and creativity, and intuitive sense for what will impress people (…) You can use large entry rooms to make a statement. Spaciousness is always distinctive" as it "gives the units a greater perceived value (…) Put extra dollars in countertops, vanities, or lighting fixtures (…) Always ask yourself, "Where can I spend my

renovation or building money to make the greatest visual impact? (Ross 2005, 117-118)

Picture 9: Real Estate Investment Books and the Real Estate Tycoon Videogame

I started this project with the sociological aim to uncover the creation of value in the market and the production of inequality. To understand the advice formulated by real estate moguls like Donald Trump, I decided to look at the smallest common denominator operating in the residential real estate market and locate the real estate agent within an organized system of interactions.

Real estate agents are located at the center of the home industry, as they are at the intersection of various groups of individuals. First, they are in close relations with other occupations or professionals including developers, bank and mortgage lenders, appraisers, home inspectors or roofers. Second, they interact with other real estate agents as colleagues, as team leaders, as managers or as operating brokers. Through socialization they must learn to embrace the behaviors and attitudes of a "successful real estate agent." Third, they interact with the public and a pool of imagined customers they need to convince about the legitimacy

of their endeavors. Fourth, they develop a relationship with clients as they develop systems and capture devices. Fifth, they need to put in interaction their clients and the market defined by enabling buyers, sellers and products. In this dissertation, I demonstrated how the last four dimensions of interactions operate in a local real estate market.

Table 8: Schematic Overview of the Dissertation Main Contributions

	Socialization	**Professional**	**Commercial**	**Market**	**Territory**
Level of interaction	Real estate agents	Public	Clients	Clients and Market	Clients, Market and Territory
Type of work	Work on the self, sense of the game	Work on the public, hierarchy and control	Work on clients, expertise, likeability and taste	Work on clients (social positions) and on the goods (market state)	Work on clients, on the goods concerning the territory
Actions	Inculcation of dispositions	Professional systems	Client capture	Transform clients, products and prices	Transform territory
Logics	Socio-professional	Professional	Relational or Network	Market	Territory

Within the framework of market intermediaries and market work (Dubuisson-Quellier and Cochoy 2013) in mind, I operated first three theoretical breaks by 1) considering the study of markets not as economic organizations made up of economic interests but through the lens of brokers whose actions also constitute the market; 2) shifting from an analysis in terms of rationality to dispositions and practical sense in which I integrated Bourdieu; and 3) getting away from both functionalist and interactionist approaches to consider professional culture and work practices. These breaks then led to answer my research questions around themes of inquiry that I highlight in the table above.

I answered my first set of research questions on becoming a real estate professional showing the acquisition of status through knowledge, training, and organizational features, how they acquire both economic and socio-professional dispositions while trained in the

real estate school and in the companies. I also demonstrate what is at stake at the organizational level behind the rise of the real estate agents as a profession.

My second set of research questions revolved around the use of relationships in becoming a "successful" agent, and what I call the discovery of the client as needed to be "captured" by the real estate agent. I specifically draw on the work done by real estate agents to build trust, using self-presentation techniques around expertise, likeability, and taste, searching to present themselves as similar to the goods or their expected clients to show the value of selling or buying through them. Customer capture also includes a gender component, that emerged rather later in the field.

Finally, my third set of research questions investigated the interaction between buyers, sellers, and the markets and the creation of market value and inequalities. By observing real estate practices, I evidenced how agents work to produce matching: socially classifying clients, drawing on their expectations while shaping the quality of the products and the prices. Pushed by economic incentives and market dynamics, realtors® draw on and contribute to producing and reproducing unequal distribution of people in a territory. In raising questions around the *effects* of the work – i.e. studying what does market intermediation to markets and to inequality – the results point to deep inscribed mechanisms that could be developed further, statistically assessed and systematized, adopting a more suited empirical design. I focus on the following to address potential limits and future directions.

4. From the Professional to the Market Field

It is important to clarify what a dissertation does and what it does not do. I elaborate on two main points regarding this. I am giving neither a *professional field*, nor a *market field* detailed analysis of the sets of players in the market. I conceived my interviews as part of an ethnographic puzzle more than a representative sample, even if I try to account for variations in the field. I remain tied to the methodology I used and have to acknowledge that ethnography must be multi-sited, long, and analyzed in light of all the institutional, political, and economic factors affecting what the market is about. Thus, while planning to develop

such broad theoretical concerns, one soon realizes the tremendous work that lies ahead: not only by being in the field, but by not wanting to stop and to discover what lies beyond the real estate agent. If I found the topic rich, it was, as Joe Galaskiewicz said to me, because I do not understand it fully. By not being too constrained in my thinking, I was able to grasp various dimensions of the sociological object. Yet, I probably would have benefited from more time to systematize all my observations. There are dozens of unanswered questions that remain. I most particularly highlight how I would like first within the framework of the real estate agent to then move on to focus on real estate as an activity and a field, which permits to further our understanding of inequalities.

I would thus start by categorizing within the world of agents how the various levels of family capital and earlier socio-professional trajectories affect the paths of real estate agents in the field. I would also want to investigate the rupture points in career trajectories. Although I wrote an article on the difficulty of "making it" in real estate and the pressure at work (Benites-Gambirazio 2017), only a few of my early recruits had stopped being in real estate by the end of the study. I have seen some agents who switched companies and agents going into teams. Three agents I interviewed decided to go back to their earlier professions. But I have not produced systematic data on that. I could also witness what factors make real estate agents' careers "go to the next level" as agents often say.

If the story of Ricky highlighted earlier seems quite uncommon in Tucson, we might expect that in bigger metropolitan areas, this acquisition of wealth through investments is more common. This leads one to think that as a real estate agent, strictly speaking, no one can ever make "that much" wealth, but that by working as a real estate investor, a fortune could be made. When interviewing real estate developers in Tucson and Phoenix for the research project I carried out on the water and urban development, I realized that developers often had a real estate license, but they mostly built from niches and developing acquaintances with high-level players in the field. By better understanding the economic and business world in which real estate operates, I could gain more understanding of the production of inequalities in the United States. The wealth generated by real estate seems so considerable that it is worth looking into both through quantitative and qualitative methods. The national and international debates around inequalities sparked through the study of

wealth, capital and the economic elites questions the future of capitalism and society (Boltanski and Chiapello 2017; Keister 2005; Lin and Tomaskovic-Devey 2013; Piketty 2013).

Ethnographers should both investigate small players, the real estate agents, and bigger players through the access to wealth of real estate assets. After thus looking at the real estate agent and the intermediation work done, future research directions point at the comprehension of the inequalities generated through the *field* of real estate. Future research could thus benefit from an empirical design that would integrate field theories (Bourdieu 1993; Fligstein and McAdam 2012). To understand inequalities, I will both change the focus of the research by not only being embedded into the world of real estate agents, but also by looking at the variety of players considering real estate as a field. By locating the research at the field level, I will gain more possibilities to assess the shape, the extent and the various dimensions affecting inequalities.

5. A Research Program on Inequalities in Real Estate

Even though I explored in Chapters 7 and 8 several dimensions of real estate that reproduced and produced unequal socio-spatial inequalities, I can draw on a specific research design that would help systematize actions and outcomes better. Through future research, I propose to envision socio-spatial inequalities through the prism of real estate and the price system. This could be done by analyzing the multiplicity of national and local dynamics at work in these markets such as market conditions, system of prices and variation, supply-side policies to develop the market and demand-side policies favoring access to home loans, household spending allocated to real estate and property valuation strategies. Aiming at understanding the respective influences of various factors on prices and inequalities, this future project would also be innovative because of its multi-situated epistemology that resolutely integrates quantitative and qualitative methodologies (interviews, fieldwork, cartography, archives, and statistics). The exploration of spatial data on prices and transactions with the deep knowledge of fieldwork, and policies will permit us to provide a better systematic analysis of the factors driving unequal outcomes. The sociological question of price

formation is also of significant importance in the capacity of economic sociologists to adequately think about markets.

Except the empirical work done in Europe by Barrey (2006), Caliskan (2007), Chauvin (2011), Nouguez and Benoît (2017), Velthuis (2013), and in the United States by Baker (1984), Podolny (1993), Benjamin and Podolny (1999); Uzzi and Lancaster (2004) and Chiffoleau et Laporte (2004) and the calls made by Beckert (2011, 757) referring to price formation as the "result of the social and political forces operating within the market field," very few economic sociologists have significantly dig into the making of prices. According to Filleule (2008), even if these authors use sociological variables and methodologies, their explanation remains tributary of the economic models such as the law of supply and demand or the transaction costs theory, hence a real challenge to develop a true sociological theory of price.

When I started my journey into the politics of land in Tucson, Arizona; I was far from envisioning what I discovered: the human face of the capitalist fabric, the urban growth machine, as powerful as it is gently embedded within symbolic and material goods we, as city dwellers, value. The real estate agents I have encountered and shared moments with remain the core material of this dissertation. They tell the sociologist a story that is worth listening to. With this dissertation, I hope to have contributed to highlight the socio-professional world that is hidden below the familiar spaces that we inhabit, drive and walk in daily.

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Appendix 1: Interview Guide

NB: This is an indicative guide about the questions asked (the questions varied based on how much the interviewee talked about the themes without me asking any question).
Within the interviews, the goal is to gain a sense of why these agents think they are “good agents,” “doing a good job,” and what are the common elements of a “good job” (what is the agent actually doing that is perceived as the “correct thing to do in this situation") and how they reflect on what is “being a good agent”/ what is a “bad agent.”

I. Starting in real estate and professionalization

Q1. Introduction. To start, could you tell me a little bit about yourself?
Permitted to build a connection with the interviewee, and to talk about their city of origin and the history of places they lived in, their family background, their education, their previous job(s)/occupation(s), and why they didn’t like/ or they quitted their previous job(s)/ occupation(s).
This permits to know about their got into RE Estate, and if family/ friends were involved in that process.

Q2. Let’s talk about you as a realtor. Tell me more about when you got started?
Which companies did they go to? How did it happen? Did they interview with one or several companies?
This will usually evolve into how to be a successful realtor, when mentioned how to get started, they will cite connections and social circles.

Q3. Where did you go to RE school? How was it?
This involves a combination of questions on experience, difficulty, learning process, role of the instructors.

Q4. Did you benefit from any training and mentoring?
That allows the interviewees to tell me more about who helped me got started in real estate, if he had someone he knew before, someone from the company he was working with, did he or she met the mentor during the interviewee? through a contact?

II. Relationships and Networks for Business

Q5. You told me you did not know anybody in town/ you did know people in town…how did/ did that help you for your business?

They will mention their strategy to get business, most often talking about social connections but they will also be asked about other techniques: marketing, phone calls, farming…which will be often mentioned as poor techniques compared to building relationships. If not done within the flow of the conversation, interviewees will be asked to mention specific instances or examples on how they did that. Further questions will be targeted as refining the types of clientele they interact with.

Q6. How would you describe your relationships with your clients? What is the type of connections created? What types of clients?

They will characterize the types of relationships they have with their clients and where they met them (if they didn't mention it earlier in the interview, this can help me understand if they got similar lifestyles and trigger further specification on "socio-cultural homophily"), what do they do if they see each other not only for business, usually types of interactions. Many will bring the topic of friendships with their clients. Here, I will try to make them characterize what they mean by friendship.

Q7. Does your business work with referrals? How does that work?

Interviewees would usually bring referrals earlier in the interview but if they didn't mention it, I will ask them specifically if they work with referrals, and get a perspective on when and how that started to happen. Many had told me they start by prospective techniques (leads, marketing, open houses) and evolves through almost a 100% referrals based as they become establish.

III. Creating Value in Interaction

Q8. Do you work equally with sellers and buyers?

Interviewees talked about the structure of their business (usually % sellers/ % buyers), and their specific missions/ activities both with buyers and sellers.
Then this will evolve into the difference of what agents do with buyers and sellers.

Buyers

Q9. When you work with buyers…? How do you approach them? You've said you "help them find what they need"
Agents will describe what they do with buyers, and I will ask them questions about what do they think they do with buyers, how they approach their clients, how do they create a rapport.
The question of budget/ loans is really important, "what do they qualify for" before starting to show them anything.

Q10. How do you go about finding a house for them?
Interviewees will go over the specific techniques used to find the product (MLS, agents' tours…)

I more specifically ask about:

Q11. How they go about "helping/ finding what the client wants"? (they often use these terms) = *selecting goods in neighborhoods.* How do you go on trying to find out about their "needs"? How does that vary with types of clients? How do they assess what people's want? Asking questions? Evaluating who they are?

They will be asked to recall specific clients' instances.

Q12. How they go about reassuring people about their choices/ convincing people that they are making a good decision? = *Influencing clients' choices.* How do they bring clients to revise their assumptions/ choices? How does that vary with types of clients?

They will be asked to recall specific clients' instances.

Sellers

Q13. When you work with sellers…? How do you approach them? You've said you "help them sell their house for the best price"

Agents will describe what they do with sellers, and I will ask them questions about what do they think they do with sellers, how they approach their clients, how do they create a rapport.

Q14. How do you go about pricing? How do you assess the value of a place/ a neighborhood?

This will go into how they assess price and value for a good, the difference between a "typical" vs. a "specific house," how they go about "feeling" the price, their experience with it, their resources (MLS but also other agents/ managers, agents' tours…), do they use an appraiser?

I will ask specifically about:

Q15. How they go about "helping/ selling the house for the best price possible" (they use these terms usually)? = *marketing and pricing right.* How does that vary between clients? They will be asked to recall specific clients' instances.

Q16. How they go about reassuring people about their choices/ convincing people that they are making a good decision to lower their price? = *Influencing clients' choices.*
How do they bring clients to revise their assumptions/ choices? How does that vary with types of clients? They will be asked to recall specific clients' instances.

<u>Market</u>

Q17. What do you mean by the "market"? How do you perceive the market?

Usually the topic will comes within the buyers and sellers' questions but here I want to refine how they perceive the market (something external? Driving everything? Or is it more about buyers and sellers' agreement).

<u>Specialization</u>

Q18. Do you specialize into any niche? Specific neighborhood/ market?

(If Hispanic, How does speaking Spanish/ being Hispanic helped you with this "niche"?)

<u>Relationships with other agents</u>

Q19. What type of relationships they have with other agents? How does that go? Do you like agents in general? What about the ones you don't?

Agents are intermediaries, so they interact with the buyer's agent if they are the listing agent, and the listing agent if they are the buyer's agent…so how does that goes? During the transactions but also behind the transactions. What about if dual agency?
This topic will likely come up earlier in the buyers' and sellers' items.

Q20. About reputation…? You've told me that "reputation was key," what do you mean by that?

Reputation came up as important in the first few interviews, so I have considered asking about it, because it taps into ethics.
What I have learned so far from them was that reputation was important and a narrative along these lines: It's a small market, everybody knows each other, you have interest in protecting your reputation. You don't want to be known as the agent who did this or that.

<u>Expertise/ Skills</u>

Q21. What expertise/skills do you need to be a good agent?

These will have come up earlier also in part I. but I might want to ask more on that, specially about the negotiation and "people" skill that agents feel they need to have.
This will evolve also about on "being a good person."

Additional information collected

Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study!

You're about to answer a few questions about your background, training and professional activity as a real estate agent.

Please note that an Institutional Review Board responsible for human subjects' research at The University of Arizona reviewed this research project and found it to be acceptable, according to applicable state and federal regulations and University policies designed to protect the rights and welfare of participants in research. The Research Consent Form (add link, print or send form) describes your rights and protection while taking part of this study!

Training and previous activity

Previous education and occupation
Q. Which is your highest level of education?
- Less than high school degree
- High school degree
- College degree
- Master
- PhD

Q. If you had a college degree, what was your degree field?
- "Hard" Science, engineering or related

- Social Sciences
- Law
- Business
- Education
- Arts, humanities, and other

Q. Is real estate agent your first occupation (excluding internships and summer jobs)?
- Yes
- No

(If No)

Q. What was your previous occupation?
(NB: Find an appropriate classification! Where do I find that? SOC?)

Real Estate Carreer
Q. Which license do you have?
- Salesperson License
- Broker License
(possible to check both)

Q. When did you receive your real estate license?
(range or exact date?)

Q. Since how long have you been a real estate agent?
(range or exact date?)

Q. Did you beneficiated from help/ advice from a friend to become an agent?
- Yes
- No

If yes, detail.

Q. Did you beneficiated from help/ advice from a family member to become an agent?
- Yes
- No

If yes, detail.

Company
Q. How many companies did you work with as a real estate agent?
- 1

- 2
- 3 or more

Q. Talking about the company you're working with right now, how long have you been working for them?
- Less than a year
- 1 to 3 years
- 4 to 8 years
- 9 to 15 years
- More than 15 years

Q. Approximately, how many people do you company count at the local level?
- Less than 5
- 6 to 15
- 15 to 30
- 30 to 60
- 60 to 100
- 100+

(Will they know? Is it that important?)

Training as a real estate agent

Q. Did you benefit from one or several mentor(s) when you started in real estate?
- Yes
- No

Q. Retrospectively, how effective would you say your mentor(s) was to help you succeed in the business?
(Scale from 0 to 10)

Q. Did your company offered a specific training such as classes for newest agents?
- Yes
- No

Q. Retrospectively, how effective would you say the training was to help you succeed in the business?
(Scale from 0 to 10)

(Answer questions if you have been in business since more than 2 years)

Q. Would you define yourself as a "successful real estate agent"?
- Yes
- No

Q. Explain why?

Professional activity

Q. Do you have a current valid real estate license?
- Yes
- No

Duration and start of activity
Q. How long have you been working as a real estate agent?
(open or following categories)
- Less than a year
- 1 to 3 years
- 4 to 8 years
- 9 to 15 years
- More than 15 years

Current level of activity

Q. Would you considered yourself working…?
Part-time
Full-time
Less than part time, I only have few transactions a year

Feelings about your work as an agent

Feelings about your clients
(Are these questions relevant in the questionnaire, test after preliminary data gathered?)

Values and Perceptions on Real Estate Business

Being a good real estate agent
Q. According to you, what are the most important qualities of a real estate agent?
(open ended)

Q. According to you, what is a good transaction?
(open ended)
(too broad?)

Q. Select the extent to which you agree with the following sentences:
(Couple of sentences about real estate business)

Ex: To be successful in real estate, it's all about selling yourself
(Strongly disagree/ disagree/ agree/ strongly agree).

Perception of Success as a real estate agent

Q. Write two or three sentences about what helped you succeeded in the business when you got started?
(open question)

Social and Cultural Capital
(NB: this is just for labeling purpose, will not be stated as such in the actual survey)

Lifestyle and Leisure
Q. In your free time, what activities do you dedicate yourself to?
OR Q. Do you have hobbies in your free time? If yes, could you list the most relevant?
(open ended)

Socialization and Community Involvement
Q. Do you donate to charities or group events?
- Yes
- No

(If yes)

Q. On the scale to 0 to 10, to which extent do you think it was profitable to your business? 0 being the least favorable and 10 the most profitable.

Q. Do you consider yourself as someone social?
- Yes
- No

Q. Do you go out with your friends often?
- Yes
- No

Q. Do you do business with friends?
- Yes
- No

Q. If yes, how much business is done with friends?
(range or exact %?)

Economic Capital
(NB: this is just for labeling purpose, will not be stated as such in the actual survey)

Income and Material wealth
Q. What was the amount of income last year exclusively coming from your real estate activity?
(open or range?)
Less than $15,000
Between $15,000 and less than $40,000
Between $40,000 and less than $80,000
Between $80,000 and less than $120,000
Above $120,000
OR

Remuneration from the work performed as an agent
Q. What was the income you received working as an agent (excluding the money you invested in marketing)
- Less than $10,000
- From $10,001 to $20,000
- From $20,0001 to $30,000
…

Q. Except your income coming from real estate, do you have any other source of income?
- Yes
- No

(If yes)
Q. How much income does it represent approximately per year?
(open or range?)

Q. Do you own real estate (one or several properties), including your own house?
Yes, one property
Yes, more than one property
No

(If yes)
Q. What is the overall value of these goods?
(open or range?)

Socio-demographics

Gender

Q. Are you…?
- male
- female
- transgender

Race
Q. Are you…?
- Non Hispanic White
- Black
- White Hispanics
- Hispanics Non-White
- Asian
- Native American

Q. How old are you?
(open or range?)
- 18-25 years old
- 26-39 years old
- 40-55 years old
- 56-65 years old
- 66-75 years old
- 76 years old and older

Family situation
Q. Do you have any children?
- Yes
- No

Q. What is your current marital situation?
- Married or living with a partner
- Single
- Divorced or separated
- Widowed

Q. How many people compose your household right now?
- Only you
- 2
- 3 or more

Q. Mother's occupation
(same occupation as chosen before)

Q. In which kind of environment did you grow up in?
Rural
Medium Size City
Big City
(Eventually, City and state (or country) you were born in)

Q. Since when do you live in Tucson?

Q. Which zip code do you live in?

Q. In a scale of 0 to 10, how much do you like Tucson? 0 meaning that you don't like Tucson at all and 10 that you absolutely love Tucson.
(scale from 0 to 10)

Appendix 2: Coding Dictionary

Code system		3889
Entry	Attraction towards independence	120
	Education	88
	Experience with the business community/ community involvement	63
	Family or Friends in RE	57
	Getting clients through social relationships and networks/ capacity to meet people	112
	Knowing people to get started in RE	104
	Previous occupation	60
	Socio-economic background	128
Training	School	78
	Companies	114
	Mentor	27
Professional relations	Relations with other agents/ collaboration & competition	22
	Hierarchy within companies (for ex. relations between brokerage managers and agents)	35
	Hierarchy between agents (profit and loss)	29
	Reputation of agents	52
Social Networking	Belonging to clubs & boards	80
	Building a rapport/ opening up people/ asking questions	84
	Cultural matching/ self-presentation (common hobby/ passion/ Social background characteristic/ from the same place)	108
	Mixing friendships and business relationships	91
	Personality and values/ likeability	182
	SOI/System of relationship management (technology)	201
	Referrals/ repeat business	125
Education of clients	Showing reality of the market/ dreams	25
	Undermining the market sphere and the economic dimensions of transactions	18
	Teaching is selling/ marketing/ create relationships	52
	Help/ Interpreting clients wants or needs/managing clients' expectations/ turning them in good clients	85
	Homeownership as morally good	89
Market	Sellers vs. buyers' market	74
	Market as external	41

	Knowing the inventory	30
Interactions with clients	Buyers vs. Sellers	23
	Clients socio-demographics	43
	client/agent relationship/ communication	19
	Market expertise/ technology devices	20
	Pricing and value of the home/ neighborhood	59
	Signing contract vs. engaging right away	17
	Developing trust & authority	29
	Timing/ making sure the deal goes through	34
	Negotiation	29
	Bad clients	10
Perception of real estate: helping, selling, money, time, profession	Charities/ give back	20
	Work Life Balance	74
	Working hard	69
	Presenting as professional	84
	Emotional labor	98
	Fear	72
	Figures of the "bad" vs. the "good" agents	127
	Relations with other agents/ collaboration & competition	42
	Reputation seller vs. Service	56
	Help vs. Money/ Financial retribution/ Pushy vs. Friendly	71
	Making money/ Money as a reward/ Prestige/ Status through money	29
	Money, savings & retirement	11
Specialization & Status of the Goods	Home as a Product	53
	Identification to Product/ House/ Taste	30
	Niche specialization	26
	Open house	41
Neighborhood	Selecting a house/ a neighborhood	47
	Opinion about area to live in/ segregation	14
	Knowledge of the neighborhood/ knowledge of the community	45
	Geo farming	38
	Tucson as a town	16
Others	Relations to the public	17
	Stories about RE brokerages	67

	Team	14
	Housing crisis	35
	Politics/ urban development	7
	Technology/ tools	29

Appendix 3: Detailed Description of Interviews and Observations

Table 9: Interviewees and Observations' Participants (N=79)

	Name	Name of the brokerage	Gender	Ethnicity	Market	Age	Married	Experience	Status	Parent in real estate	Parent entrepreneur/ self-employed/ business occupation	Previous occupation
1	Nancy	Desert Realty	M	White	High	58	Yes	18 years	Broker	No	Yes	Marketing director/ Business owner
2	Cynthia	Chic Realty	M	White	High	55	Yes	Experienced	Broker	No	Yes	Marketing director
3	Maria	Chic Realty	M	White	High	48	Yes	20 years	Broker	No	Yes	Management in Fashion Industry
4	Ross	Desert Realty	M	White	High	65	Yes	> 20 years	Broker	Yes	Yes	English teacher
5	Carrie	Pueblo Realtors	F	White	Middle/Low	62	No	2 years	Broker	No	No	Librarian
6	Bett	Pueblo Realtors	F	White	None	54	No	Experienced	Broker	No	Yes	Business owner
7	Mike	Pueblo Realtors	M	White	Middle/Low	34	No	Experienced	Sales' agent	No	No	Air traffic controller
8	Tim	Pueblo Realtors	M	White	Middle/High	43	Yes	7 years	Broker	No	Yes	Branch Manager Bank
9	James	Desert Realty	M	White	High	38	Yes	Experienced	Broker	Yes	Yes	Owner Fashion Industry/ Trader
10	Linda	Tech Real Estate	F	White	High	64	No	Experienced	Broker	Yes	Yes	Small business owner
11	Amanda	Desert Realty	F	White	Low	36	No	New	Sales' agent	No	No	Manager Hair Salon
12	Francisco	Real Prosperity	M	Hispanic	Middle/High	38	No	Experienced	Broker	No	No	Logistics/ Air force
13	Donna	Real Prosperity	F	White	Middle/Low	60	No	15 years	Broker	No	No	Unemployed/ Accounting small business
14	Rudy	Real Prosperity	M	Hispanic	Middle/Low	27	No	1 year	Sales' agent	No	No	Employee in a bank
15	Philip	Downtown Properties	M	White	Middle/High	45	Yes	Experienced	Broker	No	No	Musician/ developer
16	Eddy	Real Homes	M	Hispanic	Middle/Low	56	Yes	Experienced	Sales' agent	No	No	Spanish teacher
17	Hector	Desert Realty	M	Hispanic	Middle/Low	67	Yes	Experienced	Sales' agent	No	No	Director at Public investor protection firm
18	Jason	Real Prosperity	M	White	Middle/High	49	No	Experienced	Sales' agent	No	Yes	Sales employee
19	Lenny	Desert Realty	M	White	Middle/Low	69	No	New	Sales' agent	No	No	Pilot
20	Lara	Suburban Development	F	White	None	58	Yes	Experienced	Sales' agent	Yes	Yes	Assistant Developer
21	Patrick	Tech Real Estate	M	Hispanic	Middle/Low	62	Yes	Experienced	Broker	No	No	Store manager
22	Virna	Pueblo Realtors	F	Hispanic	Middle/Low	45	Yes	Experienced	Sales' agent	No	No	Social security employee
23	Jan & Kandy	Desert Realty	F&F	White	High	132	No	Experienced	Broker	Yes	Yes	Hotel manager
24	Florencia	Tech Real Estate	F	Hispanic	None	32	Yes	Experienced	Sales' agent	Yes	Yes	Sales employee
25	Kate	Desert Realty	F	White	Middle/High	33	Yes	New	Sales' agent	No	Yes	Leasing office employee

Table continued, page 2 of 3

26	Terri	Desert Realty	F	White	Middle/High	44	No	Experienced	Broker	No	Yes	Photographer/ Small business owner
27	Betty	Maxi Realtors	F	White	High	55	No	Experienced	Broker	No	No	Sales manager
28	Edward & Christine	Pueblo Realtors	F & M	White	Middle/High	124	Yes	8 years	Broker	Yes	Yes	Business executive & Marketing directo
29	Sonia	Desert Realty	F	White	Middle/Low	59	No	New	Sales' agent	No	Yes	Developer HOA
30	Bruce	Desert Realty	M	White	Middle/Low	40	No	New	Sales' agent	No	Yes	School director
31	Allie	Desert Realty	F	White	Middle/Low	72	Yes	New	Sales' agent	No	Yes	Unemployed
32	Angela	Desert Realty	F	Hispanic	Middle/Low	29	Yes	New	Sales' agent	No	Yes	Unemployed
33	Christopher	Desert Realty	M	Hispanic	Middle/Low	61	Yes	New	Sales' agent	No	Yes	Policeman
34	Greg	Desert Realty	M	Hispanic	None	41	Yes	8/10 years	Broker	No	Yes	Accountant
35	Steph	Desert Realty	F	White	Middle/Low	43	Yes	New	Sales' agent	Yes	Yes	English teacher
36	Jeff	Desert Realty	M	White	Middle/Low	54	Yes	New	Sales' agent	No	Yes	Policeman
37	Eric	Real Prosperity	M	White	Middle/Low	50	Yes	Experienced	Broker	No	Yes	Insurance employee
38	Matthew	Desert Realty	M	White	Middle/Low	34	No	New	Sales' agent	No	No	Bank employee
39	Dan	Desert Realty	M	White	Middle/Low	69	Yes	New	Sales' agent	Yes	Yes	Owner/ Contractor in RE
40	Alex	Desert Realty	M	White	Middle/Low	28	No	New	Sales' agent	No	Yes	Accountant
41	Nando	Maxi Realtors	M	Hispanic	Middle/Low	68	No	Experienced	Broker	No	No	Engineering
42	Rob	Desert Realty	M	White	None	63	Yes	Experienced	Broker	No	Yes	Accountant
43	Kelly	Desert Realty	F	White	High	53	No	Experienced	Broker	No	No	Unemployed
44	Thomas	Desert Realty	M	White	High	55	Yes	Experienced	Broker	No	No	Humanitarian Work
45	Sam	Desert Realty	M	White	None	62	Yes	Experienced	Broker	No	No	Director of Strategy
46	Michelle	Real Prosperity	F	Hispanic	Middle/Low	31	Yes	New	Sales' agent	No	No	Hairdresser
47	Sheila	Real Prosperity	F	White	Middle/Low	42	No	New	Sales' agent	No	No	Waitress
48	Ricky	Real Prosperity	M	Hispanic	Middle/High	31	No	Experienced	Broker	No	Yes	Soccer player
49	Spencer	Real Prosperity	M	White	Middle/Low	27	No	New	Sales' agent	Yes	Yes	Insurance employee
50	Paul	Real Prosperity	M	White	Middle/High	42	Yes	Experienced	Sales' agent	No	Yes	Cooking chef

Table continued, page 3 of 3

51	Bob	Real Prosperity	M	White	Middle/High	58	Yes	Experienced	Broker	No	Yes	Business owner
52	Heather	Real Prosperity	F	White	Middle/Low	74	Yes	New	Sales' agent	No	No	Nurse
53	Lou	Real Prosperity	F	White	Middle/Low	43	No	New	Sales' agent	No	No	Researcher
54	Tyler	Real Prosperity	M	Black	Middle/Low	36	No	New	Sales' agent	No	No	Management/ Airforce
55	Cristelle	Real Prosperity	F	White	None	35	Yes	Experienced	Sales' agent	No	No	No previous
56	John	Star Realty	M	White	None	72	Yes	Experienced	Broker	Yes	Yes	Developer
57	Brian & Cindy	Desert Realty	F & M	White & Hispanic	Middle/High	84	Yes	Experienced	Sales' agent	Yes	Yes	Bank employee & Manager medical industry
58	Brandon	Desert Realty	M	Hispanic	Middle/High	25	No	3 years	Broker	No	No	Unemployed
59	Jessica	Real Prosperity	F	White	High	57	Yes	> 15 years	Broker	No	No	Small business owner
60	Joyce	Chic Realty	F	White	Middle/Low	34	Yes	5 years	Broker	No	Yes	Esthetician
61	Elaine	Real Prosperity	F	White	High	63	Yes	12 years	Broker	Yes	Yes	Tour guide
62	Tory	Real Prosperity	F	White	Middle/High	47	Yes	8 years	Broker	No	Yes	English teacher
63	Melissa	Real Prosperity	F	White	High	44	Yes	2 years	Sales' agent	No	Yes	Veterinarian
64	Suzy	Desert Realty	F	White	High	30	No	4 years	Sales' agent	No	Yes	Store manager
65	Dana	Desert Realty	F	White	High	53	No	7 years	Broker	No	Yes	Psychologist
66	Ben	Desert Realty	M	Hispanic	Middle/High	37	Yes	4 years	Sales' agent	No	No	Spanish teacher
67	Sam	Desert Realty	M	Hispanic	Low	24	No	New	Sales' agent	No	No	Cashier
68	Alicia	Desert Realty	F	Hispanic	Middle/High	43	Yes	> 20 years	Broker	No	No	Unemployed
69	Rich	Desert Realty	M	White	Middle/Low	54	Yes	New	Sales' agent	No	Yes	Police officer
70	Karine	Real Prosperity	F	White	Middle/Low	58	Yes	3 years	Broker	No	Yes	Nurse
71	Sarah	Real Prosperity	F	White	Middle/Low	29	Yes	2 years	Broker	No	No	Secretary
72	Rebecca	Southwest Realty	F	White	Middle/High	50	No	7 years	Broker	Yes	Yes	Middle school teacher
73	Pamela	Chic Realty	F	White	High	52	Yes	> 20 years	Broker	Yes	Yes	Human Resources
74	Kara	Real Prosperity	F	White	Low	37	No	5 years	Sales' agent	Yes	No	Insurance employee
75	Casey	Desert Realty	M	White	Low	32	Yes	3 years	Sales' agent	No	No	Bank employee
76	Corey	Real Prosperity	M	White	Middle/Low	48	No	5 years	Sales' agent	No	No	Sales employee

Des agents immobiliers au travail. Intermédiation immobilière, valorisation du logement et (re)production des inégalités sur un marché résidentiel de l'Ouest étasunien

Résumé

Ce travail de thèse examine la formation et le travail des agents immobiliers sur un marché résidentiel du Sud-Ouest étasunien. Il met en lumière les activités marchandes et professionnelles qui influencent le déroulement des transactions et la valeur des biens, à partir d'une enquête ethnographique de deux années menée auprès d'agents immobiliers dans une ville d'Arizona. Je propose une entrée par les pratiques au travail et par la transaction immobilière en analysant les relations commerciales, professionnelles et marchandes entre collègues, formateurs et agents immobiliers d'une part, et entre agents immobiliers et clients d'autre part. Une centaine d'agents ont été suivis dans leurs processus de formation : durant les enseignements à l'école des agents requis pour passer l'examen de qualification pour obtenir une licence immobilière, les programmes de cours et les heures d'intégration pour nouveaux agents dans deux entreprises immobilières ainsi que des séances de tutorat actives. L'observation d'interactions entre une vingtaine d'agents et leurs clients à diverses étapes du processus d'achat et de vente : premier rendez-vous, visites de maison, inspection, *open houses* ainsi que la réalisation de 72 entretiens avec un échantillon différentié par niveau d'expérience, genre, statut des clients et prix des biens vendus, ont permis de reconstituer la trajectoire des agents, leur statut, leurs représentations au regard de leurs pratiques sur le terrain.

En partant de l'idée que la maison n'est pas un bien comme un autre et qu'il repose sur des relations matérielles et symboliques en rapport à la morale (la maison comme accès à la propriété, garantie de stabilité morale) au statut social (la maison comme style de vie) ou encore à des stratégies de reproduction (la maison comme un placement financier), il ne s'agit pas de voir le marché immobilier comme un pur réceptacle de politiques orchestrées par des acteurs publics ou des acteurs privés, mais de le comprendre dans sa relation entre des normes institutionnalisées dans un monde socio-professionnel et des configurations particulières et négociées d'une offre et d'une demande.

Cette entreprise sociologique ne peut pas faire l'économie d'une pensée en termes de valeur : *valeur d'un bien* ou d'un investissement comme celui de la maison, à la fois au niveau économique, mais aussi symbolique ; *valeur du travail* réalisé dans un marché particulier, et dans quelle mesure le travail dépend en partie des utilités financières retirées par les travailleurs marchands ; *valeur de l'espace* dans lequel le bien est inséré. Ces entreprises ou opérations de valorisation doivent être saisies dans l'ensemble des actions et des interactions ayant lieu sur le marché, et notamment la formation à des dispositions spécifiques pour faire fonctionner et transmettre le marché. Ces dispositions sont envisagées comme un ensemble de modes de pensées et d'actions qui sont d'autant plus puissantes qu'elles fonctionnement selon une forte croyance dans les principes d'organisation qu'elles sous-tendent.

Ce travail s'inscrit dans la lignée de questionnements en sociologie économique et en sociologie du travail sur les « professionnels du marché », tout en proposant une contribution originale à une sociologie des inégalités urbaines. Pour comprendre les mécanismes de marché, j'étudie les pratiques de travail des agents immobiliers et le monde socio-professionnel dans lequel ils évoluent. En saisissant les mécanismes de marché et leurs logiques sociales, j'éclaire les inégalités résidentielles.

L'agent immobilier est successivement appréhendé comme figure du marché, travailleur professionnalisé et producteur d'espace résidentiel, en tant qu'acteur ayant sa propre position sociale

(capital social, économique et culturel) et en tant qu'acteur de terrain ou travailleur (son statut et sa position dans le domaine professionnel de l'immobilier). Il est à la fois engagé individuellement par des rétributions économiques et symboliques, comme « promoteur du marché » ou comme investi d'une mission de préservation de l'ordre des différenciations sociales (mise en correspondance de clients, de biens et d'espaces). Je me focalise sur les pratiques des agents immobiliers à la fois hors et pendant l'échange (constitution de la clientèle, anticipations autour des transactions, transactions réelles). Sont observées notamment les interactions entre collègues lors de la formation professionnelle, et avec les clients lors des processus de captation et avec le marché dans l'ensemble des pratiques de valorisation de l'offre et de la demande, ainsi que la mise en adéquation entre l'espace des clients et l'espace marchand hiérarchisé socialement et spatialement.

L'étude des pratiques et des transactions se situe sur trois niveaux d'analyse :
1) la *socialisation* des agents de manière formelle et informelle par un ensemble de normes et de règles de conduite pour devenir des professionnels du marché et acquérir des dispositions permettant de représenter et de « travailler le marché ». Une attention particulière est accordée à la formation des nouvelles recrues, car en tant que stagiaires, elles apprennent (et sont tenues d'acquérir) des dispositions professionnelles et commerciales particulières ;
2) la *fabrication de la confiance* et les outils mis en place pour « capter le client » notamment dans l'utilisation à des fins marchandes par les agents de relations sociales personnalisées avec leurs clients, incluant un travail sur le genre et la classe dans l'homologie bien- client- agent ;
3) la *participation des agents au processus de création de la valeur* symbolique et marchande des biens par les préférences et les prix, la façon dont les agents les évaluent et les valorisent tout en faisant jouer coopération et compétition.

Cette recherche apporte un éclairage sur le travail effectué par les agents immobiliers dans les processus de choix résidentiels et de création de valeur sur le marché. S'appuyant sur l'école de Chicago, les travaux sur la *growth machine* et sur la ségrégation urbaine, elle montre que la valeur est « spatialisée » par un travail de différenciation sociale et d'homologie entre mode de vie et occupation de l'espace urbain. Cette « mise en valeur » est révélée durant les moments de vente et d'achat, reposant sur des mécanismes spécifiques portés par les agents immobiliers – invisibilisation des espaces, ciblage spécifique, anticipations, perceptions, régulation des prix –, qui donnent lieu à un tri urbain.

Mots-clés : agent immobilier ; marché ; valeur ; travail ; logement ; inégalités résidentielles

Working as a real estate agent. Dispositions, matching and the production of market inequalities

Abstract

This dissertation examines the work of real estate professionals (brokers and salespersons) on a local housing market and highlights how their professional activities contribute to influence transaction outcomes such as pricing, product and neighborhood preferences. Departing from the theoretical framework of market intermediaries, which posits that the exchange of goods is not based upon an automatic price matching between supply and demand, the research explores the formal and informal socialization of agents through a set of norms and rules to behave as market professionals; the use of social relationships to profit-making ends; and the participation of agents in the process of creating symbolic and market value by influencing preferences and prices, generating important implications for social and racial segregation. At the intersection of cultural, urban and economic sociology, this work sheds light on the dynamics of a market with intermediaries to refine our understanding of housing inequalities.

Conducted between 2013 and 2016 in Tucson, Arizona, the research draws on ethnographic fieldwork throughout different entries and sites of fieldwork – at the local real estate school, at two real estate companies and observing interactions between agents, buyers and sellers during various moments of the transaction – and interviews (N= 79) with real estate agents with variation on experience and status within the field, on class, gender and race were also conducted. These interviews and ethnographic observations serve to analyze the discursive and behavioral aspects of market work, how agents both talk and act on the market to create the conditions for market interactions such as selling and buying a house.

The dissertation research investigates first *the acquisition of socio-professional dispositions* and the *ethos of the real estate agent*. It objectifies the professional culture in which real estate agents are socialized and the inculcation of professional dispositions; second, it examines the *discovery of the client* or the *relational mechanisms* of *trust* and client capture. It rests on a game of anticipations which must accurately decipher the social and symbolic horizon of clients. Third, the research evidences the *matching of supply and demand* or the contribution to *clients' preferences*, *pricing* and *location of the goods*. It analyzes the professional and market practices around the encounters between agents and their clients, and the supply and demand of goods, envisions as social, physical and symbolic products. In observing working practices through multiple interactions, the research sheds light how real estate agents shape access to the territory, inequalities and reproduction mechanisms.

Keywords: real estate agent; market; value; work; housing; urban inequalities

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Des agents immobiliers au travail. Intermédiation immobilière, valorisation du logement et (re)production des inégalités sur un marché résidentiel de l'Ouest étasunien

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Ce travail de thèse examine la formation et le travail des agents immobiliers sur un marché résidentiel du Sud-Ouest étasunien. Il met en lumière les activités marchandes et professionnelles qui influencent le déroulement des transactions et la valeur des biens, à partir d'une enquête ethnographique de deux années menée auprès d'agents immobiliers dans une ville d'Arizona. Je propose une entrée par les pratiques au travail et par la transaction immobilière en analysant les relations commerciales, professionnelles et marchandes entre collègues, formateurs et agents immobiliers d'une part, et entre agents immobiliers et clients d'autre part. Une centaine d'agents ont été suivis dans leurs processus de formation : durant les enseignements à l'école des agents requis pour passer l'examen de qualification pour obtenir une licence immobilière, les programmes de cours et les heures d'intégration pour nouveaux agents dans deux entreprises immobilières ainsi que des séances de tutorat actives. L'observation d'interactions entre une vingtaine d'agents et leurs clients à diverses étapes du processus d'achat et de vente : premier rendez-vous, visites de maison, inspection, *open houses* ainsi que la réalisation de 72 entretiens avec un échantillon différentié par niveau d'expérience, genre, statut des clients et prix des biens vendus, ont permis de reconstituer la trajectoire des agents, leur statut, leurs représentations au regard de leurs pratiques sur le terrain.

En partant de l'idée que la maison n'est pas un bien comme un autre et qu'il repose sur des relations matérielles et symboliques en rapport à la morale (la maison comme accès à la propriété, garantie de stabilité morale) au statut social (la maison comme style de vie) ou encore à des stratégies de reproduction (la maison comme un placement financier), il ne s'agit pas de voir le marché immobilier comme un pur réceptacle de politiques orchestrées par des acteurs publics ou des acteurs privés, mais de le comprendre dans sa relation entre des normes institutionnalisées dans un monde socio-professionnel et des configurations particulières et négociées d'une offre et d'une demande.

Cette entreprise sociologique ne peut pas faire l'économie d'une pensée en termes de valeur : *valeur d'un bien* ou d'un investissement comme celui de la maison, à la fois au niveau économique, mais aussi symbolique ; *valeur du travail* réalisé dans un marché particulier, et

dans quelle mesure le travail dépend en partie des utilités financières retirées par les travailleurs marchands ; *valeur de l'espace* dans lequel le bien est inséré. Ces entreprises ou opérations de valorisation doivent être saisies dans l'ensemble des actions et des interactions ayant lieu sur le marché, et notamment la formation à des dispositions spécifiques pour faire fonctionner et transmettre le marché. Ces dispositions sont envisagées comme un ensemble de modes de pensées et d'actions qui sont d'autant plus puissantes qu'elles fonctionnement selon une forte croyance dans les principes d'organisation qu'elles sous-tendent.

Ce travail s'inscrit dans la lignée de questionnements en sociologie économique et en sociologie du travail sur les « professionnels du marché », tout en proposant une contribution originale à une sociologie des inégalités urbaines. Pour comprendre les mécanismes de marché, j'étudie les pratiques de travail des agents immobiliers et le monde socio-professionnel dans lequel ils évoluent. En saisissant les mécanismes de marché et leurs logiques sociales, j'éclaire les inégalités résidentielles.

L'agent immobilier est successivement appréhendé comme figure du marché, travailleur professionnalisé et producteur d'espace résidentiel, en tant qu'acteur ayant sa propre position sociale (capital social, économique et culturel) et en tant qu'acteur de terrain ou travailleur (son statut et sa position dans le domaine professionnel de l'immobilier). Il est à la fois engagé individuellement par des rétributions économiques et symboliques, comme « promoteur du marché » ou comme investi d'une mission de préservation de l'ordre des différenciations sociales (mise en correspondance de clients, de biens et d'espaces). Je me focalise sur les pratiques des agents immobiliers à la fois hors et pendant l'échange (constitution de la clientèle, anticipations autour des transactions, transactions réelles). Sont observées notamment les interactions entre collègues lors de la formation professionnelle, et avec les clients lors des processus de captation et avec le marché dans l'ensemble des pratiques de valorisation de l'offre et de la demande, ainsi que la mise en adéquation entre l'espace des clients et l'espace marchand hiérarchisé socialement et spatialement.

L'étude des pratiques et des transactions se situe sur trois niveaux d'analyse :

1) la *socialisation* des agents de manière formelle et informelle par un ensemble de normes et de règles de conduite pour devenir des professionnels du marché et acquérir des dispositions permettant de représenter et de « travailler le marché ». Une attention particulière est accordée à la formation des nouvelles recrues, car en tant que stagiaires, elles apprennent (et sont tenues d'acquérir) des dispositions professionnelles et commerciales particulières ;

2) la *fabrication de la confiance* et les outils mis en place pour « capter le client » notamment dans l'utilisation à des fins marchandes par les agents de relations sociales personnalisées avec leurs clients, incluant un travail sur le genre et la classe dans une homologie bien- client- agent ;

3) la *participation des agents au processus de création de la valeur* symbolique et marchande des biens par les préférences et les prix, la façon dont les agents les évaluent et les valorisent tout en faisant jouer coopération et compétition.

Cette recherche apporte un éclairage sur le travail effectué par les agents immobiliers dans les processus de choix résidentiels et de création de valeur sur le marché. S'appuyant sur l'école de Chicago, les travaux sur la *growth machine* et sur la ségrégation urbaine, elle montre que la valeur est « spatialisée » par un travail de différenciation sociale et d'homologie entre mode de vie et occupation de l'espace urbain. Cette « mise en valeur » est révélée durant les moments de vente et d'achat, reposant sur des mécanismes spécifiques portés par les agents immobiliers – invisibilisation des espaces, ciblage spécifique, anticipations, perceptions, régulation des prix –, qui donnent lieu à un tri urbain.

Ce résumé est construit en quatre parties qui recoupent celles de la thèse. La première partie revient sur la construction de l'objet et la méthodologie utilisée. La deuxième étudie la fabrique de l'agent immobilier, à travers la socialisation, l'acquisition des savoirs et le processus de professionnalisation. La troisième partie se focalise sur la découverte du client et les mécanismes relationnels de la confiance et de la captation. Enfin, la quatrième partie montre comment l'offre et la demande sont travaillées, avec une attention plus particulière portée sur les relations entre préférences, prix, qualités et quartiers.

Première partie : Construction de l'objet et méthodologie

Sur le marché immobilier, les acheteurs et les vendeurs n'interagissent pas directement, dans la mesure où ils sont mis en relation par des agents immobiliers, qui effectuent un travail à la fois avant et après la vente, mais aussi hors des échanges[1]. Plus de 90% des transactions immobilières résidentielles sur le marché étasunien sont effectuées par un agent, contrairement à la France et à l'Allemagne, respectivement 65 à 70% et 30% (Bonneval, 2011 ; Lefebvre, 2015)[2]. C'est d'ailleurs aux États-Unis que la profession d'agent immobilier s'est

[1] Les agents immobiliers, qui ne sont ni salariés ni complètement indépendants, dépendent le plus souvent d'un broker, une entreprise franchisée qui redistribue le paiement d'une commission, délivrée en fonction de la valeur du bien échangé (généralement 6% plus ou moins négociable) pour la mise en lien des acheteurs et des vendeurs. Si le vendeur paie la commission, l'agent du vendeur proposera un *cooperation fee* à l'agent qui lui « offrira » l'acheteur. Ainsi, cet intérêt à l'échange est mutualisé.

[2] « Aux Etats-Unis la part de marché des agents immobiliers est proche de 95%, leur rôle est prévalent. La plupart des mandats américains sont des mandats exclusifs, à titre de comparaison ils ne représentent que 10% des mandats des agents immobiliers français. La transparence autour des prix de vente et de la valeur des biens ainsi

développée de la manière la plus aboutie, que l'on considère la position des agents immobiliers sur le marché résidentiel, leur statut ou leur représentation professionnelle[3] (Spillman, 2012).

En dépit de la centralité du marché du logement dans l'économie américaine (Pattillo, 2013) et de la question relativement obscure de la valeur marchande (Aspers et Beckert, 2011 ; Cochoy et Dubuisson-Quellier, 2000 ; Karpik, 1989 ; Zwick et Cayla, 2011), il existe encore relativement peu d'études sociologiques portant sur les activités des professionnels du marché du logement et de la promotion immobilière et sur leur rôle dans la construction du marché (Smith et Munro, 2008 ; Wallace, 2008 ; Watkins, 2008). Le travail de Bourdieu (2000) sur « le marché de la maison » fait alors figure d'exception et vise à remettre en cause une vision économiciste de la création du marché, en montrant comment la rencontre d'une offre et d'une demande est orchestré par l'État, mettant en avant les pratiques des constructeurs et les goûts des acheteurs de maisons individuelles.

L'ambition de ce travail est d'abord de se réapproprier sociologiquement un objet laissé aux économistes, aux praticiens ou aux experts de l'immobilier. Si les historiens, les urbanistes ou même les sociologues s'intéressent au marché immobilier, leurs recherches se concentrent plus souvent sur des figures individuelles de la réussite immobilière et restent peu empiriques[4]. Ce travail s'inscrit donc dans une perspective particulièrement récente qui consiste à prendre « l'immobilier » comme un objet d'étude sociologique. En témoignent notamment une série de thèses de doctorat consacrées à l'étude des pratiques des agents immobiliers. Très récemment en France, deux thèses de sociologie (Bernard, 2011, 2017 ;

que l'utilisation de fichiers communs sont autant de différences qu'il convient d'avoir en tête lorsque l'on transpose une analyse du contexte américain au contexte français » (Lefebvre, 2015, p. 22).

[3]Elle est d'ailleurs souvent idéalisée par les agents immobiliers français selon les anecdotes présentées par Bonneval (2011). Voir les travaux de Hornstein (2005), House (1977) et Wharton (2004).

[4] L'une des principales critiques adressée à l'historiographie de l'immobilier est que, contrairement à celle du développement économique dominée par l'économie politique et la sociologie (Chandler, 1977 ; Dobbin et Sutton, 1998), elle s'est principalement limitée à « des récits dramatiques de succès ou d'échecs individuels » (Weiss, 1989, p. 242) parmi lesquels Robert Sobel (1989), Donald Trump (Trump et Schwartz, 2009) ou Henry Huntinghton (Friedricks, 1992), capables de « promouvoir leurs intérêts par le biais d'investissements municipaux et de décisions réglementaires » (Fleischmann et Feagin, 1987, p. 209-210). D'autres études se sont appuyées sur les « histoires officielles des entreprises ou des associations commerciales » (Weiss 1989, p. 242), telles que celles des chambres immobilières de New York et de Chicago (Eskew, 1959 ; Fish, 1979 ; National Realty Committee, 1989 ; Pegg, 1983). Elles sont relativement peu critiques quant aux récits officiels portés par les acteurs privés.

Bonneval, 2008, 2011) leur ont été consacrées. Deux doctorants américains ont également entamé des travaux empiriques sur les intermédiaires du marché résidentiel, respectivement à New York et à Houston (Besbris, 2016 ; Korver-Glenn, 2018a, 2018b)[5].

Comment les agents immobiliers - professionnels et intermédiaires entre l'offre et la demande - contribuent-ils au fonctionnement du marché résidentiel et à la valeur des biens échangés ? Dans quelle mesure la valeur des biens est-elle corrélée à la valeur de l'agent immobilier ? Peut-on dans ce sens parler d'une certaine homologie structurale ? Dans quelle mesure les agents immobiliers contribuent-ils aux inégalités résidentielles ethno-raciales et sociales ?

Ce travail de thèse vise donc à analyser la production de la valeur sur le marché. La recherche de terrain a pour objectif de comprendre les mécanismes par lesquels l'intermédiation façonne la valeur sur marché, notamment dans la lignée de récents travaux menés notamment sur la production de l'urbain et de la valeur chez les marchés immobiliers (Coulondre, 2015, 2016, 2017 ; Piganiol, 2016, 2017a, 2017b ; Duros, 2019). L'étude de la production de la valeur des biens sur le marché intègrera d'une part les acquis de sociologie générale et de la sociologie économique, et d'autre part des outils analytiques de la sociologie du travail (Anteby, Chan et DiBenigno, 2016 ; Avril, Cartier et Serre, 2010) pour proposer une contribution originale à la sociologie des marchés, des agencements marchands et de l'intermédiation marchande (Callon et Muniesa, 2003 ; Cochoy, 1998 ; Cochoy et Dubuisson-Quellier, 2000, 2013).

Le monde des agents immobiliers étasunien présente un intérêt particulier pour la recherche sociologique. Son étude permet, grâce à une entrée fine par les pratiques au travail, d'aborder des questionnements issus de la sociologie économique autour des mécanismes de production de la valeur sur un marché, en contrepied de théories postulant la présence d'acteurs rationnels ou d'automatismes liés au prix. Ce travail repose sur une enquête par

[5] Besbris (2016) montre que les professionnels du logement cherchent à provoquer des réactions émotionnelles qui influent à leur tour sur la prise de décision, tandis que Howell et Korver-Glenn (2018) et Korver-Glenn (2018) étudient le rôle central des agents dans la reproduction des inégalités raciales. Ces études démontrent que les intermédiaires de marché jouent un rôle actif dans le processus d'exécution de la transaction, principalement au niveau des clients, ce qui renforce la nécessité de poursuivre des recherches empiriques sur la question.

observations et entretiens qui vise à comprendre les dispositions, positions et les pratiques socioprofessionnelles et économiques des agents immobiliers conçus comme des professionnels du marché. Ce travail entend également contribuer à une sociologie urbaine centrée sur l'offre plutôt que sur la demande résidentielle, dans le renouvellement d'une analyse postmarxiste des rapports entre capital et espace.

Pour faire de l'agent immobilier un objet sociologique, il faut d'abord revenir sur sa position particulière dans la structure sociale, et sur la particularité des marchés du logement sur lesquels il intervient. L'importance du logement dans les trajectoires sociales et familiales en fait un objet tout à fait central pour étudier les inégalités. Je suis d'abord partie d'une théorisation sur la création de valeur dans le logement et notamment la position spécifique des agents immobiliers, pour ensuite proposer deux entrées analytiques par les interactions et les transactions sur le marché immobilier résidentiel[6].

1. Une sociologie du travail marchand, de la valeur et de la production des inégalités résidentielles

1.1. Théoriser la création de valeur dans le logement

Des « choix résidentiels » à l'intermédiation marchande

À rebours des travaux étasuniens qui considèrent, dans une approche individualiste, que les inégalités résidentielles sont le résultat de préférences individuelles en matière d'homogénéité sociale et ethnique (DiMaggio et Louch, 1998 ; Pager et Shepherd, 2008 ; Sampson, 2012 ; Sharkey, 2013)[7], je m'inscris ici dans la perspective prise par Authier, Bonvalet et Lévy (2010) qui vise à analyser l'ensemble des ressources, contraintes et

[6] Dans ce résumé, nous privilégions l'emploi du « je » et non du « nous ». C'est l'approche standard aux Etats-Unis lorsqu'il s'agit d'un document produit par un seul auteur.

[7] Basées sur des indices de ségrégation agrégées et des enquêtes portant sur les préférences, cette approche se place du côté de la « demande » en ne considérant que les résidents, propriétaires et locataires. De la même manière, les modèles économiques dits hédoniques de la détermination de la localisation des ménages ont donné lieu depuis les années 1960 à une série de travaux empiriques (Alonso, 1964 ; Brueckner, 1987 ; Diamond Jr, 1980 ; Wingo, 1961), qui prenaient pour hypothèses la satisfaction ou les préférences des ménages, comme des oppositions centres périphéries (Papageorgiou, 1976), le désir d'espace et de nature (Fujita, 1989 ; Straszheim, 1974, 1975) ou encore l'offre de services ou les bassins d'emplois (Richardson, 1977 ; Tiebout, 1956).

mécanismes sociaux à l'œuvre dans le choix d'un logement, c'est-à-dire à situer socialement les choix résidentiels :

> « Ces choix ne sont pas le simple fait du hasard ou du caprice, puisqu'ils dépendent de deux ordres de facteurs qui s'imposent aux individus : d'une part les ressources et les contraintes objectives de toute nature qui dessinent le champ de ce qui leur est possible ; d'autre part, les mécanismes sociaux qui ont façonné leurs attentes, leurs jugements, leurs attitudes, leurs habitudes, et par conséquent ce qu'ils estiment souhaitable. Socialement constitués et différenciés, ces choix ne sont donc pas « libres ». On peut même aller jusqu'à se demander s'il s'agit réellement de choix, étant donné les multiples déterminants objectifs et subjectifs qui les commandent ». (Grafmeyer, 2010, p. 35)

La variété des facteurs pouvant rentrer en jeu dans les « choix résidentiels » peut donc être saisie à travers la diversité des trajectoires familiales, sociales et professionnelles, mais aussi à travers les politiques d'encouragement à la propriété (Lambert 2005) ou les politiques de promotion immobilière ou de crédit (Bourdieu 2000). Les agents immobiliers, comme les gestionnaires d'immeubles, les organismes d'attribution des logements sociaux, sont ici appréhendés comme des « intermédiaires professionnels du tri urbain » (Grafmeyer et Authier, 2011).

En étudiant les agents immobiliers comme des « intermédiaires professionnels du tri urbain », ce travail vise à dépasser une approche de l'intermédiation comme discrimination, qui s'intéresserait uniquement aux formes de discrimination « directes » et « intentionnelles » générées par la mise en avant d'éléments tangibles de discrimination (une référence explicite à la couleur de peau par exemple) ou par la présence de pratiques visant à montrer moins de maisons à des ménages noirs qu'à des ménages blancs (Foley, 1980 ; Galster, 1990, 1992 ; Yinger, 1995, 1998). Émerge alors, en creux, la question de l'existence de pratiques d'intermédiation qui engagent d'autres mécanismes sociaux, produisant de fait des différenciations raciales, ethniques ou sociales.

Concept développé par Dubuisson-Quellier et Cochoy (2013, p. 2), le travail de marché ou d'intermédiation marchande se réfère aux activités qui « créent les conditions d'échange économique (…) façonnent la demande et les préférences des consommateurs caractéristiques de l'offre », ainsi que « l'organisation des rencontres entre offreurs et

demandeurs, producteurs et clients, produits et consommateurs ». Les intermédiaires de marché se référent ainsi aux acteurs du marché qui effectuent un travail de marché visant à organiser la rencontre entre une offre et une demande. Dans cette perspective, le marché immobilier résidentiel n'est pas le résultat d'un libre échange de biens, orchestré par les prix et les niveaux d'offre et de demande mais plutôt le fruit d'un travail d'appariement effectué par les acteurs du marché, qui façonnent activement le marché et le territoire.

Les travaux sur l'intermédiation marchande (Bessy et Chauvin, 2013; Cochoy et Dubuisson-Quellier, 2000b) permettent de formuler l'hypothèse selon laquelle les agents immobiliers ne sont pas de simples facilitateurs de transaction ou des supports d'échanges déjà fabriqués avant interaction. Ils postulent également que les intermédiaires jouent le rôle de « prescripteurs » disposant « d'un avantage en matière d'information ou d'influence » (Stovel et Shaw, 2012, p. 148) et pouvant façonner les choix des consommateurs en « établissant des systèmes de contrôle des informations et des connaissances sur la qualité, le prix, ou toute autre caractéristique liée au marché » (Karpik, 2007).

Les intermédiaires de marché peuvent aussi être appréhendés sous l'angle de leur capacité à contrôler le caractère et la circulation des informations, devenant ainsi des acteurs plus ou moins stratégiques œuvrant en réseau (Burt, 1980 ; Emirbayer et Goodwin, 1994 ; Fine et Kleinman, 1983 ; Galaskiewicz, 1979 ; Galaskiewicz et Wasserman, 1993 ; Laumann, Galaskiewicz et Marsden, 1978 ; Powell, 1990). La capacité à contrôler l'information confèrerait de ce fait un avantage comparatif et concurrentiel à « l'entrepreneur tertiaire », « une personne tirant profit de la mise en réseau des autres » (Burt, 1992, p. 34) et permettant la coordination.

La sociologie économique et les processus de qualification, d'évaluation et de valorisation

Si les travaux de la sociologie économique autour des processus de qualification, d'évaluation et de valorisation lors des échanges marchands (Bessy et Chauvin, 2013; Helgesson et Muniesa, 2013) fournissent quelques pistes pour cerner la production de la valeur marchande, l'essentiel de leur développement théorique a été axé sur les objets de l'évaluation, passant des biens et services échangés à la diversité des registres de valeurs (et leur décalage dans le

temps et le lieu) mis en œuvre par des professionnels de marché et des dispositifs (Aspers et Beckert, 2011; Callon, Méadel et Rabeharisoa, 2002)

La vente d'une maison est rarement une expérience frontale directe impliquant uniquement des clients et des produits (Canniford et Bajde, 2016) et ne peut être réduite à des stratégies publicitaires qui manipulent et agissent selon les souhaits des clients (McFall, 2009). Dans la lignée de la « nouvelle nouvelle sociologie économique », selon l'expression utilisée par McFall (2009), il s'agit d'étudier des transactions économiques non plus sous le prisme des consommateurs mais de considérer la diversité des « agencements du marché » (Callon etLaw, 2005; Callon et Muniesa, 2005), y compris les agents humains (amis, parents), les acteurs du marché (professionnels, spécialistes du marketing, courtiers, conseillers)[8] et les dispositifs sociotechniques tels que les emballages, les guides, les étiquettes de prix, les outils d'évaluation du crédit et les étalages de vente au détail qui produisent des attachements ou des systèmes de capture du consommateur (Caliskan, 2007 ; Callon et Muniesa, 2003 ; Cochoy, Trompette et Araujo, 2016 ; Trompette, 2005).

Reprenant la distinction faite par Vatin (2009), on peut mettre d'un côté le processus d'évaluation du bien, c'est-à-dire d'estimer, de juger et d'apprécier ; et de l'autre le processus de valorisation, qui consisterait à augmenter la valeur et l'estime envers le bien, entraînant une hausse de sa valeur marchande, le prix. Bien que l'évaluation soit proche d'un raisonnement statistique (« attribuer une valeur à un bien, à une personne »), la valorisation est intrinsèquement dynamique et signifie augmenter la valeur ou ajouter de la valeur.

S'il existe un travail entrepreneurial de qualification contribuant à définir la valeur marchande des biens (Coulondre, 2017), la production de valeur ne se résume pas à ce que les intermédiaires font ou produisent au travail mais bien comment ce travail est perçu, estimé par d'autres agents (Becker, 1982). Les individus peuvent aussi devenir des « noms » qui vont contribuer à la création de valeur sur un marché (Malefyt, 2014 ; Moeran, 2003). Les valeurs des individus ou « indices réputationnels », matérialisés au sein de sites et de réseaux en ligne,

[8] Des études approfondies ont été menées dans divers contextes, notamment des vendeurs d'assurance (Leidner, 1993 ; McFall, 2011), des propriétaires de galeries d'art (Velthuis, 2003), des directeurs des ressources humaines (Rivera, 2012), des courtiers en valeurs mobilières (Abolafia, 1996) et des prestataires de services de relocation (Sigaud, 2015) pour n'en nommer que quelques-uns.

sont objectivés par des « dispositifs techniques de mesure (…) compteur, votes, rangs » (Beuscart et Mellet, 2013, p. 85). Comme le montre (Dumont, 2016) au sujet des grimpeurs professionnels, ce travail réputationnel impliquent de nombreux actes concrets et notamment une mise en scène sur les réseaux sociaux (Cardon, 2013).

La littérature autour des intermédiaires et des processus de valorisation esquisse un cadre théorique prometteur, mais ne traite pas directement de la question du travail d'intermédiation dans le logement et de la production de la valeur. Pour cela, il faut comprendre la spécificité des registres de valeur engagés dans l'échange du logement comme produit marchand.

La spécificité des registres de valeur dans le logement

La pensée du marché a évolué d'une approche modélisée et largement heuristique[9] à une conception réaliste sur la construction de la valeur, des prix et de l'appariement, incluant une théorie sociale. Dans la distinction classique que Marx fait entre valeur d'échange et valeur d'usage, qu'il nomme la *nature bifide de la* marchandise, la valeur d'usage n'a d'intérêt que dans la consommation utile et pratique du bien, alors qu'on constate que cette approche trouve rapidement ces limites quand on parle de biens à forte valeur symbolique (Bourdieu, 1992 ; Garcia-Parpet, 2014). Sur les marchés des produits symboliques et coûteux, tels que les maisons, les échanges sont caractérisés par une asymétrie d'information entre vendeurs et acheteurs d'une part, et par une incertitude concernant la qualité des biens d'autre part (Akerlof, 1970 ; Callon et Muniesa, 2005), que le prix ne suffit généralement pas à éradiquer :

> « Le problème sociologiquement intéressant concerne la transformation d'une marchandise opaque et fixe dans l'espace, telle que l'immobilier, en un actif transparent que divers acheteurs et vendeurs, dans différents endroits, peuvent facilement comprendre et échanger. Déterminer la valeur d'échange d'un bien

[9] Dans ce sens, le modèle des prix hédoniques constitue une avancée mais ne répondent pas à une ambition théorique de comprendre les dynamiques sociales et spatiales de la formation des prix : « Pour les néo-classiques, alors que l'existence des sous-marchés invalident le principe d'équilibre, l'émergence à la fin des années 1960 des modèles hédoniques permet de proposer une nouvelle appréciation de la formation des prix sur le marché (…) les modèles hédoniques relèvent d'une révision partielle de la théorie néo-classique et constituent un apport certain pour la prise en compte de l'hétérogénéité de l'espace. Toutefois, l'utilisation de cette méthode renvoie à la négation de sous-marchés (…) et construit « une vision homogène de l'espace et des biens et renvoient à un fonctionnement néo-classique du marché » (Le Corre, 2019, p. 42).

> immobilier nécessite une connaissance approfondie du marché immobilier local, des systèmes de financement et des réseaux d'activité ». (Gotham, 2006, p. 235)

Le logement est aussi une « marchandise étrange », étant « construit sur un sol qui n'est pas entièrement reproductible », que « les revenus de la majeure partie de la population ne sont pas compatibles avec une rentabilisation normale de tous les capitaux engagés dans sa production et sa circulation » et que « la logique de l'usage de ce bien extrêmement durable est incompatible avec celle de sa libre circulation sur le marché » (Topalov, 1992, p. 12).

Cette difficulté à l'échange s'explique aussi par la multitude des registres de valeur engagés[10] : se cachent derrière l'achat et la vente des perspectives de profit (une revente à plus-value), des stratégies de reproduction familiale et des rétributions symboliques.

On aura bien compris que les agents immobiliers ne vendent pas des paquets de jambon comme dans l'exemple donné par Franck Cochoy (2002) dans sa sociologie du packaging. Leur travail d'intermédiation concerne en effet des biens spécifiques à forte valeur sociale et symbolique (Almeling, 2007), qui s'appuie sur un fait social central de la vie étasunienne, la maison. Les agents immobiliers ne vendent jamais un investissement purement stratégique et matériel, mais l'appariement d'un statut social et d'un bien, représentant en même temps le bien lui-même, et l'espace ou le quartier dans lequel il est inséré – autant d'éléments qui contiennent un ensemble de ressources économiques et symboliques comme l'accès à une école, les installations de quartier ou des formes de distinction liées au style de vie et au quartier (Bourdieu, 1993 ; Bourdieu et Passeron, 1990). Au cœur de stratégies de distinction et de reproduction (Bourdieu, 1979) véhiculant un sens du placement (Poupeau et François, 2008), la maison est inscrite dans un territoire ou un espace, associant sa matérialité à des formes d'attachement (Halbwachs, 1997).

[10] C'est ici ce qui manque à l'analyse du marché de la maison individuelle de Bourdieu (2000) au sein de laquelle le marché du logement est pensé comme la mise en adéquation des capacités financières des clients orchestrés par un Etat qui organise le placement d'individus dans des logements. Bourdieu laisse ainsi de côté la dimension symbolique et interactionniste du placement effectué par les intermédiaires.

D’autre part, la valeur marchande est aussi travaillée par les groupes professionnels qui font la ville (Pollard, 2007), tirant une grande partie de leurs revenus de la capacité à vendre les espaces d’une ville. La valeur de biens situés dans un espace est en étroite relation avec les opérations menées par des travailleurs sur les marchés du logement. Les promoteurs ou agents immobiliers auront donc des pratiques variées selon la localisation ou les caractéristiques du parc immobilier. Des activités économiques, qui paraissent neutres et sans fondement social et symbolique, sont en réalité des activités sociales et des entreprises de valorisation du territoire et de l’espace social vécu.

Les stratégies et les comportements des promoteurs immobiliers se font en fonction des sous-marchés sur lesquels ils agissent, correspondant chacun à « une catégorie sociale que l’on peut définir principalement par ses caractéristiques socio-professionnelles et dans certains cas par d’autres traits, comme l’âge du chef de ménage » (Topalov, 1973, p. 174). Il s’agit alors de décomposer le marché immobilier en divers ensembles, qui seront différenciés « dans la mesure où la localisation de la résidence dans l’espace urbain est un élément d’une symbolique des positions sociales, la partition socio-professionnelle du « marché immobilier » peut s’exprimer dans une partition géographique du marché de l’agglomération. Il est donc difficile de parler de marché immobilier dans son ensemble » (Topalov, 1973, p. 147).

La valeur du logement dépend ainsi de son emplacement et de l’ensemble des infrastructures publiques et privés qui y sont attachés, elle-même fonction des stratégies des travailleurs de l’immobilier et plus globalement des actions et des projets urbains portés par acteurs publics et privés. Les ménages peuvent également être concernés par des processus d’enrichissement ou d’appauvrissement liés à l’achat d’un logement. L’évolution de la valeur n’est pas forcément en lien avec l’investissement effectué et peut être déconnecté de l’amortissement. On peut anticiper sa revente ou au contraire le conserver en fonction du profit escompté. Mais pour un ménage, la revente et le déménagement n’est pas sans conséquence sociales, matérielles et symboliques (Desjeux, Monjaret et Taponier, 1998). Les processus sociaux en jeu dans l'acte d'intermédiation s’appuient et reproduisent ainsi la distribution spatiale d'individus sur un territoire donné, ce que l'on appelle plus communément les inégalités urbaines, résidentielles ou de logement.

Une sociologie des agents immobiliers

Les formes d'incertitude autour des registres de valeur rendent la mise en place d'un mécanisme de calcul ou d'une convention d'autant plus nécessaire. Dans le cas du marché résidentiel, elle est en partie médiée par la création d'une activité professionnelle qui génère une connaissance et une représentation du marché et des biens échangés, permettant une opération de traduction entre clients et marchés (Callon, 1998 ; Velthuis, 2003). La dimension fortement symbolique du marché des biens résidentiels en fait un marché peu standardisé, où les fortes incertitudes ne sont pas tant résolues par l'utilisation d'outils – des entreprises comme Zillow et Trulia en proposent-elles aussi – mais par la présence humaine et physique d'un travailleur dont les dispositions peuvent « ouvrir », transmettre et valider le marché. Les agents immobiliers, en tant qu'intermédiaires, transmettent à des consommateurs et à des clients des informations sur les propriétés, le marché et les quartiers.

Les agents immobiliers sont également au centre d'un réseau professionnel qui disposent d'outils permettant d'obtenir des informations relatives à la qualité, au prix, ou à toute autre caractéristique du marché (Hatchuel, 1995 ; Karpik, 2007 ; L'Benghozi et Paris, 2003). Les jugements du marché sont formés par diverses opérations pratiques qui visent à modeler l'offre et la demande. L'agent immobilier n'est par exemple pas passif dans le processus de fixation des prix. Des stratégies sont à l'œuvre. Pour capter « sa » clientèle, l'agent fait des investissements de qualité notamment en se spécialisant dans certaines niches de marché et dans la présentation soi. Alors que dans la théorie de l'ajustement classique entre l'offre et la demande, le prix est censé servir de *médium* de calcul, c'est ici l'agent immobilier qui par sa personne et son action place et confère la valeur des biens. Les agents peuvent, à la manière des emballages de Cochoy (1998), agir comme des dispositifs servant au calcul de la valeur des biens.

Dans l'analyse de l'intermédiation et de ses effets, il s'agit non seulement de se concentrer sur les objets et les cadres de l'évaluation, mais aussi de savoir qui est capable et qui est autorisé à « donner de la valeur aux choses » (Helgesson et Muniesa, 2013, p. 7) et à dire la valeur (Bourdieu, 1977 ; Boussard, 2013). Pour reprendre les termes de Cardon (2013), il faut mettre à jour la fabrication des « Personnes-Auteurs ». Le pouvoir de consacrer l'auteur d'une peinture est ce qui permet au domaine de maintenir l'illusion de « l'auteur » comme source

principale de valeur, alors qu'en réalité, les producteurs objectivent la valeur des peintres et de leurs peintures, instaurant un système très puissant d'oppositions et de distinctions (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu et Delsaut, 1975). Au sein de la finance, Boussard (2017) montre que la valeur économique est elle-même en partie créée par la personne qui dit la valeur. Le pouvoir de donner de la valeur et d'en tirer profit (tant en termes de capital économique que de capital symbolique) n'est donc possible que s'il existe un système de croyances, qui intègre l'économique dans le social et favorise l'action et la coordination sur le marché.

Qui est autorisé à dire la valeur, qu'est-ce qui l'autorise ? De quelle manière la valeur sur le marché est-elle produite ? Quel est la place du système professionnel dans cette production ? On décèle trois perspectives qui façonnent l'enjeu central de la thèse, la production de la valeur sur le marché :

1) Il s'agit de mettre la focale sur celui ou celle qui dit la valeur, en considérant notamment la valeur des agents comme groupe professionnel dans la lutte pour leur reconnaissance et leur légitimité (développement de savoirs experts et de système de contrôle qui les autorise à), la valeur des agents comme acteurs sociaux (avec leur engagement dans la vente, car ils doivent y croire pour capter la clientèle, inciter à la mobilité et « transmettre le marché ») et la valeur des clients, à la fois économique (crédit/ projet) mais aussi nécessité de faire de tous des propriétaires (rapport différencié au crédit) et la vente d'un espace qui varie autour d'un continuum matériel/ symbolique (euphémisation de la violence de l'assignation et du tri urbain).

2) On s'attachera aussi à celui ou celle qui reçoit ce processus de valorisation, en analysant la similitude entre agents et clients (encastrement et homologie) et en postulant que ceux qui font l'intermédiaire doivent prendre les caractéristiques de ceux qui sont offreurs et demandeurs. Le processus de valorisation concerne des biens et leurs qualités dont la valeur est construite dans l'interaction (à la fois hors et pendant l'échange).

3) Le processus de valorisation des biens, du marché et des espaces dépend d'un travail encadré par des stratégies professionnelles, qui concerne la valeur des espaces

(attribution de valeurs sociales, de réputations et de représentations à des espaces) mais aussi un ensemble de pratiques de travail transposés à ces espaces. Les stratégies dépendent des spécialisations (ou représentations des potentialités) de chaque espace, c'est pourquoi certains espaces disparaissent de la carte des possibles résidentiels.

Une analyse des inégalités urbaines doit prendre en compte les pratiques de ces intermédiaires marchands sur les marchés résidentiels. C'est par les pratiques professionnelles que cette thèse propose une entrée à la question de la production de la valeur.

1.2. Deux entrées analytiques : les pratiques de/sur/ au travail et les transactions

Pratiques, dispositions et transmission

Les sociologues de l'économie étatsuniens ne considèrent que très marginalement les pratiques au travail contrairement à leurs homologues français qui y trouvent une entrée empirique adéquate afin de « cerner le processus de valorisation dans ses modalités pratiques incarnées dans des actes de travail » en « combinant sociologie économique et sociologie du travail dans un esprit d'inter-fécondation entre ces deux traditions de recherche » (Vatin, 2013, p. 27). Cette approche permet de considérer le travail et les différents processus de qualification et d'évaluation au cœur de la construction de la valeur sur le marché. À l'aide de labels, de dispositifs, de normes et aussi des pratiques de travail d'intermédiaires, il s'agit d'éclairer le processus de création de valeur.

Derrière les intermédiaires en action sur le marché immobilier résidentiel, se donnent à voir des systèmes professionnels de contrôle. La sociologie des professions, issue en grande partie de l'héritage étasunien du fonctionnalisme et de l'interactionnisme, offre des outils spécifiques pour étudier la « professionnalisation » des agents immobiliers. Je retiens de l'approche fonctionnaliste de Carr-Saunders (1928), Merton (1960, 1958) et Parsons (1939) la catégorisation d'une profession selon divers éléments (connaissances, compétences, service à la société, comportements éthiques). Elle permet d'analyser comment le modèle du professionnel peut se révéler performatif, alors qu'il n'existe pas en soi. Les agents

immobiliers comptent une association professionnelle à vocation de lobby qui compte plus de 1,2 millions de membres, représentant ainsi la plus grande association professionnelle des États-Unis. L'essor de l'agent immobilier comme professionnel de l'immobilier et du logement s'est historiquement inspiré de travailleurs bien établis comme les avocats et les médecins. À travers la création et la consolidation de leur association professionnelle, les agents immobiliers délimitent les contours de leurs activités et leurs codes de conduite (chartre éthique), utilisant à la fois des arguments moraux et scientifiques, et un important réseau de membres. Le marché peut être étudié sous l'angle des professions, en tant que coopération et organisation collective d'un groupe de travailleurs qui cherche à adopter des caractéristiques de l'idéal-type du groupe professionnel (éthique, service, réputation, expertise).

Au contraire, chez les interactionnistes tels que (Becker, 1961 ; Bucher et Strauss, 1961 ; Freidson, 1988 ; Hughes, 1958), l'étude des professions insiste sur la diversité des pratiques et les luttes constantes concernant la reconnaissance et la légitimité du groupe professionnel. Une ethnographie des agents immobiliers permet également ce regard réaliste sur la variété de tâches et des pratiques au travail. La question du contrôle professionnel est présente dans le groupe des agents immobiliers, qui face aux avocats de l'immobilier et à d'autres professions, cherchent à perdurer l'existence du groupe, notamment par la création d'institutions pérennes de contrôle comme la National Association of Realtors®.

Non seulement les métiers doivent être étudiés de l'extérieur pour déterminer s'ils se comportent comme des professions ou s'ils mènent des luttes relationnelles ; mais aussi de l'intérieur car l'étude des métiers doit examiner les raisons, y compris les rétributions de l'engagement des travailleurs dans le monde du travail. Comme en témoignent les ethnographies classiques de la classe ouvrière comme celles de Burawoy (1979) et de Roy (Roy, 1974, 2006), les travailleurs ne font pas qu'absorber passivement les règles, ils reconfigurent les ordres de la direction en « jouant à des jeux ». Si les travailleurs suivent et même dépassent les demandes de la direction, ce n'est pas tant parce qu'ils veulent être valorisés par leurs supérieurs hiérarchiques, mais plutôt qu'ils jouent au *making out* (un jeu de « prise de risque »). Dans ce sens, le consentement n'est pas produit par un consensus partagé entre les travailleurs mais par le fait de jouer. Dans le cadre de l'atelier, le jeu implique une concurrence organisée bien qu'informelle pour obtenir des jetons. Porter son regard sur

les types de jeux à l'œuvre au sein du travail permet de comprendre la production de l'effort et du consentement.

Le processus de création de valeur peut être appréhendé comme un ensemble de dispositions en acte lors de pratiques de travail. Pour que le marché fonctionne, je pars du postulat de l'existence des dispositions et des dispositifs de construction et d'aide à la valorisation de ces dispositions. Je définis dispositions comme un ensemble de structures mentales, sociales et cognitives ou modes de pensées qui influencent l'action et le comportement des individus[11]. Les agents immobiliers s'appuient sur des expériences vécues ou sur ce que Bourdieu (1990) appelle « l'expérience acquise en pratique ». Pour qu'un intermédiaire fasse un travail marchand qui soit consistant avec l'état du marché, une formation au marché est alors nécessaire : je ne vois pas cette formation comme un pur produit de normes techniques régissant l'organisation d'un travail mais comme l'acquisition de dispositions spécifiques – via à la fois la personnalité d'un agent économique et sa capacité à saisir les actions à entreprendre. Ces dispositions qui fonctionnent comme des modes de pensées et des modes d'action sur le monde sont d'autant plus fortes qu'elles comportent une croyance forte, une forme de morale autour de l'instance sociale qu'est le marché[12].

Réactualiser la thèse de l'affinité élective wébérienne, en la mettant en parallèle avec un marché contemporain, permet de penser le rôle de la formation ou de l'acquisition de dispositions économiques orientés vers les buts du marché et la validation de ses principes de fonctionnement. Si les sociologues approchent bien la discrimination comme une forme de violence contre laquelle il faut lutter, le marché lui apparait comme une boîte noire ou toujours sous sa forme la plus neutre et la plus légitime. En réalité, les principes d'organisation

[11] Selon (Bourdieu, 1998), « avoir une disposition, c'est être enclin à agir de telle ou telle manière dans telles ou telles circonstances ». L'habitus défini par Pierre Bourdieu est alors similaire à un système de dispositions qui à la fois état et résultat : « il exprime d'abord le *résultat d'une action organisatrice* présentant alors un sens très voisin de mots tels que structure ; il désigne par ailleurs une *manière d'être*, un *état habituel* (en particulier du corps) et, en particulier, une *prédisposition*, une *tendance*, une *propension* ou une *inclination* » (Bourdieu, 1972). Ces dispositions sont héritées d'un habitus, produit d'une forme d'intériorisation de structures sociales, et permettent d'agir et de structurer l'action : « il est propension à agir et principe organisateur des pratiques, extériorisation de l'intériorité et une structure structurante ». Ces dispositions ne prédisposent pas à une action déterminée, elles voient le jour en situation : « elles ne se révèlent et ne s'accomplissent que dans des circonstances appropriées et dans la relation avec une situation » (Bourdieu, 1972).

[12] On voit ici la similitude de la thèse défendue par (Weber, 2003) dans *L'Ethique protestante et l'esprit du capitalisme*, qui pense la puissance du développement du capitalisme par la croyance religieuse sur le travail et la prédestination.

du marché, via l'acquisition de dispositions et leurs mises à dispositions, renvoient à un rôle d'organisation des hommes dans leur espace à la fois matériel, mental et social.

Comme sur le marché de la maison individuelle (Bourdieu, 2000), les vendeurs élaborent une stratégie autour des dispositions des clients, afin d' « orienter différents types de victimes vers leur chambre de capture respective » (Bourdieu, 2014, p. 38). Le vendeur n'est efficace que s'il flatte des dispositions acquises par le passé, soumettant en réalité le consommateur à son propre objectif sous l'apparence de celui du consommateur, organisant de fait un système de désinvestissement du client. Ce qui est en jeu sur le marché immobilier résidentiel, c'est l'acceptation de l'existence de hiérarchies sociales sur le marché, alors que les pratiques commerciales typiques et l'idéologie de l'accession à la propriété font croire aux ménages qu'ils peuvent acquérir la « maison de leurs rêves ». Ce travail n'est pas assimilé à de pures stratégies marketing, mais plutôt à une forme nécessaire de (ré)intégration du marché avec le social. Dans cette perspective, les agents immobiliers réalisent le social au sein de l'ordre économique, car ils ne gèrent ni ne manipulent pas que des émotions (Besbris 2016) mais un sens spécifique de l'ordre et un sentiment d'appartenance, en réaffirmant l'importance des hiérarchies sociales sur le marché.

L'analyse sociologique envisage donc « une rationalité élargie, dans laquelle le calcul mêle logique, émotions et intuitions à des évaluations morales, sociales et normatives » (Godechot, 2016, p. 412). Prônant une étude des activités financières à travers une perspective dispositionelle, (Godechot, 2000, 2001) s'appuie sur les positions divergentes des acteurs, sur le contexte social, culturel et éducatif représenté sous la forme d'habitus et sur les positions des acteurs sur le terrain pour analyser le raisonnement ordinaire des financiers.

De la même manière, le travail des agents immobiliers ne saurait être analysé comme une entreprise purement technique de mise en relation automatique d'une offre et d'une demande, mais comme un *travail marchand* de *mise en adéquation* par l'utilisation de *dispositions* spécifiques et de *mises à dispositions* d'une offre et d'une demande, socialement et symboliquement situées.

J'étudie parallèlement la socialisation institutionnelle (« comment l'institution produit ses agents (formation, récompenses…) », les positions des agents (comment « ses agents

l'habitent au premier degré ») et les croyances (comment ses agents l'habitent au « deuxième degré »). Pour qu'un agent soit « bon » et « performant », il ne suffit pas d '« appartenir », il faut adopter des manières adaptées de faire et de penser » (Proteau, 2015, p. 290). J'arrive ainsi à la construction de l'éthique du travailleur, à l'intériorisation des pratiques, aux représentations et aux croyances spécifiques relatives à une certaine position dans l'espace professionnel. C'est cette dimension manquante dans l'analyse de Bourdieu sur le marché de la maison individuelle[13] que ce travail se charge de mener à bien. J'utilise en partie ce qu'il développe dans l'économie des biens symboliques (Bourdieu, 1977), qui semble plus à propos pour notre cas d'étude.

Une entrée par les pratiques doit aussi être complétée par une entrée par la transaction, dans l'ensemble des dimensions que celle-ci recoupent, pouvant inclure les règles à l'œuvre dans l'anticipation, le calcul et les actions entreprises au travail, en fonction notamment des rétributions espérées par l'agent immobilier. C'est pourquoi je propose de saisir les multiples dimensions de ce travail, à la fois prescrites et réelles, impliquant des relations entre agents et agents, agents et clients, agents et marché et ce dans le cadre d'une transaction marchande.

Une analyse de la transaction et de ses règles : anticiper et calculer en interaction

> Au Salon de la maison individuelle à Paris, un acheteur arrive, un peu embarrassé, accompagné de sa femme, de ses deux gosses ; il demande une maison. On s'adresse à lui gentiment parce qu'il a une femme et deux gosses, c'est un client sérieux (…) Le vendeur dit au couple : « Venez-vous asseoir » (…) La communication, la structure de l'échange est très standardisée, très stéréotypée ; elle prend toujours la forme suivante : pendant quelques minutes, l'acheteur, faisant feu de tout bois de ce que lui ont dit les copains ou sa belle-mère en lui prêtant de l'argent, pose quelques questions au vendeur pour essayer de le mettre en concurrence avec d'autres, pour essayer d'avoir des informations et voir s'il n'a pas de vices cachés. La situation se retourne plus ou moins vite ; parfois, à la troisième question, l'acheteur est au tapis. Le vendeur prend la parole et de questionné devient questionneur ; il fait passer un examen en règle sur les capacités de paiement de l'acheteur potentiel. Evidemment, l'acheteur potentiel devient l'objet d'une sorte d'évaluation sociale ; c'est son identité en tant que client de la banque qui est en jeu ». (Bourdieu et al., 2012, p. 32)

[13] Il considère le marché comme le fruit des politiques de logement menées par l'Etat : « Le marché du logement est contrôlé, directement et indirectement par les pouvoirs publics. L'Etat en fixe les règles de fonctionnement à travers toute une réglementation spécifique qui vient s'ajouter à l'infrastructure juridique (droit de propriété, droit commercial, droit du travail, droit des contrats etc.) et à la réglementation générale (blocage ou contrôle des prix, encadrement du crédit, etc.) Pour comprendre la logique de ce marché bureaucratiquement construit et contrôlé, il faut donc décrire la genèse des règles et des règlements qui en définissent le fonctionnement et faire l'histoire sociale du champ social qui est responsable de ces décisions » (Bourdieu et al., 1990, p. 65).

En décrivant l'interaction entre les acheteurs de maison et un vendeur (ici, notre agent immobilier), Bourdieu fait valoir un argument épistémologique valable. En examinant les interactions, les sociologues doivent rompre avec la vérité de l'acteur et le parti pris empiriste consistant à trouver une analyse sociologique dans des interactions simplement enregistrées et observées. C'est pourquoi dans son analyse structurelle du marché français des maisons individuelles, l'enjeu des interactions est essentiellement ancré dans des règles institutionnelles définies par l'État, dans lesquelles les vendeurs, au lieu de vendre des maisons, vendent du crédit pour acheter des maisons, et procèdent à l'évaluation sociale des clients. Dans l'interprétation de l'interaction donnée ci-dessus, il semblerait donc presque que Bourdieu ait écarté les avantages de regarder au niveau microsociologique pour comprendre le déroulement des transactions marchandes. En portant notre regard sur le déroulement des transactions, il ne s'agit pas de réduire l'analyse à une dimension microsociologique, mais plutôt d'informer les dimensions plus structurelles du fonctionnement du marché immobilier résidentiel.

Une transaction de marché est toujours « un acte social dans la mesure où les partenaires potentiels sont guidés dans leurs offres par l'action potentielle d'un groupe indéterminé de concurrents réels ou imaginaires plutôt que par leurs simples actions » (Weber, 1978 : 636). La sociologie économique a peu fait usage de l'approche interactionniste alors que les échanges marchands sont constitués d'interactions réelles et anticipées entre plusieurs acteurs et objets. La transaction immobilière est envisagée comme une série d'anticipations et de conventions face à une offre et une demande partiellement adaptables aux comportements des acheteurs et des vendeurs, notamment le nombre potentiel d'acheteurs et de vendeurs dans un sous marché, les représentations qu'ils se font du marché pour agir, et les actions potentielles des acheteurs et des vendeurs sur le marché.

Je propose ici une perspective complémentaire en utilisant les apports de l'économie des conventions, de Goffman et des interactionnistes. D'un côté, l'économie des conventions (Dupuy, Eymard-Duvernay, Favereau, Orléan, Salais et Thévenot) qui dès les années 1980, s'attache à comprendre le comportement des agents et les règles les régissant en situation d'incertitude, en mettant en cause l'idée de rationalité des agents : « sans le secours d'objets

collectifs irréductibles à la rationalité individuelle, les interactions entre acteurs individuels rationnels seraient incapables de produire à elles seules une réalité sociale déterminée » (Dupuy, 1989 ; Favereau et Lazega, 2002 ; Orléan, 1994).

Une convention se présente comme la réponse à un problème de coordination sur le marché, une règle de comportement qui émane des interactions sociales, tout en se présentant aux acteurs sous une forme objectivée, réifiée, naturalisée, dont la dynamique leur échappe en partie[14]. L'économie des conventions entretient un dialogue soutenu avec la sociologie en ce qu'elle cherche à saisir les mécanismes sociaux permettant l'échange marchand, notamment dans la dimension normative des règles : « L'échange économique n'est possible que dans la mesure où il préexiste une entente (une « convention ») sur la « qualité » des biens échangés et sur les instruments cognitifs qui permettent de l'appréhender » (Vatin, 2013, p. 20). L'objectif de l'économie des conventions est « de concilier une certaine autonomie du social, allant jusqu'à reconnaître ses lois propres, avec l'idée que ce sont toujours des individus, et non des entités supra-individuelles, qui agissent et qui portent des intentions collectives (individuelles et/ou collectives) » (Bessy et Favereau, 2003, p. 121). L'existence d'un marché pur (rencontre anonyme d'une offre et d'une demande) repose alors sur la mise en place d'une institution marchande, avec des dispositifs techniques précis, comme le montre l'organisation du « cadran » décrite par M-F (Garcia-Parpet, 1986).

En complément des conventions, la sociologie goffmanienne permet d'étudier les intermédiaires marchands comme les agents immobiliers dans la place et des rôles qu'ils occupent, interagissant avec d'autres agents immobiliers, de potentiels acheteurs et vendeurs, des marchés, des biens et des territoires[15]. Chaque acheteur et chaque vendeur est donc amené à percevoir une certaine réalité du marché, à la fois en temps réel et de manière

[14] L'exemple du téléphone de David Lewis, philosophe américain, en saisit l'essence : « Lorsque deux personnes font face à une coupure de téléphone, la convention veut que la personne qui est à l'origine de l'appel prenne l'initiative de recontacter son interlocuteur. Cette convention donne un rôle précis aux deux interlocuteurs et évite que les deux individus téléphonent en même temps. Une convention différente qui aurait débouché sur le même résultat aurait pu émerger : c'est l'individu contacté qui doit prendre l'initiative du rappel. Cette convention ne fait l'objet d'aucune loi, ni d'aucune discussion publique, mais est le résultat d'interaction sociale et s'impose aux acteurs qui gardent toujours la capacité de contester cette règle de comportement et faire émerger une nouvelle convention » (cité par Vatin, 2013, p. 20)

[15] En plus des relations professionnelles symétriques entre collègues, les agents immobiliers entretiennent aussi des relations de subordination d'une part avec des chefs d'équipes, des *brokers*, ou des managers ainsi que des relations commerciales avec des clients.

anticipée : l'agent immobilier fait des recommandations, élaborées sur sa propre perception du marché, et basées sur les anticipations d'actions entre acheteurs et vendeurs, et l'évolution du marché. Les agents économiques guidés par des agents immobiliers apprennent à anticiper et à planifier leurs actions en fonction de ce que pourraient faire les autres (Beunza et Stark, 2004 ; Godechot, 2001), qui peuvent être liées à des formes d'« attentes perceptives » (Goffman, 1956) ou d'« attentes coordonnées » (Carpenter, 2003). Chaque acheteur et vendeur est ainsi formé à s'adapter et à anticiper les positions de l'autre partie, d'où les dimensions hautement interactionnelles des transactions, impliquant information, communication et négociation.

La recherche d'informations est donc réalisée sur des bases pratiques : elle vise à définir la situation, car les participants anticiperont ce que leurs partenaires attendent d'eux et, par conséquent, ce qu'ils peuvent attendre d'eux. Les anticipations et les prévisions jouent donc un rôle fondamental dans la construction de l'ordre social, car chaque participant doit ainsi « donner, intentionnellement ou non, une expression de lui-même, et les autres doivent retrouver une certaine impression » (Goffman, 1959, p. 11).

Contrôler l'interaction devient central dans les transactions marchandes autour du logement car il existe un risque que les transactions puissent échouer à tout moment. Parce que les agents immobiliers agissent souvent en tant que représentants directs de leurs clients, ils constituent le visage personnel de la transaction (processus de personnification ou d'incarnation) et doivent effectuer un travail spécifique pour que les clients se sentent à l'aise avec eux.

Il ne s'agit pas de résumer l'organisation de la transaction marchande à une somme d'interactions, mais plutôt de saisir par l'interaction l'essence du social et de ses structures. Si les interactionnistes ont souvent été considérés comme des théoriciens de l'ordre micro-sociologique, les situations analysées à ce niveau sont souvent l'expression structurelle et macrosociologique de la vie sociale (Goffman, 1967 ; Martin, 1978 ; Roy, 1974). En somme, et comme le propose (Castel, 1989), il faut avoir une lecture durkheimienne de Goffman, en mettant en lien l'ordre social et l'ordre des interactions, en voyant dans des « configurations ponctuelles » observées minutieusement dans l'ordre de l'interaction une expression de

l'ordre macro[16]. En envisageant le monde social comme une dramaturgie dans laquelle chacun joue son propre rôle, les individus acquièrent un sens du jeu et de l'ordre social en fonction de leur position, basé sur des anticipations perceptives et construit autour de multiples situations d'interactions répétées.

L'enjeu est donc de capturer le social dans les « ratés » ou les « fissures » de l'interaction (par exemple, des attentes qui ne sont pas satisfaites), car les exemptions apparentes aux normes servent de fait à les (ré)affirmer. Par exemple, pour éviter le refus du vendeur, l'acheteur prendra un soin particulier à ne pas faire une offre qui descende au-dessous d'un certain prix, en partie car le prix envoie un signal et pourrait faire perdre la face aux acheteurs, l'action témoignant d'un manque de sérieux ou d'une offense. Ce système d'attentes anticipées n'est pas nécessairement mis en œuvre directement en interaction, mais rend l'interaction présente pendant que les individus prennent des décisions, car leurs actions économiques envoient des signaux.

Lors d'une transaction immobilière, une anticipation de classe est aussi à l'œuvre. Les transactions immobilières observées montrent la mise en scène ritualisée du comportement et des valeurs de la classe moyenne, semblable à ce que décrit Goffman (1959). Pour transmettre la valeur des produits dans la moitié moyenne et haute du marché, les agents dépeignent une image idéalisée de la maison, composée d'images idéalisés, stéréotypées, simplifiées et normatives, afin de vendre aux acheteurs et aux vendeurs intermédiaires des dispositions en correspondance avec leur position sociale. L'émulation et l'anticipation des goûts fonctionnent donc comme un mécanisme assertif et rassurant pour produire un marqueur de classe, car les biens sont la matérialité dans laquelle le statut est intégré. Le symbolique est incorporé dans des produits tels que les maisons, qui révèlent la centralité du symbolique dans le matériel et dans le physique : « le goût classe et classe celui qui classe » (Bourdieu, 1979). Le prix est lié au fait qu'il existe une homologie entre ceux qui achètent, ceux qui vendent et les agents immobiliers.

[16] A propos de Goffman, (Castel, 1989, p. 32) écrit : « C'est la dimension macro-sociale de ses analyses qui, sinon donne sens à son œuvre, du moins est la condition de possibilité pour qu'il y ait ordre de l'interaction, et pas seulement des groupements aléatoires de configurations ponctuelles ».

2. Une immersion dans le monde des agents immobiliers

La méthodologie utilisée est principalement celle d'une enquête de terrain ethnographique menée entre 2014 et 2017. Des entretiens ont été conduit avec des agents immobiliers et des observations participantes ont été effectués dans les formations (aux deux écoles de l'immobilier et dans deux entreprises immobilières) mais aussi pendant les diverses étapes d'interaction entre les agents et leurs clients[17]. Ont aussi été collectés des documents professionnels incluant la formation des agents immobiliers (livres sur comment devenir un agent, la charte éthique et des documents professionnels, etc.).

L'enquête a été menée dans l'aire métropolitaine de Tucson, qui compte plus d'1 million d'habitants. Elle est la seconde ville de l'Arizona après Phoenix en termes d'habitants[18]. Son marché immobilier est représentatif des villes moyennes du pays. Le prix moyen d'une maison et le taux de propriétaires est similaire aux États-Unis dans son ensemble (respectivement 168,000 dollars contre 177,000 dollars et 63% contre 65%) selon le bureau étasunien du recensement (données 2009-2013). Le marché résidentiel de Tucson peut donc à certains égards révéler ce qui se produit dans une majorité des villes américaines, au contraire des marchés de New York (Besbris 2016) et de Houston (Korver-Glenn, 2018b, 2018b).

Les agents immobiliers sont le plus souvent des Realtors®, un nom accordé aux membres de la National Association of Realtors® (NAR), mais aussi représenté au niveau local par la Tucson Association of Realtors® (TAR®). La NAR® est la plus grande association aux États-Unis, avec 1,368,530 membres (chiffre de novembre 2018) et 1 165 associations locales (chiffres du rapport statistique mensuel des membres, mai 2018). Elle s'est étendue au cours du siècle dernier, de 1 646 associations membres à sa fondation en 1908, à un record de 52 921 en 2017.

Créée en 1921, la TAR®, qui est une association locale des membres de la NAR®, à laquelle la

[17] Lors des citations présentes dans le texte, je n'indique pas la date précise des entretiens et des notes de terrain dans le corps du texte, en partie car ce n'est pas une procédure standard en sociologie américaine.
[18] La Tucson MSA (*Metropolitan Statistical Area*) compte 1,01 millions habitants tandis que la Phoenix MSA compte 4,73 millions d'habitats d'après les recensements de 2017, respectivement 58 et 11e plus grandes métropoles des Etats-Unis.

majorité des agents est affiliée, compte environ 5 100 membres en 2018. Sur le site internet de l'association, Tucson, souvent nommé le *Old Pueblo*, est présenté comme l'« une des villes les plus uniques et belles au monde » qui bénéficie d'une « culture vibrante, d'un climat exceptionnel et d'une nature spectaculaire » permettant « d'attirer de nouveaux résidents et des visiteurs de manière croissante ». Le marché immobilier de Tucson, comme beaucoup d'autres marchés locaux, a souffert de la crise de 2008. En même temps, depuis la fin de 2011, le marché a graduellement repris les niveaux d'activité avant la crise, avec un volume d'achat et de vente parfois supérieur dans certains sous-marchés.

Les entreprises immobilières étasuniennes opèrent comme des franchises qui recrutent des agents immobiliers. Si les agents immobiliers sont traditionnellement classés comme des indépendants, leur statut est juridiquement flou. La relation contractuelle indépendante reconnait le travailleur comme libre d'un contrôle salarial par une quelconque entité. Cependant, les lois du ministère du travail et les lois de l'immobilier entrent en contradiction sur ce point. Si les lois du ministère du travail requiert aux entreprises immobiliers qu'elles traitent les agents immobiliers comme des indépendants, les lois du ministère de l'immobilier exigent une supervision légale[19]. Les entreprises référentes perçoivent une commission à hauteur de 3% du prix total de la transaction immobilière et redistribue ensuite aux agents immobiliers sous le forme d'un pourcentage ou d'une somme fixe incluant des frais relatifs aux outils marketing, aux locaux de l'entreprise en autres.

Sur le marché résidentiel étasunien, les agents immobiliers œuvrent à l'appariement entre une offre (qui est défini par l'inventaire de biens disponibles sur un marché, et portée par des vendeurs) et une demande (entendue comme l'ensemble des capacités d'achat combiné à des décisions d'achat, et portée par des demandeurs). Au niveau de la structure de leurs interactions au travail, les agents immobiliers doivent en partie interagir avec des collègues, notamment les agents des vendeurs s'ils sont agents des acheteurs et vice-versa. Le recrutement de clients, ainsi que la fidélisation sont présentés comme le cœur de la réussite de l'agent immobilier[20]. Les agents enquêtés sont également issus de différentes fractions de

[19] Voir https://www.nar.realtor/law-and-ethics/independent-contractor-status-in-real-estate-2015-white-paper

[20] Il faut aussi distinguer la différence de nature entre le travail d'un agent immobilier américain et d'un français. En effet, l'agent immobilier américain a accès à tous les biens de l'inventaire du marché local, tandis que l'agent immobilier français est souvent mandaté sur un bien par une agence. De ce fait, la nature de son activité et ses

classes : que ce soit des franges stabilisées des classes populaires, des classes moyennes ou des classes supérieures[21].

Si dans son histoire, le métier d'agent est associé à des dispositions professionnelles relevant de la classe moyenne, les enquêtés que j'ai suivi sont pour certains d'entre eux issus des franges plutôt stables des milieux populaires ou « groupes subalternes non démunis ». On peut les définir relationnellement dans l'espace des classes sociales : « au-dessus des prolétaires sans en être vraiment coupés » et « sans être protégés contre le risque de chute sociale » (Schwartz 2011a).

Les agents immobiliers français étudiés par Bernard (2016, 2017) sont également pour certains issus des classes populaires, mais ont entretenu des relations avec des milieux privilégiés notamment lors d'emplois de serveurs par exemple. Ces « interactions » peuvent alors motiver des possibilités professionnelles sans pour autant remettre en question les

pratiques en matière de démarchage auront tendance à être réparties différemment (cf. Bonneval 2011, et Bernard 2017).

[21] Dans la sociologie étasunienne, les mesures de la classe ne s'appuient pas sur une catégorisation comme les CSP à la française. On y retrouve souvent l'opposition entre la classe travailleuse ou laborieuse, les pauvres d'un côté et la classe moyenne supérieure de l'autre. Dans *Unequal childhoods*, Lareau (2003) distingue par exemple les pauvres et la *working class* d'un côté, et la *middle class* de l'autre pour montrer qu'il y existe deux styles de parents bien distincts. La classification américaine généralement accepté dans les analyses quantitatives notamment utilisent le SES (*socio-economic status*), mesuré principalement par le revenu et le niveau d'éducation (très rarement le type d'emploi) et pouvant prendre trois modalités : faible, moyen, élevé. Le SES ayant moins une vocation réaliste qu'une mesure simple permettant de comparer les inégalités entre différents groupes sociaux. Les classifications plus qualitatives établissent une distinction entre la *working class*, des travailleurs *blue* et *pink collar* avec peu de sécurité de l'emploi et peu d'autonomie, des semi-professionnels, *white collar*, qu'elle associe à la classe *lower middle*. Viennent ensuite les *poor* ou les *lower* qui vivent des aides de l'Etat, vivent en dessous des niveaux de pauvreté ou qui participent peu au marché du travail. La distinction entre *lower middle* et *working*, pose d'ailleurs problème alors que les sociologues peuvent désigner par ces deux termes des groupes sociaux proches. Ils divergent sur l'opposition entre « classes moyennes » et « classes ouvrières » ou « travailleuses ». Par exemple, dans *White Working Class,* Williams (2017) décrit cette classe de travailleurs comme séparée des pauvres, faisaient partie de la classe moyenne en disparation, mais séparée de la frange haute de la classe moyenne (*upper middle class*) par leurs pratiques et leurs aspirations. De même, dans *La Dignité des* travailleurs, Lamont (2002) étudie des « hommes de la classe ouvrière, noirs et blancs, qui ont des emplois stables » qu'elle nomme « la « classe moyenne inférieure », comme ils s'identifient eux-mêmes » (p. 15). Définies comme en opposition aux pauvres et aux membres des professions libérales, ils sont employés de banques, ouvriers d'usine, peintres, chauffeurs de camions, électriciens, postiers ou employés de bureau. Dans les enquêtes pourtant, et ce dès le milieu du siècle, les frontières de la catégorie de classe moyenne était si vaste que les ¾ des américains s'y associait. En 2017, lors des sondages Gallup annuels, qui demandent d'ailleurs à des américains de s'associer subjectivement à une des cinq classes sociales, seulement 2% répondent appartenir à la *upper,* 18% à la *upper-middle,* 44% à la *middle,* 28% à la *working* et 8% à la *lower*. Ces chiffres varient aussi fortement en fonction de l'âge, qui va en décroissant par tranches d'âge, avec 49% des 18-29 ans contre seulement 19% des 65 ans et plus qui se sentent appartenir aux classes *working* et *lower*.

origines populaires des transfuges, qui occupent par leur position dans la hiérarchie du métier et dans leurs conditions de travail un statut différencié au sein des fractions moyennes et supérieures des classes moyennes. Se nouent alors dans un milieu hiérarchisé des rapports à la fois de genre et de classes.

Si la dénomination agent immobilier semble renvoyer à des tâches, des conditions d'exercice et des chances de vie similaires, l'agent immobilier peut aussi bien être exécutant que manager, vendeur ou courtier (*broker*). Les vendeurs, population principalement ciblée dans la présente recherche, travaillent en permanence pour un *designated broker*[22], le responsable légal et juridique de l'agent immobilier et son employeur, qui se présente le plus souvent sous la forme d'une entreprise franchisée. Le statut de *broker* est statutairement plus valorisé que celui d'agent, et atteste d'une formation en immobilier plus poussée. il faut détenir une licence de simple vendeur pendant 5 ans pour pouvoir prétendre à une licence de *broker*. La plupart du temps, les *brokers* agissent pourtant comme des vendeurs sans aucune responsabilité légale, même si souvent ils peuvent aussi être à la tête d'équipes.

Il existe également une répartition des tâches différenciés entre les vendeurs : la majorité font un travail interactionnel en face à face avec des clients mais certains se contentent de faire un travail administratif sans être en contact avec le client. Comme le *designated broker* opère généralement pour le compte d'une entreprise, les agents immobiliers seront aussi, à cause de leur affiliation, soumis à des relations avec des managers et des administratifs.

Les agents immobiliers entretiennent des relations professionnelles avec leurs pairs et avec leurs supérieurs hiérarchiques. Les relations entre collègues sont faites de collaboration et de compétition, moments parfois tendus et conflictuels, selon la situation d'interaction dans laquelle on se trouve. En effet, lorsque chaque agent est censé représenter son client, il peut

[22] Le courtier référent possède une entreprise immobilière ou a été embauché pour en superviser une. Ils participent aux opérations de gestion de l'entreprise, telles que l'embauche de nouveaux agents, l'établissement de politiques et de procédures pour l'entreprise et la définition des objectifs de l'entreprise. Ils aident à développer des outils de formation (vente, négociation, droit) utilisés pour enseigner aux nouveaux agents et courtiers. En tant que superviseur d'agents et de courtiers, le courtier référant doit bien connaître les lois de l'État régissant l'achat, la vente et la location de biens immobiliers. Selon la taille d'une entreprise, certains courtiers référents gèrent directement des agents vendeurs tandis que d'autres embauchent des agents managers pour effectuer la tâche. Dans ce travail, quand je me réfère au *broker* ou courtier, ce n'est que pour me référer à un agent immobilier vendeur qui est licencié auprès de l'Etat d'Arizona en tant que tel. Légalement, cela lui permettra néanmoins de créer sa propre entreprise s'il le désire.

en venir à agir de manière considérée comme « peu éthique » par certains. S'il existe une coopération qui s'établit, alors des normes d'interaction peuvent éviter de mettre la relation sur un plan de séduction, et rentrer dans une forme d'égalité. S'il existe un conflit au contraire, il se peut que des arguments genrés soient utilisés dans la dénonciation ou le dénigrement de l'autre agent immobilier.

Quand on se place au même niveau hiérarchique, la difficulté des relations entre collègues tient d'un double registre interactionnel qui s'engage : d'un côté, les femmes et les hommes doivent se comporter de la même manière face à des normes professionnelles qui s'appliquent à tous (par exemple, se traiter en tant qu'égaux comme collègues) ; et de l'autre, ils sont également gouvernés par des règles qui guident les relations hommes-femmes, qui les différencient. En plus des relations professionnelles symétriques entre collègues, les agents immobiliers entretiennent aussi des relations de subordination avec des chefs d'équipes, des *brokers*, ou des managers ainsi que des relations commerciales avec des clients.

Les relations de subordination peuvent avoir lieu dans plusieurs cadres : des interactions entre des vendeurs et leur(s) supérieur(s) hiérarchique(s), notamment avec leur chef d'équipe, ou avec la direction de l'entreprise immobilière. Les relations entre les vendeurs et leurs supérieurs hiérarchiques sont plutôt classiques en ce qu'elles entérinent les normes de comportement d'obéissance hiérarchique, même si ls entreprises immobilières étudiées se présentent comme des structures familiales, et qu'elles font tout pour cacher la dimension verticale des rapports à leurs employés, dans l'esprit du *multi-level marketing*[23] mis en place par les sociétés de vente à domicile.

2.1. Questions de recherche

Mon étude vise à comprendre le rôle des agents immobiliers dans la construction d'un espace résidentiel et la formation d'inégalités résidentielles. En d'autres termes, la principale

[23] Le *multi-level marketing* ou vente pyramidale est une stratégie marketing déployée par une entreprise pour la vente de produits ou de services. Les entreprises utilisant ce modèle tirent leurs revenus du travail de personnes non salariées (membres) qui vendent leurs produits ou services. Les revenus de ces membres proviennent alors d'un système de compensation sous forme pyramidale, qui inclut une commission sur les ventes directes du membre mais aussi sur les ventes des membres qu'il aura recruté (Fitzpatrick et Reynolds, 1997 ; Groß, 2008).

question à laquelle je cherche à répondre est la suivante : comment les agents immobiliers - en tant que professionnels et intermédiaires entre l'offre et la demande - contribuent-ils à créer le marché du logement et la valeur des biens échangés, et dans quelle mesure leur activité structure-t-elle les inégalités ? Comment comprendre plus précisément les conditions dans lesquelles un marché est créé, maintenu, structuré ? Comment la valeur du bien immobilier est-elle produite par les professionnels de l'immobilier ? Comment le produit de logement plutôt obscur devient-il « transparent » pour les acheteurs et les vendeurs ? Je réponds à cette question en trois points :

1) **Devenir un professionnel de l'immobilier**

Il s'agit d'abord d'étudier la fabrique de l'agent immobilier dans sa formation et son identité professionnelle, à travers les normes et les règles associées à la profession. Dans la première partie, j'étudie l'acquisition d'un statut professionnel à travers la connaissance, la formation et les éléments organisationnels pour mieux comprendre comment les agents opèrent dans le marché, comment ils acquièrent des règles et des normes durant leur formation professionnelle, et les trajectoires professionnelles/ carrières qui influencent leurs comportements.

2) **Réussir en tant qu'agent ou l'utilisation du relationnel**

Dans la deuxième partie, je m'attache à décrire les conditions de l'appariement entre agents immobiliers et clients. Comment les agents immobiliers trouvent-ils des clients ? Comment les clients trouvent-ils des agents ? Quels types de relation existent-t-ils entre les deux ? Comment les relations entre les intermédiaires et leurs clients participent au fonctionnement du marché du logement ? Quelles sont les caractéristiques des agents qui « réussissent » ? J'étudie comment les relations entre les agents et les clients sont construites et maintenues, faisant l'hypothèse que se maintenir dans la profession et atteindre un certain niveau de réussite, les agents immobiliers doivent sécuriser des relations avant, pendant et après leurs transactions.

3) **Interagir avec le marché et avec des acheteurs et des vendeurs ou l'influence sur la valeur et sur les inégalités**

Dans la troisième partie, je me demande dans quelle mesure les agents immobiliers

contribuent-ils à mettre en relation/ redéfinir/ révéler les demandes originelles des acheteurs, en considérant l'état actuel de l'offre et les spécificités du marché. Comment les agents immobiliers se représentent-ils les attentes et les contraintes des futurs acheteurs durant les moments d'interaction ? De quelle manière les agents transforment-ils les prix et l'offre dans l'interaction avec les vendeurs ? Comment, et dans quelle mesure, les agents participent à la distribution inégale des individus sur un territoire ? J'analyse les relations entre les agents immobiliers et leurs clients. Je me concentre sur la façon dont les agents et les clients interagissent, et de quelle manière les agents transforment la nature des besoins des clients, le résultat des transactions et les inégalités résidentielles.

2.2. Terrains d'observation

J'ai mené des observations participantes sur différents terrains. Lors de mon premier terrain d'observation, je me suis concentrée sur l'éducation et la formation des agents immobiliers, d'une part lors de la formation initiale théorique à l'école des agents pour obtenir la licence, et d'autre part pendant la formation pratique délivrée dans deux entreprises immobilières. Le deuxième terrain a été mené lors d'observations d'agents immobiliers dans leurs interactions avec leurs clients.

Enquêter sur la formation professionnelle : une école et deux entreprises.

Pour comprendre l'entrée des agents dans le monde des Realtors®, j'ai moi-même suivi le parcours d'un aspirant agent, durant la formation des agents immobiliers à la fois à l'école et dans deux entreprises. Le but des observations ethnographiques à l'école et dans les programmes de formation des entreprises était d'analyser des normes, des pratiques et des croyances acquises durant le processus de socialisation à l'activité immobilière. J'ai donc porté mon regard sur les évènements et les rituels signalant l'intégration des agents comme notamment des cérémonies d'obtention de diplôme.

J'ai choisi d'étudier deux entreprises pour leur différence de statut et de positionnement dans le contexte du marché résidentiel de Tucson. D'un côté, l'entreprise *Desert Realty* est présente seulement au niveau local mais elle appartient aussi partiellement à un fond d'investissement managé par Warren Buffet (avec un revenu de 242,1 billion de dollars en 2017). *Real*

Prosperity, de l'autre, est une entreprise à la présence internationale, se vantant d'être « la plus grande franchise immobilière au monde » (avec un volume de vente de 303,4 billion de dollars en 2017 aux États-Unis seulement), respectivement dans la première position en part de marché (environ 35% des Realtors® en 2016) et en troisième position en termes de nombre d'agents (environ 15%). Ces observations permettent de répondre à ma première question de recherche sur la construction des agents comme professionnels de marché.

Les deux entreprises choisies offrent une formation extensive à leurs nouveaux agents. Chaque programme dure de 70 à 80 heures réparties sur deux à quatre semaines, sans compter les sessions actives de tutorat. Les instructeurs sont composés majoritairement d'agents expérimentés, parfois managers, avec exceptionnellement l'intervention de recrues récentes qui partagent leurs expériences. *Desert Realty* a été créée localement en 1926 et a fusionné avec une large entreprise de *brokerage* immobilier en 1999. En 2013, l'entreprise dit avoir 1,300 entreprises immobilières affiliées aux États-Unis, selon le Real Trends 500 Survey. *Real Prosperity*, entreprise internationale, a été fondé par Franck N. et Kyle B. en 1983 et prétend être centré sur les agents, une entreprise « bâtie par des agents, pour des agents ». Frank N. a écrit plusieurs livres sur comment réussir dans l'immobilier et a développé un modèle vente basé sur la formation des agents, le partage du profit et l'investissement local dans les communautés. En 2014, l'entreprise estime avoir 110 000 associés et être affilié à « 700 centres de marché » autour du monde, une des plus larges entreprises par nombre d'agents.

Enquêter sur les pratiques avec les clients et sur le marché

Pour répondre à ma troisième question de recherche, l'influence des agents dans la création de valeur, j'ai observé les interactions entre les agents immobiliers et leurs clients durant différentes étapes de la transaction immobilière.

Pendant les phases d'observation des formations théorique et pratique mais aussi en entretiens, j'ai demandé aux agents avec qui j'avais développé de bonnes relations l'autorisation pour observer leurs réunions avec les clients. J'ai interrogé tous les agents que j'ai suivis avant, pendant et après les observations. J'ai observé un total de 18 transactions

complètes entre agents, 11 avec des acheteurs et 7 avec des vendeurs, plus 42 transactions observées partiellement à différents moments (*open houses*[24], rendez-vous chez les vendeurs, rendez-vous avec les acheteurs, visites de maisons). Toutes ces interactions n'ont pas abouti à l'achat ou à la vente d'une maison.

L'observation de ces interactions m'a permis de comprendre le degré et la nature des divergences entre les discours des agents lors des entretiens et leurs pratiques avec les clients. Elle m'a également permis de comparer l'influence de la formation reçue par les agents immobiliers sur la façon dont ils sont censés se comporter devant leurs clients. Lors d'entretiens préliminaires, les agents ont déclaré être des amis de leurs clients. Observer les interactions entre agents immobiliers et clients a permis de saisir dans quelle mesure cet affichage correspondait à une présentation professionnelle plutôt qu'à une pratique professionnelle réelle.

Tous les Realtors® observés ont également été interviewés.

Tableau 1 : Agents suivis lors des transactions (N=15)

	Statut socio-économique et éducation	**Ethnicité et genre, âge, statut matrimonial**	**Statut et expérience**	**Secteur du marché**	**Transactions observées**		
					Acheteurs	Vendeurs	*Open houses*
Ben	Working class, MA	Hispanic man, 37, married	Sales agent, 4 years	Middle High	4	0	0
Pamela	Upper class, MA	White woman, 52, married	Broker, more than 20 years	High	3	1	0
Rudy	Working class, some BA	Hispanic man, 27, single	Sales' agent, more than one year	Middle Low	2	2	0
Kate	Upper middle class, BA	White woman, 33, married	New sales' agent, less	Middle High	2	2	2

[24] La pratique des *open houses* ou littéralement maisons ouvertes désigne une activité courante dans la vente immobilière aux Etats-Unis. En accord avec son client, l'agent immobilier qui a obtenu le mandat délimite des plages horaires (généralement trois heures le samedi ou le dimanche, parfois le jeudi soir) pour une visite libre de la maison. Souvent, cette pratique ne draine pas nécessairement des acheteurs intéressés par l'achat mais des voisins, ou des individus qui cherchent à rencontrer un agent immobilier. Elle est souvent détournée, car elle est utilisée par des agents immobiliers novices ou avec moins de statut pour se faire un réseau d'acheteurs (potentiels futurs clients également) et de se faire connaitre dans un quartier. C'est pourquoi la maison en question, qui est souvent le bien d'un courtier à plus fort statut est tenu ouverte par un agent de la même entreprise mais qui n'a pas encore de réseau. Les pratiques différenciées de l'*open house* rendent visible une segmentation des activités de marché selon leur objectif/ temps/ gain espéré.

			than 6 months				
Kara	Middle class, some BA	White woman, 37, single	Sales' agent, 5 years	Low	3	1	1
Patrick	Middle class, high school	White man, 62, married	Broker, more than 20 years	Middle Low	2	2	0
Corey	Working class, no degree	White man, 48, divorced,	Sales' agent, 5 years	Middle Low	3	2	0
Alex	Middle class, BA	White man, 28, single	New sales' agent, less than 6 months	Middle Low	3	1	0
Nancy	Upper class, BA	White woman, 58, married	Broker, more than 20 years	High	1	3	0
Sonia	Upper middle class, BA	White woman, 59, divorced	New sales' agent, less than 6 months	Middle Low	3	0	1
Terri	Upper class, BA	White woman, 44, single	Broker, about 10 years	Middle High	1	1	1
Brian	Working class, high school	Hispanic man, 39, married	Sales' agent, about 2 years	Middle High	2	1	1
Thomas	Upper class, MA	White man, 55, married	Broker, more than 5 years	High	1	2	1
Donna	Working class, high school	White woman, 60, widow	Broker, about 15 years	Middle Low	3	0	0
Bob	Middle class, no degree	White man, 58, married	Broker, more than 10 years	Middle High	2	1	0
Total	33% working, 27% middle, 13% upper middle 27% upper	80% White, 47% women; median age 49,6; 53% married, 27% single, 7% widow, 13% divorced.	53% sales' agents Including 20% new, 47% brokers	20% High, 33% Middle High, 40% Middle Low, 7% Low	35	19	7[25]

Comprendre le rapport au travail

J'ai interrogé un total de 79 agents, tous affiliés à la NAR® et à la TAR®. Mon échantillon a consisté en un mélange fait de « convenance » (*convenience sampling)* et de « boule de

[25] Je suis allée à une vingtaine d'*open houses* sans nécessairement révéler mon identité de chercheur pour observer la présentation de soi-même des agents devant les clients et le travail relationnel. Je ne les ai pas inclus ici.

neige » (*snowball sampling*) pour un total de 38 femmes et 41 hommes. Les interrogés avaient pour la majorité un diplôme d'université, entre 21 et 72 ans, et étaient à 80% blanc. Les entretiens ont duré entre 90 et 120 minutes, se sont déroulés la plupart du temps au bureau des agents immobiliers, et quelques fois chez eux. J'ai enregistré 75 entretiens, que j'ai transcrits, codés, et analysés moi-même. Les entretiens étaient semi-structurés pour laisser la place à l'émergence de nouveaux thèmes durant les conversations. J'ai posé des questions autour de la recherche de clients, la conduite de leurs activités immobilières (l'ensemble des tâches effectués et leurs modalités d'exécution) et notamment les interactions avec les clients, et autour de leurs visions de l'« engagement » et de la « réussite » en immobilier. J'ai également voulu comprendre plus particulièrement leurs rapports au territoire et aux sous-marchés de la ville, à leur clientèle et à leurs biens (catégorisations spontanées, mais aussi actions pratiques, fixation des prix et rapport à la valeur par exemple).

Les entretiens visaient à répondre à chacune de mes trois questions de recherche spécifiques, organisés en « parties » dans le manuscrit, en relation avec les caractéristiques sociales des interrogés, incluant le statut marital, l'âge, le statut dans le champ, l'ethnie ou la race, ainsi que la trajectoire sociale et professionnelle (classe sociale d'origine, éducation, trajectoire professionnelle, trajectoire religieuse).

Pour comprendre la construction des agents comme acteurs économiques et professionnels du marché, je me suis concentrée sur les trajectoires des agents – les interrogeant sur leur début de carrière, leur formation, la représentation qu'ils se font de leur activité et de leur carrière, leur définition du bon agent, et leurs perceptions de la réussite professionnelle. Le but des entretiens était de comprendre leurs discours et croyances autour des pratiques de travail et des frontières qu'ils établissent autour du bon et du mauvais travail.

Pour comprendre le processus de captation du client, j'ai d'abord questionné les agents autour de leurs relations aux acheteurs et aux vendeurs, cherchant à comprendre leur rapport au travail dans les étapes de la captation des clients. Pour les aider à être plus spécifiques, je suis partie des clients actuels de mes enquêtés, que j'ai objectivé en partie grâce à l'accès au

répertoire de leurs activités sur le *Multiple Listing Service* (MLS)[26]. Je les ai aussi guidés pour retracer leur rencontre, leur prise de contact, et leurs relations.

J'ai plus particulièrement mis l'accent sur leur façon de qualifier les relations, et sur les interactions sociales qui n'étaient pas orienté directement vers la conclusion d'une transaction. Je me suis aussi concentrée sur le travail professionnel réalisé par l'agent pour constituer et maintenir sa clientèle. J'ai demandé plus particulièrement aux femmes de me décrire leurs expériences avec leurs clients. Je leur ai demandé de me parler du sens d'être une femme dans l'immobilier, et en fonction de leurs réponses, si elles pensaient que cela les avait aidé ou freiné dans leur développement professionnel.

Pour comprendre les interactions entre agents et clients, et leur influence sur la création de valeur et sur les inégalités urbaines, j'ai demandé aux agents d'évoquer leurs perceptions sur les prix et la valeur, et leurs pratiques de fixation des prix. Puisque ma focale était le travail des agents immobiliers, je n'ai pas formellement interrogé de clients même si, à plusieurs reprises, j'ai bénéficié de discussions informelles avant ou après une interaction avec leur agent immobilier ou de commentaires en off. Ma focale était plutôt les perspectives de l'agent, sa représentation de la nature des interactions avec les clients, sa recherche de biens, ainsi que les processus de transformation et d'évaluation des prix et de la valeur.

[26] Le *Multiple Listing Service* est un service utilisé par les agents immobiliers et brokers pour disséminer les biens (*listings*) proposés à la vente auprès des acheteurs. Il diffuse donc des informations détaillées au sujet des propriétés. S'utilisant uniquement par l'intermédiaire du Realtor®, ce service est détenu localement par les associations locales de la NAR®. Il sert la coopération entre agents immobiliers. L'agent du vendeur y offre une rémunération pour les agents qui amènerait un acheteur pour leur propriété, le *listing* qui correspond à un mandat pour un bien immobilier mis en vente sur le marché, chaque mandat étant détenu par un agent et son entreprise immobilière. Ce service est donc une base de données qui stocke des informations par l'accord du vendeur de la propriété. Si le vendeur décide de vendre son bien seul (FSBO, i.e. *For Sale By Owner*), il ne possède donc aucun accès. Je m'y referai par son sigle (MLS).

Deuxième partie : La fabrique de l'agent immobilier. Socialisation, savoirs et professionnalisation

Dans cette partie, mon approche se situe à trois niveaux : premièrement celui des discours des travailleurs sur leur propre activité, *ce que les travailleurs disent qu'ils font* ; deuxièmement celui des normes et des discours institutionnels encadrant le travail (ici les agences immobilières), *ce que les institutions présentent comme la manière légitime d'être au travail* ; et troisièmement enfin, celui des pratiques de travail, *ce que font les travailleurs*. Je propose non pas de partir d'un a priori de ce qu'*est* ou n'*est pas* le travail, mais de faire émerger une définition, de manière empirique, à partir des mobilisations pour la constitution du groupe en tant que profession à part entière, des discours, des processus de socialisation et des pratiques sur le marché. Après avoir évoqué la formation des agents immobiliers dans la section, je me pencherais sur la fabrication de la professionnalisation au travers du rôle de l'association professionnelle.

1. Former des agents immobiliers

Les deux entreprises enquêtées proposent une formation se déroulant sur 2 à 3 semaines complètes, au cours desquelles les nouveaux agents immobiliers reçoivent un ensemble de conseils pratiques. A la présentation d'outils marketing traditionnels, s'ajoute un ensemble de récits détaillés basés sur les expériences d'agents confirmés avec des clients qui révèlent en partie les *pratiques du bon agent immobilier*. Les nouvelles recrues apprennent aussi à se comporter correctement pour générer des revenus et gérer leurs transactions, y compris comment remplir un contrat, rédiger et présenter des offres, s'occuper du titre et de son transfert, ou comment se déroule une négociation.

1.1. Apprendre à gérer les incertitudes

Le rejet du travail conventionnel et le management des incertitudes

Devenir agent immobilier nécessite d'apprendre à gérer l'incertitude des perspectives, au moins pendant les deux premières années. L'incertitude dans les perspectives (paiement par

commission, prospection, constitution d'un réseau de clients) renforce l'importance du discours sur l'engagement et la conversion. À *Real Prosperity*, environ 80% des nouvelles recrues interrogées proviennent de familles de la classe moyenne ou de classes ouvrières blanches intégrées. Pour une partie relativement importante d'entre eux qui occupaient avant des postes relativement stables - employés de banque et d'assurances, serveurs, propriétaires de petites entreprises et/ou enseignants du primaire et du secondaire principalement – ils doivent assumer de manière discursive leur choix d'« entrer en immobilier ». Au cours des entretiens, plusieurs recrues évoquent notamment la peur de la reconversion. Alors que la conversion n'apparait pas comme évidente, la peur ressentie par une partie de ces recrues est accompagnée par une socialisation professionnelle et une inculcation répétée au cours des différentes formations et étapes de l'intégration.

Les agents immobiliers enquêtés présentent des trajectoires professionnelles antérieurs variés. Carrie est titulaire d'un baccalauréat en bibliothéconomie et a passé une partie de sa carrière à la bibliothèque du Congrès à Washington ; Nancy était assistante marketing pour une grande entreprise dans une grande ville de la côte est ; Brian était « agent de crédit » pour une grande banque ; Amanda travaillait comme gérante d'un salon de beauté ; Rebecca était une mère célibataire avec deux enfants et une secrétaire ; Rudy travaillait dans une banque - En dépit cette diversité, environ les deux tiers des agents que j'ai suivis en formation ou lors de transactions présentent leur transformation professionnelle comme le résultat d'un mécontentement de leur ancien travail autour de contraintes de trois ordres : hiérarchie, revenus limités et horaires contraints.

Ce refus des normes conventionnelles du travail salarié ou de la forme hiérarchique d'exercice du travail est d'abord cité comme l'une des raisons du choix de devenir agent immobilier. Mais on peut aussi voir cet argument comme une manière de se rassurer à propos de cette décision qui pèse lourdement sur la vie familiale et personnelle.

Si ce rejet explique en partie de l'engagement dans le travail immobilier, il n'explique pas tout le processus par lequel ces nouvelles recrues valorisent leur entrée dans le métier d'agent. Pour développer une compréhension plus complète, je me tourne vers l'observation de formations et les interactions entre agents immobiliers. Dans le lancement de ce projet

personnel, l'inscription à l'école des agents immobiliers et la réussite de l'examen de licence professionnelle permet d'abord le premier pas vers l'affirmation d'un projet professionnel non subi, qui rend aussi compte d'une volonté de contrôle de sa vie de manière plus globale. La capacité des nouveaux entrants à réussir témoignerait alors plus largement de capacités morales à s'auto-discipliner et à devenir propriétaire de son travail plutôt que simple exécutant ou travailleur.

Lors de la formation, les agents expérimentés et les managers insistent sur la réalité des peurs expérimentées par les nouvelles recrues. Les inquiétudes, que l'on sent à demi-mots présentes chez la majorité des nouveaux, sont l'expression quotidienne de leur apprentissage à *réussir*, c'est-à-dire à avoir une base suffisamment solide de clients, à bâtir une réputation et à acquérir un respect dans le champ professionnel. L'une des craintes constantes est de ne pas avoir assez d'argent épargné pour « tenir » suffisamment jusqu'aux premières transactions et risquer de devoir faire face à un potentiel renoncement. Plusieurs fois, Rebecca a exprimé son inquiétude à l'idée de démarrer dans le métier :

> « C'est dur. Cette première année était effrayante. Vous passez d'un salaire à rien du tout. La seule fois où vous recevez vraiment un salaire, c'est quand vous vendez une maison. Ces gens-là, je ne serai probablement pas payé dessus, disons qu'ils achètent cette maison. Je ne serai pas payé pendant près de deux mois tu sais…même si j'ai fait tout le travail, je ne serai pas payé tout de suite. Donc c'est difficile ». (entretien)

À l'instar de ce que Sherman (2007) souligne à propos du jeu stratégique joué par les travailleurs de l'hôtellerie de luxe pour s'affirmer dans leur travail et contribuer à une valorisation professionnelle du soi, les agents immobiliers mobilisent la création d'entreprise comme une fierté quant à leur indépendance, rejetant la figure de l'asservissement associé au travail salarié. En entretiens comme dans les entreprises immobilières, les agents insistent à de nombreuses reprises sur ce statut d'indépendant. « Nous sommes tous des entrepreneurs indépendants qui gérons nos propres entreprises » déclare par exemple Carrie, qui ressent une certaine fierté à gagner « son » propre argent, ce qu'elle met en opposition à un revenu salarié généré par une entreprise dont elle ne serait pas propriétaire. Kim explique également à quel point l'« entrée en immobilier » est un projet d'investissement personnel et financier, comme une installation à son compte.

Si cette relation au travail ne doit pas être prise comme une forme d'objectivation des parcours et de naturalisation des capacités de réussite, qui sont informées à la fois par les dispositions préalables et les propriétés socio-culturelles des agents, elle illustre une forme de valorisation individuelle et une stratégie de travail rationalisée avec des objectifs et un plan qui se retrouvent également dans d'autres environnements de travail. Les agents immobiliers, tels que les chauffeurs de taxi décrits par Occhiuto (2017), affirment trouver un sentiment de maîtrise de soi, par la mise en place de leurs propres horaires, et la sensation de « travailler pour soi », même si, en parallèle, ce sentiment de contrôle nécessite des actions pour surmonter leurs peurs[27].

1.2. Apprendre la maîtrise de soi

> Les nouvelles recrues présentes dans la salle de formation se montrent impressionnées par Ben, ex-agent immobilier et maintenant responsable de la formation. Très enthousiaste et sympathique, il veut motiver les troupes : « Si vous surmontez vos peurs, vous pouvez y arriver ». (note de terrain)

Les capacités de réussite sont présentées comme la résultante d'un investissement rationnalisé et efficace au travail. Ils signalent parmi les formateurs une forte croyance en des chances égales de réussite selon lesquelles chacun pourrait être indemnisé selon les efforts déployés. La notion d'effort au travail est d'abord mise en valeur comme une forme de dépassement de soi, en rapprochant tous les nouveaux entrants à une situation commune : celle de la peur et des incertitudes.

En ce qui concerne la prospection notamment, le manuel de *Real Prosperity* met en avant la crainte du « non » et du rejet et exhorte les agents à ne pas se décourager, en leur assurant que leur persévérance finira par payer :

> « De nombreux agents résistent à la prospection parce qu'ils craignent le mot « non ». Préparez-vous à l'entendre. Même les méga-agents entendent « non ». La meilleure façon de faire face à cette peur est de changer de perspective. « Non » est rarement, voire jamais, personnel. Cela signifie généralement « pas maintenant », « pas sans informations

[27] C'est notamment l'objet d'un article publié par l'auteure autour des conditions d'exercice de la profession, qui autant qu'elle puisse être promesse d'affranchissement de certaines contraintes salariales, elle en recrée notamment d'autres et soumet l'agent immobilier à des processus de marchandisation (Benites-Gambirazio, 2017).

> supplémentaires » ou « pas celui-ci », mais cela ne signifie presque jamais « pas vous ». Pensez-y de cette façon : chaque « non » vous rapproche simplement d'un « oui ». Continuez doucement à sonder. Découvrez ce dont ils ont besoin d'en savoir plus. Et à la fin, si leur « non » signifie vraiment « non », remerciez-les ensuite agréablement et positivement ». (manuel de formation, *Real Prosperity*)

L'attitude envers le « non » reflète dans l'ensemble l'éthique nécessaire de l'agent. La formation sert les entreprises, non seulement pour l'acquisition de connaissances pratiques par les agents sur les transactions immobilières, mais aussi comme une incitation à transformer l'attitude du travailleur envers soi-même, en surmontant sa peur et en adoptant cet état d'esprit positif. L'acquisition de cette philosophie se traduit par une attitude spécifique vis-à-vis de l'activité immobilière, ce qui implique de s'appuyer en permanence sur la prospection.

Ces éléments d'argumentation apparaissent également dans les conversations avec mes enquêtés, qui semblent avoir intériorisé ce discours. Cette intériorisation ne résulte pas uniquement de leur socialisation professionnelle mais aussi de la diffusion de récits vantant l'autonomie et psychologisant à la fois les réussites ou les échecs au travail notamment (Schwartz 2011). Le tournant de la psychologie positive et du *recovery movement*, qui exhorte les individus à prendre soin de soi et à se libérer de leurs addictions, que ce soit des drogues, de l'alcool ou des excès alimentaires, est en effet très présent dans les discours d'auto-assistance adoptés par les agents immobiliers. Les individus sont encouragés à chercher des transformations en s'éloignant de leurs peurs et de leurs démons. Dans un mélange avec le libertarianisme, le *recovery movement* encourage les individus à acquérir une autonomie et à se libérer de leur esclavage interne. Dans ce discours, il faut surmonter ses propres faiblesses pour devenir fort.

Les agents immobiliers sont socialisés à croire que tout repose sur eux. Les formateurs les encouragent à devenir de « meilleures personnes » en transformant leur personnalité et en se mobilisant : « Vous n'avez pas à vous asseoir et à attendre, sinon rien ne viendra à vous. Vous devez être proactif ». Le vocabulaire autour de la foi apparait dans plus de 80% de mes entretiens et dans de nombreux comptes rendus de discussions formelles. Les travailleurs expriment leurs préoccupations ainsi qu'un solide système de conviction nécessaire pour

entrer dans l'immobilier. Bruce, un agent âgé de 40 ans, directeur d'une école publique avant de passer sa licence d'agent, a commencé six mois avant notre rencontre. Je l'ai interviewé après la formation de 3 semaines chez *Desert Realty*. Tout en soulignant son rejet pour son activité antérieure, il exprime sa nervosité à propos du démarrage de son entreprise mais aussi de son « acte de foi » :

> « Vous savez, c'est vraiment bizarre. Je pensais que je n'arriverais pas à dormir la nuit. Mais en fait, c'était un acte de foi, et je dors beaucoup mieux qu'avant. Je pense que ma qualité de vie est bien meilleure ». (entretien)

Chez Bruce, La conviction qu'il pourrait devenir indépendant l'a rassuré sur sa décision et ses perspectives dans l'immobilier. Chez d'autres agents immobiliers comme Lenny, les raisons de l'entrée en immobilier sont mises en cohérence avec son parcours professionnel, et donne à voir les opportunités de l'activité immobilière pour les jeunes retraités. Quand je rencontre Lenny, âgé de 69 ans, il vient de prendre sa retraite de l'armée de l'air et de la *Southwest Airlines.* Se sentant encore en capacité de travailler, il se sent particulièrement enthousiaste à l'idée de voir l'entreprise se développer, ainsi que de penser à ses objectifs à long terme :

> « Je pense que mes objectifs sont… J'ai tout segmenté en 20 ans, 20 ans à l'école, 20 ans dans l'armée de l'air, 20 ans chez *Southwest Airlines*, j'espère pouvoir le faire 20 ans avant de devenir trop vieux, mes objectifs sont de réussir dans cette affaire pour me permettre d'être libre pour le reste de ma vie. Je vais m'asseoir avec Janet, ma partenaire et l'autre membre de l'équipe et nous fixerons nos objectifs pour l'année prochaine, je veux organiser des maisons ouvertes qui nous permettrons de nouer des contacts. En gros, il faudra développer notre *business* en rencontrant des gens, et en augmentant nos contacts ». (entretien)

Au travers de son engagement dans l'entreprise, Lenny utilise la métaphore de la croissance personnelle. Cette croissance est la résultante d'actions concrètes permettant d'attester du sérieux de son engagement, et de la foi qu'il accorde à sa réussite. La majorité des agents suivies quantifient leurs engagements par des objectifs de chiffres, qu'il s'agisse de trouver de nouveaux clients ou de faire des bénéfices. Parallèlement au vocabulaire de la croissance, les agents font référence à des expériences de transformation ou à un engagement émotionnel. Lester (1974) relie cet « acte de foi » à une expérience de conversion, qu'elle décrit comme une « transformation de leur vision du monde et un sens concomitant d'enthousiasme, d'anticipation et d'engagement ».

1.3. Gérer les agents : inculquer la réussite par le développement personnel

Développement personnel et croissance

Tony, directeur financier de *Desert Realty*, est « responsable des activités de gestion financière, des opérations, de la gestion des installations et des technologies de l'information de la société, qui comprennent les services de télécommunications, l'infrastructure de réseau et la gestion de centres de données », selon son propre site web. Il possède une longue expertise en finance, notamment à *Ventana Medical Systems* et dans le domaine de l'aérospatial. Il fait partie de plusieurs associations, à la fois caritatives et commerciales, et a participé à la 96ème réunion du conseil municipal de Tucson intitulée « Construire l'avenir de l'Arizona : innovation, compétitivité et croissance ». Il est très actif dans la communauté de Tucson et donne plusieurs cours d'éducation financière, notamment autour de la productivité en tant qu'indépendant. Le premier jeudi de ma formation (le 14 mai 2015) à 13 heures, il est en charge de la formation : « entrepreneur indépendant : que dois-je faire ? »

> « Lorsque vous êtes un entrepreneur indépendant, vous êtes responsable de tout, du paiement de vos impôts, à vos bénéficies et à la gestion de vos finances. Après les taxes fédérales, étatiques et locales, vous n'obtenez que le tiers de ce que vous avez gagné. Vous devez renseigner les impôts des travailleurs indépendants avec l'IRS, ainsi que les assurances 1040 C/ES et l'assurance-maladie. Le conseil que je vous donne c'est de trouver un bon fiscaliste qui n'a pas d'agents immobiliers comme clients, car cela vous mènera à des clients, et générer des opportunités d'affaires, vous choisissez des entreprises en cours de route, c'est gagnant-gagnant ». (discours professé lors de la formation des entrants chez *Desert Realty*)

Après avoir brièvement évoqué la question de la commission et l'anticipation des rentrées d'argent (car si la transaction n'est pas conclue, l'agent ne reçoit aucun revenu), Tony insiste sur la nécessité d'avoir des objectifs et une éducation financière de base :

> « Tout d'abord, vous sortir de l'endettement est une bonne idée. Deuxièmement, vous aurez besoin de conseils financiers, d'un conseiller financier ou de bouquins pour vous éduquer et atteindre vos objectifs avec vos ressources existantes. Par exemple, disons que vous voulez acheter une nouvelle voiture, vous devez calculer votre actif, ce que vous possédez, par rapport à votre passif, ce que vous devez, ce qui vous donnera votre valeur nette, vous devez donc prendre en compte votre assurance, vos taxes foncières, mais aussi l'entretien et l'essence de la voiture, donc combien pouvez-vous dépenser ? Une Mercedes coûte 60 000 euros, une Honda 20 000 et peut-être pourrez-vous acheter une occas', moins de 10 000 km avec une garantie complète, car les voitures neuves perdent beaucoup de leur valeur quand elles sortent du garage. Vous devez donc avoir un plan et définir vos objectifs. Supposons que vos objectifs à court terme soient de rembourser vos dettes en 12 mois, d'obtenir 3 mois d'équité ou d'économiser 10 000 dollars. Vos objectifs à long terme pourraient être d'acheter

> une maison, d'éduquer vos enfants ou construire votre fortune ». (discours professé lors de la formation des entrants chez *Desert Realty*)

Pour Tony, la disponibilité d'argent devrait toujours être la priorité. Par exemple, il est essentiel d'éviter des charges imprévues sur votre maison ou vos factures médicales. Il recommande à chacun d'acheter un bon livre de développement financier (tel que les *best sellers* de Dave Ramsey ou de Suze Orman) et d'engager un comptable, un avocat ou un conseiller financier. La formation couvre également la gestion et la définition des objectifs.

Ce modèle d'organisation se situe à mi-chemin entre une vision idéalisée des compétences acquises et du savoir-faire - un individu produisant et tirant directement parti du produit de son travail sans intermédiaire - et l'inculcation d'un soi entrepreneurial responsable – dans un travail qui n'est pas dicté par un patron et dans lequel s'exerce une forte responsabilité dans le succès comme dans l'échec.
Dirigé par deux gestionnaires au niveau national, le programme de formation de *Real Prosperity* est plus particulièrement basé sur « l'évangile de la prospérité »[28], qui propose un système de croyance reposant sur une croissance perpétuelle sans limite : « le marché ne dicte pas si vous réussirez ou non, mais vous dit seulement comment vous allez réussir », « il n'y a pas de limite à ce que vous pouvez réaliser ».

Comment devient-on agent immobilier ? De quelle formation spécifique bénéficie-t-on ? Après avoir fourni une première explication relative au désir des agents de devenir indépendants, de « se prendre en main », je précise la culture professionnelle dans laquelle les agents immobiliers sont socialisés, et par laquelle sont inculqués des dispositions professionnelles. Je discute la façon dont les agents immobiliers sont socialisés et formés pour penser et se comporter comme des agents immobiliers, ce qui nécessite d'acquérir des dispositions individuelles pour vendre le marché.

Dans cette partie, je décris l'acquisition de dispositions socioprofessionnelles et l'éthique de l'agent immobilier à travers le processus de conversion mené par des entreprises immobilières. La construction d'un comportement jugé comme professionnellement éthique

[28] C'est plus particulièrement l'objet d'un article récemment publié par l'auteure (Benites-Gambirazio, 2019).

en immobilier n'apparaît donc pas comme une opération magique mais bien comme le résultat d'un processus d'inculcation qui inclut une socialisation des agents par le biais de programmes de formation et de systèmes de récompenses, notamment dans la mise en avant de dispositions individuelles à acquérir pour « réussir en immobilier ».

Le modèle idéal-typique véhiculé lors de la formation est celui d'un travailleur organisé, efficace, responsable et capable de surmonter ses propres peurs. Cette philosophie capitaliste repose sur la forte implication émotionnelle et la confiance dans les avantages offerts par ce système de concurrence, une approche « gagnant-gagnant » présentée comme une incorporation du marché par les agents immobiliers. L'agent immobilier se révèlerait alors dans un même rapport au monde que le marché, à la fois illimité (sans limite) et en croissance constante (à la recherche de nouveaux horizons).

Bien qu'il existe une dissociation entre les croyances religieuses et les pratiques commerciales, les entreprises immobilières fonctionnent souvent selon le modèle du réseau et de la communauté proche, qui souligne l'importance de la famille, de la communauté, de l'Eglise et de Dieu en tant que piliers de la vie étasunienne. Même si les entreprises immobilières se distinguent des organisations quasi-religieuses en termes de recrutement, elles présentent des caractéristiques similaires, notamment l'utilisation des réseaux sociaux par le biais de la famille et des amis, l'engagement personnel à vendre, l'absence d'obstacles (profit illimité, manque de concurrence entre les agents) qui transforme le travail en un engagement émotionnel et croyant dans le capitalisme.

L'importance du gouvernement de soi, soulignée par Foucault (2004), pourrait alors faire partie d'une nouvelle modernité néolibérale. Le « soi » valorisé est proactif : « pour survivre dans la course, il faut être actif, inventif et débrouillard, développer ses propres idées, être plus rapide, plus habile et plus créatif » (Beck et Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p. 23). Les individus sont pris dans un nouveau type de système d'oppression ou de domination, au sein duquel ils doivent apprendre à se voir comme le « centre d'action » et à mettre en place des plans pour actualiser leurs biographies. L'affirmation de soi devient une nécessité pratique tout en conservant une partie de l'éthique traditionnelle de la solidarité et de l'entraide entre membres d'une même famille ou communauté.

La construction de la figure de l'agent immobilier peut être liée non seulement aux nouvelles techniques de gestion et à la société néo-libérale au sens large (Amable, 2011 ; Foucault, 2004 ; Fridman, 2010), mais également à l'évangile de prospérité et à l'accès (ou au maintien) par la voie financière à la classe moyenne étatsunienne. Les motivations des travailleurs ne proviennent pas seulement de la volonté de s'éloigner de « petits boulots » peu rémunérés, mais aussi d'un processus de conversion formé de sociabilités solidaires, impliquant des dimensions matérielles et symboliques.

Conformément aux images et aux mythes des travailleurs sur l'activité d'agent immobilier, les équipes de direction et d'encadrement de l'école des agents et des deux entreprises étudiées s'emploient à maintenir une image dynamique de ce qu'est l'activité immobilière et à générer à la fois un consentement et des efforts au travail. Je contribue ici à la littérature sur les stratégies utilisées par les entreprises pour contrôler les travailleurs, qui ne sont « ni des sanctions négatives ni des incitations positives » directes (Sallaz, 2015, p. 30). Outre les relations sociales engagées avec leurs collègues, le rapport au travail des agents immobiliers est fortement individualisé. Dans la formation des agents, il s'agit de mettre en valeur l'affirmation de soi et la responsabilisation dans les tâches à effectuer, apprendre à devenir organisé, efficace, responsable, et en capacité de surmonter ses propres peurs, même si en réalité, les discours autour de l'indépendance et la réussite individuelle masquent de fortes disparités entre investissements au travail et rémunération, qui ne sont que peu évoqués de prime abord par les formateurs et les agents immobiliers.

2. La fabrique de la professionnalisation : l'association professionnelle

La NAR® joue un rôle important dans l'organisation d'activités immobilières résidentielles et commerciales. L'association finance et diffuse non seulement des recherches et des statistiques sur les transactions immobilières, mais offre une formation à l'immobilier, notamment par le biais de désignations et de certifications. Elle contribue au soutien du secteur immobilier par des plaidoyers politiques aux niveaux fédéral, étatique et local et

produit une variété de connaissances (juridiques, financières, technologiques) par l'intermédiaire de son association. Elle dispose d'instituts et d'entreprises affiliées et disséminent connaissances et conseils lors de nombreuses activités et évènements professionnels. Ses membres sont connus sous le nom de Realtors®. Représentant la plus grande association professionnelle aux États-Unis, la NAR® compte plus de 1,3 million de membres et 1 165 associations locales.

Je montre d'abord en quoi l'association professionnelle s'est construite autour de la défense d'intérêts commerciaux puis, je me centre sur les revendications professionnelles[29] à la lumière de leurs intérêts sur le marché. Enfin, je m'intéresse à la création d'une identité collective.

2.1. Les intérêts économiques

Les marchés immobiliers ont vu le jour au tournant du XXe siècle grâce à l'institutionnalisation d'un réseau de professionnels qui ont adopté des lois et créé des associations locales. L'échange de titres, de biens et de titres immobiliers a été avant tout une affaire d'élites masculines. Encouragés par un réseau d'élites économiques et par les opportunités croissantes de développement urbain, les entrepreneurs (agents immobiliers, promoteurs, courtiers et autres commerçants) ont créé des chambres immobilières locales depuis le début des années 1870. Fondée à Chicago en 1908 sous le nom de l'Association nationale des échanges immobiliers (NAREE), l'association est devenue en 1916 l'Association nationale des chambres immobilières (NAREB) et le NAR® en 1972. L'association nationale et les conseils locaux ont joué un rôle déterminant dans la diffusion des pratiques communes institutionnalisées. Comme l'écrit alors la NAREB, son objectif principal était « d'unir les hommes de l'immobilier en Amérique afin d'exercer efficacement une influence combinée sur les questions concernant les intérêts immobiliers » (Glaeser, 2013 ; Weiss, 2002).

[29] En anglais, le terme employé par Spillman (2012) et Spillman and Brophy (2018) est celui de *professionnal claims*. Il est utilisé dans le cadre d'une théorie culturelle sur les professions qui s'appuie sur l'héritage de Mills (1940); Larson (1977); (Becker (1962); Merton et al. (1982) ; Abbott (1993) et Freidson (2001) et reconnait que ces revendications ne sont pas uniquement fondées sur une expertise mais sur un savoir-faire artisanal imprégné d'une vision morale (« *a craft knowledge infused with moral agency* »).

Dans son doctorat sur le développement de la chambre immobilière de Chicago (*Chicago Real Estate Board*), Everett Hughes (1931, 1928) montre comment les hommes de l'immobilier se sont organisés pour institutionnaliser de manière formelle une activité commerciale peu régulée. Il y décrit l'agent immobilier comme :

> « le type qui a été dans le monde du *business* le plus longtemps » et qui « pense, se déplace et a son être dans le monde de l'immobilier ». Il est assez bien assimilé à un code d'éthique et des pratiques de l'immobilier, soutient les politiques visant la reconnaissance et le bien-être ultime du métier. La chambre immobilière est son club et généralement son seul club de centre-ville. C'est parmi ses compagnons là-bas qu'il a son statut professionnel et commercial ». (Hughes, 1971, p. 336)

Hughes retrace l'évolution du statut de l'entreprise par le biais de l'appartenance de l'agent immobilier à un conseil d'administration. La standardisation du discours et des pratiques, y compris le respect scrupuleux d'un code de déontologie, unit les voix des Realtors® pour le soutien ou l'opposition à des politiques spécifiques. Basées sur le principe des adhésions, les associations professionnelles ont pour objectif de restreindre la concurrence et d'agir comme une forme de contrôle du secteur (Aldrich et al., 1994 ; Spillman, 2012). Elles peuvent ressembler à des « associations de protection mutuelle axées sur le marché » telles que des associations professionnelles ou des syndicats (Gazley, 2013 ; Greenwood, Suddaby et Hinings, 2002 ; Merton, 1958). Elles définissent l'institutionnalisation normative des pratiques professionnelles (Aldrich et Fiol, 1994 ; DiMaggio et Powell, 1983 ; Sine, Haveman et Tolbert, 2005) au travers de « règles introduisant une dimension prescriptive, évaluative et obligatoire de la vie sociale » (Scott, 2008). Elles façonnent ainsi le développement du secteur, par la prescription de conduites et d'actions privilégiées, la constitution de normes ainsi que le contrôle d'outils techniques pour le marché.

Comment peut-on analyser le développement et la nature de ces organisations professionnelles ? S'agit-il « davantage de cartels, de groupes de pression ou d'associations professionnelles » (Spillman, 2012, p. 29) ? Les études autour de ces associations devraient alors prendre au sérieux l'analyse de revendications relatives à la professionnalisation de ses membres :

> « Connaissez-les par cet emblème. Vous verrez cet emblème partout en ville. Elle identifie les membres de votre chambre immobilière. C'est la marque distinctive du courtier (agent) immobilier qui, en raison du code de déontologie des Realtors®, a le privilège d'afficher ce

> sceau. Pour lui, l'immobilier est une entreprise, certes, mais une entreprise à traiter sur un plan professionnel dans le respect de la plus haute éthique professionnelle. Donc, recherchez cet emblème de Realtor® lors votre transaction immobilière. Laissez-le opérer comme une assurance que vous avez affaire à un homme expérimenté dans l'immobilier, prêt et disposé à vous faire profiter de cette expérience ». (campagne nationale de publicité nommée « consultez un agent immobilier » de l'Association nationale des chambres immobilières en 1926)

La montée du professionnalisme dans le contexte de la phase concurrentielle croissante du capitalisme d'entreprise a masqué la « grande transformation » dans un monde, qui pour reprendre le travail de Polanyi (1944), se trouve « subverti et remodelé » par « la tentative utopique du libéralisme économique pour mettre en place un système de marché autorégulateur ». La noble entreprise des professionnels (protection du public, intérêts des clients plutôt que de la recherche du profit) pourrait donc potentiellement représenter ce que Polanyi (1944) appelle le « contre-mouvement » pour « la protection de la société ».

Cependant, les professions émergent d'abord en tant que « moyens » de gagner un revenu sur la base des services transigés dans une société en train de se réorganiser autour de la centralité du marché au sein de laquelle l'objectif des « vendeurs de services » était de capturer une clientèle et de contrôler des marchés étendus. Les revendications professionnelles apparaissaient donc comme de « nouvelles formes d'obtention et de garantie de la préférence des acheteurs et de la confiance » (Larson, 1977, p. 9-10).

Cependant, transformer un métier en « profession » présente un intérêt majeur : acquérir un statut, gagner la confiance et acquérir un pouvoir de décision. La caractérisation d'une activité commerciale en activité professionnelle modifie le cadre normatif de la relation entre l'acheteur (et le vendeur) et l'intermédiaire : « Contrairement aux relations commerciales, où le *caveat emptor* (« c'est à l'acheteur se méfier »)[30] est l'attitude prédominante, la relation entre un professionnel et son client est censée être guidée par le précepte du *credit emptor* (« c'est à l'acheteur de faire confiance ») » (Volti, 2012, p. 155).

[30] Le terme *caveat emptor* fait référence au principe selon lequel avant l'achat, seul l'acheteur est responsable du contrôle de la qualité et de l'adéquation des marchandises. Pour la vente d'une maison, il s'agit d'un avertissement implicite à l'acheteur que le bien acheté peut présenter d'éventuels défauts, ce qui l'oblige à faire preuve d'une vigilance raisonnable avant de conclure la vente.

Au niveau local, la Tucson Association of Realtors (TAR)® organise en permanence des cours et propose des formations continues. Par exemple, un cours de trois heures autour du droit de l'*agency* compte pour un crédit de formation continue. A raison de trois heures, ce cours intitulé « fournir un service VIP » présente les préceptes de conduite pour offrir un service de qualité supérieure à de potentiels clients :

> « L'*agency* vise à protéger et à promouvoir les intérêts de nos clients. Mais nous pouvons fournir un service VIP en dépassant les attentes de nos clients, et en en rationnalisant ce système pour qu'il touche le plus grand nombre de clients. Dans ce cours, nous partagerons avec vous les modèles de réussite qui marchent et qui sont utilisés par les agents les plus prospères de ce pays, qui clôturent régulièrement des centaines de transactions avec des clients satisfaits ».

TAR® invitent aussi des conférenciers dans le but d'accroître la motivation et la productivité des agents immobiliers®. Au salon de la TAR®, Matt Jones, « un conférencier à la renommée nationale », est invité à présenter son dernier livre intitulé *Happiness is a Marathon. 26 Ways to Stay Motivated* dans lequel il raconte comment il s'est relevé des épreuves de la vie. Il est décrit de la façon suivante sur le flyer professionnel de l'évènement : « Matt a été diagnostiqué d'un cancer le 11 septembre 2002. Il est triple conquérant du cancer, a réappris à marcher, a survécu à une greffe de moelle osseuse, a réalisé sept marathons sur sept continents et, oui, cela inclut même l'Antarctique ! »

Dans les entreprises immobilières, la NAR® à travers la TAR® communique également sur les obligations du Realtor® et les moyens honnêtes et respectueux des clients pour « générer des affaires ». Les membres doivent acquérir une idée de leurs projets sur le marché et se familiariser avec les stratégies à adopter pour faire face à la concurrence. Mais c'est aussi cette même organisation professionnelle qui créée, tout en façonnant la législation, un ensemble de règles et vise à réduire les incertitudes et à limiter la concurrence et qui façonne l'identité collective des agents immobiliers.

2.2. Les savoirs experts

> « Un agent immobilier connaît le marché actuel. Il gère des centaines de transactions similaires. Il peut vous obtenir un prix juste, une vente rapide. Un agent immobilier a une liste de *prospects* qui considèrent sérieusement un achat. Il montre sur rendez-vous, en éliminant les candidats peu sérieux qui passeraient juste voir la maison sans intention d'acheter. Un

> agent immobilier filtre les *prospects* qui sont financièrement incapables de respecter votre prix. Il ne perd pas de temps précieux à montrer votre maison à ceux qui ne sont pas qualifiés pour l'acheter. Un agent immobilier est prêt à s'occuper des complexités du financement pour compléter les transactions. Un agent immobilier dispose de la technique et du savoir-faire nécessaires pour clôturer la transaction correctement ». (annonce pour la semaine de l'agent immobilier tenue du 13 au 19 avril 1956)

> « Saviez-vous que beaucoup de courtiers et d'agents immobiliers peuvent et agissent souvent à titre de consultants dans les domaines suivants : financement, investissement immobilier et fiscalité, conception et construction, évaluation de la valeur et évaluation de l'efficacité énergétique ? Les Realtors® sont des hommes d'affaires expérimentés qui ont accès aux informations les plus récentes du secteur immobilier. Ils connaissent la valeur des maisons et le marché du logement dans votre région ». (publicité de la National Association of Realtors® en 1984).

À partir des années 1920, s'est progressivement installé l'idée que la science et le savoir étaient nécessaires à l'immobilier moderne (Weiss 2002, Hornstein 2005). La *realogy* devait donc englober une grande variété de connaissances, notamment « urbanisme et aménagement du territoire, architecture, réforme du logement, démographie, génie sanitaire et arpentage des routes ». Nichols, un agent immobilier et un promoteur immobilier prospère des années 20, illustre le cadre d'une compétence particulière en s'inspirant du modèle d'autres groupes professionnels revendiquant le professionnalisme :

> « Tout homme qui veut en savoir plus sur le droit doit consulter un avocat. Tout homme qui veut tout savoir sur la médecine doit consulter un médecin. S'il veut savoir quelque chose à propos de l'immobilier ou de la terre, il doit s'adresser à un homme de l'immobilier (*real estate man*) ». (cité par Hornstein, 2005, p. 110-111)

Ces revendications autour du savoir immobilier servent en partie de légitimation face au public :

> « Si nous servons simplement de support pour le simple échange de biens immobiliers, nous ne sont pas une profession ; le monde ne reconnaît aucune vocation en tant que profession à moins que ses membres travaillent intelligemment à ajouter des connaissances et des améliorations pour le monde ». (cité par Hornstein, 2005, p. 110-111)

Les annonces immobilières comparent l'agent immobilier au médecin ou à l'avocat, indiquant à la fois les connaissances spécialisées acquises et les aspects éthiques des démarches. Les images et documents archivés du NAR® donnent accès aux publicités publiées entre 1920 et 1960, comme la publicité suivante de John Sorrentino and Son Realtors en 1946 :

> Tout comme le diplôme M.D. identifie les membres de la profession médicale qui ont passé des années à se qualifier pour traiter de votre santé physique, le terme agent immobilier désigne les membres de la profession immobilière qualifiés pour vous servir avec compétence en matière immobilière. Le terme *Realtor®* n'est pas un autre nom pour désigner l' « agent immobilier ». C'est un nom qui peut être utilisé UNIQUEMENT par les professionnels de l'immobilier qui se sont qualifiés en tant que membres de l'Association nationale des chambres immobilières, grâce à leur appartenance au *Chicago Real Estate Board*. Cela signifie que : 1) ils ont des standards personnels et une compétence professionnelle leur permettant de traiter d'importantes questions liées aux transactions immobilières ; 2) Ils doivent respecter un code de déontologie ; 3) Les *Realtors®* s'emploient activement à initier et à superviser les législations locales, régionales et nationales protégeant les intérêts de tous ceux qui s'intéressent à l'immobilier.

Au-delà de la dichotomie entre hommes et machines, les dispositifs de marché sont des agencements sociotechniques qui permettent de générer des échanges économiques et de créer de la valeur. Ces dispositifs peuvent se concevoir comme des agencements économiques rendant « des choses, des comportements et des processus économiques ». En tant que propriétaire du MLSSAZ (le MLS local) dans le sud de l'Arizona, la TAR® a créé son propre système de coopération basé sur l'accès exclusif pour ces membres à certaines informations. Ainsi, les agents immobiliers sont fortement incités à devenir membres s'ils souhaitent exercer une activité immobilière.

C'est d'ailleurs la seule plateforme existante pour échanger des informations sur les biens disponibles sur le marché ; ni Trulia ni Zillow ni aucune autre application n'ont accès à de telles informations. L'association prétend d'ailleurs avoir chapoté en 2018 des transactions immobilières d'une valeur supérieure à 2,6 milliards de dollars.

En tant que dispositif de marché, le MLS, géré par l'intermédiaire de conseils locaux, restreint l'accès des membres du NAR® aux informations et ressources sur les stocks disponibles. Ce type d'innovation technologique contribue à l'institutionnalisation de l'occupation immobilière, tout en incitant chacun à devenir membre de l'association professionnelle. L'association revendique aussi son objectif d'améliorer la réputation des activités immobilières tout en servant le bien supérieur de leurs clients et de la communauté dans son ensemble (Freidson, 1988 ; Wilensky, 1964). En maintenant un accès restreint et exclusif à

l'offre de biens, les agents immobiliers contrôlent et modèlent en partie la structure du marché.

Les programmes et actions parrainés ou organisés directement par la NAR® s'inscrivent dans des actions constantes visant à maintenir l'engagement des personnes dans le secteur et à les inciter à acheter et à vendre des maisons. Comme le remarque Spillman (2012, p. 43), il s'agit de « gérer les marchés pour protéger les performances de leurs membres ». Mais, comme le montre Bradley (1965), une association professionnelle telle que la NAR® ne vise pas seulement à gérer les prix et la production, mais aussi à « partager des informations, à éduquer, à former et à favoriser des sociabilités ».

La NAR® produit des connaissances au niveau 1) juridique : les lois sur l'immobilier, telles que l'utilisation des terres et les droits de propriété (programmes d'études à l'école immobilière et traités par le Département de l'immobilier de l'Arizona); 2) financier : financement, crédit, assurance et taxes; 3) marketing; 4) technologique : liée à l'utilisation et à la maîtrise d'une nouvelle technologie; 5) statistique : tout ce qui concerne les enquêtes sur le logement et la démographie, y compris les rapports de recherche et les articles; et plus généralement 6) des connaissances relatives au marché, aux produits et aux transactions, telles que les caractéristiques des quartiers, les prix et la négociation. La NAR® et la TAR® financent et relaient un ensemble de recherches et des statistiques sur la démographie des acheteurs et des vendeurs. Ces études sont mises à la disposition des membres pour les aider à gérer le marché et à diriger leur activité en fonction des tendances des marchés et de l'évolution des clientèles.

La NAR® s'associe à des associations locales pour fournir des cours et des ressources. La TAR® fournit directement sur place la plupart des programmes mis en œuvre par la NAR®, les accréditations, mais aussi, par exemple, le *Graduate Realtor® Institute* (GRI), dont les cours prétendent apporter des connaissances de pointe sur les normes et pratiques de l'immobilier, y compris le processus de vente, les informations légales et réglementaires, la technologie et les normes professionnelles. Conçues autour des statistiques locales, ces cours mettent en avant les bénéfices de revenus engendrés par les agents immobiliers les ayant suivi assidument.

Si l'objectif affiché de la *Realtor® University* est d'abord proposer des diplômes universitaires au niveau *bachelor* et *master* et une formation pédagogique à ses membres, elle vise plus généralement à renforcer l'aura de la NAR® : « l'amélioration de la pratique de l'immobilier consiste à s'assurer que la marque REALTOR® soit perçue comme une garantie d'expérience et de service professionnel » (document promotionnel). Le principal défi identifié consiste à proposer des cours pertinents, capables de « refléter la nature évolutive du secteur immobilier, les influences technologiques, les exigences des politiques publiques et d'encourager l'apprentissage tout au long de la vie » tout en produisant une « recherche de haute qualité » à même de « recommandations de politique publique » soutenant « des objectifs sociaux et sociétaux plus larges ». (plaquette d'information autour de la *Realtor® University*)

2.3. La morale et l'éthique

« La règle d'or j'appliquerai
Dans tout ce que je fais;
Dans tout ce que je vends et tout ce que j'achète,
Pour les clients, je serai vrai;
Avec mon concurrent, je serai
Toujours juste et carré,
Mon honneur et mon intégrité
Je vais garder avec un soin zélé.
Notre code de déontologie je respecterai
Dans chaque acte,
Ma parole je garderai aussi bien que de l'or
Ceci est mon credo quotidien ».
(Le credo de l'agent immobilier, NAREB, 1930)

Sur le site Web de la NAR®, on peut lire la déclaration suivante :

> « De la mairie au Capitole, les courtiers et agents immobiliers participent activement à un large éventail de questions liées à la santé et au bien-être des communautés dans lesquelles ils vivent et travaillent. En tant que membres de l'Association nationale des courtiers et des

> agents immobiliers, ils constituent un puissant porte-voix pour soutenir le rêve de l'accession à la propriété et s'emploient à créer des communautés solides et un environnement commercial dynamique qui profite à tous ».

Selon le *Center for Responsible Politics* (2012), le NAR® se classe au 2e rang des dépenses les plus importantes en matière de lobbying après la Chambre de commerce étasunienne. Elle a dépensé 64 821 111 dollars en 2016, dont 46% pour les républicains et 30,8% pour les démocrates. Elle plaide aussi en faveur de la défense des droits de propriété privée, de la fiscalité et de la déréglementation des services financiers. La NAR® est également membre de la *Real Estate Roundtable*, groupe de lobbying basé à Washington, DC, qui finance des programmes autour de la « fierté des quartiers », « la maison comme investissement sûr » et les « déductions fiscales pour les biens immobiliers ».

La TAR® intervient aussi sur des questions politiques telles que le soutien à des candidats politiques locaux ou des propositions de vote spécifiques. Elle est par exemple intervenue sur une proposition de loi (prop. 126 d'octobre 2018) pour laquelle ont été organisées des campagnes pour voter oui pour la défense des petites entreprises dans un contexte de crainte d'augmentation des impôts locaux.

En plus de se représenter comme des professionnels, les agents immobiliers sont souvent présentés par la NAR® comme des « champions de la communauté ». Des histoires sur la discrimination et les luttes communautaires sont également mises en scène afin de dépeindre des agents offrant des possibilités aux membres de la communauté en les formant aux avantages de l'accession à la propriété, tout en devenant financièrement responsables. Le site internet de la NAR® met en avant certains de ses membres, présentés comme des « champions communautaires » tels que Brenda dans une ville du Mississippi, présenté comme une éducatrice et une guide :

> Brenda a réalisé que cette communauté avait besoin d'aide. Il y avait des gens bien à Vicksburg. Des familles qui travaillent dur mais qui gagnent peu, et surtout aucune banque qui ne bougerait pour les aider à obtenir un prêt. Ces gens-là vivaient en location, d'une feuille de paie à l'autre au lieu de posséder leur propre maison. C'était un cercle vicieux, et par amour, elle a décidé qu'elle voulait réparer, aider. Alors, après l'avoir raté, elle a repris l'école des agents en 2002, et cette fois, elle a passé le test et elle a réussi, elle a eu sa licence (…) Depuis, elle aide les habitants de Vicksburg. Elle concentre ses efforts sur les plus démunis, les pauvres,

> non éduqués, peu informés. C'est un segment de la population trop souvent oublié par le tumulte de l'Amérique au quotidien. (histoire rapportée site internet de la NAR®)

La légitimation de l'activité immobilière découle non seulement de l'organisation de leurs intérêts, mais aussi d'une capacité à s'inspirer des valeurs de la classe moyenne au début du XXe siècle et de la promotion de l'accession à la propriété par divers acteurs publics et privés. Pour l'historien Jeffrey Hornstein (2005), le développement institutionnel réussi des agents immobiliers résulte de leur capacité à faire coïncider la formation du groupe avec les valeurs de la classe moyenne étasunienne, l'esprit d'entreprise et l'idéologie de la propriété à la fin du XIXe siècle et au début du XXe siècle.

Le préambule du code de déontologie illustre également la grande intégrité et l'honnêteté dont doivent faire preuve les Realtors® pour obéir à l'effort moral, qui s'incarne matériellement dans le territoire, et auquel les agents immobiliers doivent souscrire :

> « En dessous de tout, se trouve la terre. La survie et la croissance d'institutions libres et de notre civilisation dépendent de son utilisation judicieuse et de la propriété largement répartie. Les Realtors® reconnaissent que les intérêts de la nation et de ses citoyens exigent une utilisation optimale de la terre et la répartition la plus large possible de la propriété foncière. Cela nécessite la création de logements adéquats, la construction de villes opérationnelles, le développement d'industries productives ainsi que la préservation d'un environnement sain. Ces intérêts imposent des obligations autres que celles du commerce ordinaire. Ils imposent une grave responsabilité sociale et un devoir patriotique auxquels les courtiers et agents immobiliers doivent se consacrer et pour lesquels ils doivent se préparer avec soin. Les Realtors® sont donc fermement engagés à maintenir et améliorer les normes relatives à leur vocation et partagent avec leurs collègues agents immobiliers une responsabilité commune d'intégrité et d'honneur ». (Préambule du Code de déontologie de 1924-2017, NAR®)

En raison de l'association ambiguë des métiers de la vente à des professions, les intermédiaires commerciaux tentent de s'affranchir de l'ambiguïté morale de la vente, illustrée de manière emblématique par le « vendeur de voiture » peu scrupuleux dont le seul objectif est le gain financier au détriment du bien-être financier et social des clients.

Pour lutter contre cette image, les agents de vente que j'ai observés cherchent à démontrer qu'ils sont de « bonnes personnes » qui veulent représenter et aider plutôt qu'exploiter la vulnérabilité des individus (McFall, 2012; Mullaney et Shope, 2012). Les techniques de présentation de soi consistent notamment à se distancer de l'image du vendeur de voiture et

de personnifier une identité sympathique et aidante. La figure de l'agent se nourrit d'un côté du mythe de l'entrepreneur individuel ou du *self-made man*, et de l'autre de la figure du galant masculin, présenté comme un homme intègre, honnête ou éducateur au service des plus faibles. À l'instar de ce que McFall (2012) appelle le « bon gars » pour désigner l'agent d'assurance, l'agent immobilier, père de famille responsable, accorde une attention particulière à ne pas afficher un statut supérieur à celui de ses clients, incarnant une forme d'identité de classe moyenne. Pour être en relation avec ses clients, il met en avant la dimension symbolique plutôt que commerciale, orchestrant l'accès à la stabilité financière, à la propriété, à la stabilité et à la reproduction de la famille.

En donnant l'illusion que leurs propres intérêts disparaissent derrière ceux de leurs clients, les 15 méga-agents que j'ai interviewés souhaitent s'éloigner de la figure de l'escroc, associé au vendeur en « refroidissant leur marque » et en jouant sur la confiance (Goffman, 1952)[31]. Jessica, agent immobilier, âgée de 57 ans, figure dans le top 1% du revenu brut le plus élevé de tous les agents immobiliers de la ville, selon les statistiques fournies par la chambre immobilière locale. Elle veut se démarquer des agents avides (*greedy*), alors qu'elle se dit très intéressée par la satisfaction des besoins de ses clients :

> « J'ai un client qui a des amis. Ils ont très peur de vendre et ils sont âgés. Elle veut qu'ils parlent avec moi parce qu'elle sait que je ne serais pas agressive, et je ne leur mettrais pas la pression. Elle sait que je vais prendre le temps et expliquer le processus. Je vais probablement avoir *le* mandat, mais je vais vraiment le faire pour les aider. De nombreux agents immobiliers sont agressifs, affamés, ils vivent dans l'attente du chèque. Mon approche est différente de celle de beaucoup d'agents, parce que je le fais comme un choix, et non pas parce que je dois le faire ». (entretien)

D'autres agents minimisent également leur rôle en tant que vendeurs. Il s'agit de se détacher de la figure de l'agent immobilier comme agent commercial. Matthew, un agent de 32 ans qui a débuté il y a environ un an, va même jusqu'à vouloir ne pas être « connu » comme « agent

[31] Dans l'essai *On Cooling the Mark out*, Goffman (1952, p. 451) parle de performances identitaires soigneusement chorégraphiées qui jouent sur la confiance, « pratiquées sur des personnes privées par des acteurs talentueux qui construisent méthodiquement et régulièrement des relations sociales informelles dans le seul but de les abuser». Si Goffman n'a jamais mené de recherches sur le terrain auprès de ce type de personnalités, il s'est inspiré des études ethnographiques du linguiste David Maurer (1931) sur les arguments des escrocs ou des criminels professionnels, y puisant un modèle pour analyser plus globalement les relations sociales. Dans ce sens, les joueurs, les faussaires et les escrocs (*confidence men*) n'étaient pas des fripons isolés, mais des entrepreneurs modernes engagés dans des industries hautement organisées avec des règles, des apprentissages, des alliances et, surtout, un vocabulaire technique exclusif (Pettit, 2011, p. 148).

immobilier » car il représente le rôle de quelqu'un qui cherche à tirer profit de la vente d'une propriété. Il préfère être considéré comme un facilitateur ou un guide, et ainsi de pouvoir nouer des liens avec ses clients. Quand je lui ai demandé de se présenter, il a déclaré :

> « Ouais, je ne pense pas qu'être agent devrait te définir. Je ne veux pas être… je ne veux pas être connu comme un agent immobilier. Je veux que les gens se rappellent de moi comme une personne qui les ai aidés. Je veux construire une relation précieuse avec eux, pour toujours ». (entretien)

Même des agents assez établis comme Suzy, 30 ans, essaient de minimiser l'impact de l'importance de l'argent sur le service :

> « Je ne veux pas qu'on me parle d'argent. Déjà. Je veux obtenir un chèque et me dire « Whoa! Regardez ce que j'ai pour venir en aide à quelqu'un ! » C'est un merveilleux avantage. Mais au bout du compte, ce que je veux vraiment faire, c'est être sûr que les gens soient pris en charge. Je veux que les personnes avec qui j'ai travaillé me recommandent à leurs amis, leur famille, qui que ce soit… et pour que leurs amis et leur famille qui pensent « oh, les agents immobiliers sont juste à l'affut, ils veulent vous coffrer » se retrouvent à dire « En fait, nous avons eu une expérience incroyable. Voici sa carte. Si vous avez besoin de quoi que ce soit, appelez-la. Elle s'assurera que vous soyez bien pris en charge ». Ce que je veux, c'est être l'exception. Je veux être quelqu'un qui est connu pour « Le client vient d'abord. C'est tout ». (entretien)

Présenter la relation de marché entre l'intermédiaire et son client comme une « relation humaine » permet d'apparaitre comme un conseiller plutôt qu'un vendeur, comme le met en avant Terri, une femme agent âgée de 44 ans et active depuis 10 ans :

> « Je suis assez timide, je ne veux pas non plus me cacher dans un coin, mais je n'aime pas me mettre en avant, j'ai toujours pensé qu'il fallait être vendeur, mais je ne suis pas que ça. Avec mon entreprise, j'étais en charge du service à la clientèle, et c'est ce en quoi je crois, je n'ai jamais pensé que personne ne puisse me vendre quoi que ce soit, me convaincre d'acheter quelque chose que je ne veux pas acheter, je déteste les gens qui vous prennent comme ça, enfin je peux pas dire détester, parce que ma partenaire était la meilleure vendeuse que j'ai jamais rencontré dans ma vie, il ne s'agit pas de la façon dont vous traitez quelqu'un, mais de vos relations, de l'établissement de relations et de l'authenticité, et non de la contrefaçon, car vous voulez leur vendre quelque chose. J'ai juste une philosophie, j'aime vraiment aider les gens et atteindre leurs propres objectifs, en essayant de les aider à résoudre un problème, parce que parfois, ça peut être vraiment pesant, imaginez-vous avec une maison sous l'eau[32], vous achetez et pour peu que vous ne pouvez pas la revendre maintenant, vous essayez de

[32] Dans le jargon, les agents immobiliers parlent de « maison sous l'eau ». Elle désigne la saisie d'une maison généralement par une banque car *l'accord de remboursement passé n'est plus honoré comme convenu par les acheteurs*. La maison sera dite *foreclosed* ou en *foreclosure*. Les agents pratiques aussi la *short sale* pour vendre des propriétés dont la valeur est inférieur au à l'hypothèque ou à d'autres liens financiers. Le vendeur veut vendre le bien à un prix inférieur au montant total de sa dette. La banque ou l'organisme prêteur devra alors approuver l'opération pour un transfert libre de toute dette.

> changer de boulot, vous devez vendre, mais que faites-vous ? Beaucoup de gens sont juste paralysés, ça fait du bien pouvoir les aider à atteindre leurs objectifs ». (entretien)

Les agents moins établis se targuent également du même discours, bien que leur manque de revenu stabilisé les rende souvent très mal à l'aise. Ils tentent de combiner deux objectifs parfois contradictoires : sécuriser des transactions pour obtenir un revenu mais aussi agir dans le meilleur intérêt de leurs clients, ce qui ne signifie pas nécessairement de conclure des transactions le plus rapidement possible. Les agents immobiliers cherchent donc toujours à équilibrer une position structurellement difficile et contraignante. Sonia, 59 ans, qui a débuté dans le secteur il y a environ 6 mois, parle de la relation ambiguë qui existe entre gagner de l'argent et offrir les meilleurs services à ses clients. Il y a une opposition apparente dans son discours entre « prendre soin » et « gagner de l'argent » :

> « Il est difficile de ne pas regarder les gens sans y voir juste des dollars au début. Je suis quelqu'un qui veut construire des relations. Je veux aider les gens, mais en même temps, en juin et juillet, il y avait quelques moments où je me disais : « J'ai besoin de manger ! Il faut que je sois payée ! » C'est donc difficile de ne pas le faire, vous devez séparer les deux. Vous devez voir l'argent à la fin…à la fin d'une vente. Avant cela, vous devez vous dire : « Je dois prendre soin de ces personnes et veiller à ce qu'elles obtiennent ce dont elles ont besoin. Vous ne pouvez même pas penser à l'argent. Du moins, c'est ce qui marche avec moi. Je ne peux même pas penser à l'argent. La seule chose à laquelle je dois penser, c'est d'organiser des *open houses* dans des maisons à 300 000 dollars au lieu de 150 000 dollars, car à long terme, cela me permettra d'obtenir des clients qui sont des acheteurs plus importants et qui me rapporteront plus d'argent au bout du compte ». (entretien)

Il s'agit d'un équilibre assez fragile pour la plupart des nouveaux entrants comme Sonia, qui essaient de raisonner stratégiquement sur la meilleure manière (i.e. la moins coûteuse en temps) de générer des transactions.

L'un des arguments répétés au cours de la formation à l'école de l'immobilier et dans les entreprises immobilières est que si l'on se « donne à fond » et qu'on est « sympathique », les transactions viendront tout naturellement. Dans les deux entreprises, les programmes de formation sont conçus pour apprendre aux agents à « être en relation ». Barry, directeur d'une succursale de *Desert Realty*, 10 ans d'activité, reconnu par ses collègues comme « un gars formidable », « un orateur exceptionnel » et un « chef d'équipe fantastique », enseigne à de nouvelles recrues sur la façon de développer leur activité :

> « Pourquoi êtes-vous dans cette affaire ? Votre objectif est de vous dire que vous êtes dans ce secteur parce que je veux « avoir un impact positif sur la vie des gens » ou parce que je veux « apprendre d'eux et de moi » ou « comment puis-je améliorer leur vie ? » et non pas « Je vais gagner de l'argent avec vous ». Vous savez que le leadership du marché repose sur la compassion, l'innovation, la collaboration et les passions…Eh bien, tout le monde n'a pas cette culture de l'excellence. La mission, la production et la volonté sont bonnes, la politique est mauvaise. N'oubliez pas de leur poser des questions, que veulent-ils ou pourquoi vendent-ils leur expérience de rêve dans une maison ? Ce n'est pas une affaire de commerce, ça se joue sur les relations, il vous suffit donc de sortir de votre zone de confort et de ne pas rester au bureau, mais d'avoir un aperçu des propriétés, des portes ouvertes, de rencontrer des gens au bar, au restaurant, au supermarché. Améliorer la vie des gens sert la légitimité de l'agent mais pas seulement ; cela permet de créer un sentiment de valeur dans la vie des agents immobiliers et de créer un sens de similitude avec leurs clients, de définir comment ils donnent un sens à leur utilité et à la fierté de leur profession. (discours professé lors de la formation des entrants *à Desert Realty*)

Cette stabilisation des conditions d'exercice de la profession implique la dissimulation des principes économiques d'organisation des activités. Les investissements professionnels mettent à distance la sphère de l'argent et du commerce. Par une opération de déni de l'économie, les conditions éventuelles d'existence de l'activité de l'agent sont rendues visibles. Cette « invisibilisation » n'est pas anodine, mais renvoie à ce que Bourdieu a appelé l'économie des biens symboliques (Bourdieu, 1977 ; Maguire et Matthews, 2014).

Le marché des maisons de luxe se rapproche ainsi du marché de l'art : dans les deux cas, le marché est mis à distance pendant la transaction et devient d'autant plus efficace qu'il n'est pas pensé en tant que tel, organisé plutôt autour de la croyance en la magie ou en valeur ajoutée du produit ou de l'artiste. La dimension symbolique transforme le statut de la transaction : l'acte d'achat devient en soi plus fort que les modalités, les incertitudes et les risques qui l'entourent. Je montre ensuite dans la troisième partie dans quelle mesure la captation du client repose sur un travail aux dimensions sociales et symboliques[33].

[33] Cette troisième partie a fait l'objet de deux publications par l'auteure (Benites-Gambirazio, 2018, forthcoming 2020)

Troisième partie : Découvrir le client. Les mécanismes relationnels de la confiance et la captation

1. (Se) vendre pour capter le client

Les travaux de sociologie économique ont montré que la confiance est essentielle au déroulement des transactions économiques et fait partie intégrante des dynamiques de marché. Les entreprises et les clients à la recherche de partenaires pour des transactions commerciales font souvent appel à une personne déjà connue ou de confiance, ou recommandée par une personne déjà connue ou de confiance (Granovetter, 1995 ; Macaulay, 1963). Des recherches montrent la centralité de l'utilisation des réseaux par les entreprises notamment dans les embauches, qui leur permet de réduire les coûts d'information et les incertitudes (Bourdieu, 2010 ; Portes, 1998). Si les sociologues économiques affirment que les relations interpersonnelles sont essentielles à la sécurisation de l'information et à la création de confiance (Granovetter, 1985 ; Uzzi, 1999), l'attention accordée au travail de création de cette confiance visant à faciliter les transactions sur le marché a été moins pris en compte (Bandelj, 2009; Cochoy et Dubuisson-Quellier, 2000).

En raison du statut ambigu de la profession de vente dans le monde des professions, les intermédiaires de vente effectuent un travail supplémentaire pour générer la confiance, par opposition aux médecins ou aux avocats. Dans le secteur des services, les travailleurs doivent également satisfaire les clients, leur apporter confort et facilité en effectuant un travail émotionnel (Hochschild, 1983) ou interactif (Leidner, 1993 ; Wharton, 1996), mais leur travail est beaucoup moins attaché à des clients spécifiques et consiste en une série d'actes de déférence non personnalisés instantanés.

Dans le domaine de la vente, témoigner de sa bonne foi, apparaitre sympathique et convivial constitue un élément central de la confiance. Si les agents doivent démontrer qu'ils sont de « bonnes personnes » ne voulant pas profiter de leurs clients, ils doivent également être capables de développer des relations significatives qui serviront leur activité (Lamont, 2012).

En outre, ils travaillent à la construction de similitudes sociodémographiques et culturelles - une forme d'homophilie - afin d'établir leur autorité et de soutenir les opérations de marché.

1.1. La science des relations et le travail sur la présentation de soi

Si le travail de l'agent n'est pas sans évoquer le travail émotionnel décrit par Hochschild (1983), il présente la particularité de devoir attirer et fidéliser des clients, en investissant dans de manière centrale la personne et la personnalité de l'agent.

« Les gens font des affaires avec vous parce qu'ils vous connaissent et vous aiment » répète Tom, formateur depuis cinq ans à *Desert Realty*, à chaque séance du matin. Pendant les sessions de formation, les agents sont encouragés à adopter des formes spécifiques de présentation de soi. Les formateurs insistent :

> « Vous devez être sympathique et chaleureux et investir dans quelque chose que vous aimez. Vous êtes votre plus grand atout, les clients doivent vous aimer ». (session de formation, *Real Prosperity*)

Les formateurs insistent sur la nécessité de rencontrer les clients plus que de soucier de la vente de maisons :

> « Ne vous inquiétez pas pour vos ventes, allez à la rencontre des gens », assure le formateur lors de la session sur les techniques de vente : dans tous les lieux où vous avez des liens ou une affiliation, l'école de vos enfants, le club de football et même le supermarché et donnez les chiffres : « contactez 5 personnes par jour et votre activité est garantie ». (note de terrain, *Desert Realty*)

Lors de la formation de nouveaux agents dans des entreprises immobilières, les formateurs et les gestionnaires insistent sur la nécessité d'investir dans des « techniques de vente chaleureuses ». Les entreprises immobilières consacrent environ 40%de leurs sessions de formation[34] aux techniques et astuces pour développer et entretenir des relations. Dans le matériel de formation utilisé dans *Real Prosperity*, le chapitre « le pouvoir de la prospection face au long rendement du marketing » souligne les avantages de « travailler sur des personnes » pour trouver des clients.

[34] Il n'y a pas de statistiques formelles pour la répartition des formations. Ce calcul est basé sur l'ethnographie réalisée et le contenu affiché sur les programmes de formation.

> « Bien que la génération de leads soit une combinaison de marketing et de prospection, une action productive en quatre-vingt-dix jours nécessite que vous consacriez la majeure partie de votre prospection énergétique à la commercialisation. De nombreux agents essaient de démarrer leur carrière avec le marketing plutôt que la prospection, craignant d'entendre le mot « non ». Les gens sont tellement moins prévisibles que les logos et les cartes de visite, n'est-ce pas ? Mais écoutez ceci : les gens sont également beaucoup plus rentables que ne le sera jamais tout élément marketing conçu par des professionnels. Chaque « oui » que vous entendez paiera facilement le temps que vous consacrez à la collecte de « non ». Le temps et les dépenses que nécessite le marketing prennent toutefois beaucoup plus de temps à être rentabilisés ». (livret de formation chez *Real Prosperity*)

Les agents sont d'ailleurs encouragés dans les formations à établir des relations sociales dans leurs cercles d'appartenance, ce que fait Brian par exemple au club de moto où il est inscrit, dans le club de football de sa fille, ou sa femme quand elle se porte volontaire pour mettre à jour les listes de parents d'élèves, lui permettant un accès à toutes les adresses mails.

Le concept de « sphère d'influence » est présenté comme l'investissement le plus sûr et le plus rentable pour la réussite dans l'activité immobilière. Il consiste à obtenir des références de personnes connues, qu'il s'agisse de connaissances, de membres de la famille ou d'amis, et à entretenir la relation avec chacune d'entre elle. Jerry, qui forme de nouveaux agents depuis cinq ans et est lui-même agent depuis neuf ans, anime la session « *Grow your SOI* » (Faire croître votre SOI) à *Desert Realty*.

> « Vous devez rencontrer des gens, votre objectif est de rencontrer des gens, vous devez augmenter votre SOI à 300 personnes (…) S'approcher des gens, c'est une bénédiction, mais c'est plus que cela, c'est une activité qui génère du travail, chaque événement que votre enfant fait, porter le badge, porter le badge lorsque vous allez à l'épicerie. Certains appellent cela du réseautage, il s'agit uniquement de parler aux gens, de l'immobilier, mais aussi de ce qu'ils aimeraient ou ce dont ils pourraient avoir besoin » (discours de Jerry, *Desert Realty*)

La présentation de soi est considérée comme un signe de compétence professionnelle. Goffman (1959) a souligné la nature changeante des formes de présentation en fonction de l'interaction et du contexte. Sa notion de « présentation de soi » permet de rendre compte des manières socialement constituées selon lesquelles les agents se présentent aux clients. Bourdieu (1979) a également montré comment le monde social s'apparente à un système de signes qui se renforcent mutuellement - prononciations, vêtements, postures et manières d'être - définissant inconsciemment l'affinité ou la répulsion.

Les agents se servent de plusieurs techniques pour valoriser leur identité professionnelle et sociale, pouvant passer par l'écriture des lettres personnalisées pour leurs clients, ils peuvent siéger au conseil d'administration de leur HOA[35] ou encore organiser des événements à l'école de leurs enfants ou des soirées. Parmi les meilleurs agents de *Desert Realty*, Ben, trois années d'expérience, plaide en faveur d'un processus d'identification personnelle : « Pensez et soyez immobilier » :

> « Quand les gens me parlent, en réalité, ils savent que je suis dans l'immobilier, je n'ai pas à le dire, ils savent qu'ils peuvent me poser des questions sur l'immobilier, je ne suis pas que Ben, l'immobilier, c'est mon identité ». (discussion informelle, *Desert Realty*)

Si la présentation de soi fait partie intégrante de son travail, l'agent immobilier est aussi incités à connaitre les tendances du marché et s'afficher comme des experts.

1.2. Présenter un savoir expert

Lors de la formation chez *Real Prosperity* et *Desert Realty*, les agents sont incités à apprendre les tendances de l'immobilier local (prix moyen, évolution des prix, construction en cours, taux d'intérêt, marché de l'offre ou de la demande etc.). L'affichage de cette expertise de marché est donc utilisé pour légitimer l'agent et donner confiance aux futurs clients. L'acquisition d'information susceptible d'influencer le marché, comme le prix du logement et la valeur des quartiers est aussi encouragée. L'objectif est alors qu'ils soient en mesure d'offrir un discours spécifique sur l'état actuel du marché, par exemple les avantages financiers de la propriété par rapport à la location, ou des prêts immobiliers en raison de la baisse des taux d'intérêt.

Lors des entretiens également, les agents parlent de « J'ai gagné des gens comme ça au supermarché. Ils ont vu mon badge et m'ont demandé comment était le marché. Préparez-vous simplement à apporter des réponses », se souvient Brandon, un agent possédant trois ans d'expérience chez *Desert Realty*. Deux des formateurs recommandent notamment de toujours porter un badge avec nom et affiliation. Douze des agents interrogés mentionnent le

[35] Une HomeOwners Association est une association privée constituée généralement par un promoteur immobilier pour administrer et gérer un lotissement résidentiel et pour y commercialiser et y vendre des terrains et des maisons.

supermarché comme un endroit particulièrement adapté à la rencontre avec des clients, et surtout pour discuter du marché de manière informelle. Des personnes avec lesquelles les agents n'ont pas de lien s'arrêtent pour demander : « Comment se porte le marché ? ». J'ai pu observer cela lors de sorties avec deux de mes enquêtés.

La présentation de données, qui indique à la fois au vendeur et à l'acheteur que le moment est propice pour vendre ou investir, est considérée comme une activité neutre, alors qu'elle est en réalité essentiellement destinée à influer sur les choix ou les comportements des consommateurs sur le marché. Dans mes observations, les techniques de présentation des données (et le discours qui les entourent) n'incluent aucun composant de vente directe. Connaître et véhiculer le marché permet à la fois de minimiser l'importance de la transaction économique réelle, perçue de manière négative et trop agressive par les clients, et de produire de la confiance.

1.3. Établir des similarités : agents, clients et produits

Etablir une similarité avec les clients

Les observations révèlent comment les agents construisent leur personnalité et leur être social en fonction des niches qu'ils souhaitent intégrer. Le conseil donné par des agents expérimentés au cours de la formation consiste à se spécialiser, c'est-à-dire à faire d'un hobby, d'une passion, d'une caractéristique individuelle, comme une origine ethnique, un intérêt pour le basketball ou un statut de chef d'entreprise, un investissement commercial. Attirer les « bons types de clients », c'est aussi s'assurer une source continue de clients et donc de revenus.

L'un des livres proposés aux agents en formation indique notamment :

> « vos clients seront en adéquation avec votre expertise et vos compétences, et le service deviendra plus facile et plus naturel. Si vous attirez le bon type de clients, vous obtiendrez également une plus grande quantité et une plus grande qualité de parrainages » (Zeller 2011, p. 15).

Une technique pour trouver des clients est de s'inscrire à un club où les participants auront un passe-temps ou une passion commune. James, un agent de 38 ans, qui a commencé dans

l'immobilier après avoir travaillé dans l'industrie de la mode au Japon et à New York, se souvient de son entrée en immobilier :

> « La première chose que j'ai faite lors de mon déménagement ici est de m'inscrire à la Bonita (un club de bien-être avec un golf) pour aller jouer au tennis, pas vraiment parce que j'aime jouer au tennis, mais j'essayais juste de rencontrer des gens, je voulais aimer les événements sociaux qu'ils organisaient, et parfois, je me sentais comme un idiot parce que ce n'était pas vraiment mon style, je n'aime pas aller à ce genre d'évènement organisé, mais bon au final, on peut rien y faire, il faut rencontrer des gens en quelque sorte ». (entretien)

James pense également qu'il est important de trouver des intérêts communs pour développer des relations et réussir en tant qu'agent immobilier® :

> « Je pense que c'est bien de pouvoir parler avec vos clients parce que si vous pensez à vos clients et à leurs intérêts (…) par exemple, avec des clients qui travaillent dans un environnement financier, ils vous demandent ce que vous pensez et vous n'avez aucune idée, vous savez, ils vont dire mais comment ça, vous ne savez pas. Vous devez être un peu comme un caméléon en affaires, je n'ai jamais été un fan de basket-ball, mais je suis venu ici et l'équipe de basket de l'Université d'Arizona est énorme, et je me souviens de quelqu'un qui me parlait de l'équipe, et je n'avais aucune idée, rien, et je me suis senti comme un idiot alors j'ai commencé à regarder et à suivre le basket, maintenant j'ai même un abonnement de saison, j'aime ça, je le fais vraiment par intérêt, mais vous devez vous intéresser à ce que les gens aiment (…) il doit y avoir des points communs entre vous et vos clients, et je regarde spécifiquement ce que font mes clients et j'essaie de m'intéresser à ces choses, et puis souvent en fait, j'y trouve vraiment de l'intérêt ». (entretien)

La présentation de caractéristiques similaires est perçue comme une indication de la fiabilité de l'agent immobilier. Brian, 39 ans, qui travaille en équipe avec sa femme, donne l'exemple d'une cliente que sa femme a conquise lorsqu'elle s'est rendue compte qu'elles étaient originaires de la même ville :

> « Une fois, ma femme a rencontré la propriétaire d'une maison, elles ont découvert qu'elles venaient de la même ville dans l'Illinois. Comme la propriétaire n'aimait pas l'agent immobilier qui s'occupait d'elle, elle disait qu'elle n'était jamais disponible, elle a demandé à ma femme d'être son agent, puis elle s'est écriée 'oui, oui, chéri, nous avons une nouvelle cliente' ». (discussion informelle lors d'une maison ouverte)

Brian souligne également une forme de capital - être d'origine mexicaine et parler espagnol - qui lui permet d'investir dans ce que l'on pourrait appeler une « niche hispanique ». D'autre

part, sa femme, qui était chargée de projet à l'observatoire local avant de devenir agent immobilier, est en contact avec des clients plus aisés grâce à ses réseaux professionnels :

> « J'ai grandi à Nogales, ma femme fait des maisons plus chères, 600 000 et plus alors que je travaille avec toutes les gammes de prix, et j'ai donc aussi travaillé avec des familles hispaniques, avec des maisons d'environ 80 000, et c'est différent, il faut les voir, ils ne savent pas grand-chose et toute la famille va sortir et voir la maison, vous travaillez avec des gens ». (discussion informelle lors d'une maison ouverte)

En tant qu'ancienne propriétaire d'entreprise, Maria, 48 ans, estime que son expérience lui permet de bien s'entendre et de bien comprendre les chefs d'entreprise. Elle se sent mieux à même de répondre efficacement à leurs besoins car, outre son expertise, elle dit avoir développé une « compréhension et une identification intuitives » avec ses clients, pour une grande part directeurs commerciaux ou dirigeants d'entreprise. D'autres agents utilisent quant à eux des caractéristiques sociodémographiques marquantes pour constituer leur réseau de clients. Les agents s'appuient donc sur une forme d'homophilie pour ressembler à leurs clients. Ils le font en investissant dans des aspects de leurs personnalités ou de leurs passe-temps qui conviennent à la clientèle qu'ils souhaitent cibler.

Etablir une similarité avec les produits

En immobilier résidentiel, les transactions dépendent en partie des stratégies de présentation des maisons. Pour les familles de classes moyennes et supérieures étatsuniennes, la maison participe du bon goût et des bonnes manières, essentielles au maintien d'un statut social. L'agent immobilier n'intervient pas comme un pur outil d'accès à la maison, mais signale le bon goût et mode de vie. La mise en relation entre le produit, le goût et le type de client ne fonctionne pas automatiquement mais plutôt comme un travail mis en œuvre pour attester de la correspondance entre les clients et les maisons comme produits, ainsi qu'entre l'agent et les maisons visitées. Les agents immobiliers des marchés moyen-haut et haut de gamme effectuent alors plus que la vente d'une maison, la vente d'un mode de vie, auquel ils se sentent associés.

Nancy, par exemple, même si elle n'habite pas une des maisons à plus d'un million de dollars qu'elle vend, s'associe en permanence avec ses biens, par le type de vêtements qu'elle porte,

l'allure qu'elle adopte et la forte identification avec des produits de qualité, avec une architecture dont elle-même partage l'allure et le goût.

La trajectoire de Nancy montre combien les agents du marché résidentiel moyen et supérieur investissent les produits par la mise en scène et les photographies des maisons. Les agents que j'ai suivis au cours de leurs interactions avec les clients, notamment lors de la recherche de logement et lors de présentations, utilisent des espaces et des composants spécifiques de la maison comme projection symbolique d'un style de vie.

L'identification à la maison comme objet symbolique véhiculant une position sociale et un statut est également au cœur des représentations genrées des jeunes femmes agents qui souhaitent, comme Amanda, pouvoir s'identifier au produit de la maison et véhiculer une image d'elles-mêmes :

> « Cette maison à *Star Pass* était sûrement ma plus grosse commission, oui ces chèques sont très différents de ceux que j'ai eu avant, il y a de gros chiffres, et c'est vraiment sympa. Je me fixe des objectifs à atteindre en 1 an, mais aussi, mentalement, je veux avoir un mandat de luxe, je veux me présenter comme ça, je veux vendre des maisons au-dessus de la moyenne, je veux le client qui me dit, je veux acheter une maison à 500 000 dollars, laissez-moi vous montrez celles-ci, elles sont un tout petit peu plus belles que celle qui a subi la *foreclosure* et n'a pas eu de clim' pendant des années (rires), oui, parfois vous entrez et vous vous dites : Oh mon Dieu ! » (entretien)

Un autre agent que j'ai suivie tout au long de la transaction, Sonia, 59 ans, nouvelle recrue de *Desert Realty*, a été référée à des clients par un de ses amis. Elle ne les a jamais rencontrées auparavant, mais sait déjà quelque chose à leur sujet. Jessica, enceinte de leur premier enfant, est professeure à l'Université et Matthew est entraîneur de baseball dans une équipe locale. Ils veulent vendre leur maison pour en acheter une plus grande. Sonia m'emmène à la présentation de la maison pour la « pré-visualiser » avec ses clients. Elle a fait des recherches sur le titre et les *comps* avant le rendez-vous. En se rendant à la maison et en discutant avec Jessica, elle fait référence à la propreté et à l'espace de la chambre à coucher, en imaginant des fonctions spécifiques pour mettre en valeur la maison et en particulier des marqueurs de style de vie spécifiques au produit (« immense *master bedroom* », « belle cuisine récemment refaite »), elle projette l'idéal du mode de vie pour jeune couple tout en se référant aux « bons restaurants à quelques minutes de la maison ». Les agents tentent donc de donner un statut à la fois à la représentation des biens et à leur présentation de soi, qui doit s'aligner sur la

valeur des produits. Ils mettent en avant des éléments symboliques tout en montrant les maisons à leurs clients ou en discutant de la préparation du mandat. Cela est particulièrement vrai pour les maisons dont les prix se situant dans la fourchette des prix moyens et élevés.

Etablir une similarité entre clients et produits par le goût

Les agents ne s'appuient pas uniquement sur le capital économique de leurs clients, ils s'efforcent également de créer un climat de confiance, d'apprendre à lire leurs pour trouver des arguments auxquels leurs clients seront sensibles. Ce pouvoir repose sur l'acquisition d'un capital symbolique (« professionnel ») garantissant leur reconnaissance et leur légitimité. Leur formation, leur socialisation et leur niveau d'expérience entrent également dans l'acquisition de ce capital symbolique (Bourdieu, 1979).

En devenant des intermédiaires entre le marché et les biens (maisons), les agents sont bien placés pour amener les acheteurs et les vendeurs à acheter ou à vendre un bien immobilier : ils ont pour fonction de « rassurer » (Lambert, 2015). Leur travail consiste donc à mettre en valeur les produits, ayant pour référence le marché comme légitimation « extérieure ». Cet appariement de la valeur et du goût (renforcé ou créé par l'agent), doit également être étudié en rapport avec non seulement les possibilités d'emprunt du client, mais les attentes anticipés des clients, définis dans l'interaction agent-client.

Les vendeurs peuvent mobiliser un large éventail de symboles tels que le « style poétique » et les vignettes familiales associées à la maison ou aux domaines et demeures (Augé, 1989). Le consommateur paierait un prix très élevé pour assouvir son désir de reproduction à la fois symbolique et matériel, présenté comme un signe d'authenticité et une transmission durable. La maison est un « placement » non seulement à cause de son coût économique, mais aussi du fait des stratégies de reproduction qu'elle implique : « La maison est inséparable du ménage en tant que groupe social durable et du projet collectif qui le perpétue » (Bourdieu et al., 1990, p. 6). Non seulement la maison est un produit matériel, elle est également considérée comme un investissement financier familial et une création artistique symbolique (Bourdieu, 2000).

L'émulation et l'anticipation du goût fonctionnent donc comme un mécanisme assertif et rassurant pour produire un « marqueur de classe », car les biens révèlent la matérialité dans lequel le statut est intégré. Le symbolique s'incarne dans des produits tels que les maisons, qui révèlent l'inscription matérielle des symboles dans le matériel et dans le physique : « le goût classifie, et classifie celui qui classifie ». Ces lignes de distinction sont opérationnalisées en tant qu'outils de calcul, permettant de distinguer le « beau » du « laid », le « distingué » du « vulgaire » (Bourdieu, 1984, p. VI).

Le goût moyen fait référence à la « bonne volonté culturelle » qui repose sur une imitation du sens de la distinction de la classe supérieure, mais avec la tension permanente produite par la peur d'agir en tant que classe inférieure et de paraître vulgaire ; d'où le désir de s'élever dans l'échelle sociale et de montrer les signes de distinction appropriés pour intégrer les classes supérieures.

Le goût ne se joue pas seulement comme une forme de « consommation ostentatoire » destinée à véhiculer le statut social (Veblen, 1970), mais comme un engagement dans une lutte pour l'acquisition de capitaux pour appartenir à la classe moyenne[36], en particulier pour des individus incertains de leur condition (les petits bourgeois et leur « bonne volonté culturelle » mis en avant par Bourdieu), desquels des agents tirent intuitivement et pratiquement.

Le goût ne s'appuie pas seulement sur des jugements esthétiques sur ce qui est beau ou sur l'engagement émotionnel qui donne de la valeur à l'acheteur (Besbris, 2016), mais agit également à travers les produits comme une mesure comparative de la valeur. Il s'agit aussi d'un critère de revente dans la mesure où le produit symbolique considéré comme hautement souhaitable serait transférable au capital économique (Bourdieu, 2011). Le goût est ainsi

[36] Ici, je m'appuie sur le travail de Lamont dans *Money, Morals, and Manners* (1992) qui ne s'apparente pas la position objective de classe (SES, niveau de richesse ou possession), mais qui renvoie à des catégories de distinction sociales et morales autour de ce qui est perçu comme un signe d'appartenance à la classe moyenne. Il ne s'agit pas du bien en lui-même mais du goût, du type d'intérieur, la façon de recevoir et de se tenir, le rapport à l'argent et à la maisonnée, ainsi qu'aux rôles traditionnelles du masculin et du féminin. La position particulière de classe renvoie aussi à l'espace dans lequel s'insère l'enquête. Les catégories de distinction à Tucson sont sensiblement différentes de celles de New York. Globalement, on peut aussi dire que le « rêve américain » de possession transcendante la plupart des classes sociales (Davis 1986) même si le sentiment de perte (*losing ground*) semble différent d'une classe à l'autre (Kefalas, 2003 ; Sherman, 2019).

inscrit dans un raisonnement stratégique, mais pratique, transféré de l'agent aux acheteurs, eux-mêmes projetés dans la peau du vendeur dans le but de maximiser les profits. La logique du goût, souvent apportée ou renforcée par les agents immobiliers, devient un aspect central de l'opérationnalisation des marchés.

Si les agents immobiliers doivent analyser l'ensemble des goûts de leurs clientèles et capter ce qu'ils recherchent, des représentations autour du goût sont également utilisés par les promoteurs et les agents immobiliers pour vendre des biens à la fois pour des acheteurs qui vont y vivre mais aussi pour des vendeurs qui ne doivent pas se détourner trop de cette représentation de goût moyen. De fait, cette uniformisation par le marché des goûts peut dans certains cas conduire à une forme de standardisation au sein des sous-marchés. Cela explique aussi la diffusion d'usages et de fonctions de pièces associés à des « besoins », mais qui peut renvoyer à des frontières d'appartenance fortes entre groupes sociaux.

Si le goût des clients diffère trop du goût du « milieu de gamme », de telle sorte qu'ils n'apprécient aucun produit, il s'agit la plupart du temps de clients qui viennent d'une autre ville ou une appartenance aux classes supérieures ou la frange haute des classes moyennes. L'agent pourra alors recommander aux acheteurs de construire leur propre maison ou aux vendeurs de mettre soigneusement en valeur leurs précieux atouts en pariant sur leur « originalité ». Par goût, mais aussi expertise, c'est tout un système de calcul qui est mis en place.

2. Rentabiliser le genre

2.1. D'une affaire d'hommes à la validation morale et symbolique

La profession d'agent immobilier est une invention de la fin du XIXe siècle. L'occupation et le statut de la terre transforment l'organisation et le fonctionnement des communautés. Détenue par le gouvernement fédéral, l'État ou les premiers occupants capables de l'échanger sur un marché, la terre est devenue le centre d'investissement et l'enjeu majeur des États-Unis au XXe siècle (Chapralis, 1988 ; Davies, 1963 ; Hornstein, 2002). La transformation de la

terre en propriété est à ses débuts principalement une affaire d'hommes (Hornstein 2005). Encouragés par un réseau d'élites économiques et par des opportunités croissantes de développement urbain, des entrepreneurs (agents immobiliers, promoteurs, courtiers et autres commerçants, etc.) s'emploient à créer des chambres immobilières locales depuis le début des années 1870, qui aboutissent, comme relaté dans la partie 2, à la création à Chicago d'une association professionnelle le 12 mai 1908.

Selon de récentes statistiques NAR®, l'agent immobilier typique est désormais une femme âgée de 58 ans (National Association of Realtors® 2016). Si les métiers de l'immobilier étaient à l'origine exclusivement masculins, les femmes ont progressivement assumé un rôle croissant. Elles ne représentent que 2% des agents en 1910, mais le taux grimpe à 14% en 1930. L'entrée massive de femmes dans le métier d'agent remonte aux années 1940, lorsque le nombre d'agents de sexe masculin a augmenté de 19%, tandis que celui des femmes de 97% en dix ans. Entre 1950 et 1960, le nombre d'agents de sexe masculin a augmenté de 24%, contre 130% pour les femmes (Thomas et Reskin, 1990).

Cet essor de l'activité immobilière résidentielle d'après-guerre, notamment avec une relative féminisation de la profession (Hornstein 2002) est en partie validé par des hommes déjà établis. Si ces hommes veulent légitimer leur vocation dans l'immobilier en tant qu'impulsion héroïque et virile, ils doivent d'abord acquérir le soutien de femmes, dont « l'effort naturel » est d'incarner les biens qu'elles vendent, la maison familiale. Selon Hornstein (2005, p. 322), la réception plutôt positive de la féminisation s'explique en partie car le « discours sur la masculinité freinait la professionnalisation de l'immobilier »[37] alors que l'entrée des femmes légitimait culturellement l'activité immobilière auprès des classes moyennes.

[37] Les références aux « requins de l'immobilier » et à une profession « arriviste » et « peu intègre » sont courantes dans les années 1920, et des historiettes à valeur éducative sont publiés pour véhiculer une bonne image des agents immobiliers. Dans le *Saturday Evening Post*, George Horace (Lorimer, 1931), journaliste américain, relate notamment dans « Les secrets enfouis de la montée d'un courtier immobilier » l'histoire d'un jeune homme, animé par une morale pieuse et traditionnelle, qui fournit ses services à une vieille dame qui veut acheter une propriété. Dans le monde difficile de l'immobilier, le courtier, homme intègre et honnête, est présenté comme nécessaire pour faire une bonne affaire, il éduque et guide ses clients vers la perception de la valeur réelle des biens. L'intégrité professionnelle se voit adossée à l'image de la protection des faibles et la figure masculine de la galanterie, au côté de l'expertise technique. C'est aussi ce que (McFall, 2012) désigne par un « bon gars » (*a good average man*) dans le cas des agents d'assurance.

Le genre de l'activité immobilière repose en partie sur la reproduction des zones de prédilection dans l'espace domestique qui gravite autour de ce qui est perçu comme la capacité naturelle perçue des femmes à occuper certaines positions sociales fondées sur leur « nature féminine ». Selon des récits historiques, les femmes agents immobiliers se sont affirmées dans la sphère publique en revendiquant leur rôle traditionnel dans la famille et le foyer (idéologie de la domesticité) et dans la sphère privée grâce au concept de « femme républicaine » de Nancy Cott (Hornstein, 2005, p. 323) fondé sur la croyance en l'influence morale des femmes dans le monde social et politique. Les femmes ont utilisé des stratégies genrées différenciées pour entrer dans le domaine de l'immobilier en exploitant des compétences associées à la « féminité », y compris ce que Hornstein appelle un « modèle de gestion de la maternité », leur conférant un rôle de transmission d'un savoir relatif à l'économie du ménage. Dans les journaux des associations d'agents immobiliers, les femmes soulignent alors leur expertise genrée et leurs qualités morales associées à leurs fonctions sociales de gardienne et de gardienne du foyer.

Selon le discours des premières femmes agents, ces qualités présentées comme « féminines » (« être alerte, sympathique », « visionnaire et avoir de l'intuition ») viennent complémenter l'activité déjà réalisée par les hommes et apporter leurs capacités naturelles pour enrichir l'activité. Cet argument essentialiste aurait alors permis aux femmes de s'inscrire dans le monde des agents immobiliers dominé alors par les hommes, notamment grâce au *Women's Council*[38] qui vantait les avantages des agents femmes.

Un autre argument avancé par certaines femmes pionnières en immobilier pour justifier de leur entrée dans le métier, reposait sur le fait que les hommes aimeraient être servis par des femmes. Selon cette rhétorique, la relation de service autour de la maison à vendre imiterait celle de la sphère domestique dans laquelle les femmes, telles des épouses, seraient censées faire plaisir, servir, comprendre et aider les hommes :

> « L'homme aime traiter avec une femme dans l'immobilier pour plusieurs raisons. S'il a une femme comme membre de sa famille, il suppose qu'une femme saura mieux ce qu'elle

[38] Créé en novembre 1938 au congrès annuel de Milwaukee par 37 femmes de 9 États, le conseil des femmes a été créée car les femmes était interdites d'admission dans de nombreuses associations professionnelles locales de la NAR®. Il existe toujours actuellement et vise à défendre les droits des femmes dans l'industrie immobilière, notamment en termes de revenus, de soutien et une flexibilité pour combiner vie professionnelle et vie familiale.

> voudrait. Ensuite, il a fait votre connaissance, il est émerveillé et ravi de trouver quelqu'un qui sait gérer les affaires comme un homme mais lui donne encore le sentiment d'être un être supérieur ». (discours au conseil des femmes du NAREB le 5 novembre 1941 par Mary Amelia Warren (1941), cité par (Hornstein, 2001, p. 232))

Il ne s'agit ici pas uniquement de femmes au service des hommes mais aussi de la différence supposée indépassable entre hommes et femmes qui fait qu'une femme serait plus à même de comprendre une autre femme que son mari ou son père.

Dans mes observations, j'ai noté à quel point les relations de service étaient souvent marquées par l'image de subordination et de service de la femme envers l'homme. Cela permet alors à un client masculin de pouvoir maintenir une impression de supériorité tout en bénéficiant de conseils avisés en bonne compagnie :

> « Lors de la visite de la troisième maison, alors qu'Amanda parle à une voisine du quartier et que Sasha visite le premier étage, je lui demande : ''alors ? Vous en pensez quoi jusqu'à présent ?''. Il me répond : ''ah, j'aime bien celle-ci, et c'est vrai qu'elle a eu de bons arguments, c'est tellement plus agréable de travailler avec des femmes, elles savent ce qui peut nous plaire'' ». (note de terrain)

Le commentaire de Sasha participe d'une justification sur la place de vendeuse des femmes agents, mettant en avant une naturalisation de compétences genrées et le plaisir retiré pour un homme d'avoir affaire à une femme agent. Le modèle de la « secrétaire » (Goffman, 1977, p. 83, 2002) permet alors de légitimer un rapport de pouvoir dans une sphère de travail qui prolonge la division entre hommes et femmes dans la sphère domestique. L'homme se confie, donnent des détails sans pour autant se situer en position d'infériorité.

2.2. L'investissement différentiel : le genre comme technique de vente

Comme indiqué dans la première section de cette partie, les connaissances et les compétences techniques présentées par les agents comme un ensemble de ressources nécessaires au succès d'une transaction ne suffisent pas, et le travail de l'agent immobilier consiste à établir des contacts, à créer et à entretenir des relations sociales. Si l'utilisation du genre ne peut pas être automatisé du reste des compétences relationnelles, il convient néanmoins de l'étudier ici de manière plus approfondie.

Mes observations montrent que les agents sont principalement formés pour investir dans les relations personnelles afin de gérer leur sphère d'influence. Les formateurs ne se réfèrent pas directement aux classifications genrées de l'investissement social, mais encouragent les agents à trouver et à utiliser à leur avantage leurs qualités inhérentes les plus saillantes. Les agents ne sont pas formés à ce que l'on pourrait qualifier d'une rentabilisation genrée de leurs traits saillants : mes observations révèlent qu'ils ont tendance pourtant, dans la pratique, à investir des domaines de présentation (d'eux-mêmes, des produits) fortement genrés. Il pourra s'agir par exemple, d'une femme montrant la décoration intérieure de sa maison et son amour pour l'architecture, ou d'un homme relayant les statistiques du marché immobilier sur sa page Facebook.

Pour les femmes enquêtées, la capacité à faire parler les gens[39] semble cruciale et la conversation permet à Hannah de mieux connaître ses clients potentiels. Avoir de l'empathie et se mettre à la place de l'autre, perçu comme une « qualité féminine », comme l'explique Hannah, est un avantage :

> « Mes clients vont bientôt signer mais c'était difficile, je les aime, ils sont géniaux mais ils disposaient d'un très petit budget et avec cela, il est difficile de trouver un bon foyer, mais vous savez, quand on tombe amoureux des gens. Vous sentez les choses, je le prends personnellement et sérieusement, outre ma personnalité, je leur ai probablement montré toutes les maisons possibles du sud-ouest de la ville ». (entretien)

Lors d'une visite de maisons avec Jason – agent de 42 ans, ancien livreur – et l'un de ses clients, l'empathie n'est que peu mobilisée et les éléments symboliques (intérieur et style de la maison) ne sont que très peu évoqués. L'essentiel de la conversation est animé par la recherche de rentabilité à 15 ans, et la question des taux d'intérêt. Alors que Paul achète une maison pour s'y installer, il transforme le bien résidentiel en une opération uniquement financière :

> « Tu vois, dit Paul, j'aimerais bien avoir quelque chose qui tienne sur la durée, un bien que je peux facilement revendre, en sachant que maintenant, on aura les meilleurs taux, n'est-ce pas ? » « Oui » répond Jason, « si vous attendez trop, vous êtes sûr de ne plus pouvoir en bénéficier ». « Il faut juste comparer, voir si celle-ci vaut plus la peine, est-ce que c'est vraiment l'endroit idéal ». L'endroit idéal est d'ailleurs matérialisé par Jason par ce qu'il appelle le *locational equilibrium* qui implique la situation du logement par rapport à des services publics, à des établissements commerciaux, le coût du transport ou des impôts. Jason réinvestit alors

[39] Littéralement, « *to open people up* », c'est à dire les travailler, les mettre à l'aise pour les faire parler.

> tout un argumentaire technique, en présentant successivement l'impact du *cash flow*, de l'*appraised value* et du *cap rate*, comme si la connaissance de ces arguments lui permettait d'acquérir l'autorité et la confiance nécessaire pour que son client acquiesce et suive ses conseils. Le vocabulaire de ces interactions est fortement marqué par le registre de la prise de risque, de la connaissance du marché et des mécanismes de fonctionnement de l'investissement. (note de terrain)

Pour des hommes issus des classes populaires comme Jason, ces interactions sont l'occasion de valoriser un ethos masculin associé au sens de la bonne affaire et des capacités cognitives déployées pour « faire de l'argent ». Ces interactions s'appuient sur des démonstrations de force utilisant un vocabulaire financier associé à l'investissement, à la spéculation et au risque. Même si elles sont souvent condamnées par les entreprises immobilières en ce qu'elles encouragent la spéculation, des techniques comme le *flipping*[40] qui consiste à investir pour rénover un bienn vue de le revendre pour un prix plus élevé, entretiennent l'image de l'homme « malin » pouvant gagner de l'argent facilement. Un agent comme Rudy, 27 ans, reflète le regain de dignité populaire acquis par la valorisation de l'ambition et de la réussite financière.

Les moments de sociabilité masculine se concentrent sur des activités orientées vers la rentabilité en accord avec la figure du *breadwinner* qui « doit démontrer une compétence au travail rémunérateur et disposer de ressources financières plus importantes que la femme » (Goffman, 1977, p. 94), se transformant alors en une rétribution symbolique et financière pour les agents, garantie de la revendication d'une masculinité positive :

> De retour à l'agence immobilière, Rudy et Dan se félicitent de leur rendez-vous avec la cliente. « Il faut concrétiser » dit Dan, « franchement, c'est tout benef' » répond Rudy « elle pourra faire plus d'argent et on y gagne aussi ». Puis, le ton devient moins sérieux, et ils comptent le nombre de transactions en cours, Rudy mentionne deux nouvelles touches avec un couple de client, et un investisseur. Dan amusé lui répond : « tu es à fond ! » avant de se tourner vers moi : « tu lui as donné quoi ? » et d'offrir une tournée générale dans le bar du coin aux autres agents présents dans le bureau. (note de terrain)

Beaucoup d'hommes s'inscrivent à un club de golf afin de pouvoir obtenir des contacts. C'est en effet là où se font et se discutent des projets d'investissement et de potentielles

[40] Littéralement, renverser des maisons. Cette pratique consiste à acheter des maisons à potentiel que l'agent fait rénover, pour les revendre tout de suite ensuite et augmenter le prix de vente. Cela participe à la spéculation immobilière. Nous présentons cette technique brièvement à la p. 89 de ce document.

transactions. Il s'agit de relations semi-professionnelles ou l'art du jeu s'accommode de projets *business* ou de *deals*, et le développement d'une sociabilité amicale (*buddy buddy)* reposant sur l'instrumentalisation de relations stratégiques.

Si les hommes peuvent bénéficier du présupposé de leur autorité au travail, ils réaffirment leur masculinité dans les interactions, en se distançant du féminin et en pratiquant une forme de *re-labelling* ou de *status enhancement* (Simpson, 2004). Ils performent ainsi ce que Candace West et Sarah Fenstermaker (1995) qualifie de *doing difference*, une pratique de différenciation par rapport aux activités considérées comme féminines (Pullen et Simpson, 2009).

La connaissance du marché confère également une position d'autorité par l'association entre expertise et utilité des services de l'agent. La formation dans les entreprises immobilières insiste sur la capacité à connaître les taux d'intérêt, le marché, ainsi que tout type d'informations liées aux nouveaux projets de construction, à la vie associative, sportive et culturelle de la ville ou de la communauté de spécialisation.

De leur côté, les femmes agents immobiliers que j'ai rencontrées lors de mon travail sur le terrain sont plus nombreuses que les hommes à investir abondamment la présentation – notamment intérieure – des produits d'une part, et à s'identifier aux types de produits qu'elles vendent d'autre part. Parmi elles, Nancy illustre le travail de style, la décoration réalisée pour la mise en scène d'une maison.

> Nancy est agent immobilier depuis 1998. Elle travaille pour une entreprise immobilière de luxe. Quand je l'ai rencontrée en 2014, Nancy n'affichait pas l'allure décontractée des gens du coin – blonde et grande, elle portait des talons aiguilles et arborait un style qui se voulait sophistiqué. Elle vendait des maisons à plus d'un million de dollars qu'elle était ravie de mettre en scène, à l'aide d'un photographe qui les faisait « rayonner », pour reprendre ses propres termes. Elle avait également des clients fidèles qu'elle soignait avec des attentions particulières : courriels, cartes de vœux, appels téléphoniques, dîners. Elle se voulait aussi à l'écoute de ses clients et leur « style » ; elle affichait surtout un goût prononcé pour l'architecture ». (note de terrain)

Betty travaille également à une « mise en scène » comme technique pour mettre en valeur le produit et le présenter de manière à attirer des clients. Elle utilise un *professional stager* pour préparer la maison, la décorer et la rendre « sublime » selon ses propres termes :

> « Présenter une maison, c'est la mettre en valeur. Je travaille beaucoup à la présentation de mes mandats, ça me demande beaucoup de travail mais ça rapporte, beaucoup d'agents ne montrent que l'entrée de la maison, mais c'est le moins important, je choisis toujours ce qui attire le plus, une photo qui leur donnera envie de voir la propriété en vrai, soit la vue soit la cuisine ou quelque chose d'unique dans la maison, et c'est ce qui fait que les gens viendront ». (entretien)

La maison est alors un produit et un lieu qui doit être chargé de symboles grâce à un décor de photographes professionnels et à l'utilisation de codes de genre simples (bleu pour une chambre de garçon, rose pour une chambre de fille).

2.3. Rentabiliser le masculin et le féminin dans les interactions de marché

Le corps des femmes comme marchandise

Si les investissements différentiels sont discutés et observés dans des contextes spécifiques, ils ont également des effets spécifiques sur la répartition réelle du travail au sein des équipes immobilières. Brian, qui travaille avec sa femme, considérait la distribution de capacités "naturalisées" comme un atout, ce qui la rend facilement exploitable à des fins lucratives :

> « Elle connaît beaucoup de gens dans la communauté, elle est belle, tout le monde l'aime et veut faire affaire avec elle, moi, je ne suis bon que pour l'inventaire et pour comprendre les tendances du marché ». (discours professé lors d'une journée maison ouverte)

Il existe de nombreuses équipes d'agents, qui comprennent souvent un homme à la tête d'une équipe ou de deux agents. La logique de positionnement dans le secteur immobilier est souvent traduite sur le terrain par des hommes occupant des postes de direction. C'est le cas pour environ deux tiers de mon échantillon d'hommes contre un cinquième de mon échantillon de femmes. En revanche, les femmes sont plus souvent reléguées au rang de simples vendeuses, subordonnées à un courtier, en interaction avec le client et davantage en charge du travail relationnel. Environ les deux tiers de mon échantillon justifient cette répartition par les variations des capacités naturelles entre hommes et femmes.

Les équipes d'agents sont organisées selon les normes genrées classiques de la famille - un chef d'équipe masculin avec une armée de jeunes femmes ou un couple - qui peuvent servir de stratégie marketing. Spencer, un agent âgé de 27 ans, me raconte l'histoire d'un agent plus âgé, chef d'équipe au sein de *Real Prosperity*, qui utilise ses agents comme points de vente :

> « Il est prolifique, il a son harem de femme à lui. Pour moi, c'est clairement une stratégie. Je l'aime pas trop, pas hyper pro, il réussit du fait de son équipe, toutes ces femmes blondes et voluptueuses qui travaillent pour lui, l'autre jour, j'ai entendu par Kristy (une autre agent) que tous les hommes des Foothills (le quartier huppé de la ville) disaient : « Je veux travailler avec lui, comme ça je pourrais travailler avec toutes ces femmes » (discussion informelle lors d'une *open house*) ». (entretien)

Les femmes, surtout celles qui ont un statut inférieur sur le terrain et un capital économique et social plus faible, sont également utilisées pour attirer des clients et vendre des maisons. Les équipes immobilières composées d'un homme qui joue le rôle de chef d'équipe et de plusieurs femmes qui travaillent comme vendeurs sont une bonne entrée pour les observations. Les observations menées sur l'équipe de Bob dans plusieurs types d'interactions – des réunions d'équipes dans les bureaux de l'entreprise ou dans des restaurants pour des déjeuners ou des soirées – illustrent la nature des rapports au corps :

> Bob est *broker*, il a donc un statut hiérarchique supérieur aux simples vendeur(se)s, il a 43 ans, utilise du botox pour « rester jeune » et porte toujours une chemise, un pantalon de costume sans pour autant mettre de cravate, ce qui procure un look chic mais décontracté. Son équipe est composée de 9 femmes entre 22 et 32 ans, et d'un homme de 28 ans qui s'occupe des investisseurs. Leur clientèle est aisée, achètent des maisons entre 250 000 et 1 million de dollars. J'observe plus particulièrement les relations de membres de l'équipe avec leurs clients. Une d'entre elles, Laeticia, 26 ans, a arrêté ses études après le lycée, elle a fait des petits jobs de garde d'enfants, et faisait aussi du secrétariat dans une entreprise de bâtiment pendant quelques années, avant de rencontrer Bob par un ami commun, il l'a embauché après qu'elle ait eu son examen. Dans la voiture, Laeticia, une petite robe d'été à fleur, environ 1m70, sandales compensées, maquillée, étudie les quatre maisons qu'elle doit faire visiter à Sasha. Il a la cinquantaine, est « divorcé, mais vit en concubinage » selon Laeticia. Il achète une maison dans un quartier huppé de la ville, au pied des montagnes. Après s'être retrouvé sur le parking des bureaux nord de l'entreprise, Il nous suit en voiture. Si les interactions sont d'abord cordiales, l'imposition de l'autorité de Sasha sur Laeticia se fait assez vite sentir, à la fois dans les formes de courtoisie dont il fait preuve, en passant toujours derrière elle dans la maison, en lui posant des questions pouvant mettre en avant « ses connaissances de femme » notamment sur l'organisation de l'espace. Faisant plusieurs fois allusions à sa concubine, il questionne : « à vous, ça vous plairait ? », ça fait sourire Laeticia. Il essaie aussi de faire des blagues pour réaffirmer son statut sur elle, et des commentaires qui passent facilement de la courtoisie à une agression : « oui, des femmes jolies comme vous, il faut leur faire plaisir ». Les

> regards et les gestes à son égard sont aussi visiblement intéressés, sans pour autant être explicites, ce qui maintient une forme d'ambigüité ». (note de terrain)

La plupart des clients hommes connaissent les femmes de l'équipe et les voient à un moment de la transaction : ce sont elles qui s'occupent d'emmener les clients visiter les maisons, d'organiser les *open houses* ou d'établir le *staging* d'une maison[41]. Dans le but de se préparer pour les interactions, les jeunes femmes s'investissent de manière corporelle dans la « mise en scène d'une féminité » (maquillage, robes ou jupes, cheveux lissées, chaussures compensées ou à talons).

Les vendeuses qui constituent les équipes d'agents sont pour la plupart jeunes et originaires de milieux populaires. Elles n'ont pas, contrairement à leurs collègues issus des classes moyennes supérieures, choisi l'immobilier comme une seconde carrière – pour s'éloigner du tumulte des responsabilités professionnelles ou du monde masculin de l'entreprise – mais comme une possibilité d'investir leur corps comme une force de travail. Ce capital d'attractivité physique a vocation à être transformé en capital symbolique, par l'association avec des femmes et des hommes de classes moyennes supérieures :

> Après avoir raté l'examen pour l'école de coiffure, Mia, 24 ans, a été vendeuse dans un magasin de vêtements avant d'intégrer l'équipe de Bob, il y a environ 6 mois. A l'agence, Bob est avec Mia et un client d'une cinquantaine d'années, Patrick, un chef d'entreprise assez respecté de la ville que Bob connait personnellement. Elle doit accompagner ce chef d'entreprise pour la visite de maisons, elle a l'air assez nerveuse car elle me raconte que c'est la première fois qu'elle se retrouve en charge de montrer des maisons avec « un client de cette importance » selon ses mots. Bob lui glisse de manière discrète alors que le client s'est absenté : « t'inquiète, tu fais ce qu'on a dit, et puis tu souries, tu acquiesces, tu vas dans son sens, on a déjà parlé des maisons, c'est juste qu'il voudra s'y sentir bien, et savoir ce qu'une femme ressent, il a perdu sa femme il y a un an, c'est dur d'être seul, il doit chercher… ». Quand Patrick revient, il échange des regards avec Bob, et devant Mia, fait remarquer en souriant : « oui, vous allez bien vous entendre, elle a beaucoup de qualités, et elle te mettra à l'aise » qui donne l'impression d'un jugement sur ses caractéristiques physiques plus que sur ses compétences professionnelles. Mia correspond à une image de corps féminin valorisée (grande, mince, elle porte le jour de l'observation une robe bleue, et des talons de 5 centimètres, elle est maquillée, porte ses cheveux lissés). Si Mia se contente de rigoler, elle ne semble pas pour autant agacée par ses remarques, alors qu'elle me confie plus tard à son retour au bureau que Patrick était

[41] Le *staging* d'une maison fait référence à l'agencement particulier qui est réalisé par l'agent immobilier afin de faire visiter la maison à de potentiels acheteurs. Selon le statut du bien, l'agent immobilier peut faire venir un décorateur d'intérieur (*home stagger*) qui fournira aussi son propre mobilier, le but étant ici de faire ressortir les qualités du bien.

> absolument adorable et qu'il n'a pas arrêté de lui faire des compliments, que les maisons étaient splendides, « un moment sympa » dans lequel elle a su « se rendre serviable et utile ». (note de terrain)

Si le corps des femmes peut être instrumentalisé notamment par des hommes pour mener à bien des transactions immobiliers, il s'agit également pour ces femmes de pouvoir se détacher de caractéristiques physiques pour pouvoir « gagner une transaction ».

Agir comme un homme : gagner la transaction

Jouer sur une féminité peut donc se retourner contre les femmes des classes populaires alors même qu'elles sont perçues comme « juste belles » et que le rapport à un corps féminin entretient la suspicion et réduit l'image tout entière de la femme à ses attributs physiques. Ses capacités intellectuelles, ses compétences de négociatrice notamment lors de transactions immobilières, en seraient alors amoindries. Sans la connaissance du marché immobilier, et notamment tous les savoirs associés à l'investissement d'un bien (situation géographique, élément technique, état du marché), la mise en avant d'une « jolie maison » par une « jolie femme agent » ne permet pas l'acquisition d'une légitimité professionnelle durable. Certaines femmes adoptent donc durant les interactions avec leurs clients des modes de présentation masculins symbolisant l'autorité, le pouvoir ou la dureté émotionnelle.

C'est cette difficulté à tenir cette tension que deux agents immobiliers, Maria et Terri évoquent dans leurs interactions avec leurs clients. Dans leurs discours, elles émulent l'image d'un agent honnête et bien intentionné au service du client, mais en *backstage*, elles avouent une forme de sincérité contrôlée selon des stratégies commerciales : elles rient de leurs clients respectifs et les mettent à distance par des cérémonies qui s'apparentent aux commérages autour des aléas de leurs transactions et de leurs problèmes. Cette capacité de mettre à distance est observée chez des femmes plus âgées, auxquelles l'âge, le statut et l'ancienneté donnent une légitimité professionnelle.

> Maria et Terri font partie du même groupe d'agents qui organisent des visites de maisons un vendredi sur deux : « ah je t'ai pas raconté le client l'autre jour, il a fallu batailler pour lui faire entendre raison sur le prix, souvent ils ne veulent rien savoir, ils sont bornés, alors qu'ils perdent du temps » dit Maria, avant d'enchainer sur la façon dont elle a réussi à s'imposer « à la fin, il a bien été obligé d'admettre », ce que Terri approuve par un « *you and I, we are strong gals* ». Maria et Terri ont toutes deux finies leur *bachelor*, une dans l'administration

> d'entreprise et l'autre en *creative writing*. Malgré leurs difficultés respectives à faire montre d'autorité, elles ont bénéficié d'un réseau relationnel conséquent à leur début, et se reposent maintenant en grande partie sur le prestige local qu'elles ont pu acquérir. (note de terrain)

Les transactions apportent alors non seulement des gains financiers mais des rétributions autour de la capacité à performer et à dépasser son genre. La capacité à mener à bien ses transactions dépend en grande partie du milieu d'origine, les classes moyennes et supérieures étant mieux formés à instrumentaliser des relations professionnelles et à utiliser des techniques de caméléon. S'il s'agit d'exhiber des caractères masculins, il ne s'agit pas non plus de se détacher totalement de son genre. L'empathie est stratégiquement rendue tout en démontrant une autorité nécessaire afin prendre le contrôle de l'interaction.

Maria, qui a travaillé pendant 20 ans dans l'immobilier, explique qu'elle avait toujours l'impression d'être contrainte de devoir se battre pour prouver qu'elle pouvait faire un « aussi bon boulot qu'un homme ». La différence entre les femmes jeunes comme Kate, qui oscillent entre la présentation d'une empathie et d'une douceur, une forme de féminité classique qui leur permet de correspondre à la vente d'un espace domestique, peut les empêcher de conclure à des moments cruciaux de la transaction. Terri, 42 ans, se rappelle des transactions dans lesquelles elle lui était difficile de s'imposer face à des négociateurs qui ne la croyaient pas capable de « conclure » :

> « Ça devait être il y a presque 5 ans, j'avais vraiment du mal avec ce client, il voulait vendre sa maison à un prix exorbitant, il me mettait assez mal à l'aise, il remettait systématiquement en cause ce que je disais, il doutait de mes compétences. Un jour, je me retrouve à discuter une offre sur sa maison, je lui explique que c'est une offre conséquente (la première en deux mois) et qu'il faut voir ce qu'on peut raisonnablement faire, j'ai aussi la lettre des intéressés, des gens honnêtes…je crois que le courant ne passe pas, et il me dit : « ah oui, vous vous considérez toujours que les gens sont sincères, mais ils font des pirouettes pour avoir ce qu'ils veulent, il faut être plus dure, c'est pas comme ça qu'on fait une négociation et patati patata. Je n'étais pas habituée à « *man-up* », et puis après ça, j'ai appris, je suis plus cash, je dis tout de suite, je prends un autre ton, j'ai changé aussi, la manière dont je m'habille, ma confiance en moi … ». (entretien)

Dans le monde de l'immobilier, la tension entre la femme intouchable et la femme tentatrice s'opère particulièrement lors des interactions entre collègues et entre agents et clients. Au contraire de l'assistante dont le corps est sexualisé, le terme *lady* renvoie généralement à une figure maternelle de femme âgée qui perd toute disponibilité sexuelle. Certaines

femmes peuvent aussi perdre leur statut par leur attitude ou par leur apparence : elles s'habillent et parlent comment des hommes au point qu'elles deviennent « *one of the guys* » selon les termes employés par Lawson (2000).

Profiter de la féminité

Pour acquérir une légitimité professionnelle, les agents immobiliers se comportent souvent selon la figure modélisée du *gentleman* de la classe moyenne. Environ la moitié des hommes que j'ai suivis investissent de l'empathie et des émotions durant les interactions avec des clients comme c'est le cas de Brian ou par l'utilisation de femmes au sein d'une équipe comme pour Bob.

Durant les transactions immobilières, le modèle conjugal sert particulièrement la rentabilisation simultanée des domaines symboliques du féminin et du masculin. Bien qu'il n'existe pas de statistiques sur le nombre de couples engagés dans l'immobilier, c'est une pratique courante dans les deux entreprises que j'ai étudié. J'ai mené des entretiens et rencontré à des moments distincts de l'enquête plusieurs couples, dont Brian et Cindy, dans une *open house* puis lors d'une transaction avec un couple d'acheteurs :

> Lors des visites spontanées de maison, j'avais réussi à obtenir un entretien avec une femme qui travaillait avec son mari. Cette alliance à la fois conjugale et professionnelle m'intriguait. C'est vers 10h30 que je rencontre Brian, qui a commencé avec l'entreprise A depuis 1 an et demi. Elle, se trouve chez eux et s'occupent de leurs filles. Je la rencontre le lendemain à 16h dans une autre *open house*, lui me dit de ne jamais m'éloigner trop loin d'elle au cas où il y aurait un *weirdo* dans le coin. Brian est né de parents mexicains, il a grandi du côté américain de la frontière. Grâce à une bourse, il a pu finir ses études de comptabilité dans un *community college* et a été employé de banque jusqu'à se lancer dans l'immobilier. Ses parents, qui étaient partis de peu, avaient accumulé un petit patrimoine notamment grâce à la vente à domicile. Brian et Cindy vivent dans une maison de l'extrême est de la ville, un pavillon à l'américaine qui leur a couté 120,000 dollars il y a quelques années. Brian et Cindy n'étaient pas précaires dans leur emploi, mais espéraient gagner plus pour vivre une vie plus confortable. J'observe deux transactions avec des cachets très différents : Une, menée principalement par Cindy avec un couple de retraités, Paul et Linda, qu'elle a rencontré via un collègue de son ancien travail. Cindy est « belle », « souriante » et « avenante » selon Brian, ce qu'il fait qu' « elle s'entend avec tout le monde », et surtout, ce qu'il dit à demi-mots, ceux qui « ont de l'argent ». Ce capital permet à Brian de se concentrer sur les relations avec lesquelles il se sent plus à l'aise, « j'aime pas les gens compliqués, qui font des chichis », « souvent je ne suis pas très à l'aise dans le relationnel », « j'aime mieux être en contact avec des gens qui en ont besoin. Après une interaction avec un couple chicano d'une quarantaine d'années, Pedro et Rosario,

> qui ont réussi à bénéficier d'un accès à la propriété via un dispositif d'aide, Brian dit se sentir beaucoup plus à l'aise avec eux : « j'aime bien faire des maisons de 60,000-80,000 dollars, ces transactions sont différentes, tu dois accompagner, montrer que tu travailles avec des gens simples, honnêtes…ces gens viennent de là où je viens, ça vient naturellement ». Lors de la remise de clés, Brian a du mal à se contenir, il a développé une relation personnelle avec eux, il dit « voir ses parents ». Pedro et Rosario proposent d'ailleurs à Brian et Cindy de venir leur rendre visite ». (note de terrain)

L'identité hispanique de Brian et son milieu d'origine populaire lui permet de se mettre en relation avec des clients issus du même milieu. Il a pourtant en partie quitté ce milieu social en épousant une femme blanche issus des classes moyennes supérieures : elle investit notamment ses relations personnelles à l'école pour recruter de nouveaux clients :

> Un vendredi, je me rends à l'école de leur enfant, au moment de la kermesse, ils s'affichent clairement devant les autres parents comme « une famille d'agents immobiliers » : « oui, n'oublie pas, si tu as un ami… » dit Brian en distribuant des sodas et des oranges. De son côté, Cindy discute avec un groupe de mamans, elles parlent de leurs enfants et organisent les *playdates* de la semaine suivante. (note de terrain)

Les équipes couple fonctionnent dans une recréation de l'unité familiale et conjugale au sein du monde du travail, reposant notamment sur la naturalisation des compétences et le « rituel de la complémentarité » (Goffman, 1977, p. 11). Il s'agit ici d'un cas d'adhésion à des normes de classes moyennes et supérieures dans une interaction au corps et à l'idéal féminin qui fournit un statut, un parallèle moderne à l'adhésion des « ouvrières de la mode » à l'idéal bourgeois de l'habillement, à un modèle de logement pavillonnaire et à une forte imbrication entre statut et capital économique (Zylberberg-Hocquard, 2002). L'utilisation du couple sert à légitimer une position et à renvoyer à la forme familiale rassurante, légitimation symbolique nécessaire pour mieux faire passer des transactions lourdes, complexes et parfois risquées. La configuration typifiée de l'interaction consiste donc à pouvoir s'adapter à celle ou à celui qui prend la décision, souvent des couples.

Nous avons vu dans la partie 2 que les agents immobiliers sont intégrés à un réseau socioprofessionnel constitué d'outils d'encadrement de la recherche de biens sur le marché. Le système professionnel qui encadre l'activité immobilière des agents reposent sur un différentiel de connaissances et d'informations. Les clients ne peuvent pas visiter l'ensemble des biens sans l'intermédiaire des agents. Ils ne peuvent pas non plus obtenir des informations

relatives aux biens, ou tout du moins une information de moindre qualité. Ce différentiel d'accès et d'information est alors capté par les agents immobiliers par les stratégies relationnelles mises en place par les agents immobiliers pour transmettre le marché aux clients. Le genre est également instrumentalisé et rentabilisé en interactions par les agents immobilières avec une série d'inégalités entre agents que j'ai pu donner à voir dans cette troisième partie.

Une série d'actes relationnels - qu'il s'agisse d'interactions, de présentation de données sur le marché, de délibérations, de discussions – contribuent finalement collectivement aux décisions (Beunza et Stark, 2004). Les agents économiques guidés par des agents immobiliers apprennent à anticiper et à planifier leurs actions en fonction de ce que pourraient faire les autres (Beunza et Stark, 2004 ; Godechot, 2001), qui peuvent être liées à la forme d'interaction de Goffman (1956) et à ce que l'on peut appeler « attentes coordonnées » (Carpenter, 2003) que l'on étudie dans la quatrième et dernière partie de ce travail.

Quatrième partie : Travailler l'offre et la demande. Préférences, prix, qualités et quartiers

Au sein du marché immobilier résidentiel de Tucson, il s'agit maintenant d'examiner les interactions entre acheteurs et vendeurs, à la lumière des pratiques professionnelles des agents immobiliers. La proposition de cette dernière partie est d'examiner spécifiquement les pratiques des agents immobiliers, à la fois dans leurs interactions avec le marché et les clients, les outils utilisés pour contrôler ces interactions, et dans le jeu au sein duquel les agents sont intégrés afin de maintenir (ou de modifier) leur position dans leur monde socioprofessionnel.

En considérant l'ordre social et l'ordre interactionnel comme interdépendants, la nature des pratiques immobilières est envisagée à partir de la valeur à la fois morale et sociale que les agents immobiliers attribuent à leurs actions sur le marché. Il s'agit de mettre en avant les mécanismes de catégorisation sociale qui se révèlent dans les « ratés » de l'interaction. Ces ratés s'illustrent par exemple dans les attentes non satisfaites ou les déviations aux normes qui servent à (ré)affirmer l'importance de l'ordre social et classifications ordinaires.

L'objectif ultime des agents immobiliers est de faire correspondre l'offre et la demande, tout en utilisant des stratégies pour les faire se rencontrer et les transformer. Ils sont motivés par des considérations économiques pour façonner les comportements des acteurs du marché (acheteurs et vendeurs) par le prix (signaux) et les qualités (définition et présentation). Je considère les positions sociales et professionnelles des agents, illustrées à la fois par des éléments matériels et symboliques. Si le jeu professionnel importe, c'est aussi parce qu'il donne lieu à des pratiques spécifiques ou à des investissements au sein du travail, par lesquels les agents essaient d'accroître ou de maintenir des capitaux, économique mais aussi social et culturel.

Les agents (re)produisent ces segmentations de marché. Premièrement, ils apprennent à faire correspondre l'offre et la demande par le calcul de la valeur, ou comment lire, comprendre et travailler avec un marché spécifique grâce à des outils tels que le MLS pour inciter les clients à assumer une posture et à agir, contribuant en partie à la construction de la qualité et du prix

des produits. Le déroulement des transactions repose également sur les calculs et les intuitions des agents immobiliers sur la façon de créer leurs propres revenus grâce à un contrôle sur les interactions avec les clients, tout en opérant une transmission du marché (amener les clients au marché) qui permet de détacher leurs opérations de marché de leurs propres intérêts.

La recherche d'informations autour des biens disponibles et de la clientèle est réalisée sur des bases pratiques : il faut définir le contexte de marché pour que chacun des participants sache ce qui est attendu de lui selon sa posture (acheteur ou demandeur) et que chacun adopte un comportement adéquat face au marché. Le marché n'est pas considéré comme un élément externe aux pratiques. Il est utilisé à la fois de manière performative, dans la mesure où les agents se fient intuitivement aux « bonnes choses » à faire dans le contexte du marché ; ils croient fermement que le marché existe (« le marché ne ment pas »), sont très prudents et soucieux de ne pas le perturber. Le contrôle des interactions et des signaux envoyés par les agents immobiliers en définissant les prix et les qualités sert d'abord une légitimation professionnelle : c'est le marché qui décide et il faut veiller à le suivre.

Deuxièmement, ils génèrent des inégalités résidentielles par des actions spécifiques basées sur des pratiques socioprofessionnelles tendant à homogénéiser les quartiers, à contrôler les prix, à invisibiliser ou à éloigner des individus de certaines zones. Comme la spécificité du marché immobilier résidentiel réside dans le fait qu'il est organisé et segmenté spatialement, cela signifie que des biens similaires auront des valeurs différenciées en fonction de leur emplacement sur le territoire. Cette valeur localisée doit également être prise au sérieux, car les mécanismes de marché se définissent selon les conditions spécifiques perçues et anticipées par les agents immobiliers (valeurs, biens et types de population imaginées ou espérées). Les pratiques de travail contribuent ainsi à produire et à reproduire la segmentation du marché, et constitue donc une entrée originale pour étudier la ségrégation et les inégalités urbaines.

Cette dernière partie de la thèse propose donc de s'affranchir des explications individuelles pour proposer une entrée socio-spatiale et socio-professionnelle sur les inégalités résidentielles. Ces approches permettent de se concentrer spécifiquement sur les pratiques

des agents immobiliers pour voir comment elles pourraient contribuer à augmenter (et parfois à réduire) la répartition inégale des personnes sur un territoire. Je me centre plus particulièrement sur les interrelations entre les catégorisations ethno-raciales et de classe dans le déroulement des transactions. J'utilise plus particulièrement Goffman dans sa théorie des anticipations coordonnées pour comprendre les enjeux des interactions entre les agents immobiliers et leurs clients.

1. Travailler la valeur des clients et du marché : construire des préférences et des prix

Aux États-Unis, la plupart des discussions scientifiques récentes sur la production des inégalités résidentielles restent marquées par une approche individualiste, dans laquelle les inégalités sont le résultat de préférences individuelles en matière d'homogénéité sociale et ethnique (DiMaggio et Louch, 1998 ; Pager et Shepherd, 2008 ; Sampson, 2012 ; Sharkey, 2013). Bien que ces études fournissent des informations précieuses sur les motivations des acteurs dans les processus décisionnels et la perpétuation des inégalités, elles ne considèrent pas directement le rôle des marchés du logement et des professionnels tels que les agents immobiliers.

Si d'autres études menées depuis les années 1980 et 1990 mettent en évidence les processus de discrimination générés par les agents immobiliers pour des acheteurs de maisons appartenant à des minorités, notamment en empêchant les minorités d'accéder à certains quartiers (Foley, 1980 ; Galster, 1990, 1991 ; Yinger, 1995, 1998), elles restent souvent quantitatives et n'abordent que très à la marge les mécanismes susceptibles d'émerger du monde socioprofessionnel des agents immobiliers. (Howell et Korver-Glenn, 2018 ; Korver-Glenn, 2018c) étudient par exemple la production d'inégalités par le biais de pratiques raciales manifestes opérées par des professionnels de l'immobilier. Elle avance l'argument que des stéréotypes ethniques sont à l'œuvre chez les agents immobiliers, ce qui les incite à placer des individus dans certains quartiers.

Si les pratiques de discrimination ou de racisme institutionnel sont bien connus dans le parc social et le parc privé (Choi et al., 2005; Clark et Blue, 2004), on sait peu de la nature des pratiques professionnelles qui pourrait amener à considérer l'existence d'un « racisme sans raciste » (Bonilla-Silva, 2010). On aura donc à cœur de différencier l'intentionnalité des actions des actions elles-mêmes et du cadre institutionnel et juridique dans lequel elles opèrent. Ici, je pars du niveau individuel pour aborder les pratiques et les opérations de classification menées par les agents immobiliers.

1.1. Manager, évaluer et classer les clients

Dans plus de 80% des premiers rendez-vous clients, les agents, équipés d'un questionnaire, se concentrent de manière stratégique sur des éléments spécifiques qui les aideront à cibler la recherche. Ben, d'origine hispanique, âgé de 37 ans, ancien professeur d'espagnol dans un lycée public, connaît bien les acheteurs.

> J'ai suivi Ben à travers une transaction avec les acheteurs Sarah et Matt pendant environ un mois à compter de la première réunion. Ben m'a dit qu'il avait déjà parlé avec eux au téléphone, il s'agissait d'une recommandation d'un autre agent qui était bon ami avec eux mais affirmait ne pas avoir le temps de s'en occuper. Avant la réunion, Ben me montre le questionnaire. Le questionnaire les interroge sur leur vie sociale, aborde leur mode de vie, leur famille, leur travail, leurs loisirs, leur situation financière ainsi que leurs attentes. Les réponses aux agents peuvent être vagues, en particulier pour les acheteurs les plus jeunes, les nouveaux en ville ou les clients avec un capital économique moins élevé dont les demandes sont moins spécifiques : je veux un « bon quartier », une « maison de trois chambres », « quelque chose de sympa ». Grâce à l'expérience de Ben, la façon dont Ben traite avec les acheteurs est assez standardisée. Il essaie de « les fermer » le plus tôt possible sans paraître en avoir l'air, stratégie qui a fonctionné dans deux transactions notamment avec Sarah et Matt mais pas avec Mariana. La découverte du client engage principalement de sociologisation spontanée des clients pour évaluer leur rang social, leurs motivations et volonté et leur capacité d'achat. (note de terrain)

Bien que les clients au statut social élevé soient souvent considérés comme plus difficiles, de nombreux agents n'établissent aucune relation entre statut social et style : qu'ils soient « faciles » ou « difficiles ». Ben dit adapter ses stratégies de présentation en fonction du type de clients avec lesquels il traite. Pourtant, en réalité, le statut social du ménage transforme les manières déployées de l'agent pour convaincre et plaire aux clients, avec une utilisation de la

tenue et de la déférence[42] qui croit en fonction du statut social, utilisé principalement avec la frange haute de la classe moyenne ou les classes supérieurs. Par exemple, avec Sarah et Matt qui ont tous deux une maîtrise et qui cherchent à acheter une maison de 300 000 dollars, il répond à leurs questions point par point, en apportant des connaissances détaillées, tout en louant leurs choix et leurs « carrières réussies » et en tentant de s'appuyer sur des points communs.

Pourtant, la tenue et la déférence adoptée dans les rituels d'interaction des classes moyennes-supérieures peut également se retrouver mise à mal par le comportement du client, et l'incapacité au final pour l'agent de « définir la situation d'interaction » ou autrement dit de « gagner la transaction » ou de pouvoir rapidement conclure. D'autres agents enquêtées, Terry et Kate, au contraire, présentent justement des expériences plutôt difficiles. Pour chacune d'elle, j'ai suivi des transactions qui ont eu lieu avec un client masculin de classe supérieure qui se présentait comme expert du marché immobilier, ce qui entrainait une forme de domination savante. Dans une transaction avec un acheteur, Terri, agent de 44 ans originaire de la grande bourgeoisie et titulaire d'un master en arts à UCLA, se retrouve totalement dépassée. L'acheteur prend l'ascendant et invalide son travail de pré-sélection et veut proposer des offres pour des biens qui ne correspondent pas du tout « au prix du marché ».

A l'inverse, avec les clients de classe moyenne inférieure, et particulièrement lors des transactions que je suivais avec des agents plus expérimentés - Ben, Corey, Thomas, Terri, Kara et Rudy – les agents démontraient de l'aplomb et semblaient contrôler dans une large mesure l'interaction, laissant de la place aux clients au début des premiers rendez-vous pour définir leurs projets ou en visitant les maisons pour la première fois, laissant moins de place à mesure de la progression de l'interaction. La transaction que j'ai suivie avec Rudy, Abbo et Kintu, un couple noir ougandais de 4 enfants, illustre bien cette dynamique :

> Les acheteurs ont rendez-vous à 10 heures. À 10h02, Rudy et moi entendons le bébé qui pleure, des voix dans le couloir, Abbo et Kintu arrivent avec leur bébé âgé de deux mois : «

[42] Chez (Goffman, 1974), la déférence désigne « un composant symbolique de l'activité humaine dont la fonction est d'exprimer dans les règles *à* un bénéficiaire l'appréciation portée *sur* lui, ou sur quelque chose dont il est le symbole, l'extension ou l'agent » (p. 50) et la tenue, un « élément du comportement cérémoniel qui se révèle typiquement à travers le maintien, le vêtement et l'allure, et qui sert à montrer à l'entourage que l'on est une personne douée de certaines qualités, favorables ou défavorables » (p.68-69).

> Bonjour, comment allez-vous, asseyez-vous, vous voulez une bouteille d'eau ? Oui, merci » et Rudy commence : « Nous verrons le questionnaire après. Je voudrais d'abord vous parler de l'achat, du processus ». Il sort un guide d'achat, il ne leur montre que quelques pages, leur signalant que le guide leur sera remis à la fin du rendez-vous. Après avoir présenté le déroulement de la transaction avec la brochure standard contenant des informations et des conseils au sujet de la vente, il les laisse dans la salle en leur demandant de remplir un questionnaire. Il les laisse seuls pour cela après tous les détails sur le fait qu'il a déjà une hypothèque et sur l'endroit où ils veulent vivre, ce qu'ils veulent dans la maison, en essayant de trouver ce qu'ils cherchent pour pouvoir aller aussi vite que possible dans l'entretien « 1 heure maximum, je ne veux pas passer toute ma matinée avec eux ». (note de terrain).

J'ai été surprise de constater à quel point Rudy était rapidement passer sur le questionnaire, soulignant seulement le fait que ces clients n'avaient pas d'organisme de crédit (*lender*) et qu'ils recherchaient une maison de 5 chambres dans la fourchette de prix allant de 160 000 à 180 000 dollars. Lors de la présentation du processus de transaction, Rudy semble d'ailleurs particulièrement confiant quant à la mise en avant des informations détaillées sur les étapes de l'achat. Abbo et Kintu ont pourtant tous deux du mal à s'exprimer en anglais. Ils essaient vaguement de poser des questions mais Rudy semble plutôt voir presser l'échange comme s'il avait déjà compris les enjeux. Abbo et Kinto finissent alors par hocher la tête.

Rudy évoque ensuite le processus d'achat en huit étapes et des coûts associés à l'achat d'une maison tout en les rassurant sur les capacités d'achat et le déroulement du processus. Il aborde d'abord succinctement le déroulement du processus d'achat, comme pour planter le décor et procéder à une mise en scène scénarisée permettant de contrôler l'interaction. L'observation permet de révéler que l'utilisation de tenue et de déférence, préalable à la création de confiance qui préfigurent les interactions avec des clients de la classe moyenne supérieure disparaît généralement si le statut des clients se trouve être inférieur à celui de l'agent immobilier. Dans ce cas particulier, Rudy semble avoir compris que le mode opératoire de la déférence ne lui servirait pas à conclure la transaction : les clients ont besoin d'une maison mais opère un classement spontané de « clients peu difficiles ». Se faisant le relai d'informations sur le déroulement de l'achat d'une maison, et malgré la confusion évidente des acheteurs, Rudy me dit en sortant de la réunion : « As-tu vu à quel point ils étaient rassurés à la fin ? » comme s'il voulait faire comprendre que « tout va bien, ils sont sous contrôle ».

Bien que l'interaction n'est pas tendue, j'ai été surprise par la compréhension somme toute très basique des enjeux de la transaction par les acheteurs et par la confiance de Rudy à postuler de la confiance témoignée par les acheteurs. J'ai réalisé que Rudy avait élaboré un scénario[43] dans lequel il mettait en place un jeu spécifique pour parler beaucoup et ne pas les écouter, contrairement à ce que je constate avec le traitement réservé aux clients des classes moyennes et supérieures par Pamela. En raison de leur statut socio-économique, il avait également supposé que perdre ces clients n'était pas un problème, et que ces clients n'imposaient pas un rapport de force ou une domination, et donc que leur capacité à s'imposer lors d'une transaction serait presque nulle. Ainsi Rudy redoublait aussi d'une confiance de l'imposition, ou de pouvoir les impressionner facilement, ce qui serait effectivement utile lors de la transmission du marché et de comment agir sur le marché. Cette interaction, qui m'apparue comme effectivement déséquilibrée car les clients ne pouvaient ici pas s'exprimer, ce qui informait aussi sur le déroulement de la transaction par la suite, et notamment la visite de maisons.

La classe sociale et sexuelle des participants influence le déroulement de l'interaction, selon des conduites qui sont souvent situées. La relation par exemple d'un agent issu des classes populaires avec un ménage issu des classes moyennes et supérieures ne se déroulera pas selon les mêmes modalités de déférence et d'autorité que si le ménage provient des classes populaires, car l'agent doit saisir la spécificité du mode interactif qui lui permettra de convaincre ses clients. Les spécificités de la relation agent-client peuvent interagir avec l'origine sociale des participants.

Si les comportements entre égaux doivent être symétriques, les règles d'interactions entre clients et agents dépendent des formes de conduite propres à la relation agent-client, la « déférence que les supérieurs doivent aux inférieurs » qui mélange douceur et fermeté comme par exemple la dignité des serviteurs à effectuer des services indignes pour leur maître (Goffman, 1974, p. 70). La relation au client nécessite de se mettre « socialement en dessous de son client » pour marquer la déférence et le respect, cet « en dessous » peut-être celui de

[43] Appelé *script* en anglais, ce scénario s'apparente à une forme plus ou moins formelle qui encadre le déroulement des étapes de la transaction. Il peut aller jusqu'à utiliser des phrases types pour susciter des réactions de la part des clients ou anticiper des réactions.

la classe sociale mais aussi du féminin par rapport au masculin. Il faudra alors prêter attention à l'interaction *socialement située* (classe sociale de l'agent et du client, genre de l'agent et du client) afin de rendre compte des comportements en actes[44].

La capacité des agents à gérer les transactions est donc influencée par les classes sociales respectives des clients et des agents ainsi que les dispositions socioprofessionnelles développés par la répétition de situations de travail avec des clients de différentes classes sociales, leur permettant d'anticiper, grâce à un sens pratique, les meilleures façons de gérer les transactions selon les types de clients. Les agents, particulièrement ce qui bénéficie d'une formation d'enseignant comme Ben, font développer des capacités à convaincre, à éduquer et à transmettre.

1.2. Aligner les clients sur le marché

À première vue, on pourrait penser qu'il est assez facile de faire correspondre offre et demande. Pourtant, sur les marchés immobiliers, les asymétries informelles sont particulièrement vives.

Les agents bénéficient d'un accès spécial à la liste des biens grâce au MLS et ont développé des applications permettant aux acheteurs et aux vendeurs de naviguer entre l'offre et la demande. En outre, le vendeur et l'acheteur ne sont pas des experts du produit qu'ils vendent ou achètent. Ils font donc appel à un intermédiaire de marché pour attester de la qualité et de la conformité de l'achat. Il existe une quantité importante d'incertitude car l'acheteur craint que le vendeur cache une partie des problèmes en espérant en tirer le meilleur parti. Le vendeur est préoccupé par le fait que l'acheteur souhaite diminuer le prix à son avantage. Le « lissage » de la transaction repose donc sur l'acceptation de la « valeur correcte » payée pour le « montant de qualité » que le bien offre.

[44] Si certains ont reproché notamment à Goffman ses exemples très situés socialement et ethniquement : ils correspondent à des femmes blanches issues des classes moyennes plutôt que des femmes des classes populaires (Boltanski, 1973 ; Zaidman, 2002), d'autres insistent sur le fait qu'il n'analyse pas des « relations égales » mais « polarisées » : « des relations entre des employés issus des classes moyennes ou populaires et des clients plus aisés » (Keck, 2012, p. 2).

Les agents s'appuient sur le développement d'outils professionnels et technologiques dont les professionnels de l'immobilier ont conservé le contrôle exclusif, comme le montre la partie 2. Grâce à leur affiliation au NAR®, les agents immobiliers® peuvent accéder à une fiche MLS plus détaillée fournissant des informations précieuses pour le choix des produits. Des entreprises telles que Trulia et Zillow[45] contiennent également des informations, mais l'association professionnelle restreint les informations contenues, et les prix diffèrent grandement des prix fixés durant la transaction. Sans l'embauche d'un agent, les clients sont limités dans leur utilisation et leur compréhension de la technologie.

En utilisant le MLS et les *comps*[46] pour affirmer leur pouvoir, des agents tels que Rich cherchent également à amener les clients à reconnaître qu'ils se trompent, par exemple à faire que les clients acceptent qu'ils ne puissent pas obtenir autant qu'ils veulent pour leur propriété et qu'il n'y a qu' « une seule bonne option ». Les désirs des clients doivent en ce sens être alignés sur le marché. Le travail des agents consiste donc à transformer le client, à le « désinvestir » car il « découvre que ce qui est mesuré à partir de lui est sa valeur sociale, il arrive avec des rêves et quitte avec la réalité » (Bourdieu 2014, p. 34).

Plutôt que de jouer aux vendeurs, les agents jouent le rôle de psychologues ou de conseillers en donnant l'illusion que les clients contrôlent leur choix. Leur travail consiste en réalité à orienter les clients vers la découverte d'options spécifiques pouvant être activés face au marché. J'appelle cela « la découverte du marché ». Sans s'en rendre compte, les agents sont donc engagés dans un système de désinvestissement du client (Bourdieu et al., 2012).

Même s'ils ont des croyances contradictoires et s'appuient sur des conceptions vagues du marché, les agents immobiliers se décrivent comme des « éducateurs » ou des « guides » pour

[45] Grâce à des algorithmes, Zillow et Trulia estiment les valeurs des propriétés en temps réel dans tous les Etats-Unis même si les biens ne sont pas à la vente. Elles utilisent les données foncières publiques disponibles pour donner la valeur estimée de la propriété au public et aux agents immobiliers. Sur Zillow, les propriétaires peuvent aussi se connecter en ligne, voir leurs propriétés et amender les informations. Les critiques des agents immobiliers mais aussi des propriétaires font alors état d'une grande imprécision et des décalages importants en terme de valeur estimée. Avec Trulia, les agents immobiliers mais aussi les propriétaires vendeurs peuvent créer un compte payant pour inscrire leurs biens à vendre. D'autres informations autour du quartier sont également disponibles, taux de criminalité, évaluation des écoles notamment.

[46] Les *comps* dans le jargon des agents immobiliers font référence aux biens comparables, c'est-à-dire la plupart du temps similaire en taille (3 pièces 2 salles de bain par exemple) vendus dans le quartier au cours des trois derniers mois.

entrer, reconnaître et comprendre la forme du marché. Les sessions de formation sont des moments où les agents sont encouragés à communiquer avec leurs clients sur l'état actuel du marché, par exemple si le marché est favorable aux acheteurs ou aux vendeurs. Lors d'une session de formation chez *Real Prosperity*, l'un des agents expérimentés, Sam, suggère que le fait de disposer de peu de statistiques et de phrases toutes faites permet d'inciter le client à adopter la « décision appropriée » :

> « Vous ne pouvez pas mentir, le marché ne ment pas, il est ce qu'il est, soit vous devez l'accepter, soit vous devez être irrationnel, placez votre maison sur le marché et soyez frustré par le fait que votre maison ne se vend pas, parce que tout le monde a accès aux mêmes données dont nous avons parlé, mais que si vous pouvez le faire de manière non abrasive, vous pouvez généralement parler avec le client et le convaincre d'accepter la réalité (…) Je pense que si vous avez confiance en ce que vous faites, et vous pouvez transmettre cette confiance au client respectif, vous pouvez le faire passer du côté obscur à la réalité ». (session de formation chez *Real Prosperity*)

Comme je l'ai évoqué dans la troisième partie, les formateurs des deux entreprises insistent sur la nécessité d'être prêts à parler du marché avec des clients ainsi que des personnes aléatoires, en expliquant par exemple les avantages financiers de la propriété par rapport à la location, les avantages des taux d'intérêt plus bas ou tout type d'information influencer les prix du logement et la valeur d'une communauté ou d'un quartier.

Discerner les bons et les mauvais éléments de qualité d'une maison à partir d'une feuille de liste MLS est tout à fait impossible pour un acheteur régulier. Le libellé, par exemple, peut tromper le client : *cosy* signifie généralement petit et de superbes images superbes peuvent déformer la qualité du produit. Les agents utilisent le MLS comme « base de données » et dispositif de signalisation pour encourager les autres agents et leurs clients à visiter physiquement la maison. Le MLS sert d'outil d'emballage du produit ou de marketing (Cochoy, 2002a) plutôt que de simple moyen d'évaluer la qualité de la maison (Karpik, 2010).

Cette surveillance étroite des préférences, qui sont examinées et hiérarchisées sous l'autorité de l'agent, lui permet de traduire pratiquement en critères opérationnalisables sur le marché. Un défi consiste à s'assurer que les clients se sentent au centre d'une décision, et qu'ils se sentent réellement impliqués dans leur propre projet. Cela est particulièrement délicat, car

les agents doivent faire attention à ne pas se faire accusés d'avoir, au regard des lois existantes, voulu imposer une option plus qu'une autre à leurs clients.

Kate par exemple est relativement attentive à la mise en place d'une marge de manœuvre ou de possibilités pour ses clients : elle leur montre l'ensemble de ce qui théoriquement leur est accessible. Puis, dans un deuxième temps, sachant que les clients expriment de manière plus ou moins explicites des goûts, elle les amène progressivement, et en fonction de l'échelle de goûts des clients que Kate elle-même contribue à mettre en valeur, à se saisir de la réalité du marché.

Un couple de nouveaux acheteurs brésiliens Laura et André, nouvellement arrivés aux États-Unis[47] ont contactée Kate par l'intermédiaire du patron de son mari, lui aussi brésilien.

> Comme ils étaient nouveaux dans la ville, elle a dû expliquer un peu la culture et le style de Tucson, bien qu'elle ait essayé de partager ce point commun avec « l'étranger » alors qu'elle venait elle aussi de Chicago. Après avoir commencé à répondre à leurs besoins spécifiques, ils voulaient au moins 4 chambres et quelque chose dans un quartier agréable de la ville. Ils avaient environ 300 000 dollars à dépenser. Kate ne cachait pas son enthousiasme car elle savait que le chèque serait également plus agréable. Au café où Kate et moi avons rencontré Laura et André pour la première fois, ils ont surtout parlé de la ville et ont commencé à créer une liaison. Elle a dit qu'elle avait une idée de ce qu'ils cherchaient et qu'elle leur avait donné des indications. Après avoir discuté avec eux, nous sommes retournés à la voiture, elle m'a dit : « ils ne connaissent pas l'endroit. Je dois donc leur montrer ce qui est disponible, les aider à comprendre où se trouve leur compromis, donc on part avec un très large entonnoir et tu descends ». Elle voulait aller voir différents quartiers de la ville avec eux. Elle a donc rapidement regardé quelques endroits à l'est, où nous étions pour les montrer, et nous sommes allés là-bas avec eux. Bien qu'elle n'ait pas directement formé leurs préférences, elle s'est orientée et a poussé pour les premières visites de maisons. (note de terrain)

Comme environ les deux tiers des agents que j'ai interviewés, Kate pense que les acheteurs ne peuvent souvent pas vraiment préciser leurs besoins, jusqu'à ce que vous leur montriez pratiquement : « Parfois, les acheteurs pensent savoir ce qu'ils veulent et vous leur montrez exactement ce qu'ils veulent. Ce n'est pas qu'ils ne savent pas ce qu'ils veulent, mais ils ne

[47] André dispose d'un visa de travail et Laura d'un visa de conjoint qui ne l'autorise pas à travailler tout de suite. Ils sont tous les deux diplômés de l'équivalent d'un *bachelor* au Brésil et disposent de ressources financières antérieures pour s'installer aux Etats-Unis. Ils parlent tous les deux relativement bien anglais malgré leur fort accent et utilisent notamment les réseaux de connaissance des collègues ingénieurs d'André.

savent pas ce qui est possible ». Le processus de découverte comprend une sorte de voyage qui commence par le rêve, se poursuit par des compromis tout en se confrontant à la réalité.

1.3. Fixer les prix et façonner les qualités

Alors que le travail sur demande et l'offre commence par la gestion des clients et la préparation des acheteurs et des vendeurs sur le marché, les agents immobiliers créent le marché en travaillant spécifiquement à l'évaluation et à la démonstration de la valeur par le biais de l'évolution de l'offre et de la demande. Ils ont un impact à la fois sur la qualité et le prix, et font en sorte que les deux s'affrontent pour modifier la forme de l'un par rapport à l'autre. Par exemple, si la qualité d'un élément de la maison est inférieure, les agents peuvent fixer un prix inférieur pour le signaler, ce qui immédiatement entrainera la réaction d'autres agents qui s'interrogeront sur la « sous-évaluation » du prix du bien pour « sa catégorie ». Le prix de la maison peut, au contraire, être augmenté si un remodelage important est effectué. Les agents sont d'abord formés pour établir la valeur. Cette formation est acquise à l'école de l'immobilier mais aussi dans les entreprises. Les agents immobiliers apprennent ensuite à « transformer » l'état de l'offre et de la demande par le marketing, la recherche de logements et la fixation des prix.

La loi du marché

Dans la justification que les agents utilisent devant leurs clients, ils s'appuient sur le modèle théorique de la « loi de l'offre et de la demande », qui est le plus souvent très répandue parmi les acheteurs et les vendeurs avertis, et constitue un pari sûr pour expliquer leur besoin, faire tel ou tel déménagement en fixant un prix ou en faisant une offre.

Dans cette partie, je démontre que la plupart des actions visant à définir les prix et les qualités de mise en forme sont effectuées conformément à un modèle d'efficacité normatif, qui évalue de manière conservatrice ce que les acteurs sont censés faire lors d'un échange de biens. La mise en place de prix et l'achat de biens de qualité ne relèvent pas du fonctionnement de la main invisible, mais résultent à la fois d'un système de coordination structurel et relationnel géré par les agents immobiliers. Instructeur chez *Star Realty*, Mike renforce l'idée que déterminer la valeur est en réalité très difficile et qu'il n'est pas établi une fois pour toutes, il

est déterminé en fonction de l'état de la demande et de l'offre, mais également négocié en interaction. Le déroulement de la démonstration de Mike est un bon exemple des zones d'ombre entourant la valeur, car les agents ne sont finalement pas conscients de la manière dont elle est produite.

Pendant au moins trois moments du module de formation, Mike attribue la détermination de la valeur marchande du point de vue des acheteurs : en s'appuyant sur un mélange de sentiments intuitifs et de connaissances générales sur les produits, ou de ce qu'il appelle « savoir » lorsqu' « on voit » de la valeur. Il utilise l'exemple d'un sac Louis Vuitton (contre un sac de la marque Kors) pour sa démonstration. Mike utilise la différence de prix pour démontrer que les femmes - en raison de leur goût et de ce qu'elles sont disposées à payer - définissent le prix des sacs, alors que d'autres personnes – ici, il fait référence aux hommes - ne « l'apprécieraient pas » autant.

La démonstration de Mike vise à démontrer que la valeur est relative par rapport à celui qui est disposé à acheter un produit. Une vérité circule par exemple au sujet des piscines : de manière générale, elles valent 10 000 dollars, mais si les acheteurs ne la souhaitent pas chez eux, cela peut se retourner et ne rien valoir. Ainsi, certaines personnes attribueront une valeur élevée à une piscine alors que d'autres ne le feront pas.

Cette configuration définie de « valeurs » est utilisée pour des pièces ou des éléments standardisés de la maison, tels que la piscine, la cuisine et le garage. Les agents font permettre d'identifier ces éléments pour les présenter aux vendeurs, tout en affirmant que c'est souvent controversé, comme pour certains acheteurs, la piscine va être un avantage tandis que pour d'autres, elle va être un inconvénient ; d'où la variation en termes de désirabilité influencera à son tour le prix.

L'échange est de fait hautement ritualisé et routinisé par des systèmes de contrôle opérant au niveau du domaine professionnel (Velthuis, 2003). Par exemple, le calcul du prix des biens obéit à des décisions historiquement situées. Dans la section suivante, je souligne la méthode de calcul du prix et d'évaluation de la valeur.

Une méthode pour calculer le prix

Le principe de comparaison est au cœur de l'évaluation de la valeur. Pour déterminer la valeur des produits, il faut sélectionner des produits comparables sur le marché, c'est-à-dire d'autres produits de taille similaire dans la même zone géographique. Les biens comparés doivent être des biens ordinaires. Mike suggère implicitement la règle de l'approche comparative du prix dans laquelle les « propriétés anormales » sont exclues, c'est-à-dire qu'elles ne devraient pas être incluses dans le calcul de la valeur, même si elles existent sur le marché.

Lorsqu'il compare des biens, l'agent ne peut inclure de transaction sans lien de dépendance (père à fils, frère à sœur) ni d'opérations favorables. Mike donne un exemple concret amusant de nombreuses anomalies :

> « Si ce couple doit vendre sa maison rapidement, peut-être est-il obligé de passer rapidement à un autre travail, il n'aura pas les dollars les plus élevés. Si je vends ma maison à mon fils, c'est un membre de la famille, alors comme il s'agit d'une transaction de pleine concurrence, il y aura conflit d'intérêts, la mère qui est en droit aura un taux plus élevé (rires) ». (discours professé lors de la formation à l'école des agents immobiliers)

Les agents chargés d'évaluer la valeur devraient alors être attentifs aux prix non conformes sur le marché, car ils signalent souvent une situation anormale qui ne permet pas une bonne comparaison :

> « Soyons sérieux une seconde, vous pouvez appeler l'agent, si vous voyez une maison dont le prix ne correspond pas à celui des autres, appelez pour savoir pourquoi, ce pourrait être un drapeau rouge pour indiquer, par exemple, qu'elle est vendue dans un jour, c'était une vente intérieure, c'était un jour dans la MLS, ce n'était pas vraiment au marché, il se pourrait que le fils l'ait acheté, qu'ils l'aient vendu à leurs amis ». (discours professé lors de la formation à l'école des agents immobiliers)

La valeur marchande est également non seulement une rencontre des esprits entre acheteurs et vendeurs, mais se définit au sein de systèmes socioprofessionnels conçus par les acteurs de l'immobilier et des banques, des organismes de crédits ou des évaluateurs. Mike insiste plus particulièrement sur les *appraisers*[48] :

> « Ok, je veux revenir aux *appraisers*, que font-ils ? Ils sont embauchés pour déterminer la valeur marchande. Des évaluations sont effectuées pour les banques, c'est un outil de gestion

[48] Je me réfère ici aux professionnels qui pratiquent l'*appraising*. L'appraising ou évaluation immobilière désigne le processus d'élaboration d'une opinion sur la valeur (le plus souvent marchande des biens immobiliers. Toute propriété soumise à une transaction immobilière nécessite une évaluation car, à l'inverse d'autres marchandises, elles ne s'échangent que très peu souvent et sont uniques (caractéristiques spécifiques mais aussi état).

> des risques pour les banques. Plus vous avez d'acheteurs précis le prix va être juste, car il y aura beaucoup d'activité sur le marché ». (discours professé lors de la formation à l'école des agents immobiliers)

L'évaluation joue un rôle de sauvegarde dans l'évaluation de la valeur, ce qui permet à la banque ou au prêteur d'attester de la valeur de la maison. Cette double évaluation inclut également le fait que les prix sont vérifiés à la fois par les agents immobiliers et par quelqu'un qui n'a pas l'impression sur papier de faire en sorte que la transaction ait lieu.

Sur les 20 cas où j'ai assisté à des évaluations, ils sont revenus à 17% dans la même fourchette acceptée, mais se sont produits trois fois des cas où ils ne l'ont pas fait. Lors d'une transaction avec Rudy, le prix de départ de la maison était de 200 000 dollars. Ses vendeurs ont donc fini par vendre à un prix inférieur. De l'autre côté de la transaction, Pamela et ses acheteurs refusaient de payer plus cher : « Qui va vouloir payer au-dessus de la valeur estimée ». L'acheteur va dire quelque chose de ce genre : « Je veux tellement cette maison. Personne d'autre ne l'aura, il me la faut ». Les acheteurs étaient toujours sur la maison, mais ils ne voudraient pas payer plus que la valeur estimée, et dans ce cas, « ne vont pas payer 200 000 dollars pour une maison qui ne rapporte que 180 000 dollars à la banque ». Les vendeurs ont alors accepté, car ils voulaient vendre : « D'accord. Nous voulons vendre la maison. Nous allons descendre à 180 000 dollars et vendre à ce prix ». Les acheteurs ont fini par payer 180 000 dollars car ils avaient contredit l'idée selon laquelle seuls les vendeurs et les acheteurs déterminent le prix des maisons, car les agents et les évaluateurs fixent ce qui est accepté. Dans un autre cas, la transaction a échoué car les vendeurs ont décidé de retirer la maison de la vente. Ils ont préféré attendre plus longtemps, même si l'agent a utilisé les arguments d'autorité lié au marché et à son activité pour les convaincre. Enfin, en dernière instance, il s'est avéré aussi que les acheteurs s'éloignent de la transaction.

L'approche de comparaison ou l'approche de données de marché est basée sur un grand nombre d'acheteurs et de vendeurs sur le marché. Le marché doit être actif pour rendre cette méthode valide. La méthode fonctionne avec 3 *comps* et au maximum 3 à 6 mois après la vente, explique Mike. La raison pour laquelle vous avez besoin de trois, c'est que vous essayez d'en trouver un qui est inférieur, un supérieur et un qui est à peu près le même que les

propriétés du bien concerné. Ensuite, des ajustements seront faits pour la taille et le prix de la maison :

> « Les acheteurs nous donnent le prix de vente et ensuite nous nous ajustons. Prenons, par exemple, l'exemple d'une propriété : celle-ci est vendue au premier rang avec 230 000 dollars et ne se vend pas pendant 4 mois ; un autre agent prend la liste à 220 000 dollars. Le vendeur reçoit une offre de 199 000 dollars, mais ne souhaite pas moins de 210 000 dollars. Il fait donc une contre-offre. Il y a tout un processus de négociation en cours. Dans ce cas, explique Mike, l'agent est resté debout 4 nuits d'affilée pour que cela se produise ». (discours professé lors de la formation à l'école des agents immobiliers)

Les prix peuvent alors prendre trois modalités - « bon, excellent, pas bon » - car les prix envoient un signal de qualité, mais également de conformité et se comportent correctement et respectueusement envers les autres acteurs. Voici un exemple qu'il dessine au tableau pour voir comment vous allez évaluer un prix. Dans ce cas, le marché est en hausse. Vous pouvez classer même en précisant si c'est « bon, bon ou pas bon ». Aux fins de l'évaluation, les appareils, les locaux ou les pièces doivent être quantifiés par rapport à la moyenne, en déterminant par exemple l'ampleur du décalage par rapport à la cuisine moyenne. L'emplacement, tel qu'évalué par le quartier, est également compris comme moyen, supérieur ou inférieur.

Plutôt qu'une « main invisible » façonnant les échanges sur le marché, les agents immobiliers partagent des conceptions ou des croyances relatives aux transactions, et ils créent une gamme d'actions possibles sur lesquelles les clients peuvent agir sans perturber l'efficacité du marché. En ce sens, les agents agissent sur une compréhension commune des marchés et de la théorie économique, acquise au cours de leur formation et de leur socialisation professionnelle, forme de connaissance tirée d'un raisonnement économique qu'ils souhaitent transmettre à leurs clients. Étant au centre de jugements raisonnables pour agir sur le marché résidentiel, ils deviennent ainsi un dispositif en apportant aux outils technologiques, professionnels et sociaux la valorisation des échanges de biens sur le marché.

2. Travailler la valeur marchande des territoires : l'ordre social et les jeux professionnels

> « Attention, vendeurs, directeurs des ventes : *location, location, location*, à proximité du parc Rogers ». (1926 petites annonces immobilières dans le Chicago Tribune)

Si certains peuvent reléguer les principes du code de déontologie et d'éthique de la NAR® rédigé en 1924[49] en soulignant une mission plutôt ancienne et idéalisée de l'agent immobilier, ce travail montre que les agents immobiliers, en plus de fournir un accès aux marchés résidentiels et au crédit, agissent souvent en tant qu'« éducateurs » pour apprendre à leurs clients à prendre des décisions financières et économiques judicieuses. Ils assurent la médiation des relations avec les organismes de crédit tout en alignant les préférences des clients sur le marché, leur statut social et leur lieu de résidence.

Dans la section 1 de cette partie, j'ai examiné la manière dont les agents immobiliers façonnent l'offre et la demande via des mécanismes qui influencent les transactions : ils utilisent des techniques de séduction pour renforcer la confiance et transmettre des informations. Ils apprennent à déchiffrer ce que veulent les gens, en essayant de le faire « correspondre » au marché et à leurs stratégies professionnelles. Ces pratiques ne sont pas les mêmes chez tous les clients ou dans tous les territoires, notamment car peu de marchés contiennent ces deux dimensions de la valeur, à savoir le produit lui-même mais également le produit intégré dans son emplacement. La valeur marchande (et sa construction par des intermédiaires) est hautement située, l'histoire de la propriété privée étant liée à l'exclusion et aux inégalités raciales (Brown et Smith 2015). *Location, location, location* est un mantra répété par les agents immobiliers (« Vous pouvez acheter la bonne maison au mauvais endroit »). La valeur de la maison est donc étroitement liée à l'espace géographique dans lequel elle

[49] Pour rappel, le préambule du code cité en partie 2 est le suivant : « En dessous de tout, se trouve la terre. La survie et la croissance d'institutions libres et de notre civilisation dépendent de son utilisation judicieuse et de la propriété largement répartie. Les Realtors® reconnaissent que les intérêts de la nation et de ses citoyens exigent une utilisation optimale de la terre et la répartition la plus large possible de la propriété foncière. Cela nécessite la création de logements adéquats, la construction de villes opérationnelles, le développement d'industries productives ainsi que la préservation d'un environnement sain. Ces intérêts imposent des obligations autres que celles du commerce ordinaire. Ils imposent une grave responsabilité sociale et un devoir patriotique auxquels les courtiers et agents immobiliers doivent se consacrer et pour lesquels ils doivent se préparer avec soin. Les Realtors® sont donc fermement engagés à maintenir et améliorer les normes relatives à leur vocation et partagent avec leurs collègues agents immobiliers une responsabilité commune d'intégrité et d'honneur ».

est située, formée de caractéristiques propres mais aussi de sa localisation notamment par rapport aux lieux de centralité.

S'appuyant sur l'analyse des performances et des attentes de Goffman (1956), mon analyse contribue à étayer la thèse selon laquelle les mécanismes de production des inégalités ne peuvent pas être uniquement étudiés sous l'angle de processus actifs de discrimination ou des objectifs institutionnels d'éradication des injustices, mais aussi en rapport avec notre perception des populations qui habitent des territoires, et par la traduction de valeurs symboliques en valeurs économiques. Je présente d'abord la perspective théorique à partir de laquelle je construis mon argument. J'explore ensuite trois dimensions : je documente tout d'abord la façon dont les agents sélectionnent des informations sur les quartiers et leur démographie, ; je montre ensuite comment les agents immobiliers et les quartiers classent les quartiers et les clients et comment s'alignent les valeurs économiques et symboliques ; je discute enfin de la façon dont l'immobilier, en faisant des profits sur la valeur, façonne les quartiers.

2.1. De la discrimination aux pratiques d'intermédiation marchande : communiquer sur le territoire et ses biens

La discrimination sur les marchés du logement a été un sujet de recherche central dans la littérature étasunienne. La plupart de cette littérature se concentre sur la nature et l'étendue de la discrimination sur les marchés de l'immobilier résidentiel et des crédits. Le *redlining*[50] et le *blockbusting*[51] reflètent l'exclusion financière et sociale des minorités raciales et ethniques du marché.

En ce qui concerne la discrimination raciale sur le marché du logement, les débats sociologiques sont axés sur les conséquences négatives de la ségrégation, qui touchent de manière disproportionnée les classes populaires et les minorités ethno-raciales, via une

[50] Le *redlining* est une pratique des acteurs du crédit consiste à limiter l'octroi et/ou le montant des prêts pour des populations situées sur des zones, territoires ou quartiers délimités.
[51] Le *blockbusting* est une pratique des agents immobiliers et des promoteurs immobiliers qui consiste à faire que des ménages blancs vendent leur maison à moindre prix à bas coûts. Ils instrumentalisent de cette manière la peur que des minorités raciales s'installent dans le quartier.

pauvreté concentrée, une mobilité résidentielle réduite et un manque d'accès aux ressources sociales et économiques. Pour comprendre ces mécanismes au-delà des explications individualistes (préférences individuelles) (Ellis et Wright, 2005 ; Farley, Fielding et Krysan, 1997), les chercheurs ont déplacé l'unité de l'analyse sur des facteurs externes (Crowder et South, 2008 ; Korver-Glenn, 2018c ; Massey, 2005 ; Massey et Rugh, 2017). Par exemple, Sampson (2012) a exploré le rôle des effets de voisinage en analysant le rôle des ressources de voisinage dans la ségrégation. Bien qu'importante, la perspective des effets de quartier invisibilise le rôle d'acteurs institutionnels et de pratiques du marché du logement qui contribuent à la ségrégation raciale et résidentielle, à la mobilité résidentielle et au déclin du quartier.

Les chercheurs omettent de fait souvent de considérer les « mécanismes invisibles » ou ce que (Giddens, 1984, p. 30) appelle les « conditions d'action non reconnues », qui entraînent des « conséquences non voulues » ou des actions non intentionnelles, alors même que les spécialistes des questions ethno-raciales s'accordent pour dire qu'il ne s'agit plus en grande majorité d'une discrimination raciale directe et déclarée et qu'elle n'est pas nécessairement à l'œuvre dans la ségrégation (Bonilla-Silva, 2010).

Aux États-Unis, le secteur immobilier comprend divers groupes d'intérêts : promoteurs, constructeurs, sociétés de crédit immobilier, banques, prêteurs et agents immobiliers (Gotham, 2002). Aalbers (2011, p. 40) invite à regarder au-delà des « indicateurs habituels de changement tels que le niveau de revenu moyen, la mobilité des résidents (rotation du logement) et la composition des groupes raciaux/ethniques » et « de creuser plus profondément pour découvrir les actions des acteurs de l'immobilier ». Le secteur immobilier « ne répond pas (exclusivement) à la demande des clients, comme le soutiennent les écologistes, mais offre des incitations et des opportunités qui tirent et modèlent les comportements, les préférences de localisation et les choix des clients individuels » (Gotham 2002, p. 87). Les acteurs du secteur immobilier de fait joue un « rôle majeur dans la transmission d'informations » (Bernheim et Meer, 2007 ; Hodgson, 1988, p. 178). Ces acteurs et investisseurs immobiliers peuvent précipiter, accélérer et façonner le marché en « réagissant de manière excessive aux premiers symptômes de décomposition », en structurant activement le *milking*, la spéculation, et le déclin passif (*redlining*) (Bonneval, 2014 ; Grigsby

et al., 1987 ; Grigsby, 1963, p. 235 ; Korver-Glenn, 2018b ; Levitt et Syverson, 2008) devenant « non seulement des automates du mécanisme des prix, qui orientent le fonctionnement naturel du marché » mais aussi détenteurs « d'un pouvoir dont ils disposent pour initier et structurer le déclin d'un quartier » (Aalbers, 2011, p. 42).

Comme indiqué dans la section 1 de cette partie, la valeur marchande est essentielle à la mise en opération des marchés résidentiels. Avec la méthode comparative, les agents établissent un lien entre les biens économiques, toujours liés à une géolocalisation et les tendances du marché dans la région. Ainsi, la valeur est liée aux projections de valeur, et peut-être encore plus lorsque les valeurs devraient augmenter. Qu'est-ce qui alors, au-delà de l'offre et de la demande, affecte la valeur marchande ? Comment la localisation géographique affecte-t-elle la valeur marchande du quartier ? Les agents et experts immobiliers affirment de manière constante que « les maisons peuvent connaître des augmentations ou des baisses de valeur importantes du fait de leur emplacement » et que l'on « peut acheter la bonne maison au mauvais endroit » (Weintraub, 2018).

2.2. L'homologie entre le social et le marchand : évaluer des clients, des quartiers et des valeurs marchandes

Une forme sociale de pilotage : gérer les informations dans les conversations

Les agents ne sont pas en mesure de communiquer des informations sur la composition sociale et raciale des quartiers depuis les lois sur du ministère du logement (HUD). Sur le terrain, j'ai constaté que les agents savaient qu'ils pouvaient être audités par des représentants du HUD afin d'aligner leurs pratiques sur les directives de l'organisation. Conscients de cela, ils se faisaient donc prudents lorsque des acheteurs potentiels les appelaient sans leur demander de s'informer sur les quartiers.

Dans une discussion avec Bob lors d'une *open house*, il mentionne le fait que les agents doivent faire preuve de prudence maintenant, car ils ne sont pas en mesure de communiquer sur les caractéristiques des quartiers :

> « J'aime parler avec les gens, quand ça doit être amusant, vous savez, et j'aime bien parler de n'importe quoi, enfin presque, mais après leur avoir montré les maisons, vous en avez une idée, mais il y a une chose… Connaissez-vous la loi sur le logement équitable ? Donc, vous ne

> pouvez rien dire à propos d'un quartier, disons que j'ai des clients qui disent : « Quel est le meilleur quartier de la ville ? ». Je peux leur rappeler des faits, mais je ne peux pas leur dire que les *Foothills* sont le meilleur quartier de la ville et du sud. Tucson est vraiment nul, parce que nous sommes supposés informer mais pas guider comme ça, alors je leur dis que légalement je ne peux pas leur dire mais qu'ils peuvent le chercher en ligne, ils peuvent voir le district scolaire, le crime statistiques et tout. Mais, par exemple, une fois, quelqu'un m'a dit: « Je ne veux pas vivre près des Mexicains, alors peux-tu être sûr qu'il n'y a pas de Mexicains dans les parages » et je dis que je n'étais pas autorisé à le faire, de toute façon si j'étais en lui donnant un jugement ou en l'influant dans mon jugement, mon permis peut être révoqué, je veux dire de temps en temps que je reçois ces appels d'un acheteur potentiel qui me demande si je peux fournir des informations sur un quartier ou dans lequel il fait bon vivre en ville, et quelques questions sur mes sentiments ou mes jugements, formulées par le bureau du *Fair Housing*, qui peuvent prendre mon permis, alors je ne dis jamais rien, je ne peux pas. Il y a une publicité à la télévision publique où une personne demande à un agent immobilier de louer une maison avec un nom et un accent mexicains, et l'agent immobilier dit : « désolé, il est déjà loué, puis une autre personne appelée le même agent immobilier avec un nom indien et un accent indien, et l'agent répond la même chose, désolé c'est loué, et une troisième personne avec un accent américain typique appelé John Smith appelle et l'agent répond que l'endroit est disponible à la location. (discussion informelle retranscrite lors d'une maison ouverte)

La construction de ce qu'est un « bon » quartier doit être située dans le contexte de l'inégalité d'accès aux possibilités de scolarisation et plus largement de la stratification sociale. Ces informations sont connues et signalées dans les conversations par les agents immobiliers, souvent sans même s'en rendre compte. Le traitement de l'information est d'une importance capitale pour le pilotage, et est également au cœur des comportements d'appariement du marché comme nous l'avons évoqué dans la section 1. En vertu de la loi, les agents ne sont pas autorisés à donner des informations, une représentation ou des indices sur les quartiers, en termes de la démographie sociale, les statistiques de la criminalité ou les commentaires d'évaluation. Cependant, dans la pratique, le cadre informel d'une conversation rend les choses difficiles.

J'ai suivi la transaction d'un acheteur avec Alex, 28 ans, blanc, recrue plus récente chez *Desert Realty*. J'ai été surpris de voir comment il opère une présélection des zones dans lesquelles ses clients pourraient potentiellement habiter. Sandra et Jeff, un couple blanc, disposaient d'un budget d'environ 400 000 dollars et cherchaient à acheter une maison de 4 chambres à coucher. Ils venaient juste d'emménager en ville et ne connaissaient pas grand-chose du territoire. Ils ont été recommandés par un autre ami qui est un agent dans le Minnesota, où Alex a de nombreux parents. Il les rencontre au bureau de *Desert Realty* et leur montre une

carte du territoire à l'écran. Alex a mis en exergue des espaces intéressants pour eux : « tu peux aller au nord de River, c'est là que se trouvent les plus belles demeures ». Techniquement, il ne donne aucune information sur la composition raciale de la population, mais correspond à la définition de Galster et Godfrey (2005, p. 8) quand ils parlent des trois types de *steering* (indications) :

> « Les agents peuvent donner trois types d'indications, qui ne sont pas mutuellement exclusives : inspection, recommandation et édition. Ils peuvent inspecter les domiciles en personne avec leurs clients, recommander des domiciles aux clients à partir de listes MLS ou autres, et éditorialiser, c'est-à-dire fournir des évaluations gratuites positives ou négatives sur certains éléments de la maison ou du voisinage ».

Au cours des interactions entre clients et agents, j'ai été témoin de différents comportements, qu'il s'agisse de clients de classe supérieure ou de classe moyenne inférieure :

> Avec Sandra et Jeff, un couple de Caroline du Nord au capital économique et culturel élevé et embauchés comme professeurs à l'Université d'Arizona, Alex adopte une attitude déférente et leur recommande immédiatement de regarder des maisons à Sam Hughes, un quartier qu'il dit « très populaire pour les profs d'université ». Il semble alors qu'en raison de leur budget (400 000 dollars) et de leurs propriétés sociales, ils aient été presque automatiquement affectés à une partie de la ville, un quartier, qui reproduit à la fois leurs critères initiaux et une sorte de correspondance de classe entre style de vie et lieu géographique d'habitation : être un « quartier convivial » et pas trop éloigné de l'université. Dans le cas de Cristina et Fernando, acheteurs hispaniques, qui tout en exprimant leur désir de vivre plus près d'une zone centrale en raison de leurs emplois dans le domaine de la maintenance et des soins infirmiers, ne disposent que de 100 000 dollars à dépenser, Alex ne fait pas preuve d'autant de déférence et semble plus confiant dans la conduite de l'interaction, même s'il suggère alors que Cristina et Fernando seraient mieux dans un lieu plus grand était plus loin. (note de terrain)

De même, Lucy et Ryan, clients de Kara, n'avaient au départ pas compris les « types de communautés » qui pouvaient les intéresser. Grâce à leur connaissance du territoire, Kara situe leur recherche dans un petit rayon qui correspond à la proximité de l'autoroute pour aller rendre visite à leurs amis à Phoenix et à des endroits dont ils avaient entendu dire qu'ils étaient gérés par d'autres agents dans leurs bureaux. Tous les mercredis à *Real Prosperity*, les agents annoncent leurs propres annonces, et le mercredi précédent, deux maisons apparaissaient à proximité des mêmes quartiers. Kara a rencontré les clients le lundi précédent et ces deux maisons semblent parfaitement dans leur gamme et leur budget. Elle avait également sélectionné deux autres maisons dans le même quartier. Bien qu'ils soient censés offrir une grande variété de perspectives à leurs clients, l'une des contraintes de leur

travail est la nécessité de procéder à des transactions rapprochées pour pouvoir être payés. Ils choisissent donc souvent des éléments de l'acheteur pour les faire correspondre à leurs objectifs et des informations actuelles sur les « bonnes listes disponibles ».

Certaines des interactions que j'observe pourraient également être qualifiées d'un *steering* de classe, défini comme « schémas spatiaux de la présentation des logements dans lesquels les zones montrées à des acheteurs de maisons appartenant à des minorités ont un statut socio-économique inférieur (revenus, taux d'accession à la propriété, valeurs de propriété, etc.) inférieurs à ceux des zones montrées aux populations blanches, en moyenne » et même à un *steering* ethno-racial - ce qui représente « les schémas spatiaux de la présentation des logements dans lesquels les zones montrées aux acheteurs de maisons appartenant à des minorités ont des minorités ethno-raciales plus grandes (ou en croissance) que les zones montrées aux populations blanche, en moyenne » (Galster et Godfrey, 2005, pp. 5–6).

Le *steering* peut alors réduire la mixité de certains quartiers et cantonner les classes populaires à des quartiers spécifiques. Cela s'est produit à plusieurs reprises avec Bob, le chef de l'équipe de *Real Prosperity*, mais a souvent prétendu être attribué à des informations sur les listes et les capacités du candidat, plutôt que sur la sélection par race des clients. Un de leurs clients hispaniques avait bien demandé à voir des maisons situées dans le nord de la ville, mais leur budget semblait alors hors de portée pour Bob, mais ici, je doute également qu'il ait effectué les recherches qu'il aurait dû faire. En effet, il aurait probablement pu trouver quelque chose de plus petit qu'ils recherchaient ou un condo pour leur gamme de prix.

J'ai suivi une transaction entre Ben et sa cliente Mariana, une acheteuse hispanique âgée de 28 ans diplômée de l'Université de l'Arizona et travaillant chez Raytheon :

> Nous nous sommes rencontrés au bureau de Ben. Une fois, je l'ai accompagnée chez elle et nous nous sommes arrêtés pour prendre un café en chemin. Elle a commencé à me dire qu'elle ressentait dans une certaine mesure une « pression douce » de Ben pour ne pas acheter où elle le voulait. Mariana a grandi dans une famille hispanique du sud de Tucson, dans un code postal caractérisé par une hispanique à 90%. Bien que ses collègues de travail lui aient conseillé d'embaucher un agent immobilier, elle m'a dit qu'elle n'en avait jamais eu. Cette situation l'a rendue un peu hésitante quand elle a rencontré Ben, qui a été référé par un collègue. Ben a procédé à l'évaluation de son mode de vie et a posé des questions spécifiques sur ce qu'elle aimait faire, mais ne s'est pas référé à sa famille. En effet, être proche de sa famille semblait

> plus importante pour Mariana que son travail. Quand il lui a demandé si elle avait regardé les maisons, elle a répondu qu'elle venait de voir un couple dans le sud de la ville. Alors que Ben aurait dû la suivre dans cette partie de la ville, reconnaissant que cet endroit était important pour elle, il cherche à faire accepter à Mariana une logique alternative. Il semblait investi personnellement dans son choix, disant vaguement quelque chose du genre : « Je veux dire, avec ce que vous faites, vous pouvez vous permettre d'avoir une maison plus belle », ce qui signifiait en d'autres termes, un meilleur quartier. Il a fait valoir de nouveaux arguments sur la position du marché, affirmant qu'elle serait mieux située au centre qu'au sud. Alors que Mariana n'était au début pas sûre à 100%, Ben a proposé de ne regarder que quelques maisons dans un endroit plus central qui puisse correspondre à ce qu'elle voulait.

Après avoir visité trois maisons la semaine dernière, elle préfère s'en tenir à ses plans initiaux, mais Ben continue subtilement à faire pression pour acheter d'autres maisons dans un lieu plus central. Qu'est-ce qui peut expliquer l'instance de Ben pour pousser Mariana à choisir un autre endroit ? Ben est très attaché au succès de la transaction, au-delà de la préférence de Mariana pour la localisation de la maison.

Théoriquement, il devrait essayer de trouver le lieu que Mariana voulait vraiment. Mais en se basant sur ses attentes sociales pour acquérir la propriété de valeur maximale qu'elle pouvait se permettre, sa position sociale spécifique (après avoir obtenu son diplôme de maîtrise et associé de son salaire à un style de vie moyennement élevé), Ben a souligné un projet de ce qu'elle « devrait » attendre de la vie, c'est-à-dire où elle devrait rester en résidence pour se conformer au statut social.

L'une des hypothèses de développement de cette transaction - Mariana a fini par acheter une maison proche de ses parents sans commission et par le biais de réseaux familiaux - est que les agents ne se contentent pas de juger de ce qu'il convient de faire pour leurs clients en fonction des faits réels sur le marché. Ils projettent également sur leurs acheteurs et vendeurs un sens de la place, un certain point entre une rationalité économique et un positionnement social qui détermine ce qui constitue une bonne ou une mauvaise décision. Cela rend en effet impossible de séparer la valeur économique de la valeur sociale des lieux, car une fois le statut social devrait se refléter à la fois dans un bien et un lieu symboliques et matériels plus élevés, mais aussi dans l'anticipation de la valeur économique qui reflète les gains escomptés. bien matériel et symbolique et son emplacement. Dans ce cas, Ben agit avec déférence (au sens de

Goffman, 1967) envers Mariana, tout en essayant de la louer à travers des compliments et des appréciations et en soulignant le statut social qu'elle a atteint.

Comment analyser la réaction de Ben à Mariana ? Goffman (1956) explique explicitement comment les individus cherchent à acquérir des informations sur les autres et à mobiliser des informations telles que le statut socio-économique, l'idée qu'il a de lui-même ou les dispositions à leur égard, des compétences et une honnêteté. Selon Goffman, la recherche d'informations est réalisée sur des bases pratiques : elle vise à définir la situation, car les participants sauront ce que leurs partenaires attendent d'eux et, par conséquent, ce qu'ils peuvent attendre d'eux. Avec cette information clarifiée, ils sauraient ainsi comment se comporter en fonction des réponses qu'ils souhaitent obtenir. Les anticipations et les prévisions jouent donc un rôle fondamental dans le tissu social de Goffman. Chaque participant à la transaction doit donc donner, intentionnellement ou non, une expression de lui-même, et les autres doivent retrouver une certaine impression (Goffman 1959). Ben utilise des indices explicites en lui parlant directement - Mariana lui indiquant où elle a travaillé, son degré d'avancement - et des indices implicites indirects tels que sa façon de parler, sa façon de s'habiller, son apparence physique utilisant des significations symboliques pour évaluer des informations. Ces indices explicites et implicites sont ainsi traduits en signaux de statut social, qui déclenchent des comportements ou des « lignes » cohérentes avec l'information (Goffman 1951).

La situation d'interaction révèle non seulement la structure sociale, mais également la fragilité de son ordre social : c'est parce que les individus risquent d'être mal adaptés et que les quartiers risquent de décliner que les intermédiaires acquièrent un rôle d'intermédiaire. Dans cette interaction, ils contribuent à la préservation de l'ordre social, en le renforçant en faisant correspondre les personnes, les maisons et les lieux. Si les clients ne doivent pas être considérés comme n'ayant ni capacité ni marge de manœuvre, ni pour agir contre les recommandations d'un agent, j'observe que, lorsqu'ils se présentent des opportunités (présentées comme des faits sur lesquels il faut agir), les clients issus de milieux socio-économiques défavorisés ne sont pas nécessairement capable de se lever efficacement pour discuter et évaluer leur «meilleur intérêt» et a fini par suivre les comportements attendus d'eux par les agents immobiliers. Cela a été démontré dans le cas de Rudy avec ses premiers

acheteurs de maison en Afrique, qui n'étaient pas familiers avec la région, manquaient de connaissances en anglais et de compétences culturelles pour naviguer dans leurs recherches. Pour les clients qui connaissent bien le territoire, l'agent peut simplement renforcer les désirs ou fournir un accès à l'inventaire. Cependant, pour ceux qui sont peu familiers et moins équipés, l'interaction avec l'agent les assignerait à des endroits spécifiques. Avec tous les types de clients, les agents contribuent à mettre en évidence et à rendre certains espaces visibles et invisibles. Non seulement contribuent-ils à orienter les gens dans leurs choix, ils doivent également correspondre aux personnes et aux quartiers en évaluant la valeur du quartier, en ciblant et en mettant en valeur les espaces résidentiels.

Les agents ciblent ou soulignent spécifiquement les domaines dans lesquels ses clients peuvent (ou ne peuvent pas) vivre, en fonction de leur compréhension spatiale de l'inventaire (biens disponibles à l'achat) et de leur évaluation des positions sociales / styles de vie des clients. Par exemple, l'agent sélectionne uniquement une "zone urbaine" pour la recherche de maisons avec des critères ciblés, car il est justifié de dire qu'il connaît l'inventaire et que c'est là que le client peut trouver le meilleur inventaire (rentabilité future, emplacement, type de marchandises, etc.). Les agents peuvent demander à leurs clients de sélectionner sur une carte les zones qui pourraient leur convenir et interprète à sa guise les lieux les plus appropriés pour ses clients. Ces zones peuvent être ciblées par des acheteurs spécifiques, de statut socio-économique inférieur, et sont souvent considérées comme "inappropriées" et "dangereuses" pour le reste des acheteurs. Il s'agit donc d'une approche différente en fonction du statut économique des clients.

L'homogénéité des biens

La tarification immobilière repose sur des techniques d'évaluation qui récompensent l'homogénéité : les biens doivent être similaires. Dans quelle mesure cela s'applique-t-il également à sa population ? Si les maisons ne sont pas comparables, il est difficile de déterminer la valeur. C'est pourquoi, avec cette complication, il est dit aux résidents de ne pas rénover leurs maisons avant de vendre, ou de ne pas être la « maison la plus chère » du quartier, s'ils se soucient sur « leur valeur ». La construction de la valeur serait donc issue un processus éminemment relationnelle : il dépend de divers standards professionnels,

anticipations et principes économiques fondés sur le monde social dans lequel évoluent les agents immobiliers.

J'ai observé la transaction entre les vendeurs Eddy et Nina et un agent immobilier, Corey, qui travaille dans le secteur de l'immobilier depuis environ 6 ans. Selon Corey, à moins que l'agent fasse appel à une entreprise pour refaire entièrement la maison, le meilleur moyen de vendre est de procéder à des ajustements mineurs et de bien la préparer. Bien que l'on puisse penser que cela ne concerne en rien l'emplacement général de la maison, je découvre lors de la réunion avec les clients que Corey n'utilise finalement pas les éléments matériels et objectivables du bien. En effet, tandis qu'Eddy et Nina parlent de leur intention de refaire la cuisine et de la mettre à jour, Corey leur dit de « foncer pour vendre tout de suite ». Quand ils commencent à parler de l'ajout de certaines installations à l'extérieur ou de transformer la structure générale de la maison, il répond alors très clairement : « Vous savez, vous devez faire attention ». Il avait déjà expliqué l'importance de bien entretenir son bien. Corey soulignait aussi la nécessité de se plier aux règles de la HOA pour la maintenance en veillant à ce que le jardin soit ordonné, que les haies soient taillées, que les poubelles soient rangées etc. Ces règles concernaient aussi les transformations potentielles de structure, la forme et la couleur de la maison.

Lors des observations d'interactions, les agents immobiliers insistent de fait souvent auprès des vendeurs sur la nécessité de respecter un principe d'homogénéité : « Vous ne devez surtout pas être la meilleure maison du pâté de maison ». En effet, selon ces agents, la meilleure maison en termes de caractéristiques formelles ne sera pas aussi attrayant pour un acheteur moyen, car il est possible qu'elle ne soit pas valorisée à la revente ou qu'elle perde de sa valeur en contact avec des biens de standing inférieur.

Les agents ne le nomment pas expressément principe d'homogénéité, mais le mettent en avant, à l'image de Corey comme un argument de vente du bien. Les agents que j'ai suivis ont donc fortement découragé leurs vendeurs de procéder à un remodelage long et coûteux, à moins que cela visait expressément à égaler le standing des biens du pâté de maison. Les agents établissent alors pour leurs clients des stratégies de transformation de leurs biens en

fonction des autres biens présents dans le quartier, affirmant le principe d'homogénéité et de similitude comme une vérité du marché et des conditions de vente.

L'invisibilisation des espaces

Certains espaces ne sont pas mentionnés par les professionnels de l'immobilier, ils disparaissent tout simplement de la carte des quartiers possibles au choix. J'appelle cela le mécanisme d'invisibilisation. Considérés comme "inappropriés", ces espaces (c'est le cas du sud de la ville par exemple) disparaissent complètement de la carte des possibilités résidentielles. Les agents ne les présentent pas comme des lieux potentiels et les clients ne les connaissent pas nécessairement, même si leur lieu de travail pourrait totalement correspondre à l'achat d'une propriété dans le sud de la ville.

Lors des réunions que j'ai observées avec les acheteurs de Rudy, celui-ci s'est rendu au rendez-vous avec une carte de la ville. Quand les clients ne savent pas où habiter, l'interrogatoire habituel de Rudy se règle autour de l'emplacement physique de leur lieu de travail. Objectivement, les clients sont plus proches du centre et du sud de la ville. Mais après avoir engagé une discussion sur leurs besoins (taille et caractéristiques de la maison principalement), Rudy met en évidence des zones du territoire où il sait qu'il y aura des stocks. Après avoir abordé un peu la carte, les clients l'écoutent principalement, il leur dit assez directement : « eh bien, North of River, c'est l'endroit où vous devez être ». Il indique des directions différentes, mais dans son point de vue, Sud est non existant. Ceci peut être attribué à sa connaissance : Rudy sait qu'il n'y a rien à vendre là-bas, aucune valeur à extraire, c'est-à-dire aucun inventaire ; ainsi que ce qui est révélé plus spécifiquement dans le cadre d'une interview formelle : Rudy, comme environ 90% des agents à qui j'ai parlé de cette question, a peur que les clients se plaignent du fait que le quartier est un mauvais lieu de vie, voire même de revendre leurs maisons.

2.3. Les jeux professionnels autour de la valeur : clients, volume, qualités, rapidité, et spéculation

Non seulement les agents immobiliers agissent en relation avec une hiérarchie et une classification des quartiers, en fonction notamment de leur connaissance géo localisée des

inventaires, mais ils s'engagent aussi dans une forme de jeu mettant en jeu le développement de leur capital socioprofessionnel. Ce jeu consiste à orienter leurs activités de travail vers la recherche stratégique des meilleures transactions possibles dans un laps de temps réduit, afin de se constituer un capital économique.

En raison de ces objectifs, les agents se lancent dans la recherche d'opérations souhaitables selon deux types de configuration : d'une part, viser des opérations à forte valeur transactionnelle, ce qui réduira alors l'objectif du chiffre ; d'autre part, chercher des opérations à valeur faible ou moyenne mais de manière beaucoup plus fréquente.

Avec un bémol cependant, car une maison de moins de 100 000 dollars s'avère finalement très peu rentable pour un agent immobilier, et ne le rémunérera que 3% du prix total de la transaction, ce qui équivaut à 3 000 dollars moins les taxes et les frais prélevés par les entreprises immobilières[52]. Pour la plupart des agents que j'ai interviewés, cela semble alors représenté une masse de travail conséquente pour des gains très minimaux à la fin. En effet, les deux tiers des agents interrogés attestent de cette déconnection entre temps de travail effectif et revenus, non seulement en termes de temps pris par les actions engagées (par exemple, passer tout un samedi à faire visiter des maisons à un client) mais aussi en termes de faiblesse du revenu pour un ensemble de tâches à faire pour une transaction qui ne varie pas sensiblement (par exemple, vendre une maison de 700 000 dollars vs. Une maison de 80 000). S'établit alors ici une hiérarchie entre activités valorisés par les agents immobiliers avec un statut déjà établi dans le champ, qui préfère détenir l'inventaire ou autrement dit, s'occuper des vendeurs, et les agents qui débutent, à l'affut des *open houses* pour rencontrer des acheteurs[53].

Si les agents ne travaillent pas dans certains quartiers, c'est aussi parce que les prix des maisons sont trop bas et ne génèrent pas assez de revenus, ce qui contribue également à accroître les inégalités, car les biens qui sont « dépourvus de valeur » ne sont pas montrés, ne pas vus, pas amélioré à des ménages. Au contraire, on aura tendance à favoriser des

[52] Le revenu final de l'agent immobilier sera alors particulièrement faible, même si cette structure de revenu est très différente selon les entreprises et les agents, car ils doivent négocier individuellement avec l'entreprise le % qui recevront de ces 3%.
[53] Cf. note de bas de page 24

transactions plus rapides avec des investisseurs qui font beaucoup vite qui permettra de générer un revenu certes assez modeste[54] mais en un temps record et qu'on pourrait optimiser

Le défaut d'investissement dans les marchés à faible valeur

J'ai observé une transaction entre Kara, agent immobilier et Anton, client qui cherchait un bien dans le sud de la ville. Anton a été présenté par un de ses amis de l'Université de l'Arizona ; il avait trouvé une maison de 48 000 dollars sur la 32ème rue et la 3ème avenue. Ce n'est pas un domaine dans lequel les transactions immobilières sont en plein essor, contrairement au centre-ville et au Nord de la ville. En effet, on peut évaluer rapidement en regardant des maisons actives sur le marché qu'au sud de la 22e, le marché devient beaucoup moins actif et seules quelques propriétés sont disponibles. Les prix sont beaucoup plus bas en moyenne que les autres quartiers de la ville. La maison n'était pas moderne, et pour l'agent immobilier qu'est Kara, le bien est même obsolescent (c'est-à-dire qu'il ne répond pas aux normes attendues et standards de confort présentés à l'école des agents immobiliers, ce qui constitue donc un problème attesté pour la revente du bien), Anton lui le déclare « un peu vieillot, a besoin d'être un peu rafraichi ». Anton voulait cependant acheter rapidement, le quartier ne semblait pas lui poser de problème, malgré les représentations de ses amis autour de sa pauvreté et de son état de dégradation attestés. Dans un commentaire en off, il m'expliquait qu'il voulait un agent uniquement pour « rentrer dans la maison ». Malgré les sollicitations d'Anton pour voir une maison dans le sud de la ville, Kara a néanmoins insisté pour examiner d'autres propriétés avant d'acheter et qui n'était pas situés dans le Sud de la ville, car comme elle déclare « ce n'est pas comme si vous allez acheter des bananes au magasin ». Anton était cependant déjà décidé, alors que Kara ne semblait pas du tout convaincue par la propriété.

Même si à l'école et dans les entreprises, j'ai pu entendre les instructeurs répéter à plusieurs reprises : « souvenez-vous que ce sont les décisions de vos clients, vous n'avez pas besoin d'aimer la maison pour la vendre », dans le cas de la transaction de Kara avec Anton, j'ai pu observer que s'il n'existait pas des formes de pression directe pour empêcher Anton d'acheter, de formes de pressions se sont exercées, principalement par une pratique discursive qui consistait à détourner le potentiel acheteur de son choix en lui mettant en avant

[54] Certains agents attestent alors ne pas descendre en dessous d'un certain prix.

la difficulté de la revente ou l'ensemble des travaux à envisager, et que sans mentionner directement le quartier ou la population qui s'y trouvait, de nombreuses références à dégradation des lieux était principalement hérité d'une connaissance et d'une réputation du quartier.

C'est aussi principalement parce qu'Anton disposait d'un certain capital socio-culturel tout en ayant un capital économique beaucoup plus faible - à l'époque, il était musicien pour un groupe local et fréquentait beaucoup d'universitaires et d'activistes locaux. Dans ce cas, l'agent immobilier n'a pas présenté le bien, mais a néanmoins agi en proposant de réaligner correctement la classe et le bien, par la proposition d'un bien plus cher dans un autre quartier.

Kara a ici même essayé de décourager Anton de prendre la décision finale. Kara m'a aussi déclaré en off et de manière euphémisée qu'elle avait quand même l'impression de perdre son temps. Après les impôts et les frais prélevés par son entreprise immobilière, il ne resterait à Kara que 800 dollars environ pour une durée de transactions qui ne pouvait descendre que difficilement en dessous de 60 jours, ce que donc la plupart des agents immobiliers déjà établis auraient bien évidemment refusé, mis à part peut-être avec des connaissances proches. Certains auraient pour parer à cela fixer un prix maximum.

Sachant qu'elle considérait Anton comme un ami d'amis, elle mettait aussi un point d'honneur à ce que l'accord n'échoue pas et le considérait alors la demande d'Anton comme tout à fait légitime. De plus, la transaction a duré plus longtemps que prévu car certains problèmes ont été découverts et la maison n'a pas été évaluée au prix convenu. De la même manière, Kara s'est sentie plutôt désengagée de cette transaction car elle n'avait aucune incitation financière à la faire fonctionner, pas plus qu'une forme de connexion avec le bien et le territoire qu'elle vendait.

Ces éléments empiriques de l'analyse s'appliquent en effet à la plupart des marchés hispaniques aux prix très inférieurs à ceux du marché moyen dans le sud de la ville que j'ai pu observer. Si aucun investissement n'est réalisé et que les maisons sont vendues à des prix très bas, certaines sont même échangées sans agent immobiliers. Il n'y aura alors pas

d'investissement ou de *geo-farming*[55] jusqu'à ce que les courtiers et les investisseurs anticipent des gains potentiels.

L'attraction vers les prix élevés

Amanda et Nancy, par exemple, montrent qu'elles sont plus attirées par la présentation de biens immobiliers à prix plus élevés, car elles s'y « sentent mieux ». Ainsi, le prestige du bien contribue également à augmenter le prestige de l'agent, créant ainsi une disparité sur le marché, un traitement différentiel de facto pour les biens bas ou haut de gamme. Comme l'illustre le point 2 de la partie 3, Nancy et Amanda se présentent comme s'occupant de biens de cette classe et répondant aux besoins de ce type de clients. Elles prétendent que leur objectif est d'obtenir des « produits de luxe » pour des « clients exigeants ». Elles retrouvent un sens positif d'elles-mêmes alors que travailler avec des produits de basse qualité ne leur permet pas d'incarner un tel statut.

Nancy, par exemple, aime porter une belle robe et des talons hauts, mais cela ne semble approprié que de travailler dans le milieu de gamme supérieure du marché. Elle qui a beaucoup de maisons chères voir très chères, aime aussi la photographie, la mise en scène et l'architecture car elle se sent, sans être modèle ou designer, proche du secteur du luxe. Dans le travail d'agent immobilier de luxe, elle valorise l'esthétique qui lui permet d'apparenter son statut socio-professionnel et sa personne au produit. S'opère alors un processus de valorisation qui fonctionne par l'homologie entre le travailleur et le bien vendu.

Retourner le négatif en positif

Même lorsque les agents immobiliers obtiennent des mandats à bas prix, ils mettent généralement en scène ces propriétés sur le MLS en visant des acheteurs potentiels : dans le cas d'une maison à moins de 80 000 dollars, ils visent des investisseurs types plutôt qu'une famille. Sur l'annonce, Kara inscrit toujours la mention « idéal investisseurs » quand elle repère des biens peu chers mais dont elle sait que les propriétaires-investisseurs pourront extraire une rentabilité locative du bien.

[55] Le *geofarming* ou *geography farming* s'apparente à la centralisation de l'activité d'un agent, principalement la construction d'un réseau, le marketing, et la vente dans une zone géographique définie, un quartier par exemple. C'est une pratique assez développée sur mon terrain et qui se concentre principalement sur des zones aux prix élevés.

Patrick sait également l'importance de la rapidité de la transaction surtout dans le secteur des maisons à faible prix, et donc de trouver des sources d'acquéreurs identifiés, qui lui permettront de générer des revenus beaucoup rapidement. Les investisseurs du marché bas de gamme ont généralement des liquidités, d'autant plus qu'ils n'ont pas besoin d'évaluation (*appraising*)[56], qu'ils connaissent très bien les propriétés et savent comment gérer la transaction. Ils opèrent également à temps, ils voudraient donc que la transaction soit conclue dès que possible. Thomas, qui a négocié avec des investisseurs très modestes, m'a un jour déclaré : « C'est fondamentalement le travail le moins important que j'ai consacré à la transaction. Le gars savait déjà une bonne partie de ce qui se passait, le contrat était déjà réglé, propre ».

Les agents immobiliers tentent alors de cibler un public bien défini qui leur permettra de fluidifier et de routiniser leurs opérations. Il peut s'agir aussi d'une capture de l'agent de l'acheteur lui-même, car celui-ci fait un travail d'anticipation en amont de connaissance des biens qu'il pourra montrer à ses clients. Par exemple, le processus de *milking* consiste à augmenter le prix des loyers tout en réduisant les coûts et les frais d'entretien. Cela peut avoir un impact considérable sur les quartiers dégradés et défavorisés, et sur la manière dont les investisseurs peuvent en tirer profit.

Volume et timing : fast-forwarding la transaction et faire de l'argent

Les agents sont en effet très préoccupés par la réalisation de leurs objectifs de vente. Tandis que certains que j'ai interviewés, comme Rudy, n'hésitent pas à parler de chiffres, ils surveillent de près leur volume de vente et ont un « plan commercial » pour l'année - d'autres, comme Matthew et Kate, refusent de parler de la partie financière de leur activité car ils craignent de paraître gourmands.

Bien que la majorité des agents hésitent à parler d'argent, ils soulignent l'importance de ne pas « être pris pour des idiots » et d'être rémunéré pour le travail qu'ils accomplissent, les montants de la rémunération contribuant grandement à leur fierté et à leur auto-estime. Lorsque Peter me présente Rudy, il déclare tout de go : « Tu verras, Rudy est notre meilleur nouvel agent. Il a reçu un prix l'année dernière pour son volume de ventes d'entrée ». Les

[56] Cf. note de bas de page 47

agents qui ont accepté d'être observés ont relativement percés dans leurs niches et bénéficiaient pour 80% d'entre eux d'une reconnaissance dans leurs propres entreprises.

Le deuxième jour, après avoir observé la réunion de Rudy avec des acheteurs potentiels, j'aborde plus précisément de ce qu'il fait pendant la journée. Je veux avoir une idée de ce à quoi ressemble pour une journée typique de travail :

> « Chaque matin, je regarde mes chiffres. Ce sont mes transactions pour l'année. Ceci est une grande feuille de calcul de toutes les transactions que j'ai eues ou que j'ai eues et à quel stade elles se trouvent. Je regarde mes chiffres et vois à quel point je suis près de mon objectif. Je me demande quel est l'objectif ? L'objectif est d'avoir sept transactions en attente, deux inscriptions actives et six clôturées, mais mon objectif est d'effectuer soixante transactions. À l'heure actuelle, je compte environ un million de dollars en *escrow*[57], mais je souhaite en avoir au moins douze d'ici la fin de l'année (*l'entretien a lieu en avril*). Alors, j'ai beaucoup de rattrapage à faire. Je réponds, « mais nous sommes moins de la moitié de l'année, non ? » « Ouais, je sais, nous venons de commencer, mais je suis toujours stressé. Mes listes totalisent 605 000 dollars. Si je réunis ces deux chiffres, ils atteignent près de deux millions, mais cela me laisse tout de même à environ soixante-dix ou quatre-vingts pour cent de mon objectif. « D'accord », dis-je, « combien de millions ventes alors ? » Douze. C'est ce à quoi j'ai ajouté le tout. Mon objectif commercial ici est « Quel serait votre revenu de cela ? » J'ajoute : « Revenu après. Mmm, cent cinquante-huit. 11,6 millions de dollars en volume, c'est vraiment bien. Mais je ne vise que douze. Donc, si je vais à midi, je vais certainement aller au but. Donc, vous regardez essentiellement mon plan d'affaires pour l'année. Cela me montre tout. Mon objectif est d'atteindre un revenu brut calculé de 350 000 dollars. C'est donc vraiment ce que je gagnerais si je n'avais pas à payer d'impôts ou de dépenses. Cinquante pour cent de cela provient d'acheteurs et cinquante pour cent de la liste. Mon prix moyen devrait se situer autour de 220 000 dollars. Si ce n'est pas le cas, je vais devoir rattraper un peu mon retard. Mes acheteurs sont un peu plus bas. Un grand nombre des acheteurs avec lesquels je travaille sont des acheteurs d'une première maison. Ils ont généralement environ 150 ans. Ensuite, j'ai un revenu de référence de 5 000 dollars. J'ai déjà dépassé ça. C'est juste d'autres agents qui me traitent ». (entretien)

Au cours de cette conversation dans son bureau, Rudy cible plus que tout le volume des ventes. Il élabore une stratégie pour atteindre le chiffre de douze millions de ventes, estimant que le nombre d'inscriptions et d'acheteurs dont il aurait besoin pour l'atteindre (60

[57] Avoir une propriété en *escrow* signifie qu'il existe de l'argent déposé sur un compte par un tiers pour mener à bien la vente. Il s'agit d'une pratique routinière pour tous les agents immobiliers enquêtés. Dans le langage des agents immobiliers, avoir un bien en *escrow* se réfère plus communément au fait qu'il est sous contrat, sous-entendant qu'il y a une forte probabilité pour que la transaction aboutisse et que l'agent touche une rémunération.

transactions pour une moyenne de 200 000 dollars chacune), ainsi que des revenus supplémentaires issus de recommandations.

J'ai également observé une incitation à montrer moins de maisons régulièrement. L'interaction le rend favorable à l'agent si la personne est de statut inférieur, alors montrer que moins de logements dépendent même de la façon dont l'agent souhaite que la transaction se déroule : moins vous montrez de logements, plus l'affaire peut être conclue. Statistiquement, certains travaux montrent que les agents immobiliers montrent moins de maisons aux individus Hispaniques, mais encore faut-il pouvoir comprendre le mécanisme qui se joue derrière ces chiffres. Une des hypothèses faites est que certains clients voient plus de maisons parce qu'ils demandent à être montrés plus nombreux et/ou sont disposés à avoir plus d'options. En cela, la classe pourra jouer un rôle important.

L'inflation de la valeur des maisons : le flipping

Le *flipping* semble être une pratique courante chez de nombreux agents immobiliers en Arizona. Si cette pratique n'est pas spécialement discutée dans les entreprises, j'ai pu observer plusieurs interactions qui s'y referaient. J'ai interviewé 12 agents immobiliers sur ce thème et suivi deux transactions qui s'apparentaient à cette pratique. J'ai aussi réalisé que l'agent que j'interviewais est devenu millionnaire en commençant par « retourner ».

Au sein de *Desert Realty* et de *Real Prosperity*, les instructeurs, et en particulier les plus âgés, ne favorisent d'ailleurs pas ce type de pratique. À un moment donné, Greg parle du fait qu'il avait une entreprise avec son père pour organiser des tournées de maisons avec des agents immobiliers. Le superviseur de la formation est embarrassé : bon, oui, ça existe mais ce n'est pas bon… ». Rudy travaille pour *Real Prosperity*, je l'ai suivi dans l'un de ses plans pour organiser une journée portes ouvertes. Avant de se rendre dans la voiture pour rencontrer ses associés avant de se rendre chez un client susceptible d'être un revolver, il déclare avoir obtenu son premier projet et obtenu la désignation « *Decimated Real Estate Designation* ».

S'il est évident que la valeur des biens immobiliers réside tout particulièrement dans leur localisation, des pratiques professionnelles autour de la valeur se donnent à voir, elles visent

à ajuster les valeurs au client, et vice versa. Dans un produit comme une maison, la localisation sert de signal/point de départ pour la position sociale, mais comme on l'a vu dans le secteur 1, les agents travaillent à transformer conjointement les préférences et les produits. Dans ce chapitre, je montre que les agents immobiliers conditionnent à la fois l'entrée des quartiers et celle du marché, ainsi que la valeur des quartiers en essayant d'accroître la valeur et d'apporter de la valeur pour égaler l'état perçu du marché. Leurs actions sur les clients et les quartiers contribuent à façonner activement les inégalités entre les lieux, mais principalement indirectement. L'analyse des pratiques des agents en tant qu'objectifs professionnels et attentes sociales permet de mieux comprendre comment se (re)produisent la discrimination, la ségrégation et les inégalités malgré l'absence de discrimination consciente et évidente.

Dans mon travail sur le terrain, j'ai pu observer les pratiques certains agents immobiliers® agissant en tant qu'investisseurs qui achètent de l'immobilier et le revendent. La pratique du *flipping*, bien que controversée chez *Desert Realty*, augmente la valeur d'une propriété et pourrait, peu à peu, affecter la valeur de l'ensemble du quartier. Les travaux sur la crise des *subprimes* révèlent que les minorités ont été beaucoup plus touchées par la crise, notamment à cause des créances irrécouvrables qui leur ont été accordées. L'accès au crédit était garanti, mais aux personnes qui n'avaient pas la cote de crédit correcte et ne pouvaient pas les rembourser. Plusieurs commentateurs ont fait valoir qu'il y avait une véritable chasse aux nouveaux clients potentiels et que le marketing destiné aux classes inférieures et aux minorités les plus pauvres explique également en partie pourquoi elles ont été les plus touchées.

Conclusion, apports et limites

> « 90% de tous les millionnaires le deviennent grâce à la possession de biens immobiliers. Plus d'argent a été gagné dans l'immobilier que dans l'ensemble des investissements industriels. Le jeune homme sage ou salarié d'aujourd'hui investit son argent dans l'immobilier » (Andrew Carnegie, 1835-1919, industriel, magnat des affaires et philanthrope)

> « Acheter de l'immobilier est non seulement le meilleur moyen, le moyen le plus rapide, le plus sûr, mais le seul moyen de devenir riche » (Marshall Field, 1834-1906, magnat des affaires, entrepreneur et philanthrope)

> « Les grandes fortunes d'Amérique ont été faites sur la terre » (John Rockefeller, 1839-1937, industriel, magnat de l'entreprise et philanthrope)

> « Les biens immobiliers ne peuvent être ni perdus ni volés, ni emportés. Acquis avec bon sens, intégralement payés et gérés avec un soin raisonnable, il s'agit de l'investissement le plus sûr au monde » (Franklin Roosevelt, 1882-1945, homme politique, 32e président des États-Unis)

> « Le meilleur investissement sur terre est la terre » (Louis Glickman, 1905-1999, investisseur immobilier et philanthrope)

> « Posséder une maison est la clé de voûte de la richesse, de la richesse financière et de la sécurité émotionnelle » (Suze Orman, née en 1951, gourou financier)

> « Une chose que je dis à tout le monde, c'est d'apprendre sur l'immobilier. Répétez après moi : l'immobilier fournit les rendements les plus élevés, les plus grandes valeurs et le moins de risques » (Armstrong Williams, né en 1962, magnat des médias et entrepreneur)

> « Si vous ne possédez pas de maison, achetez-en une. Si vous possédez une maison, achetez-en une autre. Si vous possédez deux maisons, achetez-en une troisième. Et prêtez de l'argent à vos proches pour acheter une maison » (John Paulson, né en 1955, investisseur, gestionnaire de fonds de couverture et philanthrope)

Au cours du XXe siècle, l'achat d'une maison est devenu l'un des jalons matérialisés du rêve américain (Belsky et Belsky, 2013 ; Callis, 1997 ; Chevan, 1989 ; Fligstein, Hastings et Goldstein, 2017 ; Rohe et Watson, 2007). Les avantages présentés de l'accession à la propriété pour les personnes à faibles revenus ont été sérieusement remis en question après la crise des crédits à risque (Saegert, Fields et Libman, 2009) et la déconnexion entre les revenus des ménages et les prix du marché immobilier dans plusieurs métropoles américaines. Avec la légère baisse du nombre de propriétaires, certains se sont même demandés si les individus préféreraient finalement plutôt louer qu'acheter.

L'investissement dans l'immobilier a également été au centre de la construction de la fortune de magnats de l'immobilier et d'une croyance forte dans la sécurité et la rentabilité de la pierre. Au centre d'un système de croyance autour de la richesse, de la reproduction et des

inégalités, l'immobilier mérite une attention sociologique. Comme le soulignent les citations ci-dessus, les entrepreneurs américains ont souvent vanté la supériorité des actifs immobiliers en raison des avantages financiers attribués à l'investissement.

Lorsque j'ai commencé ce travail sur le terrain, je ne savais pas grand-chose des bulles immobilières, hormis l'impact considérable sur l'économie et les ménages de la crise financière de 2007-2008. En comparaison avec le marché des valeurs mobilières, les actifs immobiliers sembleraient, à première vue, plutôt protégés des logiques spéculatives : la faible liquidité des marchés immobiliers étant associée à l'importance des coûts de transaction. Pourtant, les marchés immobiliers sont également très exposés aux bulles spéculatives. Lawrence Yun, économiste en chef de la NAR®, a fait valoir à la fin de 2018 que les ventes de maisons atteignaient un niveau record, avec des hausses de prix dans 90% des marchés du pays et des taux d'intérêt au plus bas depuis 10 ans. Même si la dette hypothécaire est « proche du sommet d'avant l'effondrement », Yun assure que cela n'est pas une cause d'inquiétude (Yun, 2018, 2019)[58]. Certains économistes controversés estiment toutefois qu'une fois que les prix commenceront à chuter, une bulle pourrait éclater (Stockman, 2019)[59]. Les premières crises européennes des années 1860 ont montré que les marchés financier et immobilier sont intrinsèquement liés. Les biens immobiliers sont également uniques, à la fois sur un territoire physique et soumis à plusieurs formes d'investissement, y compris financiers. En outre, les marchés immobiliers sont organisés par des réseaux institutionnalisés de personnes y travaillant, y compris les différentes juridictions locales et nationales et les différentes professions du secteur qui engrangent des revenus (Nneji, Brooks et Ward, 2015). La théorie des anticipations rationnelles a notamment postulé que l'anticipation de la hausse des prix a favorisé l'emballement des marchés. Une autre explication, popularisée par des films tels que *The Big Short* (2005), suggère que les travailleurs du marché, y compris les banquiers, les agents de crédit et les agents immobiliers ont été animés par la cupidité.

[58] Mortgage debt nears a pre-crash high but that's no cause for concern, 20 novembre 2018 http://www.nar.realtor/newsroom/op-eds-and-letters-to-the-editor/mortgage-debt-nears-a-pre-crash-high-but-thats-no-cause-for-concern;
Lawrence Yun, "Boom or Bust for Spring Homebuying," Forbes, 14 mars 2019 http://www.forbes.com/sites/lawrenceyun/2019/03/14/boom-or-bust-for-spring-homebuying/#7c4f97864246

[59] Cf. les articles récemment écrits par David Stockman "Fake Boom, Fake Budget" at http://davidstockmanscontracorner.com/

La thèse propose une explication alternative par l'immersion sociologique dans le monde des agents immobiliers. En tant qu'intermédiaires de marché, les agents ne sont pas de purs et simples réceptacles des logiques de marché. Les travaux de sociologues de Michel Abolafia, (1996) ou d'Olivier Godechot (2001) ont d'ailleurs montré que les comportements sur le marché financier sont influencés par diverses rationalités, intégrées à des systèmes institutionnalisés, techniques et professionnels.

Comme les revenus des agents immobiliers dépendent des prix des biens, les intermédiaires ont intérêt à générer plus de valeur et à faire monter les prix. Les acheteurs et les vendeurs sont également convaincus que les prix sont en hausse constante et espèrent revendre leurs propriétés plus chères ultérieurement, augmentant ainsi leur propre capital financier. La connaissance des marchés immobiliers par les intermédiaires de marché est également plutôt ambiguë, même si elle est largement partagée. Dans le but de transformer les clients, les intermédiaires de marché inculquent une rationalité économique au public, aux consommateurs ou à leurs clients. Pour faire correspondre des personnes avec des marchandises, les agents immobiliers s'appuient sur des routines apprises et utilisent des dispositifs spécifiques pour évaluer les prix probables des marchandises (Favarger et Thalmann, 2008).

Bien que la crise de 2007-2008 revêt des explications multiformes, la compréhension des croyances économiques et des logiques pratiques des agents immobiliers permet une analyse empirique et réaliste du fonctionnement des marchés. Faire des banquiers de Wall Street devenus cupides les principaux coupables de la crise ne fournit en aucun cas une explication satisfaisante. En effet, peu de chercheurs, hormis des ouvrages collectifs (Boussard, 2017 ; Fligstein, Forthcoming) se sont interrogées sur la logique professionnelle et celle du marché entourant l'acquisition d'actifs immobiliers. Pourquoi l'immobilier apparait-il comme un sinon le seul moyen incontesté d'atteindre la richesse ? Je me centre ici sur l'agent immobilier (ici je ne parle pas des banques ou les organismes de crédit bien qu'ils constitueraient un terrain de recherche riche et tout à fait complémentaire), en tant que travailleur professionnel qui apprend à être socialisé à une rationalité économique spécifique et à un esprit d'entreprise.

En conclusion, je souligne d'abord les contributions spécifiques de ma thèse à l'étude des marchés et des inégalités. Je regarde ensuite les limites de mes positions méthodologiques et théoriques et propose des approches alternatives pour faire avancer la recherche.

L'importance de l'agent immobilier : classe moyenne, richesse et reproduction

Alors que la maison est devenue « le site crucial de la consommation et de l'identification de la classe moyenne au début du XXe siècle », l'essor de l'agent immobilier, peut-être plus que toute autre catégorie professionnelle, est attribué au développement des styles de vie et des valeurs de la classe moyenne (Hornstein, 2005, p. 613). Je n'ai pas particulièrement cherché à objectiver l'appartenance ou non des agents immobiliers à la classe moyenne bien que nous avons mis des différences de classes entre agents. J'ai plutôt cherché à comprendre pourquoi l'agent immobilier construit son activité professionnelle et commerciale autour d'aspirations anticipées d'appartenance à cette classe qui est activé en pratique. L'agent immobilier étasunien agirait comme un dispositif en chair et en os de la propriété de classe moyenne, pour incarner et garantir le goût, les mœurs et les valeurs de la classe moyenne blanche, qui malgré des conditions de logement plus ou moins favorables, continue à être animé d'un désir de « style de vie luxueux » dans des « banlieues somptuaires » (Davis, 1986).

La capacité d'accéder à la propriété et de la réaliser financièrement fait partie intégrante de la poursuite d'une stabilité statutaire pour la classe moyenne étasunienne. Dans *La Dignité des travailleurs*, Lamont (1992) a mis en évidence la catégorisation établie par les classes moyennes inférieures autour de la morale, du succès et de la richesse. Elle a démontré une tension entre leurs valeurs traditionnelles - y compris l'intégrité et la discipline personnelle représentées dans l'évaluation d'individus sincères, responsables et travailleurs (p. 21) - avec leurs rêves de prospérité (p. 118) - louant les personnes « intelligentes » (p. 106), avec des « objectifs » et du « leadership » (p. 120).

Le récit de Paul West, « un vendeur d'assurances diplômé du secondaire », présenté par Lamont (1992), rappelle les discours des agents sur la supériorité morale des individus autonomes, méprisant « les personnes qui n'ont aucun contrôle sur leur vie », qui « ne sont qu'un paillasson ou une écharde » ou « font juste ce que tout le monde leur dit de faire » et

qui « ne sont que des victimes ». S’exprime alors des frontières morales avec à la fois les pauvres et la classe laborieuse, qui sont souvent vus comme des personnes peu à même de pouvoir s’en sortir et de réussir.

La crainte d'être « un perdant » associé à un fort désir de réussite est forte parmi les agents immobiliers que j'ai interrogés. Ceux qui peuvent faire appel à un capital ou à une entreprise familiale auront effectivement plus de ressources pour « réussir » leur entrée en immobilier, alors que d’autres auront besoin d’une forte impulsion morale pour se lancer dans l’activité immobilière. Dans leur version du rêve américain, quiconque se trouve au bas de la hiérarchie peut se hisser au sommet, comme le représentent les capitalistes-investisseurs et les entrepreneurs : « Dans un style typiquement pionnier, Trump a relevé le défi de créer un produit dans un marché que personne d'autre n'avait jamais osé défier. Trump croyait à cette niche et se montrait confiant que les riches affluraient vers ce bâtiment spectaculaire » (Ross, 2005, p. 113).

Les revenus des agents immobiliers et des investisseurs sont en réalité très variables. Cependant, le système de croyance autour de la possibilité de « réussir un jour » contribue à maintenir en vie le désir de réussite et faire que certaines personnes engrangent des revenus issus du travail d’autres personnes. Ricky est un exemple de cette nouvelle richesse immobilière engrangé d’abord sur le marché immobilier de Tucson. Il est né au Mexique. Avant son entrée en immobilier, il était un joueur de football professionnel. Lorsque j'ai commencé mes recherches en 2013, il ne disposait que d'une équipe d'agents à Tucson. En 2018, il est devenu l'un des personnages immobiliers les plus riches de Tucson. Il a gagné plus de 351 000 adeptes Instagram et s’exhibe avec des jets privés, des bateaux et des voitures de luxe, voyageant et séjournant dans les endroits où se retrouvent habituellement les nouveaux riches - y compris Los Angeles, Abou Dhabi, Dubaï et Monaco.

La figure de Ricky met probablement moins en avant la philosophie de la *working class* que celle de la classe moyenne qui souhaite vivre comme les riches sans travailler aussi dur que les pauvres. En effet, l’existence et l’émergence de mouvements de liberté financière tels que FIRE (indépendance financière, retraite anticipée) d’une part, et la pression maintenue pour se présenter comme des « bourreaux de travail » ont été documentés dans diverses couches

de la société américaine, comme en témoigne une série d'articles parue récemment dans le *New York Times*.

Le vocabulaire des agents immobiliers s'articule autour de la création d'entreprise plutôt que l'obtention d'un emploi, ce qui ressemble à ce que Ricky discute lors du podcast de Casey Adams, jeune influenceur (Episode 19 : Ricky – les secrets de l'investissement, 2 janvier 2018) : « Il faut se rappeler que si vous travaillez dans une entreprise qui vous verse de l'argent uniquement quand vous y êtes, vous avez un emploi et non une entreprise ». Ricky conseille alors aux aspirants au style de vie nouveau-riche de « créer un effet de levier au moyen de systèmes et de personnes », de « déléguer le travail ». À l'instar de Ricky, il existe plusieurs figures médiatiques, sortes de gourous tels que Suze Orman et Robert Kiyosaki, qui cherchent à inculquer aux américains une éducation financière pour développer des systèmes leur permettant de gagner un revenu passif, phénomène documenté notamment par Fridman (2015) dans le cas des États-Unis et de l'Argentine.

L'obsession étasunienne autour de la richesse est également attestée par les deux décennies de travail de la journaliste Lauren Greenfield, dans son reportage photo et film *Generation Wealth* (2017-2018) et son documentaire *The Queen of Versailles* (2012) enquêtant sur une famille qui a commencé à réplique du château de Versailles en Californie mais qui se retrouve en faillite avec la crise de 2008.

Bien qu'il ne s'agisse pas de prétendre que Ricky représente l'agent immobilier typique, je m'appuie sur un cas extrême pour montrer que derrière l'argent se trouve la valorisation de la réussite personnelle et financière, le prestige, la stabilité familiale et le désir de transmission. L'exemple de Ricky montre que les recherches sur les intermédiaires de marché doivent aussi comprendre les dispositions des agents sociaux, afin d'explorer la dynamique relationnelle d'un marché, sous-tendue par les représentations autour de la richesse, de la reproduction et de la classe moyenne. Ma recherche propose également d'intégrer théoriquement les travaux sur les dispositions et les attentes et d'explorer les intersections possibles entre Bourdieu et Goffman.

La rencontre entre Bourdieu et Goffman : dispositions et attentes perceptives

L'une des contributions importantes de la thèse est de souligner l'intégration fructueuse des travaux de Bourdieu sur la logique de la pratique et de l'analyse de Goffman sur les jeux de rôle et la présentation de soi pour mener une sociologie du travail de marché.

Partant des structures sociales de l'économie de Bourdieu et intégrant la contribution de Goffman, le fait d'examiner les interactions ne conduit pas nécessairement au piège des ethno-méthodologues, en prenant tout à leur valeur, sans remettre en contexte les discours. Avec les trois écueils soulignées par Bourdieu dans *Le Sens pratique* (1980) et prises par Burawoy (2018), l'objectif de la recherche était d'évacuer d'abord les logiques subjectives des acteurs pour en tirer une véritable enquête sociologique, tout en considérant les structures objectives, dans lequel les individus agissent, pour revenir à leurs explications localisées, les faire parler, expliquer pourquoi ils prennent certaines positions, ainsi que les relations à établir entre leur positionnement social et leurs attitudes, leurs actions et leurs goûts.

Autour des travaux de Bourdieu dans lesquels il a développé sa théorie de l'action autour du sens pratique acquis par les individus et ceux de Burawoy (1979) sur le sens du jeu, je propose de comprendre les dispositions au travail, tout en ne négligeant pas structurellement le rôle de l'agent immobilier.

L'analyse de l'interaction n'est utile que pour ce qu'elle dévoile de la structure (Castel, 1989). Les premières études interactionnistes sur les médecins et sur des professions (Becker et al., 1961 ; Bucher et Strauss, 1961 ; Goffman, 1959) permettent de penser les intermédiaires de marché comme situés au centre de multiples formes d'interactions: interactions entre eux, avec le public, avec le client, avec le marché et le territoire. En tant qu'êtres sociaux, les individus sont impliqués dans une multitude d'interactions et de rôles, en tant que parents, enseignants, amants, ou travailleurs. Il est alors intéressant d'analyser l'agent immobilier dans ses multiples positions sociales, et non pas uniquement dans son milieu professionnel. Compte tenu de l'importance du patrimoine immobilier dans l'économie et dans la reproduction sociale, et de la position stratégique des agents immobiliers dans cette recherche, l'étude, comme le dit Goffman, des « hommes et de leurs moments » permet de

spécifier les formes d'encastrement des transactions économiques dans le social ainsi que la production d'inégalités.

Le contrôle de l'interaction devient alors central dans les transactions de logement car le risque devient que les transactions échouent à tout moment. L'intuition et l'autorité, jouant honnêtement et directement, adoptant à la fois la déférence et le comportement par le biais de dispositions et de compétences, sont au cœur du rôle de l'intermédiaire. En intégrant la logique de pratique de Bourdieu (1990) aux rites d'interaction de Goffman (1974), j'ai montré de quelle manière les inégalités pénètrent et s'inscrivent dans les pratiques sociales, commerciales et marchandes des intermédiaires. Les agents classent socialement les individus en fonction des comportements attendus. Cela a des conséquences réelles sur la manière dont ils sont introduits ou non sur les territoires et sur les endroits où ils pourraient envisager de vivre. Professionnellement, ils sont guidés par des normes qui leur donnent envie de se positionner d'une certaine façon, et qui ne dépendent pas forcément à une logique de discrimination. Ils ne peuvent pas enfreindre des règles informelles sans se sentir déplacés et risqués également leur réputation, ce qui tend à favoriser la conformité à leurs comportements. En ce qui concerne le marché, leurs pratiques sont orientées vers l'extraction et la création de valeur, ce qui les encourage à bien comprendre les qualités des produits pour les vendre et à augmenter les prix.

Cette intégration théorique vise donc à proposer une sociologie qui aborde les logiques de pratiques dans les rapports d'interactions socio-professionnelles, en fonction de la manière dont les individus, intégrés au sens du jeu du marché, effectuent des transactions et se comportent en fonction de leurs rôles sociaux, professionnels et des publics avec lesquels ils interagissent. Il semble donc à ce propos judicieux d'intégrer dans les travaux de la sociologie du marché Bourdieu et Goffman. Cela permet alors de mieux comprendre comment les intermédiaires du marché, tels que l'immobilier, façonnent les marchés et les inégalités.

Dans le cadre des intermédiaires de marché et du travail de marché (Cochoy et Dubuisson-Quellier, 2000 ; Dubuisson-Quellier, 1999), j'opère trois avancées théoriques: 1) en considérant l'étude des marchés non pas comme des organisations économiques constituées d'intérêts économiques mais à travers le prisme des pratiques des agents immobiliers; 2) en

passant d'une analyse en termes de rationalité à des dispositions et un sens pratique dans lesquels j'ai intégré Bourdieu; et 3) en m'éloignant des approches fonctionnaliste et interactionniste pour prendre en compte la culture professionnelle et les pratiques de travail.

Je réponds à mes premières questions de recherche sur le statut de professionnel de l'immobilier, en partant de l'acquisition d'un statut par le biais de connaissances, de formations et de caractéristiques organisationnelles. Je documente comment les agents acquièrent des dispositions à la fois économiques et socioprofessionnelles après avoir suivi une formation en immobilier et en entreprise. Je montre également ce qui est en jeu au niveau organisationnel derrière la montée du métier d'agent immobilier.

Ma deuxième série de questions de recherche s'intéresse à l'utilisation des relations pour devenir un agent « réussi » et à ce que j'appelle la découverte du client qui doit être « capturée » par l'agent immobilier. Je m'appuie spécifiquement sur le travail effectué par les agents immobiliers pour créer un climat de confiance, en utilisant des techniques de présentation personnelle autour de l'expertise, de la sympathie et du goût, cherchant à se présenter comme similaires aux biens ou à leurs clients afin de dévoiler la valeur de la vente ou de l'achat. La capture du client comprend également une composante de genre, apparue un peu plus tard sur le terrain.

Enfin, ma troisième série de questions de recherche porte sur l'interaction entre les acheteurs, les vendeurs et les marchés, ainsi que sur la création de valeur marchande et d'inégalités. En observant les pratiques de l'immobilier, j'ai montré comment les agents travaillent pour produire une « correspondance » : classer socialement les clients, s'appuyer sur leurs attentes tout en façonnant la qualité des produits et des prix. Poussés par les incitations économiques et la dynamique du marché, les agents immobiliers s'appuient autant qu'ils contribuent à produire et à reproduire une répartition inégale des personnes sur un territoire. En soulevant des questions sur les effets du travail – c'est-à-dire en étudiant en quoi consiste l'intermédiation des marchés vers les marchés et les inégalités – mes analyses qualitatives indiquent des mécanismes dont la prévalence pourrait être analysée de manière statistique.

Si la trajectoire de Ricky évoquée plus haut semble assez rare à Tucson, on peut s'attendre à ce que dans les grandes régions métropolitaines, cette acquisition de richesse par le biais d'investissements soit plus courante. Cela laisse penser qu'en tant qu'agent immobilier, à proprement parler, personne ne peut jamais créer « autant » de richesse, alors qu'en travaillant en tant qu'investisseur immobilier, une fortune pourrait être constituée. En interrogeant des promoteurs immobiliers à Tucson et à Phoenix dans le cadre du projet de recherche sur l'eau et le développement urbain que j'ai réalisé, je me suis rendu compte que les promoteurs avaient souvent une licence d'agent immobilier, mais qu'ils étaient principalement construits à partir de niches et qu'ils développaient des relations avec des acteurs de haut niveau sur le terrain. En comprenant mieux le monde économique et commercial dans lequel opère l'agent immobilier, il s'agit de mieux documenter la production d'inégalités aux États-Unis. La richesse générée par l'immobilier semble tellement considérable qu'elle mérite d'être examinée à la fois de manière quantitative et qualitative. Les débats nationaux et internationaux sur les inégalités suscitées par l'étude de la richesse, du capital et des élites économiques posent d'ailleurs des questions quant à l'avenir du mode d'accumulation capitaliste (Boltanski et Chiapello, 1999 ; Boltanski et Esquerre, 2017 ; Keister, 2005 ; Lin et Tomaskovic-Devey, 2013 ; Piketty, 2013).

Les ethnographes devraient à la fois enquêter sur les « petits » acteurs, les agents immobiliers et les « grands » acteurs qui ont constitué leur richesse sur des actifs immobiliers. Après avoir ainsi examiné l'agent immobilier et son travail d'intermédiation, une enquête potentielle viserait à enrichir la compréhension des inégalités générées par l'accession à la propriété et les trajectoires patrimoniales des ménages. A partir d'un dispositif théorique et empirique permettant d'appréhender l'immobilier comme un champ (Bourdieu, 1997 ; Fligstein et McAdam, 2012), l'objet de la recherche ne sera plus seulement le monde des agents immobiliers, mais les caractéristiques et les positions des acteurs qui opèrent dans l'immobilier, à la fois du côté des producteurs et des propriétaires.

Un programme de recherche sur les inégalités dans l'immobilier

Bien que j'aie exploré dans la partie 4 plusieurs dimensions de l'immobilier qui (re)produisent des inégalités socio-spatiales, je peux utiliser un modèle de recherche spécifique qui permettrait de mieux systématiser les types d'actions et leurs portées. Dans le cadre de

recherches futures, je propose d'envisager les inégalités socio-spatiales à travers le prisme de l'immobilier et le système de prix. Cela pourra être fait en analysant la multiplicité des dynamiques nationales et locales à l'œuvre sur ces marchés, telles que les conditions du marché, le système de prix et de variation, les politiques d'offre visant à développer le marché et les politiques en faveur de la demande favorisant l'accès au crédit immobilier, les dépenses des ménages alloués aux stratégies d'évaluation immobilière et immobilière. Visant à comprendre les influences respectives de divers facteurs sur les prix et les inégalités, ce projet serait également novateur en raison de son épistémologie à plusieurs emplacements qui intègre des méthodologies quantitatives et qualitatives (entretiens, travaux sur le terrain, cartographie, archives et statistiques).

Une recherche autour des inégalités patrimoniales permettra aussi d'enrichir la compréhension des dynamiques de classe. Adkins et al. (2019) s'interrogent notamment sur la reconfiguration des inégalités de classe suite à l'inflation des prix et de la désinflation concomitante des salaires, processus de stratification dans lequel s'insèrent les gains et les revenus du capital et le transfert intergénérationnel. L'intention sera lors de sélectionner, et ce après une revue de littérature plus fournie, des variables permettant de dresser une nouvelle taxonomie par classe d'actifs, par types d'acquéreurs, ou par dynamiques de prix.

L'exploration de données spatiales sur les prix et les transactions avec une connaissance approfondie du travail sur le terrain, combinée aux données foncières permise grâce à la récente ouverture de DFV et à une analyse des politiques de défiscalisation, d'aide à la pierre et d'investissements[60] permettront de fournir une meilleure analyse systématique des facteurs à l'origine d'une potentielle reconfiguration des inégalités de classe.

[60] C'est en effet l'objet du projet ANR WIsDHoM, anr.fr/Project-ANR-18-CE41-0004 sur lequel j'ai été recrutée cette année.

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