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## **PRACTICE MATTERS!**

### **Geographical inquiry and theories of practice**

JONATHAN EVERTS (Bayreuth), MATTHIAS LAHR-KURTEN (Mainz), MATT WATSON (Sheffield)

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#### **Summary**

Recent developments in theories of practice have seen place and space taken explicitly into account. In particular, Theodore SCHATZKI's 'site ontology' offers distinctive but as yet under-explored means of engaging with human geographies. By giving ontological priority to practices as constitutive of the social, this kind of practice theory provides an integrative conceptual framework that enables the analysis of diverse phenomena in relation to each other, over space and time, as they are constituted through practices. This article develops an outline agenda for bringing theories of practice, and particularly SCHATZKI's 'site ontology', together with geographical inquiry. We elucidate this agenda through consideration of three contemporary preoccupations in human geography, comprising emotion, materiality and knowledge.

## 1 Introduction

Theories of practice have been a presence in social theory for over a century. Never with a central role, they have nevertheless undergone cycles of revival and decline over the decades. From the closing years of the twentieth century, they have had a latest revival, as part of the gradual unwinding of social theory from the preoccupations that followed from the representational turn. This latest revival has been in part shaped by new developments in the loose tradition of practice theory, which we contend bring fresh resonances with the preoccupations of human geographers. In this article we set out what we see as the key dimensions of theories of practice and of these new developments, gathering around Theodore SCHATZKI's 'site ontology', as a basis for arguing that human geography can benefit from engagement with contemporary theorisations of practice.

Within theories of practice, practices are the central aspect of social life. Each practice consists of specific ways of doing and saying things, for example ways of consuming, working, or socialising. This includes particular ways of understanding, knowing how to use things and states of emotion (cf. RECKWITZ 2002, 249-50). However, theories of practice are not singular. Rather, they emerge from a bundle of writing authored over a century or more. These can be gathered together as having commonality in the priority they have given to practice as a feature of the social. While theories of practice have much longer intellectual roots, it was the writings of BOURDIEU (especially 1977 and 1990) and GIDDENS (1984) that initially inspired geographers to employ ideas of practice on any scale.

Concepts from BOURDIEU have been widely used by German-speaking geographers in studies of a number of contexts (to name but a few DIRKSMEIER 2009, DÖRFLER et al. 2003, DRILLING 2004, JANOSCHKA 2009, LIPPUNER 2006, ROTHFUSS 2006). Another take on practice stems from GIDDENS' theory of structuration. It was introduced and popularised to the German geography audience by WERLEN (1999), causing a significant increase in actor-centred research. British geographers had an early start in taking up GIDDENS' theory of structuration in the mid 1980s (GREGSON 1987), reworking much of it already in the early 1990s (THRIFT 1993). THRIFT'S (1996; 2008) non-representational theory (NRT) incorporated some of the central implications of theories of practice in general, highlighting a theoretical agenda that foreshadows some of our current concerns; that is, practices constitute our sense of the real; we need to valorise practical expertise, focus on presencing practices and the entire body including all its senses; we should be sceptical about the linguistic turn and call for an empathic understanding of people's lives (THRIFT 1996, 7-8).

From the 1990s, a novel take on practices has emerged and steadily gained in influence, formulated by US-American social theorist Theodore SCHATZKI, and discussed by German sociologist Andreas RECKWITZ. Though this work shares some of the tenets of NRT, it is not directly indebted to THRIFT'S and related writings (although see SCHATZKI 2007). It is also less dependent on the concepts of habitus, capital, and field (BOURDIEU) or rules, resources, and practical consciousness (GIDDENS). Rather, this body of work builds on a different strand of practice theory as a social ontology and theoretical vocabulary.

SCHATZKI identifies the roots of his conceptualisation of social life as being constituted in and through practices with his reading of Charles TAYLOR (SCHATZKI

2002, 70). Dealing originally with the theoretical problems posed by behaviourism, TAYLOR (1971; 1984) suggested that practices should be the primary units of investigation since the 'meanings and norms implicit in [...] practices are not just in the minds of the actors but are out there in the practices themselves' (TAYLOR 1971, 27). TAYLOR's outline of social practice provides precedent for the way in which SCHATZKI gives ontological and analytical priority to practices (SCHATZKI 1996). In his more recent work, SCHATZKI (2002; 2010) integrates his initial take on practice theory into what he calls site ontology. This is a much broader framework which attends not only to practice but to material and immaterial entities and how they relate to each other and so carry and constitute meaning, constituting what he calls orders or arrangements. This also includes the spatial dimensions of social life.

In contrast to the geographical considerations of BOURDIEU or GIDDENS, there is as yet no detailed engagement with what is at stake for geographers when building on these recent developments in practice theory. Having said that, in our own work with a number of collaborators within and beyond Geography, we draw increasingly on SCHATZKI's work (LAHR-KURTEN 2011, SHOVE et al. in press, JACKSON a. EVERTS 2010; see as well SIMONSEN 2007; 2010). Our aim here is to bundle our encounters with his writings in order to explore in what ways SCHATZKI's work could be beneficial to geographical inquiry more broadly.

So far, we can find occasional engagement with SCHATZKI's take on practice theory in empirical work. This refers mainly to our own and others' work on consumption cultures and the use of mundane objects such as DIY items (SHOVE et al. 2007, WATSON a. SHOVE 2008) the everyday practices of shopping (EVERTS 2009, EVERTS a. JACKSON 2009) or driving (WARDE 2005), Nordic Walking (SHOVE a. PANTZAR 2005) or waste disposal (GREGSON et al. 2009). Other geographical writings on culture as social practice also occasionally nods to SCHATZKI or RECKWITZ such as the work on practices and lives of entrepreneurs in Syria (BOECKLER 2005) or Berlin (PÜTZ 2004) or the practices of urban design (BRZENCZEK a. WIEGANDT 2009).

Nevertheless, still missing is a more concerted effort to clarify what is at stake for geographers in engaging with this strand of practice theory, and specifically the overarching site ontology proposed by SCHATZKI.

In writing this article, we seek to engage explicitly with practice theory and the site ontology as developed and articulated by SCHATZKI, in relation to current and perennial concerns of geographical inquiry. We offer a purposive reading of SCHATZKI's work as a means to explore and demonstrate its applicability to current geographical thought and research. We begin by outlining key characteristics. Notably, practice is no longer an umbrella term on its own but tied to a site ontology that considers not only practice but also material and immaterial arrangements as crucial parts of social reality. From this foundation we consider what difference a site ontology approach makes to engaging with three current preoccupations of human geography: emotions, materiality and knowledge. This enables us to begin to elaborate the potential for bringing together human geography with SCHATZKI's take on theories of practice. This provides a fundamental argument for geographers to engage more seriously with this strand of practice theory.

## 2 Practice theory and site ontology

The move towards activity centred ontology recurs within each generation of theoretical writers and has a long tradition (RECKWITZ 2003). Remarkable to us in that respect is NIETZSCHE's (1998 [1887], 29) claim that 'there is no "being" behind doing, acting, becoming; "the doer" is merely a fiction imposed on the doing – the doing itself is everything'. More recently, in sketching the intellectual lineage of contemporary theories of practice, RECKWITZ (2002; 2003) marshals a wide range of 20<sup>th</sup> century theorists who can all be placed, retrospectively at least, in the tradition of theories of practice. Among others, he highlights the writings of HEIDEGGER and WITTGENSTEIN as important philosophical roots and the most elaborate and explicitly fleshed out practice theory based on both thinkers is provided by SCHATZKI, whose work we now consider in more detail.

To begin with, SCHATZKI tries to create an ontology that 'transcends rigid action-structure oppositions' (2001, 1). To a certain extent, he shares this endeavour with BOURDIEU and GIDDENS. However, SCHATZKI moves a step further when he seeks to establish his site ontology. According to SCHATZKI, site ontologies combine the approach of 'practice theories' (e.g. TAYLOR, DREYFUS, BOURDIEU, GIDDENS) with that of 'arrangement theories' (e.g. those of LATOUR, LACLAU & MOUFFE, DELEUZE & GUATTARI). Whereas accounts of practice are focused on activity of any kind, arrangement theories seek to shed light on the ways that things and thoughts are connected within complex networks of entities (SCHATZKI 2002). Following SCHATZKI, arrangements of any kind are constituted in and through practice. Moreover, the practice of arranging entities of any kind equals a process of ordering. The outcome of that process is orders, comprised of entities such as material things, artefacts or organisms as well as meanings (ibid.).

Thus, SCHATZKI draws on two basic concepts—practices and orders/arrangements—defining the 'the site of the social [as] a mesh of practices and orders' (SCHATZKI 2002, xii), whereby 'practices and orders enable and constrain one another' (ibid, 117). In the following, we will explain first the particular concept of practice used within the site ontology and then turn to the arrangements and orders.

### *Practices*

Most significantly, SCHATZKI's approach tries to avoid an 'intellectualisation of social life' – a term used by RECKWITZ to denote the tendency of social scientists to read intention, motivation, reason or cause into routinised action and behaviour. However, this should not lead to any rigid analytical distinction between routinised actions on the one hand and intentional actions on the other. Practices consist of both types of actions or rather of various elements that are, to a greater or lesser degree, intentional or routinised (RECKWITZ 2009, 173). As RECKWITZ puts it, intentions still are part of a practice, yet like other elements they are just one part of practices and not the only element of interest (ibid., 291). All doings and sayings are parts of a practice. Practices such as the practice of governing, the practice of cooking or the practice of teaching consist of routinised bodily movements as much as of intentional and reflective thought. Characteristically, all elements of a practice, intentional or not, hang together in the way that the practice in question is

organised. Thus, SCHATZKI defines any given practice as 'a 'bundle' of activities, that is to say, an organized nexus of actions' (SCHATZKI 2002, 71) or 'a set of doings and sayings' (ibid, 73).

It does not matter from this point of view, whether it is sayings or it is doings which are more pivotal for a given practice. Indeed, sayings are as much doings as any other bodily activity. The linguistic turn may have 'led some theorists to overvalue the significance of discourse in social life' (SCHATZKI 2002, 77), for example in conceptualising practices as collections of sayings alone or slipping from discourse as articulated intelligibility to formulations that privilege language and neglect other doings (a problem also highlighted by non-representational theory). Sayings are distinctive: 'for deep reasons [...] no one has yet fully fathomed, on most occasions uttering words says something in a way that squatting [on one's heels, for instance] only rarely [...] does' (SCHATZKI 2002, 76-7). Nevertheless, to avoid the pitfalls of taking this distinctiveness as grounds for over-prioritising speech and other representational doings, 'an account of practices must not just mark the distinction between doings and sayings, but also grant each its proper due in both the perpetuation of practices and the articulation of intelligibility' (ibid.).

It is useful to exemplify the limitations of giving priority only to either sayings or doings. Within a practice such as that of shopping, it is possible to group doings such as touching an apple, or sayings such as chatting to a shopkeeper to the same project, that of shopping for food. Projects which, like that of shopping for food, are goal oriented provide the structure and contingent boundaries within which human practitioners navigate the flow and crossings of practices comprising everyday life (SHOVE *et al* 2007). Similarly, researchers must take the step of identifying distinct practices within the continuous unfolding of social life, such as the practices of shopping and food consumption (EVERTS a. JACKSON 2009), the practices of DIY (WATSON a. SHOVE 2008) or the practices of language promotion in France (LAHR-KURTEN 2011).

How do we know what pertains to one practice and not another? Since projects and ends do not belong to the individual but to practices, we need to look at the organisation of a practice; that is, the ways in which the nexus of doings and sayings is organised. Following SCHATZKI (2002), the doings and sayings of any given practice are organised by items of four types which are part of that practice (see Figure 1): First, there are 'practical understandings' which refer mainly to the ability to know how to do something and how to understand what other people do or in which practice they are engaged. The second link is formed by 'rules', i.e. explicit formulations, principles, precepts, and instructions that are interjected into social life for the purpose of orienting and determining the course of activity. Third, the sense of oughtness and acceptability coupled with ways of feeling and experiencing certain activities is what SCHATZKI calls 'teleoaffective structures'. Fourth, there are 'general understandings' that form a wider backdrop than practical understandings in so far as they are broad regimes of thought such as religious convictions or a sense of community.

**XXX [Figure 1: Items organising social practice (LAHR-KURTEN 2011)] XXX**

Returning to the example of practices of food shopping, we could then investigate learned and trained skills such as separating fresh from mouldy apples, calculating

prices and knowing what provisions you need for preparing lunch, or to feed the family for the week, as practical understandings. The price tags, signposted parking lots, or cooking books are examples of rules. The pressure one feels for providing oneself and others with food, the pleasure of browsing and the aim to prepare a tasty dish can be considered under the rubric of teleoaffectivity. Lastly, notions of 'good' food, be it in respect to a healthy, ethical, nutritious or affordable diet, linked with general notions of acting responsibly can be thought of as general understandings.

### *Orders, Arrangements and Timespace*

Having conceptualised practices as an organised nexus of doings and sayings, we need to look at what is sometimes called the context for any given practice. SCHATZKI's approach of a 'site ontology' above all differs from other practice theories through its second major concept, that of orders or arrangements respectively. SCHATZKI defines social orders as follows:

'Social orders are the ensembles of entities, through and amid which social life transpires – the arrangements of people, artifacts, organisms, and things that characterize human coexistence. All social life is marked by social orders. In such orders, moreover, entities relate, enjoy meaning (and identity), and are positioned with respect to one another. All social life exhibits, as a result, relatedness, meaning, and mutual positioning.' (Schatzki 2002, 38)

Orders comprise material and immaterial aspects of the social. Thus, material arrangements of a class-room or a shopping mall are likewise to be understood as orders as are discourses or imaginary spaces. All those kinds of orders are interwoven with practices that enable and constrain one another. In order to avoid the pitfalls of any implicit structuralism, it is important to underline SCHATZKI's particular conceptualisation of orders: 'Relations, positions, and meanings, like the arrangements of which they are aspects, are labile phenomena, only transitory fixations of which can be assured' (SCHATZKI 2002, 24). In effect, there are no stable orders but only temporally and spatially unfolding sites that are made of the mesh of practices and orders. Change and becoming is integral to the site ontology:

'The mesh of practices and orders does not simply clear some paths and obliterate others. Rather, it figures them as more distinct or fuzzy, more threatening or welcoming, more unsurveyable or straightforward, more cognitively dissonant or soothing, smoother or more jagged, more disagreeable or appealing, and so on.' (SCHATZKI 2002, 226)

This ontology also has bearing on SCHATZKI's conceptualisations of time and space. For SCHATZKI, spatial relations are part of what he calls social orders. He considers all entities that compose an arrangement to be physical, though exhibiting qualities that transcend their physicality; e.g. the position or meanings they have within the particular arrangement. In an earlier treatment of how to integrate space into social theory, SCHATZKI (1991, 654) stressed the spatial dimensions of social reality which 'is people's interrelated being-in an interconnected world'. More recently, he elaborated his concept of timespace. Timespace denotes the connection of

existential temporality of present activity that departs from somewhere and is coming towards something and the arrays of places and paths amid and through which activity occurs. Thus, timespace is a feature of the organisation of practices that 'engender a net of interwoven timespaces, a net of interwoven jointly instituted futures-presents-pasts and place-path arrays' (SCHATZKI 2009, 40).

In sum, the site ontology derived from practice theory works towards a dynamic and activity-oriented understanding of space and place. From that perspective, on the one hand, places only exist within and through activities that arrange surrounding entities and meanings. On the other hand, activities occur amidst these arrangements. In this way, meanings and entities are arranged and to which practices they pertain is a matter of practice itself, i.e. the way in which a practice is organised by understandings, rules and feelings. Practice itself is an organised nexus of doings and sayings that are neither fully intentional nor fully routinised but consist of both elements to varying degrees. In the following section, we try to explore what this ontology – a social world made of practices, doings, sayings, organisation, projects, arrangements, orders, timespace – can mean for geographical inquiry.

### **3 Emotions, materiality, knowledge**

In exploring the potential value of theories of practice tied to the site ontology discussed above for geographical inquiry, we have selected three themes that have become increasingly important to human geographers; emotions, materiality, and knowledge. The first and second are interrelated since they both shift the focus of inquiry towards the 'fleshiness' of the world (cf. SIMONSEN 2007, KAZIG a. WEICHHART 2009) and we will explore them in more detail. In comparison to these, the third one appears to pertain to the more ethereal realm of thoughts, ideas and discourses. However, from a practice theory point of view, knowledge is an overarching theme that addresses understandings as much as emotions and materiality that are embedded within practices. We understand emotions, materiality and knowledge as different foci of empirical research pertaining to the same social world, which, through theories of practice, can be all approached within the same conceptual framework.

#### *Emotions*

Geography's encounters with places, landscapes, cityscapes or neoliberal politics have increasingly resulted in engagement with the emotional and affective qualities of the social world (cf. PILE 2010). For instance, Nigel THRIFT and others have attended to the ways capitalism and neoliberal orders are sustained through the engineering of affect, such as through the purposeful design of cityscapes that elicit playful consumerism and oust (unwanted) political activism (THRIFT 2004; 2008). Another line of inquiry stems from humanistic geography, a central aim of which was to analyse the sense of place, the various attachments, wants, desires and fears that characterise the experience of rooms, buildings, cities or landscapes (BUTTIMER 1976, TUAN 1976). This endeavour has been taken up anew by geographers who are interested in the emotions implicated in human encounters with 'nature' (such as



phobias or death), things and artefacts (e.g. foodstuffs), or other people, places and practices (ANDERSON a. SMITH 2001, BONDI et al. 2005, SMITH et al. 2009). Furthermore, interlinked with both affect theories and emotional geographies, several strands of 'geographies of fear' have appeared recently that deal with socially significant and widespread fears and anxieties around crime, food, diseases, economic wealth or natural hazards (LAWSON 2007, PAIN 2009).

We suggest that geographies of emotion and affect could benefit from theories of practice by adding to their agenda the ways in which emotions are practised, how being emotional is learned and unlearned and how affect resonates with practical understandings of knowing how to do things or how to proceed. Furthermore, it would add weight to accounts of emotions that already acknowledge the importance of practice such as PAIN a. SMITH (2008, 12), who state that fear 'is an increasingly ingrained material practice' (cf. JACKSON a. EVERTS 2010).

In a co-authored paper involving one of the present authors, the proposition is to analyse events of anxiety such as pandemics or terrorism from a practice theory point of view as outlined above (JACKSON a. EVERTS 2010). Conceptualising anxiety as social practice opposes accounts that treat anxiety as an issue pertaining to individual bodies alone, be it as some form of individual phobia or personal pathology. Practice theory helps to open up the phenomenon of anxiety to a much broader analysis since anxieties 'are embodied and social, practical and practised' and like 'other social practices, they are routinised, collective and conventional in character' (JACKSON a. EVERTS 2010, 2801). It follows from this that we need to look at geographical and temporal variations of anxiety as they are practised and talked about, which variations determine the waxing and waning, spread and containment of that anxiety.

The 2009 H1N1 A pandemic, also known as swine flu, for instance, denotes a real event that resulted from the viral reassortment and subsequent human to human transmission and global spread of a new subtype of swine-origin influenza virus. However, swine flu was also an event of anxiety that was brought about by various practices as much as it was dealt with through a manifold of practices in time and space. First of all, the scientific practices of laboratory and epidemiological research, combined with mappings and news media coverage, created 'swine flu' as an issue of global importance. Other social practices were engendered in reaction to those practices: production and stockpiling of vaccines, mass-slaughtering of pigs in Egypt, quarantine for slightly feverish air passengers in China, restrictions and cancellations of flights to Mexico and so on. Each individual practice contributed to the event of anxiety through intensifying and amplifying a sense of urgency in the face of a new disease with possibly catastrophic dimensions (see EVERTS forthcoming).

Analysing a global event like swine flu from this angle shifts the attention to 'concrete goings on' (SCHATZKI 2002, 222) that produce social phenomena such as the event of swine flu. It directs our gaze to what real people do and say, how they do and say things and which tools they use. For instance, drawing on preliminary findings from an ongoing project on pandemic anxiety by one of the present authors (EVERTS forthcoming), we can look at the epidemiologist travelling to the places of an alleged outbreak and interviewing patients, the cartographer mapping

'cases' or the journalist presenting and explaining the map to the public. We can break up each practice into projects unified by understandings that are property of the practice itself. For instance, epidemiological work needs to detect sources for infection (was it the country fair with accidental pig exposure or travel to and from Mexico?), cartographic work uses red colours to indicate danger and seriousness of the issue to the public or news reporting needs to be timely, prompt and visual, no matter how little data or how few substantive insights are available. Hand in glove with the understandings intrinsic to specific practices are routinised ways of feeling such as the excitement of epidemiological fieldwork, or the shrugging indifference of the cartographer who gets asked to produce yet another map of the pandemic, or the anxious tensions of health officials who hope to explain the seriousness of the threat to the public without instilling panic.

But as much as we can use practice theories for analysing and understanding distressing global issues such as pandemics or terrorism, they can be equally helpful in drawing out intimate and very personal encounters that have been of interest to humanistic geographers for quite some time. The sense of place, for example, does not stem from a merely discursive figuration of what this or that place means. It is crucially created through practices that constitute the experience of place. It is only through practice that eventually a 'feel for the place' emerges. For instance, in describing the 'emotional topography' of Arctic landscapes in Iceland and Greenland, HASTRUP (2010) stresses the need for movement if one wants to grasp the Arctic:

'Only then did I realise how much life there was on the ice-clad fjord; by feeling small and insignificant myself, I was later able to interpret the tiny black dots on the ice as sleds, going in particular directions for seal. I had understood neither the magnitude of place nor the near-invisibility of people within it until I truly started moving about myself.' (HASTRUP 2010, 196)

It is through motion and emotion that HASTRUP can relate to the people and the landscape she is studying. But what is more, 'feeling small and insignificant', a crucial emotional state for her interpretation of the Arctic landscape, was only achieved through practice, through doing the 'emplacement' that created feelings for place, space, scale and time.

Following from this, we want to draw attention to at least one additional framing for inquiry in respect of emotion. SCHATZKI brings together the emotional with the intentional and motivational in devising his term 'teleoaffective structures'. He stresses that the term 'teleoaffective' indicates the directedness of feelings, expressing how human activity is goal-oriented and organised in tasks, projects, and ends (SCHATZKI 1996). In our earlier example of shopping for food, consider how shopping can be as much rewarding as it can be frustrating, leading to emotions of joy or anger. Witness the porous contours of what is deemed to be acceptable when people complain about prices or get agitated in the queue, how they get upset when products that ought to be there are sold out. Working through the emotional side of life can yield important insights into the appropriateness and oughtness attributed to the various projects and ends in the pursuit of which people are engaged.

It follows from this that feelings are the embodied understandings, not least of what is right and wrong, good and bad and so on. Frustration, for example, emerges often when activity is thwarted by material or practical constraints such as the lack of money, the layout of a building, a crowd of people.

Practice theories suggest that emotional bodily states are not just affective and beyond discursive control but on the contrary bound up and nestled into the formation of practical intelligibilities. Focusing through the lens of practice on how people feel toward different projects and ends, toward their own and others' doings and sayings or toward the presence and absence or size and movement of people, organisms, artefacts and things can thus yield important insights into the make-up of social reality.

### *Materiality*

Another important aspect of social reality of pivotal interest to geographers resides less in the teleoaffective structures that are one organising principle of practice but within the material world that is part of the arrangements and orders discussed earlier. Since the turn of the century, there has been increasing attention paid to the 'material' dimensions of human geographies. This 'material turn' (or return) can be placed as part of progression away from preoccupation with the representation which characterised much of human geography in the closing decades of the twentieth century, in the wake of a cultural turn which was in part defined by rejection of Sauerian cultural geography's parochial interest in the materiality of landscapes. In the millennial year, JACKSON (2000) and PHILO (2000), both leading lights of the 'new cultural geography' from the 1980s, called for the re-materialisation of social and cultural geography. JACKSON placed his call in the context of different literatures emerging from the mid 1990s, from fresh engagements with traditions of material culture, in geographies of consumption (GREGSON 1995) but also the then nascent impact of Science and Technology Studies, and in particular Actor Network Theory (BINGHAM 1996; MURDOCH 1997; WHATMORE 1999). As the twenty first century gathered steam, these strands of engagement with materiality have matured and to some extent run together with other preoccupations characteristic of NRT including embodiment, touch, emotion and affect (ANDERSON and WYLIE 2009).

Discussion of Actor Network Theory (ANT) most clearly indicates what is distinctive about contemporary engagements with materiality. For LATOUR, preeminent theorist of ANT

'Artefacts ... construct, literally and not metaphorically, social order .... They are not 'reflecting' it, as if the 'reflected' society existed somewhere else and was made of some other stuff. They are in large part the stuff out of which socialness is made.' (LATOUR 2000, 113)

For ANT, materiality is not the passive backdrop to the goings on of the social, nor simply a screen on to which society projects and reads back its meanings. Rather, the material is an active component within the social, making possible and relatively durable our social and cultural relations. This reframing of the material, of the nonhuman, follows from a more fundamental theoretical move. For ANT, social

agency – the power to act and have effect – is not the property of human subjects, or indeed of any single entity. Rather, agency and action are effects, emergent from the relations between all manner of entities, both human and nonhuman (LATOURE 2005). ANT illustrates, and to a significant extent underpins, contemporary geographical engagements with the material stuff of the social.

Theorists of practice have also taken up the challenge of integrating the material into their conceptions. RECKWITZ grants objects a place in studying the social ‘insofar as they are necessary components of social practices’ (2002, 253). SCHATZKI too gives a role to materiality in his theorisation of practices, arguing that ‘understanding specific practices *always involves apprehending material configurations*’ (SCHATZKI et al. 2001, 3). However, this is a role defined in contrast to that characteristic of ANT. While LATOURE is included in RECKWITZ’S list of names comprising the tradition of practice theory (2002), the role he gives materials in constructing social order is contested by some within practice theory, for whom ANT’S denial of human agency as ontologically unique is profoundly troubling (SCHATZKI 2002; SIMONSEN 2007). Indeed, SCHATZKI (2002, 71) directly contests the ‘extension of the categories of actor and action to entities of all sorts’ and those who ‘contend that practices comprise the actions of various entities and not those of people alone’. For him, artefacts (human made), things (not human-made) and organisms (living entities other than humans) are not literally part of practices. Nor are they necessarily part of networks (LAW and LATOURE), discourses (LACLAU and MOUFFE) or assemblages (DELEUZE and GUATTARI). Rather, they comprise *arrangements* which, while co-produced with practices are nonetheless distinct (SCHATZKI 2010b).

This is more than semantics, with the concept of arrangements stressing the incompleteness and transitoriness of the resulting orders and retaining a place for human agency, in the capacity to ‘arrange’ things and to establish nexuses.

The supermarket, as both a spatial-material arrangement and a loose set of practices conducted by the people in the processes of working and shopping, is a nice example. It is an arranged space that brings together a variety of things, artefacts and organisms such as walls, shopping carts, tills, artificial light, cans, plastic bags, foodstuffs and microbes. People moving in and out of that arrangement, pursuing largely routinised practices of bringing things in and taking things out, help to build, maintain and rearrange the arrangement. Through the recurrence of practice, the arrangement exists and persists; and without the continued re-occurrence of practice, it would cease to exist.

On this formulation, distinguishing practices from arrangements, SCHATZKI contends that ANT attends only to the ‘arrangement’. It is not the network of entities which constitute social phenomena, but rather it is ‘the practices that are tied to arrangements’ which do so (SCHATZKI 2010a, 135). In this criticism lies the basis for recognising the unique potential of theories of practice for enriching our approaches to materiality. For some, it is not necessary to place materials outside of practices to recognise the limitations of existing engagements with materiality. SHOVE, PANTZAR and WATSON (SHOVE and PANTZAR, 2005; SHOVE *et al.*, 2007; SHOVE *et al.*, in press) locate materials firmly within the dynamics of practices. For example, the dynamics of the practice of skateboarding, can be read as the iterative co-evolution of bodily skills, meanings and also materialities, as the board itself has

changed, through transitions such as that from skate parks to street skating. There is a recognisable process of co-evolution of the key materials of the practice (particularly the board) with the specific competencies and meanings of skateboarding, with incremental changes in what it is to do skateboarding resulting in incremental changes to boards which enable further changes in the actual doing (SHOVE *et al.*, in press). Whether materials are understood as within practices or as comprising the arrangements with which practices co-exist, by appreciating individual artefacts and arrangements of nonhuman entities as emergent from the flow of practices, and of the shaping of subsequent performances of practices by those artefacts and arrangements, we gain fresh purchase on the role of materials, not only as sticky anchors of social relations (LAW, 1991), but as part of the flow of action through which social relations are both reproduced and iteratively transformed.

### *Knowledge*

Though accommodating the emotional and the material, we also like to draw attention to RECKWITZ's claim that practice theories are at heart cultural theories, interested in explaining the social by referring to knowledge. Most cultural theories share the assumption that one needs to scrutinise the 'constitutive rules' to understand social life. For practice theories, knowledge is embedded in practices. It does not exist outside of performances of specific practices by skilled bodies engaging with the other elements of practice (WATSON a. SHOVE, 2008). In the words of RECKWITZ (2002, 253), paraphrasing SCHATZKI's aforementioned four links of the nexus of doings and sayings, knowledge 'embraces ways of understanding, knowing how, ways of wanting and feeling that are linked to each other within a practice'. This conception of knowledge also redistributes the material and the emotional within social theory. Objects are related to humans by know-how and understandings, which govern practices. Moreover, wants and desires do not belong to the individual alone. They are a form of knowledge that pertains to the teleoaffectivity of practice; 'every practice contains a certain practice-specific emotionality' (RECKWITZ 2002, 254). It often makes more sense to talk of practitioners instead of actors, emphasising the need to practice, to learn and to become skilful, as well as the processes of forgetting and unlearning.

For geography, researching the situated processes of gathering the knowledge required to accomplish practices is a suitable task. Through a practice framing, this would imply a shift from only questioning which skills and knowledge we need, for instance, for shopping, driving, cooking, or calculating prices, to also clarify how this gets taught, how it is learned, how it travels between moments of performance, how it changes and is made anew (SHOVE *et al.*, in press). In short, it would imply in the long run to drop the category of knowledge with its built-in stability claim and to elaborate the more procedural notion of 'understandings' as site- and practice-specific ways of grasping what is going on, what makes sense to do and how to do it.

#### 4 Conclusions

Practice theory grounded within the site ontology insists on a nuanced treatment of the 'spatial-temporal manifold of actions' (SCHATZKI 1997, 285) that constitute practices. Building upon the above argument for human geography to engage with theories of practice anew, not least through SCHATZKI's site ontology, we close by considering the implications of the approach for geographical inquiry.

In social geography, social relations in space are of key interest. From a practice theory perspective, people's lives hang together through practice. Groups of people are less defined than through categorisation such as age, sex or income but the various practices in which they are engaged, and from which the arrangements and orders which constitute such categorisations emerge and are reproduced. This means necessarily that the same person can participate in very different 'communities of practice' (see below). Social inequalities are not excluded from that perspective. Focussing on practice entails a closer look at how the organisation of practice includes and excludes through understandings and rules that are inherent to that practice. Since practices transpire and bring about site-specific arrangements of entities of all kinds, geographers are able to analyse the fabric of social life along the lines of arranged entities, places and paths that a given practice builds on and to which it belongs; and the practices that constitute and make use of arranged entities, both material and otherwise. Though explanatory power in the case of social inequality such as unequal income contribution could be seen as one of the limitations of practice theory, this is one of the future challenges to show how such inequalities reside in and are produced by various practices: practices of hiring and firing, practices of salary bargaining, practices of bank loaning, or practices of educational categorising and selection.

Another challenge for human geography remains its endeavour to keep the material conditions of our lifeworlds in sight. Through concepts such as arrangements and orders, practice theory offers a suitable vocabulary for this task. Terms such as arrangement and order retain the unique quality of human agency to arrange entities and read meaning into material objects. Artefacts and things are not invested with essential meaning but they become meaningful in and through practice. Furthermore, material objects do not necessarily belong to only one practice but can be constituted differently within different practices. Finally, material objects are part of the flow of actions, they influence the shape of any given practice and change with practice over time and space.

In cultural geography, a focus on practice helps to conceptualise knowledge as understandings that arise from the nexus of doings and sayings as much as they are an organising part of that nexus. Moreover, emotions and feelings can be related to the world of meanings and knowledge by looking at how a given practice offers distinctive ways of feeling towards certain projects and ends, doings and sayings or presences and absences. In the example presented, anxious feelings in the context of pandemic events are integral to the way responding practices are organised and enacted.

By way of sketching future directions, we turn now to the dynamics of community formation and reproduction as one last point that we derive from our engagement with practice theory. Practices have the power to form communities, or, in fact, are constitutive of any community when competent bodies are brought together by engaging in the skilful performance of the same distinctive practice or set of practices. Thus, they interact and they might learn how to do or effectuate the practice in a better way. It is this emphasis on learning that has been pointed out by social anthropologist Jean LAVE and the learning theorist Etienne WENGER in the concept of 'communities of practice' (LAVE a. WENGER 1991) which we suggest complements SCHATZKI's site ontology. The emergence and contours of communities of practice are not confined to co-presence or bound by place and we might as well investigate how practices can travel across space, reach new practitioners and form communities of practice. Increasingly, for example, a spatially distributed community clusters around the practice of ethical consumption that includes shopping for foodstuffs that were produced under 'fair' conditions (CLARKE et al. 2007, ERMANN 2006, GOODMAN 2004). How has this happened? How do new practitioners enter the community, how do they get 'skilled' and how 'skilful' are they, and finally, how do some eventually 'forget' to perform the practice defining and maintaining the community?

Researching communities of practice means to look into the various vehicles and attachments that connect the sites and entities engaged in the practice in question. Thus, it is not only interesting to ask who is drawn into specific practices and by whom but as well to clarify how this happens, through which connections, techniques, and materials, how and where different activities and the learning of these occur, and how that relates to different ways of feeling (for a more detailed treatment see LAHR-KURTEN 2011 on the practices of German language promotion within the French educational system).

This discussion of communities of practice draws together and to a close our outline agenda for bringing human geography into productive communication with contemporary developments in theories of practice. As we have argued, ways of feeling can be investigated through discussing senses of oughtness and acceptability that are so pervasive in shaping the agreeability of doing things this way and not another. The materiality of social life can be accessed through the concept of arrangements. The spatiality of arrangements can be usefully complemented with geographical notions of the relationality of places and space. After all, practices make places and practices are in turn inherently spatial. Changing, transforming, destroying, preserving, protecting or maintaining any kind of place is dependent on the dynamic nexus of practices and arrangements which comprise it. In the ways we have discussed, at least, there are the clear grounds for human geographers to pursue the fresh lines and means of inquiry opened up by theories of practice and a site ontology.

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