

Please Note: The following working paper was presented at the workshop "Demanding ideas: where theories of practice might go next" held 18-20 June 2014 in Windermere, UK. The purpose of the event was to identify issues and topics that constitute 'unfinished business' for people interested in social theories of practice and in the relevance of such ideas for the DEMAND Research Centre. This working paper should not be quoted without first asking the author's permission.

DemANdING ideas

Working Paper 11: Stanley Blue, *Time, Difference and Change: Moments and Rhythms of Practice* (stanley.blue@manchester.ac.uk), August 2014

Although I have tried to put them in manifesto form, I must admit that these notes are more in the form of sketches and workings out than a consolidated plan of action and argument. In these notes, I have attempted to pull together a number of threads, some attached to my recently completed doctoral work, others to my current reflections on that work and more to my future ambitions for working within the field of 'theories of practice'. I hope to re-present a snapshot of how these ideas are currently forming and to make a suggestion, by way of manifesto, that 'practice theorists' may do well to continue to investigate the lucrative relationship between practice and time over the next decade, to exploit rich social and philosophical arguments in these areas to account for themes currently under-considered in this field (e.g. inequality, power).

In writings on 'theories of practice' we are encouraged to understand practices as being fundamentally routinised, as repeated aggregates of individual actions that are ordinary, mundane and everyday. At its base, this implies a close association (and perhaps stronger than that) with the temporal. I claim here that it is the theoretical positioning of activity and time that foreshadows our ability to analyse, to take account of organising principles, processes of re-production and therefore systems of power and inequalities. As such the relationship between practice and time warrants further investigation.

Stuart Elden¹ reminds us that for Lefebvre, the notion of 'everyday life' (*la vie quotidienne*) retains two important senses: first, 'everydayness' (*quotidienneté*) refers to the repetition of daily life and second, 'everyday' (*quotidian*) suggests the *commodification* of ways of living that has made human life come to be experienced as dull, mundane and trivial. It seems to me that until now, 'practice theorists' have been exceptionally successful in accounting for the repetition of social action, but have had less to contribute to conversations regarding how these re-productions, that is the processes of re-production, are themselves re-produced as a consequence of those wider systems of commodification, exploitation and alienation. One method for providing a critique of the 'everyday', in order to investigate inequalities and relationships of power, might be for 'theories of practice' to engage with an alternative and fresh conceptualisation of 'time'. To consider 'everydayness' not only as repetition, as the ordinary or the normal, but perhaps to engage with it in a more similar way to that of Heidegger and Lukács' notion of *alltäglichkeit* - as the domination of modern, technological, capitalist systems of exchange that produce and re-produce social action, human life and practice, in a particular way, as mechanical, trivial and dominated by commodity fetishism.

This then, would be my manifesto: That to engage with processes of social change and to address under theorised concerns of power and inequality for example, 'practice theorists' need to account for the temporal relates to wider systems of production and exchange. In what space remains, I

¹ Elden, Stuart. 2004. *Understanding Henri Lefebvre*: Bloomsbury Academic, p 112.

attempt to sketch out one starting point, taking my cue from Henri Lefebvre, that the sociologist's first step in analysing the modes of the re-production of practice is to do away with the commodified, the mediated and the re-presented and to turn one's attention to the presencing of social action. As such I focus here on his theories of moments and rhythms of practice rather than on performances and entities. In the final section I show what differences and additions that this theoretical re-alignment might make to our analyses of social action.

Performances and Entities

In 'Social Practices' (1996), Schatzki describes three notions of practice. The first and currently under-re-presented notion is that of practice as a process, of practice as learning and as "development through doing" (89). Schatzki accounts for this notion through the interplay of the following two notions of practice as performance and entity. However, I want to bring a focus exactly to this under-re-presented notion of practice as an instance of doing and as development in order to offer a third and potentially complementary notion of practice that could open the field to new ways of thinking about time, practice, change, power, etc. First it is useful to say something of practice-as-performance and practice-as-entity by way of contrast.

Since the publication of Schatzki's text, those that have worked with the ideas of social practices have tended to consider them both as (somewhat) bounded entities, made up of a "nexus of doings and sayings" that, in connection with networks, webs and bundles of other practices, emerge, persist and disappear in space and time; and as distinct performances, individual enactments of the practice. Significantly, Schatzki writes:

"Each of the linked doings and sayings constituting a practice is only in being done. Practice in the sense of do-ing, as a result, actualizes and sustains practices in the sense of nexuses of doings."²

Usefully, this allows an account of social action as do-ing. By studying the interplay between practices-as-entities and practices-as-performances, in various empirical situations, 'practice theorists' have made great strides beyond traditional and critical fractures in social theory and philosophy, between re-presentations of the individual and the whole, the universal and the particular and between structure and 'agency'.

However, making an analytic distinction between performance and entity has particular consequences. It maintains a distinction between subject and object and externalises change from action. By providing an analysis that argues that practices-as-performances (as re-presented instances of social action) are shaped by practices as entities (as subjects), even if this relationship is mutually configured, the impetus for change is situated outside of the doing itself. I.e. changing the elements of the entity affects performances and changing individuals' performances will change the configuration of the entity itself.

The distinction between performance and entity also plays out in and maintains a distinction between subjective and objective time, that is, time as lived experience on the one hand and time as quantifiable clock hours on the other. In Bergsonian philosophy, this distinction is paralleled in that

² Schatzki, Theodore. 1996. *Social Practices: A Wittgensteinian Approach to Human Activity and the Social*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 90.

the past, present and future of activity only exist as separate and distinct in objective or 'spatialised' time. In subjective or 'real' time, they occur "all at one stroke". This unfolding 'duration' is to be considered as the experience of:

"... the continuation of what precedes into what follows... uninterrupted transition, multiplicity without divisibility, and succession without segmentation."³

It is this formulation that underpins current conceptualisations of the relationship between practice and time. Memory and intellect do not introduce segmentations, defining actions, rather, they remember segmentations that were *actually there* (i.e. practices-as-entities). That is, whilst we may experience human life *à la* Bergson, as a continuous unfolding, it is a continuous unfolding of particular practices-as-entities:

"True, both my performances of these actions and my lived-through experiences of this series were continuous. But the continuous performance of action was of precisely these actions, and my continuous performance took precisely those turns."⁴

In synthesising the segmentation of particular actions (practices-as-entities) with an understanding of continuous unfolding (as continuous performance), Schatzki provides a schema which links practice and time in a particular way, i.e. synthesising performance and entity with subjective and objective time.

This is significant to note because it is this distinction that organises analyses from within the field of 'theories of practice' that are focussed on the ordering of practices-as-entities 'in (objective) time' as a result of, or in creating experiences of (subjective) time as harried, busy, rushed, relaxed, etc.⁵ Conclusions that usually follow are that perceived notions of 'busyness', 'time-squeeze', etc. might motivate people to re-order practices in some potentially more or less sustainable ways, or engage in new practices that make use of technologies and energies which might have detrimental or beneficial impacts on the environment. Of course this is an over simplification of complicated analyses which have made a significant impact in environmental policy and practice. However, such arguments quickly reach their limits in accounting for different strategies of coping with 'time-squeeze', for different orderings of practices, and further defined understandings of inequality and power. Or at the very least, inequality and power come to be explained by access to resources (through practices) and time itself becomes reduced to one of those resources.

There seems to me to be much more that 'theories of practice' could learn from a wider engagement with and further development of the social and philosophical literature available on time. Particularly in search of novel ways of conceptualising and accounting for various, and currently under theorised themes. One method might be to put aside the distinction between subjective and objective time, between practices-as-entities and as-performances and to consider practice as immediate and as development, through a theory of moments and rhythms.

Moments and Rhythms

³ Bergson in Schatzki, Theodore. 2010. *The Timespace of Human Activity: On Performance, Society, and History As Indeterminate Teleological Events*: Lexington Books, p 189.

⁴ Schatzki, Theodore. 2010. *The Timespace of Human Activity: On Performance, Society, and History As Indeterminate Teleological Events*: Lexington Books, p 193.

⁵ For example see Southerton, Dale. 2003. "Squeezing Time." *Time and Society* 12 (1):5-25.

Lefebvre's critique of everyday life and his analysis of rhythms provide us with one example for reconsidering the relationship between practice and time, and potentially for accounting for change and intervention in certain actions in new ways. Much of this work involves a critique of the representation of human life and social action as commodified, as *things* (entities) that return (emerge, persist and disappear) over time. Instead, Lefebvre seeks to capture the presencing of social life through an alternative understanding of repetition – not repetition of the same *thing*, but repetition of difference, or change:

“Repetition of behaviour patterns (conditionings)... cannot be assimilated to repetition of states [i.e. entities]... We must distinguish between repetitions of situations [i.e. performances]... and repetition of certain systems... If repetition, return or renewal of the same (or more or less the same) phenomenon should be understood according to each specific case and type, the same can be said of the relation between what is reproduced and the newness which springs from repetition (for example, repetition of sounds and rhythms in music offers a perpetual move-ment which is perpetually reinvented).”⁶

We can draw three important ideas for understanding the relationship between practice and time here from Lefebvre: First, that being is becoming. That in its enactment practice changes – it is not static, rather practice is itself change. Second, that if practice is change then we can no longer think about it in terms of re-presented entities and performances, but instead need to consider its immediate and becoming qualities in *the moment*. And third, that a turn to the moment requires a different understanding of ‘lived time’ through a specific modality of repetition: “‘Something’ – which is certainly not a thing – is encountered once again.”⁷ It is this repetition of ‘moments’ of practice, thus conceived as never a repetition of the same, but as always drawing with it ‘something’ different, that constitutes Lefebvre’s analysis of rhythms.

Clearly then, in Lefebvre’s formulation at least, rhythms do not belong to practices-as-entities, traceable along an x-axis and re-presentable in graphic form as they often are through representations in time-use data, for example. He makes this point clear when he writes:

“Everybody thinks they know what this word means. In fact, every-body senses it in a manner that falls a long way short of knowledge: rhythm enters into the lived; though that does not mean it enters into the known. There is a long way to go from an observation to a definition, and even further from the grasping of some rhythm (of an air in music, or of respiration, or of the beatings of the heart) to the conception that grasps the simultaneity and intertwinement of several rhythms, their unity in diversity.”⁸

The repetition of the moment does not happen in isolation. Instead it occurs within the polyrhythmia of the everyday. That is to say that any given rhythm can only be understood in relation to its contextual and supporting rhythms. Rhythms shape each other. This can happen in two ways. First, rhythms can be in a state of eurhythmia, of co-ordination and concordance in their normal and everyday (*quotidian*) state. However, rhythms can also break down. This second state is

⁶ Lefebvre, Henri. [1961] 2014. *Critique of Everyday Life*, Vol. 2: Verso, p 634.

⁷ Ibid, p 636.

⁸ Lefebvre, Henri and Régulier, Catherine. 1985. “The Rhythmanalytical Project.” *Communications* 41: 191-199, p77.

described by Lefebvre as arrhythmia, as the de-synchronisation of rhythms which results in the extra-everyday:

“[W]hen they are discordant, there is suffering, a pathological state (of which arrhythmia is generally, at the same time, symptom, cause and effect). The discordance of rhythms brings previously eurhythmic organisations towards fatal disorder.”⁹

Importantly however, arrhythmia does not indicate the end of a rhythm, or a stepping out of polyrhythmia. Instead it is a re-alignment, a re-synchronisation of the polyrhythmia of the everyday. Breaks in eurhythmia are not rare, but continuous – as soon as one eurhythmia breaks down, another immediately aligns. What matters for Lefebvre, is how the continuous discontinuities are reproduced, how the processes of repetition themselves affect and shape ongoing change. To this end he distinguishes between two structures of rhythms: the cyclical and the linear. This is not the same as a Bergsonian distinction between ‘real’ and ‘spatialised’ time. Both linear and cyclical rhythms are constituted by the production of *difference* through repetition, but they do this in different ways. Whilst cyclical rhythms are of biological and cosmic origins, linear rhythms are born out of the technical-social. Importantly the continuous interaction between the cyclical and the linear is the site of domination by mechanical and technical, linear rhythms over ‘natural’ human rhythms. Nevertheless, for Lefebvre it is also the site of struggle, the place to contest capitalist rhythms of production and exchange that have come to organise bodily and ‘natural’ rhythms of becoming.

Power then, in this account, depends on time. Not more simply on the access to time as a resource. Instead power is expressed through the organisation of societal rhythms of practice. Similarly, inequality could be conceived in terms of the rigidity and flexibility of those rhythms. This argument clearly requires further crafting, but for present purposes it is enough to propose for discussion the idea that thinking about practice and time through a theory of moments and rhythms might well provide an interesting avenue down which to pursue, thus far under-considered concepts, such as power and inequality, and to conclude by imagining what some of those differences might look like.

The Next Decade – *Time for Desperate Measures (Mesures)*?

The practical implications of exploring this shift in theoretical orientation vary in how much they might change current recommendations for intervening in and shaping practices. It is clear that novel interventions in the arrangement of rhythms, for example, are possible, and yet intervening in the material infrastructures that form part of the moment of practice, or re-ordering practices in time will still affect the symphony of rhythms thus conceived. However, what is interesting to note and warrants further discussion are the differences or additions that thinking about the relationship between practice and time might be. In the space below I outline a few of these differences as summary.

a) Re-production not Repetition

One common goal within ‘theories of practice’ is to understand the relationship between social action and social change. The DEMAND centre explores this question through its second theme framed as: ‘How End Use Practices Change’. From a practice theoretical perspective focussed on

⁹ Lefebvre, Henri. [1992] 2004. *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life*. Translated by Stuart Elden and Gerald Moore. Edited by Stuart Elden. London, New York: Continuum, p 16.

moments and rhythms we might suggest that this framing involves re-presenting a specific and (to some extent) bounded entity that emerges and persists through repeated performances until something changes either within the internal configuration of elements or through an example of performance, that then might lead to the disappearance or re-constitution of that practice. It might also be useful to consider social action as already constantly changing, as un-bounded, and un-representable in this way, and to turn our attention to the very ways in which moments of action become re-produced. Significantly this might promote an even further emphasis on the relationship between moments of practice rather than on the internal configurations and boundaries of practices-as-entities.

b) Syncopation not Synchronisation

Synchronisation is fundamental to the study of rhythms and is also of conceptual significance to the DEMAND centre's first research theme on 'Trends and Patterns in Energy DEMAND'. Currently however, emphasis is placed on the synchronisation of practices and not on rhythms (as described above). This means that the concept can only be put to use in a limited way, aggregating patterns of the use of time (as a resource) for certain activities. Of course, this is extremely important for capturing analyses of peak energy load, for example, but it does less to explain the resulting 'lock in' of rhythms established by a harmonious and eurhythmic working day, re-produced through repetitive, linear, mechanistic, technical and rational rhythms of production. In order to extend this analysis of synchronisation we might do well to add the idea of syncopation. That is, to stress, or emphasise a particular action or measure (*mesure*) that might disrupt the 'locked in' eurhythmia of rhythms of practice that exist around peak demand. Establishing these kinds of arrhythmias could then lead to the establishment of new sets of rhythms, a new eurhythmia that consists of a more dispersed set of rhythms of practice that doesn't produce peaks in energy demand.

c) Time as *Difference* not as Resource

The central argument from these notes that I suggest by way of manifesto is to echo Schatzki's argument in *Timespace*¹⁰ - to move away from conceptualising practices as existing in a kind of temporal container, in objective time. I argue that it may also be fruitful to go even further and to consider Lefebvre's suggestion that time is *difference*. That is to say, that to extend social theories of practice through a further engagement with social theories of time promises to open new ways of considering the relation between social action and social change. One preliminary route is to work with moments and rhythms to study the various ways in which moments of practice are re-produced.

d) Not Just Everydayness but the Everyday

Lefebvre's work challenges us to go beyond analyses of the routine, the mundane and the ordinary and to investigate the commodification of everyday life that produces that triviality, banality, repetition and alienation. Significantly this requires us to account for the relationship between the extra-everyday and the everyday, between the cyclical and the linear and between mechanical

¹⁰ Schatzki, Theodore. 2010. *The Timespace of Human Activity: On Performance, Society, and History As Indeterminate Teleological Events*: Lexington Books

rhythms of exchange and human, bodily rhythms of becoming. In short the concept of the 'everyday' is a rich site from which to investigate new questions and themes over the next ten years.

e) Festival and Triviality

I will end with another quote from Lefebvre, which sums up the point I have tried to make in these pages, that further developing notions of practice and time, could well point us in the direction for building new practice-theoretical concepts that can help us to account for the commodified and repetitive everyday and how it changes:

“The theory of moments will allow us to follow the birth and formation of moments in the substance of the everyday in their various psychic and sociological denominations: attitudes, aptitudes, conventions, affective or abstract stereotyped, formal intentions, etc. Perhaps it will even permit us to illuminate the slow stages by which need becomes desire, deep below everyday life, and on its surface. But most importantly, it must be capable of opening a window on supersession, and of demonstrating how we may resolve the age-old conflict between the everyday and tragedy, and between triviality and festival.”¹¹

¹¹ Lefebvre, Henri. [1961] 2014. Critique of Everyday Life, Vol. 2: Verso, p 652.