

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 4: Allison Hui, [≠] *Manifesto* (a.hui@lancaster.ac.uk), August 2014

This ‘manifesto’, like others, gathers, muddles, and re-presents the past to create a provocation for the present. It arises from my longstanding interest in mobilities of diverse people, things, and elements, and the complex and changing practices in which they come together. My approach to practice has drawn upon a range of theoretical resources from the complementary but not entirely coherent literatures on practice (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990; Hetherington, 1997; Mol and Law, 1994; Reckwitz, 2002; Schatzki, 1996, 2002, 2009; Shove and Pantzar, 2005, 2007; Shove et al., 2012; Warde, 2005). By bringing concepts and principles from theories of practice together with diverse cases and literatures (including tourism, leisure, migration, and now energy) I have pursued an interest in how practices unfold through mobilities, and how following networked elements and patterns of circulation can inform understandings of changing dynamics of practice. Though not always explicit in what follows, this trajectory informs and gains momentum from the thoughts that follow.

[*Imagining Futures*]

While considering how I got here, I found myself wondering about the extent to which following the logic of previous work offers a compelling frame for imagining the next decade of theories of practice. When (and how) is it useful to build a manifesto based upon a logic of X' , X'' , X''' ... X^n ? Or upon an imagination of territory-yet-to-be-conquered – those phenomena and disciplines not yet embedded in discussions with practice theory? Or upon a goal of what practice theory should become: perhaps a dominant social scientific paradigm? A set of understandings thoroughly embedded into policy practices? An eclectic and often incoherent set of tools fit for all purposes? Looking back in ten years, will theories of practice still be addressed as one set of similar things, or as many sets of dissimilar ones? Will its internal diversity make it a movement akin to Baroque or Impressionist painting, or to pointillism or cubism? How much does any of this matter for us as we consider the manifestation of manifestos?

[*Defending Practices*]

In part due to the nature of academic arguments, and the continual need to emphasize a distinct contribution, theories of practice have thus far been well articulated in relation to competing frames for understanding the social world. Reckwitz situates theories of practice as a variant of cultural theory offering a model of the social world distinct from understandings of ‘homo economicus’ and ‘homo sociologicus’ (2002). Schatzki, while developing a distinct ‘site ontology’ in which to situate practices, makes a series of differentiations from individualist and socialist ontologies, as well as the more specific arguments of theories of arrangements (2002). Shove has also articulated how practice theory offers a compelling alternative to behavior change approaches which dominate in many public and policy circles (2010a, 2010b). Though this positioning work has been central to the

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building of a 'practice turn' in social theory (Schatzki et al., 2001) and will undoubtedly remain important in attempts to shift or steer the public framing of social problems and dynamics, it is important that the differentiation of practice theories from other approaches to the social world (e.g. individualist ones) does not remain too dominant a focus.

This is not to suggest that work thus far has been solely focused upon defending practice theory from the outside – indeed, much has already been done to build up a set of concepts that allow discussions of how practices are composed, reproduced, and related. Dynamics of change have been one major focus for recent work, and consideration has also been given to how theories of practice can work alongside other literatures or concerns (Shove et al., 2012; Shove and Spurling, 2013; Spaargaren, 2011; Watson, 2012). Nonetheless, ample space remains for further investigation and characterization of differences and distinctions within the world of practices.

[Remaking Practices]

I've decided to use the idea of nonequivalence as a loose frame for the rest of my comments. Focusing on [≠] as a device for thinking highlights how our work is always positioned and justified by boundaries. A particular type of relation, [≠] suggests the inevitability of difference that arises from repetition [X', X'', X'''...]. But [≠] can also push out to more unfamiliar territory – questioning what we habitually ignore or fail to incorporate into our considerations. How might making things [≠] be a creative task that allows us to enroll unfamiliar resources in the project of solving familiar problems? To what extent can thinking about what is [≠] help to develop richer conceptual vocabularies, more accessible strategies, and more widespread impacts? As an experiment, I start from [≠] to explore potential forays for future practice theory.

[≠] – Not all practices are equal

This proposition, and the rest that follow, may at first seem irrelevant and unimportant. There will always be more nonequivalences than equivalences, and therefore their worth can seem minimal. Of course, one might reply, not all practices are equal – no one ever said they were. Yet what is the range of our vocabulary for discussing this relationship? How might it be usefully expanded?

One of the corollaries of taking practices of a unit of study has been that the comparability of practices is taken for granted in many basic concepts. All practices have practitioners who are also 'carriers' of the practice (Reckwitz, 2002). Varying definitions of the elements of practices (Gram-Hanssen, 2011; Maller and Strengers, 2013; Reckwitz, 2002; Shove et al., 2012) or the linkages of doings and sayings (Schatzki, 1996, 2002; Warde, 2005) highlight the similar components that make up diverse practices, and how in some cases these components are shared between practices (as shared elements (Shove et al., 2012), dispersed practices (Schatzki, 1996) or taste regimes (Arsel and Bean, 2013)). The spatio-temporal aspects of practices can be articulated through discussions of 'activity-place spaces' (Schatzki, 2002), 'activity timespaces' (Schatzki, 2010b) or circulation (Hui, 2011, 2013; Shove and Pantzar, 2005; Shove et al., 2012). One of the major contributions of theories of practice then has been in developing a set of concepts that allow components or characteristics of practice to be articulated and investigated in specific empirical cases.

Though the differences between practices have also been discussed, particularly when addressing the adoption of new practices over time or considering how practices relate to the consumption of


energy and resources (Chappells et al., 2011; Nansen et al., 2011; Shove et al., 2007; Strengers and Maller, 2012; Warde et al., 2007), there is still a limited set of concepts to articulate differences between practice-entities. This may be in part due to the concentration of empirical work upon practices of everyday life, rather than larger and more complex practices related to professions, economies, or governments. It is one thing to look at the bathing practices of migrants and consider how they might differ from those of locals (Maller and Strengers, 2013) and another thing entirely to consider the relationship between migrants' everyday routines and the enactments of 'migration' that occur in immigration departments, visa offices, relocation companies and border crossing points. While Schatzki's discussions of how practices and orders form bundles and nets provides one set of resources in this ongoing discussion (2002: 154-155), more could be done to develop a set of resources that facilitate empirical investigations in and between varied social contexts. Whether framed as issues of scale (Birtchnell, 2012), of micro/macro, or of power, a series of questions thus deserve further attention.

What are the implications of one practice for another? What are the different types and degrees of influence that one practice might have on another? How do these interactions play out in space and time? How do flows and obstructions in a world of practices enact patterns of power and differentiation?

How is the inequality of practices (and not just people) enacted? How is inequality orchestrated (cf. Schatzki, 2002: 147-)? To what extent are aims or goals of different practices complementary or conflicting, policed or permitted? How do the spatio-temporal demands of practices relate to inequality in the present, or to the probability of flexibility or decline in different future scenarios?

[≠] – Not all elements are equal

[Talking about elements]

H; He; Li; Be; B; C; N; O; F; Ne; Na... In natural science worlds, the nonequivalence of elements is articulated in many ways. Ordering and arranging elements by atomic numbers, groups, periods, blocks, states, prevalence and more provides a context for understanding how any one behaves in specific contexts. Some patterns of elements are more common than others – some reactions and compounds are more likely than others. There are therefore a wealth of ways of talking about and representing elements. Water = H₂O = . Carbon, due to being particularly adept at bonding, is known as the building block of life. Reactions between Na and Cl can be anticipated and represented.

Could we then see the articulation of different elements within theories of practice as the first step towards a more complex discussion of relationships and differentiations? While the properties of elements of practice may be deemed more fluid and even malleable than those of chemical elements, discussing them in a greater number of ways, in relation to a greater number of practices, would help to further characterize the world as made up of practices.

Are there elements of practice that could be seen as basic building blocks, as Carbon, Oxygen, and Hydrogen are? How might these differ in Asia or other parts of the world? What difference would it

make to talk about Confucianism or guanxi (relationships/關係/关系) as elements with specified and dynamic interrelations?

How many practices is an element a part of? How can its role in each be differentiated? How can a vocabulary be created to discuss these dynamics?

Are there viral elements – those that both spread quickly and are potentially deadly (for practices, or resources, or other elements)? How might a discussion of viral elements contribute to imaginations of the future – of interdisciplinarity; of digital literacy and the infection of all kinds of practices with digital competences and knowledges? How might such circulating elements be seen as a different kind of infrastructure for social life?

[Not talking about elements]

Though breaking practices down into categories of elements has been helpful for articulating these components in empirical contexts, the inequality of elements can also be seen in the varied attention given to different types. Discussions of materials/things/objects have been helpful in linking practices to socio-technical studies, work on technology and innovation, and discussions of affordances and the way that objects prefigure agency (Hui, 2012; Jalas, 2009; Nansen et al., 2011; Schatzki, 2010a; Shove and Spurling, 2013; Watson and Shove, 2008). Considerations of competences/skills/know-how have drawn upon Giddens' attention to tacit knowledge and Bourdieu's understandings of habitus, supporting the study of embodied practices such as capoeira and tai chi (Brown and Leledaki, 2010; Delamont and Stephens, 2008). The aspects of practice related to meanings/knowledge/rules, however, sometimes seem more precariously placed. In part, this could be due to the fact that they are not always materialized or directly observable, and thus can be difficult to identify or represent (cf. Lloyd, 2010: on the corporeality of information literacy). They are also complicated to discuss because the distinction between addressing them as elements of practice and sliding into ontologically incompatible framings of norms or values can be difficult to negotiate or defend. At times, they are also addressed as part of different frames, as in how Arsel and Bean discuss aesthetics in terms of dispersed practices and 'taste regimes' (2013).

It seems to me, however, that more could be done to develop a vocabulary bringing together less-discussed elements of practice and the linkages named by Schatzki and Warde (Schatzki, 1996, 2002; Warde, 2005). In particular, extending a consideration of the 'procedures' (Warde, 2005) involved in practices offers possibilities for thinking about new dimensions of difference and similarity between performances and practice-entities.

While a practice needs to be performed in order to exist, not all performances are the same. To some extent this is a function of context, and of the basic tenet that repetition \neq replication. But even performances involving the same elements can differ in terms of how these elements are integrated. That is, elements can take on more or less importance, and sequences can change.

Take for instance the example of making a patchwork quilt. While all patchwork quilts involve cutting up pieces of fabric and then sewing them back together to form a pattern, the process can unfold in different ways. Sometimes quilters start with a pattern found in a magazine, and then purchase fabrics with the aim of replicating the pictured quilt. At other times they start with fabrics

they already have lying around, choosing colors and patterns that go well together and then finding a pattern that will complement the fabrics. At yet other times, they start with an idea – such as expressing the cycle of seasons – and then slowly develop a new pattern, and dye new fabrics, until they have expressed the idea in a satisfactory manner. Each of these procedures for quilting arrives at a completed artifact, and involved many of the same skills including cutting and sewing. Yet they also enroll different understandings, aims, and skills – matching complementary colors or expressing a unique artistic idea are necessary elements of some but not all procedures.

This highlights how practices already have methods for enacting varied performances. This is both a strategy that helps ensure extended engagement (by staving off boredom) but also a means of addressing and adapting to the variable accessibility of elements. Since at the moment practice theory is being used to address issues of variability as well as questions linked to consumption and need to curb consumption of particular types, further attention to *procedures* of integration could be helpful.

How many procedures or methods for bringing elements together exist within a practice? How do these facilitate adaptation to scarcities of resources? How do these facilitate adaptation to diverse levels of skill, competence, or knowledge? How does the sequencing of procedures relate to particular aims of a practice? How can procedures from dissimilar practices be used to transform ways of working?

[≠] – Not all interactions with practice theory are equal

A final nonequivalence bearing mention is that not everyone who uses or develops practice theory interacts with it in the same way. Not only are people more or less devoted to building up the conceptual repertoire of practice theory, but also their institutional and career positions shape their trajectories and engagements. This is no different for practice theory than for any other academic specialty or community. Yet if we are interested in thinking about the next decade of work in a collective and not individual manner, then further questions arise.

Given the fact that theories of practice are often difficult to digest upon first encounter, and not always easy to translate into methodological and empirical terms, how will the potentially competing aims of making practice theory and “making practice theory practicable” (Sahakian and Wilhite, 2014) be negotiated and by whom? Can ‘making practice theory practicable’ simultaneously be ‘making practice theory’? How many ways can one take practice as a focus empirically? Analytically? In practice as researchers? How might expanding our means of addressing units other than practices (elements, linkages, careers) help in addressing methodological, theoretical, or societal challenges?

[≠] – Departures

In many ways, these pages ≠ a manifesto because the proclamations have been too banal, too bland, to be read as clear and bold provocations for future work. Moreover, the scarcity of examples provides almost too open a space to consider possible directions. Connecting the questions to my own interest in mobilities and materialities would have started to provide more concrete trajectories. Yet to do so would have also been to write a more limited frame for discussion.

Therefore this \neq a manifesto in the hope that it might be useful in our shared process of manifesting the future of practice theory.

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