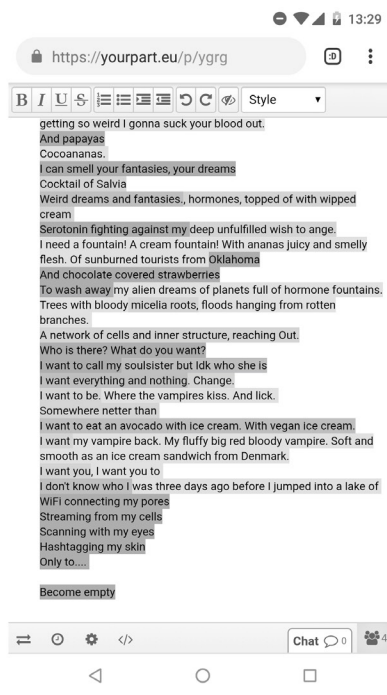


In the Spirit of Addition: Taking a 'Practice+' Approach to Studying Media

Magdalena Götz, Sam Hind, Danny Lämmerhirt, Hannah Neumann,
Anastasia-Patricia Och, Sebastian Randerath & Tatjana Seitz
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The cover image consists of three screenshots taken by Magdalena Götz related to the art workshop "Weird Read Intensive" led by the artist duo Dorota Gawęda and Eglė Kulbokaitė, founders of the Young Girl Reading Group (YGRG).

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The workshop took place on 5th and 6th of July 2019 at NRW Forum Düsseldorf as part of the event "Digital Imaginaries" initiated by the "Akademie der Avantgarde" in cooperation with "Institut für Kunst und Kunsttheorie" at the University of Cologne. From left to right: screenshot of one part of the story "YGRG workshop" featured on the Instagram account of the YGRG (@y_g_r_g), <https://www.instagram.com/stories/highlights/17864136457432608/>; screenshot of a collective writing process using the web-based text editor Etherpad; screenshot of an Instagram post by Dorota Gawęda (@tuniatunia), https://www.instagram.com/p/Bzf_bHzliNu/

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Abstract 2

Introduction: Taking a 'Practice+' Approach 2
Sam Hind et al.

Configuring and Being Configured: Parasitic Practices Through Salesforce 5
Sebastian Randerath

**(Dis-)entangling YouTube Practices: On Broadcasting, Watching
and Researching Online Video Content** 9
Anastasia-Patricia Och

Queering Practices: Uses of Digital Mobile Media in Queer/Feminist Art 15
Magdalena Götz

Agre's Interactionism 22
Sam Hind and Tatjana Seitz

Taking Things Seriously as a Practice 26
Hannah Neumann

Health Data Donations as Cooperative Practice 30
Danny Lämmerhirt

Epilogue: Media Scholars Determine their Situation 35
Christoph Borbach

Abstract This collection of articles considers the possibility of taking an “additive” approach to studying media, which the contributors to the collection refer to as a “practice+” approach. In this spirit the collection attempts to establish novel connections that potentially bring new life to the study of practice, by exploring new concepts, thinkers, energies, methodologies, and disciplinary traditions. These additional engagements, it is argued, are intended to augment and supplement (rather than displace or replace) popular practice approaches offered through, and found within, ethnomethodology, organizational studies, workplace studies and similar. The articles explore how practices are variously constituted in, and through, contemporary media such as video platforms, collaborative text editors, enterprise software, social media APIs, automotive navigation systems, and health data apps. In these cases not only does one find a welter of varied, interconnected, multi-scalar, differentially located practices but in the process of their articulation, one also discovers new vocabularies with which to document and articulate them. The contributions, thus, gesture towards how relations between media and their practices can be alternatively and fruitfully approached, evidencing new lines of thinking and doing in the study of practice.

Keywords Practice, Practice+, Praxeology, Platforms, Collaboration, Data, Media Studies, Methodology

Introduction

Sam Hind et al.

Practices, seemingly, are everywhere. Scholars across a range of fields talk variously of “everyday” practices, “situated” practices, “digital” practices, “data” practices, “cultural” practices and many more besides. Yet with what Genner (2020: 2) describes as a “turn” towards practice, what does one gain? If the world is awash with practices, what then? How might one study, identify, characterize, or distinguish between practices, or between practices and “not-practices”? This collection of articles is intended to broach these questions from different starting points: critical data studies, media linguistics, organization studies, theater studies, queer studies, and platform studies. In so doing, it hopes to bring new life to the study of practice.

Genesis of the Collection

It is worth telling a story about the *genesis* of the collection. It began with a desire to find common ground between the contributors, with the hope of working together on a project. Our interests were often shared, partially overlapping, but somewhat ill-defined. An initial workshop in February 2020 – our last in-person event before the pandemic – saw us grapple with these connections. We began with our ‘hopes, dreams, and visions’ for such a project, before mapping out ‘concepts, methodologies, and practices’ each of us was engaged in. After ‘taking our concepts for a walk’ in the surroundings of the University of Cologne, it became obvious that more than anything else, it was the study of ‘practice’ that bound us together.¹

1 Thanks to Danny Lämmerhirt for the original suggestion. This phrasing is taken from a collaborative document workshop participants contributed to during the “Rethinking Locating Media” workshop in February 2020. Thanks to Daniela van Geenen for her considerable participation

As a group of contributors who have encountered practice theories ‘from the outside’, or at least from peripheral positions, the aim of the collection is to contribute to the debate on the study of practice both from a fresh perspective and from collective experience. Most of the contributors are new to the study of practice, new to both historic and contemporary theorists associated with the study of practice in ethnomethodology, organizational studies, workplace studies and similar. The contributions, therefore, should be seen as a *documentation* of *evolving* thinking over the preceding years: of presenting texts, sharing work, discussing readings, planning events, and – intermittently – eating, drinking, and socializing together, in which practice, and media practices, were often discussed. In other words, of creating an environment through which various shared practices and experiences had themselves become integral to the intellectual development of our work on practice. Only in organizing a workshop together did this collective interest finally crystallize.

Accordingly, the contributions do not explicitly offer critiques of existing approaches to the study of practice. Instead, they broadly offer what the contributors have more productively referred to as a “practice+” approach, in which they emphasize how practices have been *additionally* engaged with in their own work by taking up new concepts (e.g. parasitic), new thinkers (e.g. Philip Agre), new political energies (e.g. disruption), new methodological routes (e.g. *through* and *beyond* media) and ‘new’ disciplines (e.g. theatre studies). In this, contributors draw on a wide-ranging cast in order to study practices found within various contexts, including business, the arts, and academia itself. These additional engagements, it is argued here, *augment* and *supplement* (rather than displace or replace) popular practice approaches. For instance, in how Sebastian Randerath uses Michael Serres’ work on the “parasite” to articulate the relationship between Salesforce and third parties, or how Sam Hind and Tatjana Seitz consider how Philip Agre’s “interactionism” offers an account of how digital technologies modulate, and manage, practices.

Moreover, that in their application, these contributions allow for an alternative encounter with practices, sidestepping a typical canon (e.g. Garfinkel 1967), not least through their engagement with, and mobilization of, new vocabularies (Gherardi 2016) that reinvigorate the study of practices. Or, for instance, in how adjacent disciplines such as theater studies think about, write on, and act through, practice as Hannah Neumann argues in her contribution. In this short introduction we attempt to locate these efforts

within the study of practices more generally, and to establish the direction of travel within this collection itself.

Genealogy of Media and Practice

Although the contributions to this collection have been written by scholars who associate with a wide variety of fields, each contributor has a *shared interest* in the study of media, whether media “in motion” and “in situ”; or participative, collaborative, or “cooperative” media.² Yet, in the study of practice the discipline of media studies itself arrived rather late to proceedings. Whilst Schatzki et al. (2001) identified a turn towards practice across the humanities and social sciences, with philosophy, cultural theory, history, sociology, anthropology, and science and technology studies all worthy of mention, such a turn “didn’t seem to concern media studies” (Bergermann et al. 2021: 11). Indeed, that despite various mentions of “mediation” within Schatzki et al. (2001), and despite the intellectual closeness between sociological thought and media studies, this freshly articulated practice turn seemed to be happening without media scholars, or at least outside the purview of others who had begun to document it across an array of connected disciplines.

Fast forward 20 years and media studies appears to be, slowly, catching up. At least, that is, within a German context, courtesy of glossaries, conceptual treatments, or edited collections by Schüttpeitz and Meyer (2017), Gießmann (2018), and Gießmann et al. (2019), this despite work by Couldry (2004) appearing not long after Schatzki et al. (2001). Recent crossover work by European media scholars in the English-language have helped to translate this belated interest in practice, from Ramella et al. (2017) on mobile digital practices, Gherardi (2019) on collective doing, and Genner (2020) on the origins and the intentions of the “turn” itself, to Bergermann et al. (2021) on religion, gender and postcolonialism, and Hirsbrunner (2021) on climate change visualizations. The intention here, however, is not simply or only to add an additional application of practice approaches to studying media, within the English language. Instead, it is to provide an *additive* account of practice itself, using these texts as “signposts” (Genner 2020: 8) on our collective journey.

As the contributions emphasize, this attention towards the practical nature of media – as designed, tested and developed, as well as used “in the wild” – is always necessarily qualified by media’s ability to mediate, that

in, and feedback on, the project through its various stages. Thanks also to Asli Telli Aydemir, Mine Gencil Bek, Hendrik Bender, Max Krüger, Roger Norum and Astrid Wiedmann for their participation in the original workshop.

² These phrases and interests come from two DFG-funded initiatives based at the University of Siegen, Germany to which contributors to this collection are connected: the Locating Media graduate school (GRK 1179) and the Media of Cooperation collaborative research center (SFB 1187).

is “to divide and connect simultaneously” (Bergermann et al. 2021: 9). In other words, through an awareness that tracing media-related practices remains tricky, with the “middle of media itself [seemingly] distributed right across the mix of material, semiotic and personal entities” in which the “location of agency [becomes] hard to pin down” (2021: 9). As Gherardi (2016: 682) suggests, “most practice theories agree on the ingredients of a practice – actions, individuals, contexts, artifacts, rules, symbols, texts, discourses, and embeddedness – but they disagree on the salient feature of each of them.”

Put differently, following both, there must be an acknowledgement that attending to how, and where, media practices occur remains difficult. Contemporary media has an ability to endlessly generate *new* practices, and effortlessly *shift* where practices occur, as Anastasia-Patricia Och finds out in her contribution on YouTube practices, in which the lines between broadcasting and viewing transform and blur. Indeed, that categorizing things as practices at all, if they do not constitute a “knowledgeable doing” (Gherardi 2019: 1), represent a challenge to media scholars faced with platforms that are typically opaque to users, in which “knowledge” of how a media platform operates is arguably critical to how basic “actions” turn into learned practices, not least as media studies “again has turned its attention... to how particular materialities and media infrastructures play a part in structuring what people do with, around, and through media” (Ramella et al. 2017: 6). As Magdalena Götz considers in her participation in an art workshop by a queer-feminist art collective, there are always possibilities to disrupt, and “reorient”, established practices.

What is a Practice+ Approach?

A practice+ approach, then, is an attempt to attend to methodological concerns. Firstly, of acknowledging the *interconnectivity* between practices, at different “levels” (e.g. “micro-social” and “meso-social”), in different locations (e.g. beyond the traditional workplace), and for different users (e.g. of social media platforms). Secondly, of acknowledging the possibilities of studying practice from *multiple perspectives*, whether conceptual, theoretical, political, methodological, or disciplinary. Each contribution, therefore, allows these additional dimensions to be made explicit – surfaced and stated – rather than added as an afterthought or afforded a lesser status in the study of practice. In this *additive spirit* the collection is not intended as a new turn, or a return, and less still a ‘practice 2.0’ but a rearrangement or *agencement* between practice and other elements, in which we establish, and formalize, new connections (Gherardi 2016), deliberately “contaminating” the study of practices (Magaudda and Mora 2019: 2) across various scales (Coulter 2001). To navigate these connections topologically, follow

the special footnotes indicated by circled numbers.^{xy} The contributors to this collection acknowledge that practice does not solely mean human, bodily practice; and nor does a focus on practice necessarily require ignoring phenomena that support, enable, and generate practice. Nevertheless, the contributions point towards ways in which these relations can be alternatively and fruitfully approached, *evidencing* new lines of thinking and doing in the study of practice.

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