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Culture, Terror and Practice in International Relations: An Invitation to Practice Theory

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Abstract

Several IR scholars have claimed recently that 'practice' needs to receive different attention in our daily work, needs to be 'returned' to our theorizing, that practice is a concept under theorized in IR, in sum a turn to practice is what we need. Once again we see the call for a new turn – a practice turn. In this paper we inquire into the question of what IR theorists mean when they call for a (re-) turn to practice. We demonstrate that scholars stress practice, not because they plainly want to focus on world political action (a position that we call a vulgar understanding of practice), but as they see in practice theory a promising new social ontology. Such an ontology, first, helps to re-focus on action, while not falling into the traps of utilitarian or norm-based understandings of action. Second, practice theory as a part of the larger domain of cultural theorizing is a counter-offensive against these tendencies reducing social science and IR to a study of discourses. Third, the ontology of practice theorists helps to re-think some of the major *problematiques* in IR and social science. We are invited to see the relations between agency, practice and orderliness in a new way. We are encouraged to place social change and stability at the centre of research and to re-considerate the material dimensions of our being. Finally, practice theories suggest liberating us from too tight methodological and epistemological clothes, and taking responsibility towards our scholarly practices, instead.

We adopt three strategies to stress these points. First we show how a classification narrative by Andreas Reckwitz can provide us with a map in which we usefully can sort practice theory in. This classification also provides us with a negative backdrop of what practice theory is not, by contrasting it to its culturalist (br)others. Second, we puzzle with the practice theory vocabulary to identify its coherence and multiplicity. We discuss practice-structure relations, change, the 'material' and implications for research practice. Practice theorists, although seeing the social as gaining its stability by routine, differ over there emphasis on complexity and contingency. Finally, as a third strategy, we discuss the illustrative example of new global terrorism as a field of practice, to show how practice theory can be practiced in IR. We do not suggest that practice theoretical research is superior to other ways of doing IR, but emphasize what we might lose, if practice is not woven into IR considerations.

1. Introduction: (Re-)Turning once again: Practice and International Relations

> "During the last 20 years the social sciences have partly been replaced by an interdisciplinary (or non-disciplinary) complex called 'cultural studies'. Moreover, these cultural studies have become the domain of a specific intellectual orientation, i.e. a sort of radical and comprehensive 'social constructionism'. I think it is time for a sort of counteroffensive from the side of the social sciences. In this counter-offensive the 'constructionist' and 'discursive' aspect should not be denied; it is rather one of the strengths of the social-scientific tradition that it has always itself contributed to an analysis of such social construction, but it had not done this in the relativist and irrationalist way in which poststructuralist cultural studies tend to do it. For such a counter-offensive we need the integration of the discursive dimension into the social scientific analysis of macrosocial processes, and hence a strong interest in intellectual history, but not a dissolution of social analysis in mere discourse analysis" (Joas 2004: 310)

> What is a theory, if not the articulation of practice? And what is an epistemology, if not a discourse that elucidates that relationship? (de Certeau 1995:313)

'Practice' is a buzzword in International Relations. A good introductory course to IR theory is usually called the 'theory and practice of international relations' and when we refer to the 'doings' of politicians or states we call it 'practice'. What seemed to be so commonsensical what we mean when we utter "practice", has been recently challenged by a range of scholars who claim that practice needs to receive different attention in our daily work, that it needs to be returned to our theorizing, that practice as a concept is under theorized in IR and that a turn to practice is what we need. Once again we see the call for a new turn – a practice turn.

Iver Neumann reminded us in 2002 that the linguistic turn was never only about discourse, text and speech, but "involved from the beginning a turn to practices" (Neumann 2002:627). He argued that institutional change came out of focus in IR, and that studying these changes should be done by studying "social action as such". In New European Security Studies scholars such as Didier Bigo (e.g. 2002) and Jef Huysmans (e.g. 2006) have argued for a focus on the routine practices by which security is manufactured on an everyday basis. As Huysmans argues exclusively discursive understandings have neglected the implementation site of policies and sidelined the major role routinized technocratic practices, technologies and techniques play. Security is to be located also in security techniques, "it is embedded in training, routine and

technical knowledge and skills, as well as artefacts" (Huysmans 2006: 9). Emanuel Adler (2005) called for revising community conceptions proliferating in IR, in arguing that "most of the transnational communities described in the IR literature […] are in fact species of communities of practice". (Adler 2005:16) *Communities of practice* should be understood as developed in practice theory, as mediating "between state, individuals, and human agency, on the one hand, and social structures and systems, on the other" (Adler 2005:15). While Adler argues more or less to add practice communities as an additional entity in the study of international relations, others have argued for breaking with scholastic thought and turning to practical reason instead.

It has been argued that the discipline of IR should be understood as a community of practice, bound together by a distinct set of scientific practices as described in practice-oriented science studies (Lebow 2007, Büger and Gadinger 2007). Scholars such as Friedrich Kratochwil (2007), James Bohmann (2002), David Owen (2002) or Gunther Hellmann (2001) have argued that IR's epistemology should consequently be centred around 'practice'. Not only are IR's (epistemological) practices contingent, but scholars should follow the lead of 'practical reasoning', acknowledging for contingency, time, space and situations. In a similar vain, IR's neighbouring science have called for a new focus on practice: Influentially 'Perestroikan strawmen' Bent Flyvbjerg (2001) has plead for turning political science into *phronetic research* (see the related discussion in Topper 2006 and Schram and Caterino 2006). Similar voices are to be found in policy and organization studies arguing for the usefulness of relying on practical reason to study public administration and organizations (e.g. Wagenaar and Cook 2003, Miller 2004).

What do scholars mean when they talk in such glorious ways about 'practice'? And why should we seriously consider these arguments to read, think, interpret or explain global politics in a different way? These are the questions we explore in this article. Yet, we do not intend to produce another 'plea' to turn to practice, or to administer a 'practice therapy' for IR. Rather we shall demonstrate what scholars mean when they refer to 'practice theory' – the common reference point in all of these studies. We shall situate the recent calls to listen to practice theory in the social theory landscape and explore why and how this bundle of perspectives on practice can enrich our understanding of global politics.

We set off by, firstly, situating practice theory in the landscape of social and IR theory. Instead of following a single author or practice theorists dogmatically, we shall demonstrate the heterogeneity and plurality of approaches that might be subsumed under the practice theory label. In relying on several authors that have advocated for a practice turn in history and sociology, we secondly, sketch what kind of social ontology the heterogeneous bundle of practice theories has worked out and in what way this involves different strategies of knowing.

Practice theories are well placed in what social theorists call *cultural theorizing*, theorizing that attempts to make sense about the social by unravelling the systems of thought by which action becomes meaningful. Yet, practice theories understand themselves as neither post-structuralist nor as constructivist theories, as we have come to called them in IR. Rather, practice theories attempt to work in an ontological in-between. Consequently practice approaches cope with the agency-structure *problematique(s)* quite differently. By their focus on everyday phenomena, concrete material situations, doubt, uncertainty and the creativity of agency they advocate for a different understanding of social change. And by conceiving the knower (the social science analyst) as being situated in a 'field of practice' they attempt to work in a different methodology, understanding science as a dialogue between the knowing subject and its object. Epistemology is then a way to meaningful order this dialogue between knowledge and its (epistemological) objects.

To highlight how such a perspective on the social can enrich our understanding of global politics we thirdly move from description to analysis, from a negative to a positive heuristic in turning our eyes on the problem field of global terrorism. We attempt to show how the ontology offered by practice approaches and the different strategies of knowing they evoke can provide a true added value for the study of global politics. Terrorism cannot be grasped as a primitive ontological entity, but rather as a field of practice which refers to the fluid and dynamic character of terrorism as a mesh of practices and orders.

We conclude by a summary of the challenges re-thinking practice pose on our being social scientists.

2. Practice theory: What is the recent 'practice talk' about?

The scope of practice theory

In this section we elaborate what can be understood by 'practice theory'. We adopt two strategies to do so. First we will try to posit practice theories in the broader field of cultural theorizing and contrast them to other families of theories that are better known in the contemporary IR discourse. Nonetheless, any of these boundaries between families are less natural but free-floating, rather set politically, strategically. As we conceive of intellectual turf wars as rather unproductively – or no more helpful than as a first approximation –, we secondly enter the 'core' of practice thought, by discussing the assumptions and problem solutions that give them coherence and make them "hang together".

According to Theodore Schatzki, who is alongside with Andreas Reckwitz one of the major thinkers of the recent generation in practice theory, "practice accounts are joined in the belief that such phenomena as knowledge, meaning, human activity, science, power, language, social institutions, and historical transformation occur within and are aspects of *the field of practices*. (Schatzki 2001: 2, italics in original). Consequently, Schatzki suggests that "a theory is of the practice variety, when it either 1) proffers a general and abstract account of practices, either the field of practices or some subdomain thereof, or 2) refers whatever it offers to a general and abstract account of the field of practices" (Schatzki 2001:3-4). In this sense, practice theories form "a family of theories" (Reckwitz 2002a: 244), which differ in certain ways from other classical types of social theory and offer a new social-theoretical vocabulary. The notion of 'family', however, raises awareness of the multiplicity of practice approaches, which do hang together, but do not form a unified clear-cut concept.

In IR, practice theory has been primarily associated with the theoretical work of John Dewey, late Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu. Pierre Bourdieu's work has meanwhile maybe influenced IR the most, given that several studies rely on his concepts of 'practice', 'field', 'habitus' and 'capital'.[1] However, we should not equate practice theory with Bourdieu, or maybe more importantly we should not restrict the practice vocabulary to a Bourdieuan one. De facto, IR scholars have shown that other vocabularies of practice might be more helpful for research in IR.[2]

If we turn our eye to two recently published edited volumes (Schatzki et al. 2001 and Spiegel 2005), which are meant to mark the 'practice turn' in social theory and history, we recognize that there is de facto a wide range of scholars working under such a heading. Although such a list by nature is open ended (and not systematic), it would include contemporaries such as French pragmatists Boltanski and Thevenot, critical science studies scholars Latour, Knorr Cetina, Star-Leigh, Rouse and Pickering, cultural theorists such as Swidler, ethnomethodologists such as Lynch, management theorists such as Wengger and social theorists such as Turner or Butler. While these names might initially sound less familiar in IR, the authors that are presented as founders or first generation practice theorists indeed are: Besides already mentioned Dewey, late Foucault and Bourdieu, Baumann, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Joas, Deleuze, Taylor, Garfinkel, de Certeau, and Giddens are the major philosophical resources in these discussions. And indeed if we consider for instance the roles Swidler's definitions of culture, Giddens structuration theory or Foucaultian governmentality has gained in IR there seems hardly a point to call for a practice

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1 Do we have to give reference to this? Well it is, for instance the work of Ashley, Huysmans, Bigo, Guzzini and others.

2 Such as Neumann's (2002) usage of Ann Swidler and Michel de Certeau, Adler's (2005) usage of Etienne Wenger's work or those works that rely on Foucaultian governmentality (e.g. Neumann and Sending 2006), Bruno Latours actor-network theory (e.g. Walters 2002) or assemblage theory (Dillon 200X).

turn in IR. Nonetheless, as we will show in the following, contemporary practice theorists conduct a specific reading of these authors and highlight distinctive features – features that have not reached IR well in the majority.

Cultural (Br)others: Constructivisms, Post-structuralisms and Practice theories

If we follow Andreas Reckwitz (2002a, 2002b, 2006), who has provided the most consistent intellectual history of the emergence of practice theory, theories of the practice kind are well situated in the 'cultural turn' permeating social theorizing since the 1960s. This wave of theorizing – creating what might be called, according to Peter Wagner (2001), 'imaginaries of the second crisis of modernity' or more conventionally 'theories of high modernity' – has been a flow of increasingly thinking the social as culture and of explaining human action and social order in reference to shared systems of meaning (for a discussion of and contributions to the cultural turn in IR see Lapid and Kratochwil 1996). Although an understanding of practice theory may well be gathered through reading its anchorage in classical sociology (e.g. Mannheim and Durkheim), Wittgensteinian language-games and Heidegger's early social philosophy, practice theories have developed on the ground of and in arguing against other recent culturalist thinking. Hence, as a first approximation we like to introduce the practice family by contrasting it to its 'others' in culturalist theorizing. We do so in relying on a classification system introduced by Reckwitz.

Reckwitz operates with a classificatory system in which he basically differentiates between three major ideal type variant of modern social theory: first, purpose-oriented theory of action, relying on a utilitarian actor model, as given by the *homo oeconomicus*; second, norm-oriented theories of action based on the model of a *homo sociologicus*, and third, cultural theorizing. The first type is contemporarily to be found in rational choice theory and the latter shapes the majority of 'constructivist' theorizing. Both former models (norm-based and utilitarian models) are to be seen insufficient, as these, firstly, restrict the problem of social order to the Hobbesian problem of coordination between individuals. Such an understanding however does not reach an explanation of collective patterns of action. Secondly, a model of the homo sociologicus suggests that the level of norms, may it be in form of sanctioned social expectations or in form of internalized norm orientations, is the level of the last instance which makes understandable the existence of collective patterns of action. Such a perspective however cannot explain the norms themselves or even attempt to explain these – in quite a similar way as the problem the homo oeconomicus faces for interests. Reckwitz, hence, sharply contrast those two with the third: In difference to the homo *oeconomicus* and *sociologicus*, culturalist theorizing does not see the problem of social order rooted in the problem of coordinating actions, solvable for instance by underlying normative rules (homo sociologicus). Instead, cultural theories need to be understood as these

theories that focus on what enables agents to suppose the world as being ordered and as such gain the capacity to act (Reckwitz 2002a: 288). Hence, "the newness of the cultural theories consists in explaining and understanding actions by reconstructing the symbolic structures of knowledge which enable and constrain the agents to interpret the world according to certain forms, and to behave in certain ways. Social order then does not appear as a product of compliance of mutual expectations, but embedded in collective cognitive symbolic structures, in a 'shared knowledge' which enables a socially shared way of ascribing meaning in the world" Reckwitz (2002a: 245). Then, cultural theories differ from the others in how they grasp the conditions of human action and social order.

Table 1: Three ideal types of modern social theory[3]

	Primary elements of meaning	*Behaviour as a problem of explanation*
Homo oeconomicus	Interests and beliefs	Individual actions
Homo sociologicus	Normative order	Intersubjective coordination of action
Cultural theories	Collective knowledge orders; cognitive-symbolic orderliness	Repetitive patterns of action

While the focus on shared knowledge is the common ground, cultural theorizing can be specified and distinguished by where shared knowledge is located and what hence forms the 'centre of gravity' of theorizing. Reckwitz' classificatory system argues for distinguishing between three ideal type sub-sets, mentalism (structuralism and phenoemenology) and textualism (post-structuralism, inter-subjectivism) and practice theory (practicism?).

Reckwitz classificatory system gives us a useful tool to sort and order the contemporary social theory landscape. Transferred to IR we indeed also conventionally distinguish between the *homo sociologicus* and the *homo oeconomicus* as presented in the most recent debates between constructivism and rationalism. However, within IR the borders between the *homo sociologicus* and *culturalist theorizing* might be seen as more free-floating. While such a sharp distinction could be made in the eighties with the 'dissidents in international thought' movement on the horizon, today, we would feel more uneasy to sort what is going on in IR constructivism in such a clear way. IR's constructivists – and indeed the label of 'IR constructivism' itself, rarely used in such a way in

[3] Cp. Reckwitz 2004.

other disciplines is a proof of that itself – have developed several hybrids between the strands Reckwitz describes, whether this is for the good of IR theory or not.[4]

Reckwitz classificatory system is, however, explicitly meant to present ideal types for the purpose of conceptual clarification and hence some care is necessary when put into the realm of 'real authors'. Let us instead continue reading Reckwitz's classification narrative to see how he describes the differences arising inside culturalist theorizing and what differentiates 'practicism' from 'mentalism' and 'textualism'.

Mentalism

Reckwitz refers to mentalism as this category of theorizing which locates shared knowledge in the mental, in the human mind and its cognitions. Radical constructivism, the phenomenology of Schütz or Husserl, and the structuralism of de Saussure or Levy-Strauss centre their theorizing on the cognitive systems of the mind, which is seen as the pivotal device of knowledge and meaning structures. Hence in the frame of mentalist theorizing the social is to be found in the 'head' of human beings.

In structuralism, human behaviour is an 'effect' of symbolic structures in the 'unconscious' mind and the social and the psychological become largely identical. While structuralism is largely the objectivist version of mentalism, phenomenology is its subjectivist brother. While still locating the social in the mind, the phenemenologies of Schütz and Husserl argue to take over a subjective perspective in reconstructing sequences of mental acts of consciousness "which are located 'inside' and are directed in the form of phenomenological 'intentionality' at outward objects to which the consciousness ascribes meanings" (Reckwitz 2002a: 248). Hence phenomenology turns structuralism upside down in focussing not on unconscious cognitive structures, but on the sequence of intentional acts in consciousness.

In IR neither phenemology nor structuralism has ever gained a strong foothold. If we however conduct a 'friendly' reading of IR literature, we might well locate here IR's early literature on 'belief systems', 'operational codes' and 'images' (see Sullivan 2002:chapter 2) and the more recent literature on ideas. While we clearly face hybridical research here, as these were largely attempts to frame shared knowledge in rationalist and/or positivistic terms (Laffey and Weldes 1997), the 'ideas matters' literature has tried to conceptualise shared knowledge, as 'beliefs'. Yee (1996: 69), summarizing the literature, for instance, speaks of "ideas and beliefs" as "mental events that entail thought". The key problem for this IR scholarship has hence been, as Keohane and Goldstein (1993: 27) have put it "that students of the role of ideas must interpret what is in people's heads".

[4] In, for instance, mixing notions of culture with a rationalism or positivistic research designs.

Textualism

Accounts Reckwitz refers to as 'textualist' take rather the opposite stance to mentalism. They locate symbolic structures not 'inside' in the mind, but 'outside' in symbols, discourse, communication or 'texts'. Reckwitz locates poststructuralism and cultural semiotics here associated with authors such as Geertz, early Foucault, Derrida, Riceour, Barthes.[5] These approaches centre their analysis of structures of meaning on the 'extrasubjective'.

For textualists, "'Mental' qualities, then, turn out to be nothing more than very specific *concepts* within discourse *about* something which is described as mental" (Reckwitz 2002a: 248, emphasis in original). Foucault' 'archaeology of knowledge', for instance, proposes that discourse is not to be treated as a mere 'document' of any mental qualities 'behind' it, but, instead, as a sequence of external events in which symbolic structures are manifested. Knowledge is an inherent quality of discursive events. For Foucault then discourses define subjects. Geertz's 'symbolistic anthropology' has a similar tendency. In regarding 'culture as a text', his 'thick description' of the cultural, does not refer to 'what is in people's head', but to the symbolic quality of material objects.

If we recall Joas diagnosis that social science has been partly replaced by a complex called 'cultural studies' that primarily focuses on discourse analysis, we might tend to make the same judgement about IR today. What started with the 'dissidents in international thought' movement, these days, at least in European IR, a majority of scholars associates themselves with the above mentioned authors: Numerous approaches have been presented to understand the international as discursive, symbolic space and argued for studying "symbolic techniques" (Laffey and Weldes 1997), "representational practice" (Doty 1997), "discoursive nodal points" (Diez 1999), "speech acts of security" (Waever), or "discourses of danger" (Campbell 1992) to mention only some of the recent proposals. What all these poststructuralist accounts have in common is that their "critical and political understanding of discourse implies" that "there is no place outside of language" as Lene Hansen (2006: 213) has programmatically proclaimed.

Practice theory

The crux about Reckwitz classification is now, that practice theories neither locate the social in the mind nor in extra-subjective discourses of symbols systems, nor in interaction, but in practice. Practice theories break up with such a dichotomy of mind/structure. By their emphasis on practice they stress that the social is to be found both partly in the mind, as humans are carriers

[5] Reckwitz also adds Habermasian intersubjectivity and Luhmann's open system theory, which we do not discuss here for avoiding further complication. See Reckwitz 2002a, 2002b

of practice, and partly in orders, as practice forms orders. As has been in IR maybe best argued by Neumann (2002) practice theories break with the either/or. They should not be put in opposition to mentalists or discourse analysts, but be read as a way to integrate their insights.
Given the priority of the ontological entity 'practice', how do practice theorists conceive of this? In the first place practices are a routinized type of behaviour. The definition given by Schatzki has meanwhile received some prominence. Schatzki (1996:89) understands by social practices a "temporally unfolding and spatially dispersed nexus of doings and sayings". Hence practices are a set (a nexus) of linguistic (sayings) and non-linguistic (doings) actions that have some stability over time and space. That practices are composed of both sayings and doings entails that analysis is concerned about both practical activity and its representations. Schatzki (1996) further distinguishes between dispersed practices and integrative practices. Dispersed practices are basic units and refer to examples such as describing, explaining, following rules, evaluating or imagining. To perform such a practice requires basically understanding. Explaining, for instance, requires understanding of how to carry out an explanation. 'Integrative practices' refer to "the more complex practices found in and constitutive of particular domains of social life" (Schatzki 1996: 98). Schatzki refers to cooking practices, farming practices or business practices as examples. Integrative practices involve dispersed practices, some times in a very distinct manner.
Schatzki (2003: 191) adds that these organized human activities are an open-ended set of actions "linked by pools of understandings (pertaining to action), a collection of rules (explicit formulations), and a 'teleoaffective structure' (a range of normativized, hierarchically ordered ends, projects, and tasks, to varying degrees allied with normativized emotions.)"

Reckwitz' (2002:249) definition seems even more helpful in this regard, as he stresses the several elements that get interconnected to one another in practices: "forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, 'things' and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge." Hence, "a practice is […] a routinized way in which bodies are moved, objects are handled, subjects are treated, things are described and the world is understood. To say that practices are 'social practices' then is indeed a tautology: A practice is social, as it is a 'type' of behaving and understanding that appears at different locales and at different points of time and is carried out by different body/minds." (Reckwitz 2002:249-250).
All these definitions seem to be quite general or high on the ladder of abstraction. Nonetheless we can conclude from them that the term practices, refers to a mix of several elements, different kinds of activities and knowledges, as well as things and objects. Practices are never either linguistic or non-linguistic but always a combination of them. And they are socially organized.

The social can then be understood, in contrast to textualist and mentalist accounts, as a field of embodied, materially interwoven practices centrally organized around shared practical understandings, a praxeology (Schatzki 2001: 3). Practice theories have put forward different terms to grasp the interwoven character of practices. While Schatzki uses the terms "web of practice" or "field of practice" as well as the more developed term of a "mesh", others have come to grasp social practice by terms such as 'field' (Bourdieu), 'culture' (e.g. de Certeau, Swidler), 'assemblages' (Deleuze) or 'actor-network' (Latour, Law, Callon).
While we explain these issues more in depth in the succinct section, it should have become clear that the concept of practice should not be taken as a synonym for action. Practice evokes more then understood in vulgar forms of practice as referring to practitioners actions – not every doing is a practice. In contrast to 'action', practice points to a socially organized form of behaviour that binds space and time. Practice theories suggest a distinct ontological vocabulary.

3. Puzzling with practice theory

Reckwitz' classification system is a useful map for navigating in the jungle of contemporary cultural theorizing. So far it should have become clear that practice theories should be contrasted with vulgar ideas of practice-as-action and with the classical utilitarian and norm-based actor models. Further, practice theories are based on the prime assumptions of culturalist theorizing, but differ from other more well known mentalist and textualist accounts. Let us now take a closer look at the key concepts of practice approaches and the related understandings of subject and structure, body and the material, and knowing and acting.

3.1 Addressing social science problematiques

Practice theories have many parallels to textualist theorizing, for instance in stressing the importance of language. Nonetheless practice theorists attempt to cope with issues they find problematic in texutalism differently. Most notably practice theorists argue that in textualism insufficient attention is paid to the structuring capacity of agents and to the contingency of textual or discoursive structures. Hence practice theorists try to rethink agent-structure relations and offer a different account of social change conceived as the interplay between routine and crisis. Further, textualists have reduced the material to a plain symbolic dimension, hence also the relation between the material (in the form of artefacts and the body) and the social need reconsideration. Finally, the practice ontology induces a different epistemology based on the understanding of science as practice. In sum, the ontological priority given to the "field of

practice" opens a range of options for coping with some of the consistent *problematiques* in social science (and IR) theorizing differently. Yet, we do not argue that practice theories have solved these *problematiques*, rather they offer us different ontological and epistemological ways of puzzling. Hence, as a second strategy to explore practice theories, we shall puzzle a bit with practice approaches. Our objective is not to solve these issues, but by relating practice theories to these *problematiques* to explore the core, the "hanging together" of these, and, also, the major controversial issues among theorists of practice. The purpose is to provide a sketch of the practice theoretical programme and to discuss how they might illuminate IR – and our discussuin should be valued in this light.

3.2 The Orderliness of the Social: Meso-Solutions and the Practice-Structure Problematique

> "Not 'society', but 'social action' and the emerging types of social order are the object of sociology." (Hans Joas 2004:309)

To recall Schatzki's (2001) summarizing definition of practice theories, this family of theories attempt to conceptualize major social phenomenon through the concept of a 'field of practices'. As we stressed already different notions to speak about that field of practice have been suggested – notions such as 'culture', 'mesh', 'assemblages' or 'field'. Hence, in difference to theories of radical contingency, practice theorists assume that there is some degree of orderliness in the social and something stable can be identified. In IR we have come to call this orderliness 'structures' and/or 'institutions'. The main trigger of discussing the relation between actors, institutions and structures in IR has been the infamous 'agency-structure debate' – a debate that served many scholars as entrance gate to introduce 'fresh' ontologies. So let us do the same and use IR's agency-structure debate as an initial entrance gate,[6] to see what practice theories have to say about the stability of the social and how their take differs from what has been suggested in IR so far.

IR's Agency-Structure Debate: An Opportunity Missed ?

In IR the most direct influence of practice theorists, so far – despite epistemological considerations (see 3.4) – might be conceptions of the 'international' as a field of practice. For instance, scholars having familiarized themselves with Giddens structuration theory – most influentially Wendt (1987, 1992) and Cerny (2000) – argued for an understanding of the international system (structure) as formed by the interplay of practices. In retrospective the 1990s

[6] Although some scepticism needs to be raised how disciplinary and delimiting such a strategy is.

'agent-structure debate' in IR offered a certain opportunity to negotiate a social ontology for IR that prevails over conventional dualisms, retains from a mechanistic worldview in which it is whatsoever causality between agency and structure to be identified and considers practice systematically. Although Giddens' 'theory of structuration' was as a central reference in IR, how Giddens' insights on practice were adapted in IR rather demonstrates that it was an opportunity missed.[7]

Giddens (1984) central concern has been the interrelation between agents and practices on one side, and structures, institutions and social systems on the other. He proposes a 'duality' of agency and structure, which means that he conceived of social systems as being reproduced by human agents, while generative structures (rules and resources) are dynamic elements enabling and constraining social action (Giddens 1984:25). It is no overstatement to conclude that the 'theory of structuration' is one of the first grand-theoretical accounts which succeeded in placing recurrent social practices in the centre of social theory and to weave insights of a sociological micro-level into the consideration of structural concerns. Although practice was so central for Giddens, it is surprising that IR authors have referred rather exclusively to the mutually constitutive relationship between agency and structure, but have largely forgotten agency as well as practices. While the relative absence of agency in Wendt's social theory, as well as in the agent-structure debate generally has been criticized (Wight 1999; Herborth 2004)[8], the absence of practice and the missing debate about the relationship between practices and structures have not provoked a wider critique in IR.

As one of the few voices raising such a criticism, Roxanne Lynn Doty (1997: 376) has laid out the underestimated nature of agency as well as the missing consideration of practices in IR's agency-structure debate. For Doty it is an irony that nearly all IR theorists discussing the agent-structure *problematique* assert significance to practice, but hesitate to give analytical priority to the very thing that drives this debate – *practice*.

Doty criticizes the restricted and conservative understanding in this literature to "tame" practice and to control its unruliness and instability. Practice needs to be understood as a term that stresses contingency. In Doty's words (1997: 376), "effectively addressing the issue of practice must entail an acceptance of its indeterminacy. It must entail a decentering of practice. To decenter practice requires an appreciation of the intrinsically ambiguous and open-ended nature of practice". Doty's critique rightfully emphasizes the 'play' of practices, which cannot be essentialized – yet, her own suggestion on how to cope with this indeterminacy seems less

[7] See the similar criticisms of Suganami 1999 who attempts to liberate structurationism from Wendt's frame. And the criticism of Doty we will discuss shortly below.

[8] For Herborth (2004:76) Wendt hence fails to explain social change adequately and falls finally back in a structuralist bias to "culture all the way down".

convincing, as her understanding of practice falls back into a textualist understanding of practices as a plain 'signifier of meaning and representation', a view as discussed for the case of textualism underpins a tendency towards a macro-perspective, namely discourses.[9]

Practice Theories and the 'Holy Grail'

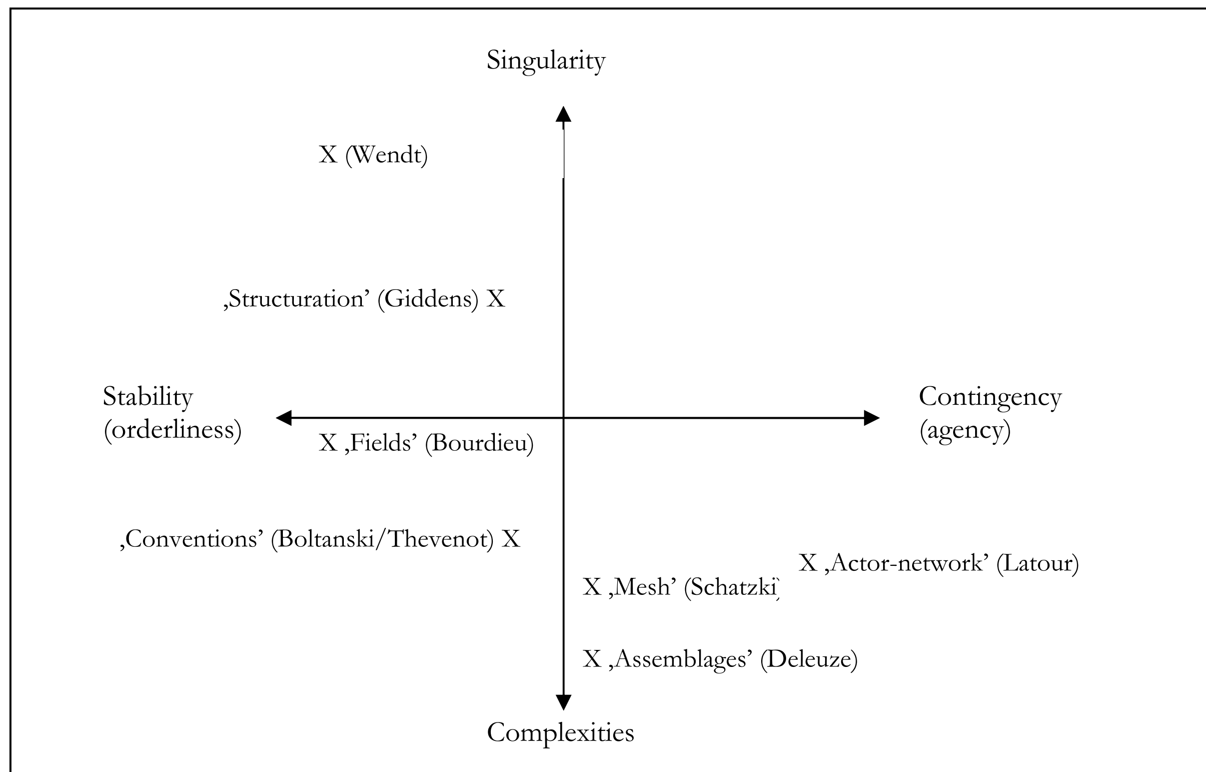
Practice theorist's prime concern is on the meso level, on practice. In refuting in a similar way as Doty that any a-priori distinction between micro and macro-object can be done on ontological grounds, they focus on how practice serves as a vehicle to create micro- and macro-objects. Taking practice as the smallest unit of analysis the question is then how practice can form more stable enduring patterns, an orderliness that is similar to what IR scholars have come to call structure or institutions. The relation between practice and orderliness in turn has nonetheless provoked wide debates. As Berard (2005: 197) has nicely coined it "the relation between practices and structures has proved to be something of a holy grail for social theorists". Not surprisingly, then several strategies have been outlined to find 'the holy grail' – an adequate conception of the interplay of practice and structure: If we consider a representative set of holy grail searchers in practice theory, we find more diversity then unity. Nonetheless, we suggest that we can describe the different conceptions along a matrix of complexity, contingency, orderliness and singularity. Practice theorists share that they want to weave macro- and micro-sociological insights into each other, yet they differ how they place emphasis on contingency and complexity (Graph 1 provides an initial guide of thinking this way).

From the viewpoint of conventional constructivist IR scholarship, conceptions such as those outlined by Giddens or Bourdieu might be 'fast food', if compared to the notions of liquidity, hybridity, chaos and complexity underlying the work of Deleuze, Latour and others. Let us now consider a selection of the 'grails' offered in practice theory,[10] and how they relate singularity and complexity and between orderliness and contingency. We will start in the upper left (fast food) corner, move to the lower left and end in the lower right corner of our graph.

[9] "Practices are generally embedded in discourse(s) which enable particular meaning(s) to be signified. However, discourses do not mechanically or instrumentally produce practices, nor do practices mechanically or instrumentally reproduce a particular discourse. Rather there is a dimension of indeterminacy or 'play' to practices. What they signify is never straightforward. Moreover, practices, because of their inextricable link with meaning, have an autonomy which cannot be reduced to either the intentions, will motivations or interpretations of choice-making subjects or to the constraining and enabling mechanisms of objective but socially constructed structures." (Doty 1997: 377)

[10] Several wings of the practice theoretical programme we do not discuss at all, without having any justification for this. Most notably Foucault is notoriously absent in this paper, but also the discussion of Rouse, Turner, Butler, Lynch and so on. But this, however needs to be left to another paper.

Graph 1: Practice theories and orderliness



Fast Food? Bourdieu and Giddens

Certainly two practice accounts have received the most attention in the last years (not only in IR but also in sociology): Both, Giddens in his structuration theory, as well as Bourdieu in his field theory have put much foil in re-thinking the relation between practices and structures. While Giddens has not provided a very clear conception of practice (Barnes 2001) -- and was criticized because of its eclecticism and its inability to inspire an ongoing research program (Berard 2005: 200), early Bourdieu has placed practice on the center-stage.

Bourdieu's work that in contrast to Giddens' has been always more interested in empirically research than in the development of ontological vocabularies. Nonetheless over his several empirical contributions he has fine grained his conceptualizations, originally outlined in *Outline of a Theory of Practice*.[11] Bourdieu's key concepts are that of 'capital', 'habitus', 'field' and 'practice'. While his earlier works where more clearly focused on practice and the role of practical reasons and knowledges, in his later works he became much more focused on fields (Warde 2004, King 2000). The idea of a field is the main concept, by which Bourdieu came to grasp the relation between agents, practices and structures. In contrast to Giddens who tends to see society as an organic whole (de Landa 2006:9-10), Bourdieu moved towards acknowledging the multiplicity of

[11] Nonetheless, Bourdieu has been heavily criticised for not formalising his conceptualizations enough, which directly concerns the relation between fields and practices.

orders, without assuming a kind of 'master' order, such as 'society'. Order for him is hence much more dynamic. For Bourdieu the social is a combination of different, varying and overlapping fields. Fields, which are structured by an illusio, by the rules of the game played in the distinct field. Agents play in these fields and attempt to maximize power. His central concern has however not been the single subject, but the struggles between agents in a distinct field about their position to each other and hence, a struggle about power relations, or to use Bourdieus vocabulary 'capital'.

The "workhorse in his theory" (Berard 2005: 203) for grasping the relation between structures and practices is the idea of 'habitus'. With 'habitus', Bourdieu refers to a double character (King 2000). Habitus conditions the practices of agents in a group/class/field, while mutually the practices of these agents stabilize and reproduce the habitus, as well as the structures of the fields, which in turn both condition them. Bourdieu succeeds in explaining (in a conflict theoretical tradition), how agents pursue their interests against other agents in a field, by trying to improve their own volume of capital volume.

However, Bourdieu has been criticized for his structuralist (and often objectivist) connotations. With this criticism we move closer to the lower right corner. Hans Joas for instance criticizes the inability of the field theory to explain whether agents act differently in particular fields and to clarify what the differences between the fields identified de facto are. For Joas the reason lies in the matter that Bourdieu follows always the same model of action and leaves the term of the field theoretically underdeveloped (Joas/Knöbl 2004: 545). Warde (2004), providing a summary of criticism on the concept of fields, stresses that concept has too many defects, that it is overstretched. Further criticism has been raised against the concept of the habitus (e.g. King 2000): Bourdieu has not much to say how agents are able in their flexible scope to change the power structures of their conditioning habitus. Indeed, Bourdieu stresses the permanent struggles of agents in the fields which stabilize the structures, but says nothing about the possibilities of agents breaking out of these situations. Hence, Bourdieu's combination of practices and structures (over-)accents the stabilizing elements of social order.

The majority of the (French) scholars, we suggest to place in the lower right corner, base their alternatives in one way or the other on such a criticism of Bourdieu. We shall shortly sketch some of these alternatives: First, Schatzkis 'site ontology' directly setting up on a critique of Bourdieu, second, other authors associated to contemporary 'assemblage theory' and thirdly those 'lower right' representatives relying on notions of 'culture'. The latter two differ from Giddens, Bourdieu, and Schatzki in the way they present their argument: their thoughts are based on a general skepticism towards any attempt to develop a large scale social ontology, and, instead, argue for a 'basic' ontological vocabulary that enables empirical research.

Schatzki's site ontology

As one of the practice theorists that has developed a complex ontological vocabulary – but certainly not as well-received as Giddens or Bourdieu – Schatzki has criticized Bourdieu for his over-emphasis of orderliness and his tendency to singularity. Schatzki proposes to see the site of any social life as a 'mesh of practices and orders', or 'arrangements'. His outline of the relationship between practices and orders is of a very dynamic and open-ended character. He criticizes Bourdieu for his over-unification of the social by assuming in a wholist conception large-scale integrated units (fields). Instead, Schatzki stresses that practices, arrangements, and practice-arrangement meshes are intricately interlaced, forming among other things, nets of meshes and confederations of nets (Schatzki 2003: 195). At their widest expanse, "they form an immensely complex overall nexus of practices and arrangements that connect, overlap, and interpenetrate in a labyrinthine, unsystematic, and contingent fashion. This immensely complex nexus is the overall site of human coexistence at any moment or durée of time." (Schatzki 2003: 195). Schatzki (2002: 152) criticizes Bourdieu's usage of practices which are still assigned a secondary role in his account. For Schatzki, practices are open and temporally unfolded; while in Bourdieu's account practices lose their twofold character as integrative and dispersed, because of the packaged organization of practices into the structure of habitus.

With Schatzki we indeed find an account for which complexity, contingency and chaos is of uttermost importance. Yet, as some of the quotes highlight, in developing this ontology, he moves into the direction of a 'poetics' of the social, in which formulations and definitions are more based on aesthetic grounds of justification. While we might want to discover more of Schatzki's universe, at the present state – while we find his definition of practices helpful – his arguments on orderliness will be more of interest to the social theorist, than to the IR scholar interested in guidance for his empirical research. Something similar might be said about the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, who in a comparative way as Schatzki develop an ontology that breaks with many of our assumptions of the social and stresses its chaotic, hybridical, fluid nature.

Assemblages

However, in contrast to Schatzki, the Deleuzian vocabulary has already inspired a good amount of empirical research, and scholars have coped with its termini relatively pragmatically (Markus and Sakka 2006). Most notably practice oriented scholars[12] have picked up the concept of

[12] such as Paul Rabinow, Georg E. Markus, Manuel de Landa, Aihwa Ong, and Stephen Collier, partly in security studies Michael Dillon

'assemblage'. The idea of 'assemblage' is again to conceptualize order in a new way. Although interpretations differ, for Markus and Sakka (2006: 102) the term assemblage "seems structural, an object with the materiality and stability of the classic metaphors of structure, but the intent in its aesthetic uses is precisely to undermine such ideas of structure" Instead of offering anything stable, "it generates enduring puzzles about 'process' and 'relationship'. […] Whoever employs it does so with a certain tension, balancing, and tentativeness where the contradictions between the ephemeral and the structural, and between the structural and the unstably heterogeneous create almost a nervous condition for analytic reason." In its pragmatic usage assemblage then denotes a "contingent ensemble of diverse practices and things that is divided along the axes of territoriality and deterritorialization. Particular assemblages of technology and politics not only create their own spaces, but also give diverse values to the practices and actors thus connected to each other" (Ong 2005: 338). In a similar way as Bourdieus 'field', assemblage points to conflict and instability in an order, but yet without assuming that anything temporarily fixed (stable) can be identified. Phenomena such as an assemblage of genetic knowledge, expertise in central banks, cities and organisations have already been studies in using the assemblage metaphor (see Collier and Ong 2006 and de Landa 2006).
Similar to the concept of Assemblage – as it highlights the synchrony of technology and politics and wants to describe contemporary modernity, without relying on a modernist vocabulary – is the idea of 'actor-networks' as developed by Bruno Latour, Michel Callon and John Law. In assuming that the world achieves its stability by semiotic networks woven between diverse actants (humans and non-humans), these scholars have stressed that research needs to follow the actants in their practices of weaving and stabilizing these relationist networks (Latour 2006, see also our discussion of actor-network theory in section 3.3). Both 'assemblage' as well as 'actor-network' assumes that there is no essence to these entities, but only relations constantly woven and re-woven.

New French Pragmatists

A comparable – but maybe less fuzzy (which is however a matter of taste) – perspective is taken by the new French Pragmatists Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot (see also the work of Peter Wagner and Michèle Lamont and the many similarities that exist to authors such as Joseph Rouse). Boltanski and Thevenot put the Deweyan notion of 'situations' to the fore, and speak of the social gaining stability by what they call 'conventions'. For them, categories such as 'norms' and 'rules' gain there importance by being constantly re-enacted in (material and social) situations in its temporality. The prime question is then how and why there is similarity across diverse situations. Boltanski and Thevenot focus on situation of 'disputes' – situations marked through

uncertainty, doubt and the need to achieve an agreement or coordination. Hence, the centre of interest is, as Wagner (2001a: 107) details in relying upon Thevenot (1990:39-44), “the individual’s uncertainty about the identification of the situation and the interpretative effort that is required to determine, together with others, the situation as a shared and common one.” To reduce uncertainty and reach such an agreement considerable social labour is required. The interpretation of a situation is not determined by structure, but defined by the capability of agents, the repertoire of action they bring into the situation. Such repertoires are potentially manifold, and “what is to be expected [...] is a plurality of criteria to determine the situation and a process of selecting the appropriate criteria that is itself part of the reaching of an agreement” (Wagner 2001a: 107). Something as ‘structure’ is then itself being determined in the process of interaction. Nonetheless while there is a plurality of criteria, Boltanski and Thevenot stress that these are not endless or totally contingent. Instead, they speak of a ‘multiplicity’[13] of such conventions and their research is directed towards identifying the regularities of social practices in situations.

To sum up, while assemblage theorists start their research more or less with a notion of fuzzy orderliness and want to identify the relations there-in, French pragmatist and actor-network theorists focus on the ongoing *labour* of agents by which the social receives orderliness.

Culture-as-Praxis: Neumann’s Cocktail

Let us as a last example of a practice theory falling into the lower right corner, and before we move to other issues, discuss those conceptions that work with notions of culture. The above discussed theorists explicitly avoid the term culture, as it has no explicit explanatory value for them, but carries the danger of re-enforcing a dichotomy between culture and nature (e.g. Latour 1998). Nonetheless conceptions of ‘culture-as-praxis’ form a major part of the practice family and are, so far, indeed more familiar in the IR debates. As already mentioned especially Swidlers account of culture has received some prominence in IR – although being forced into positivistic research designs. Neumann (2002) has quite well explained Swidlers understanding of culture-as-praxis and most interestingly has mixed it with the semiotic work of historian Michel de Certeau – who has not received sufficient attention in our paper so far. Hence, there is not that much need for a re-statement and for digging further. Let us shortly summarize Neumann’s inspiring mixture, instead.

Neumann (2002) offers us a ‘practice theoretical cocktail’ that focuses on the terms ‘discourse’, ‘practice’ and ‘stories’. He sees the objective of his research in uncovering – similar to actor-

[13] See the related discussion in Law and Mol (2002), who stresses the difference between the idea of plurality as principally open-ended and multiplicity as “more than one, but less than many” (Law 2004)

network theory and French pragmatism[14] – the 'repertoires of actions' that actors hold and which are primarily to be found in the 'stories' of a culture. Following Swidler he assumes that a culture needs to be understood as the interplay between discourses on the one side and practices on the other, while he conceives, in relying upon de Certeau, of stories as being the intermediating element. Neumann (2002:635-6) argues that narratives "'go in a procession' ahead of social practices in order to open a field for them. […] Story-telling […] authorise and unprecedented practice. Order is constituted, subject positions created and these and other phenomena named so that a new practice may take shape in a relevant context. This practice is nested in other practices, both in the sense that it emanates from a set of similar practices existing elsewhere, and in the sense that it has to fit in with other practices that already play themselves out in the new field into which it is being inserted."

Neumann furthermore highlights that we should consider basically two forms of narratives: one that takes an orchestration function that stabilizes the discourse and its power relations; and one that opens up the possibilities for new practices, and hence, if the narrative becomes established through practices, for a new order. In analogy to Foucault, Neumann calls the former type (narrative of) *governmentality* and the latter (narrative of) *conceptual power*. In sum by this focus on these narratives Neumann (2002: 633) wants to unravel "knowledge that goes into performing them [practices] and perhaps altering them, all the tricks and improvisations which come into play and which are traditionally read out of social analyses." Given the existence of non-narrative discourse, and given that practices are embedded in one another, thus, the object of investigation for Neumann (2002: 633) is what kind of *repertoire* actions exists for a particular type of subject in a particular context.

Summary

Although we are far from having said everything that seems to be important to the relation of structures and practices, we hope to have succeeded in detailing some of the notions of order, practice theorists have established. Our overview had the objective of showing that the agency-structure *problematique*, the relation between micro and macro, is considered in practice theory quite differently. The same time we also provided a brief tour de horizon of what we considered some of the main research programmes currently undertaken in practice theory. As we have shown practice theories join in their emphasis of a meso-level, the level of practices. Although there is quite some diversity in vocabulary we tried (more or less successfully) to discuss these on a common ground in clustering the approaches around how they place emphasis on orderliness

[14] Silber 2003 stresses for instance the similiarities between Bourdieuan theory, French pragmatism and Swidlers work as all being what she calls "repertoire theory". Theories that "give weight to the wider cultural repertoire which social actors draw upon while engaged in meaning-making 'on the ground'" (Silber 2003: 430).

and complexity. We try to be less lengthy in the following passages, given that the main terms and programmes have now been introduced

3.3 Practice, Routine and Change

One of the major arguments for a return to culture has been that these accounts are better equipped to grasp social change (Kratochwil 1996), whether it is change due to the end of the cold war or processes such as globalization. Consequently we assume of practice theorists to have a lot to say about this. Partly we have talked about this. We discussed that Bourdieu largely fails to address change, while for the more radical versions of practice theory there seems to be nothing but change. Let us nonetheless discuss this issue more detailed, as it is indeed one of the major arguments, why we could be interested in practice.

As we have seen practice theorists disagree about the question how stable social order(s) can potentially be. Yet, they agree that stability (structure) lies in routinized practices. Routinized practice implies a temporality of structure. Hence, practices occur in repetition and orderliness is basically reproduction. Fields, institutions, orders, arrangements or assemblages are repetitive produced, reproduced and restructured in social practices. This opens the question of when a cycle of reproduction is stopped and a practice breaks down or new repetitive patterns occur. All practice theorists more or less argue that change comes through agency. However, as Reckwitz has argued over several articles, it is a major dispute among practice theories, where the boundaries between reproduction/change lie, and if reproduction should be treated as the normality, while change as the exceptional or occasional. While late Bourdieu has tried to conceptualize change through the introduction of the mysterious *hysteresis effect*, that at least allowed him for the possibility of a changing habitus (King 2000), others have put more emphasis on change in either pointing to the floating border between reproduction and change (Schatzki), or in focussing on situations of doubt and uncertainty (French pragmatists).

For Schatzki (2001) the question of change is more or less a question of when practices dissolve and when new ones emerge. He stresses for gathering an understanding of change, we basically need to pay attention to the continuous interplay of reproduction and change. In his chapter *Becoming and Change* he re-stresses that the social needs to be understood as home to continuous occurrences, as a "wave of doings", in which "agency is the chief dynamo of social becoming" (234). Schatzki suggests that the wave of doings, however can be "maintenance" of a practice or change and hence clarifies that constant doing should not be equated with change. Maintenance is for Schatzki characterized by "the occurrence of activity that perpetuates practices and reorders arrangements, minimally" (234). Change by contrast, comes about with activity that alters practices and orders more robustly. In a for the IR reader surprising move, Schatzki stresses that

many of the large scale institutional developments that 'historical institutionalists' have argued to be change, should largely be understood as consequences of maintenance.

Schatzki relies on three terms. "Human activity maintain a practice when it carries out bodily doings and sayings that 1) already constitute the practice and 2) express extant elements of the practice's organization" (240). Schatzki contrasts the term of maintenance with the terms of re-organization and re-composition. By 're-roganization' he refers to a robust change of the understandings, rules and teloaffective structures that organize integrative practice. By 're-composition' he refers to a change of the doings and sayings that constitute such a practice. By using these terms Schatzki tries to clarify that the processes underlying change are at least twofold. He suggests that the reorganization of rules and teloaffective structures is occasional and largely intentional. The recompositions of practice are largely continual and unintentional and usually "coordinated with the introduction of new machinery, orders, projects and tasks, or responds to events […], including rearrangements that resulted from nonhuman causal interventions". (241). Schatzki draws a very fine line between reproduction and change. "When components of its extant practice organization change piece-meal, or when multiple mutations are accompanied by continuities in other components, a practice lives on. […] By contrast, when changes in organization are vast and wholesale, or a practice's project and tasks are simply no longer carried out, former practice expire. The line between the continuance and dissolution of a given practice is not, consequently, fixed". (241-242). Schatzki continues in basically outlining different types of changes in the moving mesh of practices and orders. Those types are contagion, continuity over ends, hybridization, bifurcation, fragmentation and appropriation, coherence, conflict, insemination, common events, media of communication and politics. While Schatzki stresses himself that this is the least developed part in his ontology, pragmatists have again in a more empirical way tried to address the problem of change through the term situations. As Reckwitz (2002a: 255) points out, practice theorists cope with social change in arguing that "the 'breaking' and 'shifting' of structures must take place in everyday crises of routines, in constellations of interpretative interdeterminacy and of the inadequacy of knowledge with which the agent, carrying out a practice, is confronted in the face of a 'situation'." Such an understanding focuses on the doubt and uncertainty agents bring into a situation. To understand social change, we hence can differentiate between how agents act in crisis and routine situations. In routine situations practices are reproduced, in crisis situations, or what Boltanski and Thevenot call 'disputes', they are likely to be changed. While the French pragmatists largely show an interest in how agents solve disputes with which combination of resources, German pragmatists have largely turned to focus on the 'creativity' of agency, as most notably developed by Hans Joas. In IR, Joas' term of creativity has been largely introduced by Gunther Hellmann

(2002). His key concern is the interplay between crisis and routine situations. For Hellmann (2002: 9), it is the "genuine creativity of action" which is pivotal in "problematic situations", because these situations are "open" and not determined by apparent ways of dealing with them. Furthermore, this understanding of "*situative* and *genuinely creative* action implies that it would be inappropriate to dissolve any action as a singular action from its larger *context of action*" (Hellmann 2002: 10, italics in original). Hence, it is first of all the crisis situation as a phase of doubt and uncertainty in which routines of action break down and agents are forced to cope with the problematic situation and to rethink established patterns of action, and exactly at his point the potential of creativity comes into play (Hellmann 2002: 10).

That means the pragmatist wings of practice theory locate change in problematic situations and the 'creativity of action' can be seen as the result of an attempt of practical problem solving in a such a situation (Joas 1992: 218-244; Reckwitz 2000: 617-643).

This however leads to the follow-up question in what way a problematic situation translates to a crisis situation in which the agents has to change established practices and to act in situative creativity. For Reckwitz (2000: 626) this can occur in basically two different ways: firstly; the agent is confronted with a situation of interpretive uncertainty in so far that referring to a distinct order of meaning does not solve the crisis of action. Secondly, the agent is in an ambiguous situation of 'cultural interferences', meaning that different orders of meaning are enabling different possible actions. In both cases it is not possible to relate an exact meaning (Sinnzuschreibung) to the action which interrupts routinized practices. The phenomenon of cultural interferences arises when an actor as carrier of different practices is in on the intersection between different orders, linked to different fields, communities or meshes. Such a constellation of incompatibility may lead to a problematic situation for an actor, but not necessarily (Reckwitz 2000: 632). Yet, Reckwitz rightfully criticizes that practice theoretical works have not paid sufficient attention to illustrate these processes systematically and in detail.

In sum, practice theories are sceptical about the "myth of cultural integration" and consider the possibility of cultural interferences when actors are confronted with incompatible orders of meaning and interpretive uncertainty. Hence, such situations contribute to cultural dynamics and to the change of practices. Nevertheless, as Reckwitz (2000: 641) puts it, practice theory risks its theoretical strengths, if we turn completely to the extreme point of a permanent cultural change which is characteristic for the practice accounts of Deleuze and Latour. For Reckwitz it would be paradoxical if practice theorists who successfully grasp routinized social practices would substitute in their accounts a "myth of integration" with a "myth of cultural dynamic".

To conclude, practice theorists indeed offer challenging thoughts about change and continuity, although much more systematic theoretical work has been suggested. The re-focus on agency,

whether grasped with the term of a creativity of agency or through observing the interplay of continuity and change on a meso-level seem promising in IR as well. Such a perspective locates change not necessarily in a linear long term historical development, as textualists suggest, but in the interaction of agents with situations, where temporality breaks down.

3.4 The social and the material

A third dimension in which the ontological vocabularies of practice approaches want to take novel paths is the question of how the social is thought to relate to the material. As we have seen in the short discussion of definitions of practice, pivotal elements of practices are bodies, are things and objects and we should add to this list technology. As Neumann (2002) has pointed out such a re-emphasis on the material induces a different methodology in focussing on other resources then text, and it invokes a different social ontology. Before we shall discuss the methodological dimension in the next section, let us try to grasp how practice theories want to deal with 'the material' differently.

In IR maybe William Walters (2002) has made the point for considering the material the strongest. Walters argues that attention is needed for how Europe is constructed by what he calls "little things" – things that are not primarily symbolic, but shape the everyday practices of knowing and governing Europe. He refers to devices such as reporting forms, telephones, machines, glass walls or passports. In following Latours works, he suggests that these little things are to be understood as inscription devices, material manifestations of knowledge (inscribed knowledge) that shape the social through their everyday usage not through their symbolic character. Through their existence and their usage they forces actors to think and to act in a distinct way. For Walters then bureaucratic objects, such as reporting forms "are not merely passive, inert materials, or instruments wielded by human actors. Rather, they have their own materiality and irreducibility, and a capacity to exert *effects* on actors" (Walters 2002: 97, emphasis in original). Jef Huysmans (2006) stresses in his concept of a 'technocratic politics of insecurity' in a similar way that the knowledge framing insecurity is heavily dependent on technological devices – in sum, these kind of 'things' that the technocrats use in their practice of producing insecurity knowledge.

Yet, Walters' and Huysmans' argument fundamentally differs from the arguments we are used in IR, whether it is IR Realism' argument that the international is structured by the distribution of capabilities and resources (e.g. Mearsheimer 2001: 45), Marxists emphasis on basis and superstructures, or textualism's idea of the material as being an symbolic object.

Again practice approaches want to break with the either/or: neither is the material to be seen as preceding the social, determining it or exerting causal influence as in Marxism or IR Realism nor

does the material only matters as texts give a symbolic meaning to it. Again the solution is centred on the concept of practice: first, practice is understood as being always also a bodily activity, second, things are social as there is rarely any practice that does not involve things, in sum, we could not perform practices without the material. Any practice is material and expressive (symbolic, linguistic) and any situation in which a practice is performed has an expressive and material dimension.

If we leave aside Marxism and IR Realism for a moment and focus on practice theories cultural (br)others again, Reckwitz (2002b) offers a plausible argument in stressing that cultural theorizing either completely neglects the material or falls back into a neo-Kantian subject/object division. Classical sociology of knowledge to be found in the works of Marx, Mannheim, Scheler or Durkheim has conceived of 'the material' as "social structure", understood as a non-ideational sphere of regularities and pattern existing and exerting causal effects independently from subjective and collective interpretations. Reckwitz, hence, speaks about a culturalist-materialist "double", in which the 'material' is separated from the 'cultural' and the relation between the two is the main puzzle whether thought as a condition for action or as a structural cause. Culturalist theorizing breaks through this double in recognizing that material entities gain their status as objects by discourse or language-based interactions. In mentalist and textualist accounts "the material world *exists* only insofar as it becomes an object of interpretation within collective meaning structures. There are no material entities as such, but only systems of distinctions that define certain 'material objects in a certain form and delimit them from other (material and non-material) objects. Material entities exist as carriers of meaning, as *'objects of knowledge'*" (Reckwitz 2002b:202, italics in original). Hence, practice theories culturalist (br)others do not ascribe any explanatory force to the material. Again there are major differences about the mentalist and textualist branches in cultural theory. Yet, as Reckwitz argues in all of them the material appears "as the plane of objects to be known or to be observed, to be talked about or to be interpreted, each time constructed by cultural codes" (Reckwitz 2002b:207). A position that is without doubt advantageous compared to classical sociology or crude materialism, but which comes at a prize: Human action is reduced to interactions between subjects or to actions making use of objects; social order is no more than an exclusive result of symbolic order; and social change in history is largely identical with changes in cultural codes (Reckwitz 2002b:207).

The question is then how we can retain the insights from mentalist and textualist studies without falling back into doubles, or crude materialism. And for IR this means how we can conceive the role of material entities such as the ozone layer, airplanes, skyscrapers, nuclear weapons, precision bombing, the world wide web, airports, surveillance technology, bureaucratic forms or passports differently then we have done so far. For instance, it seems to be hardly controversial that

weapon technology has shaped the social space we call international relations. Nuclear arms have made a difference to relations between states, precision bombing has made a difference to global intervention politics and airplanes used as weapons have changed how we travel the globe. While nowadays everyone would reject that any of these artefacts just mentioned determines or causes the social structure of international relations, the question is then, if any of these are more then symbolic objects in our discourses of world politics.

Practice theorists emphasizing the material component of practices do not have a definite answer to this question. Yet, they have pointed out two important dimensions: First of all, when we act we usually do so in material situations and in using artefacts – we find ourselves in buildings and we use cars, telephones, fax machines and emails. Second, the history of mankind has always also been a history of things. We discover, develop, manufacture and create new artefacts. Things, objects for which we in turn require new practices, new practices that in turn change our understanding of the world – that change social practice.

Practice theorists working in science studies have maybe added the most to how conceive the role of things. In studying the natural sciences, one of the major interests of the 'anthropologists of epistemology' was how new things enter the social, are brought to life and, once successful, change how we know and act.[15] Bruno Latour, Michel Callon and John Law have based on the results of these studies generalized there thoughts and present today maybe the most radicalized version of practise theory when it comes to the material. Latour and his associates stress in their programme of a 'symmetric anthropology' that since Durkheim too much explanatory burden has been put on the social. Instead they argue that subjects and objects, the material and the social are (not least with rapid technological developments) indistinguishable. The majority of objects are not social or material, they are both, they are 'hybrids', or as Serres calls it 'quasi-objects'. For Latour this in turn means that if we are to understand action, we should give equal ontological weight to humans and non-humans. Humans and non-humans form together what Latour calls an actor-network[16], a network from which the capacity to act arises. Hence if humans act they usually do so in association with non-humans. As Walters puts this in relying upon Latour, "actions are coordinated, behaviours collectivised and regulated not by sharing or the inculculation of norms and ideas alone, but through the way in which socio-technical networks combine humans and non-humans, and how non-human elements in those networks imperceptibly shape human conduct" (Walters 2002:98-99).

[15] Whether this is the vacuum pump enabling the idea of a laboratory and experimental science or the human genome enabling us to create humans differently.

[16] In rejecting the mechanistic connotation of a network, proponents of this approach have later on come to speak of actant-rhizome ontology instead.

Yet, we might not want to (or have to) go as far as Latour does in giving equal actor status to humans and non-humans – rightful criticism has been raised against Latour for his theoretical imprecision and the practical impossibilities of treating non-humans equally in empirical research (see e.g. the summary in Barnes 2001). Yet, Latour forces us to reconsider that non-humans (things, objects, artefacts) have an impact on how we act, they cannot be taken for granted. And furthermore his point is – and this is rather collectively emphasised among practice theorists – that the orderliness of the social partly depends on the material. Objects allow for the extension of spaces of the stability of interpretation that stretch further then immediate situations. Objects, things de facto enable that practices can be carried out in different temporal and spatial situations by different body/minds the same way. As Walters puts this for IR, governing across states is a technical as well as a political accomplishment (Walters 2002: 93).
Hence practice theories reconsideration of the material offers us a different way to think the construction of the international system in a way that neither is based on crude materialism, nor puts all the burden on the social as textualists have done. The space we call international relations is more then text and talk, more then representations, but less then material resources and capabilities.

3.5 Practice as a different way of knowing: situated knowledges

Let us, finally, as a fourth point consider what kind of epistemological and methodological conclusions practice theorists draw from their ontologies. Practice theorists favour ontology over epistemology, nonetheless they argue for a distinct viewpoint on these issues. Again not everything can be said, but we try to explore some of the major points and may add what hasn't been exemplified enough. Moreover, if IR has shown concern for practice theoretical reasoning then it has been (beside the agency structure debate discussed above) epistemological issues. There seems little to add to the several recent contributions that argue for a pragmatist or practice-oriented epistemology. Hence, what are the major consequences of a practice theoretical perspective? What follows is, if the social is to be thought as a field of practice shaped by routinized behaviour and shared understandings, correspondingly science is also. Such a view might be broken down to two key terms 'reflexivity' and 'praxeology'. Under reflexivity we can bundle all these views that argue for taking a different stance on our own, scientific actions, and under a praxeology all these arguments on how scholar should incorporate practical reason.

Reflexivity: Scientific Practice, Ontological Politics and Connectivity

While from a practice theoretical understanding reflexivity is a precondition of any action (Lynch 2000), relatives of the practice family suggest with many similarities to mentalist and textualist

(br)others that taking a practice perspective implies to a considerable degree reflecting on the practices of the field one finds himself in. Bourdieu for instance argues in his *Science of Science and Reflexivity* that reflexivity needs to become a common law of the scientific field, "which would become characterized by a sociological critique of all by all that would intensify the effects of the epistemological critique of all by all." (Bourdieu 2004: 91). Reflexivity hence should be understood as to establish a regular pattern in which scientists critically and empirically study scientific practice by the means of practice theory. The majority of practice theorists consequently stress that 1) science is a social practice; that 2) this social practice is interlaced with science cannot be conducted from a detached (objective) viewpoint and that 3) science involves an active engagement with objects of research with passivity on neither side. Although the majority of this arguments have been spelled out as criticism against other understandings of science (for instance in the infamous 'science wars', in the perestroika movement, in IR's third debate and so on and may as such sound well-known to any scholar, familiar with the linguistic turn) these are issues we shall discuss shortly.

Practice theorists agree that also scientific activities need to be understood as a social practice. Whether the social space of science is understood as a field, mesh, or assemblage, scientific practice does not – although having its peculiarities – fundamentally differ from other spheres and is as such principally open to be studied by the same analytical tools. While science as such is one cultural sphere beside others, considerable disagreement exists on how unique or different science is, given its rules of engagement are relatively strict. The majority of practice theorists from science studies, tend to stress the similarities between scientific practice and other knowledge producing (epistemological) practices as those of companies or bureaucracies. They suggest that scientists work with the same repertoire of symbolic techniques and artefacts as actors in other fields do. Practice theorists focussing in their empirical work on other spheres rather tend to stress a boundary between science and other spheres, highlighting the different conventions that scientific activity relies on. For instance Bourdieu argues that science should be understood as a unique objectifying practice.

What can be followed is that science as practice is interwoven with other practices. Sciences integrated practices involve the labours of creating coherence through common narratives, community and institution building, securing resources such as funding through weaving networks to non-peers while simultaneously drawing a boundary to other spheres, and last but not least practices of engagement with research objects, starting from the constitution of these objects to the regulated dialogue with them (Büger and Gadinger 2007).

Science in such an understanding is not (and cannot be) free-standing, detached observation, but is always participant observation. Scientists participate in the fields or assemblages they study.

They are not pure observers but through their connectivity to these fields or object of study they enact, they become partly participants. Those IR scholars (e.g. George 1994, Walker 1992) interested in power relations have clearly stressed, how science can weave itself into the power relations being studied, by naming reality. Science (IR) is then one practice of naming the nature of things and as such a practice of power. Hence, any epistemological practice is always political, epistemology and politics cannot be split from each other. Scientists do not find an ordered world, but order the world themselves through concepts, classifications, methods and instruments (inscription devices). As maybe advocated the strongest by Latour (1998) to assume a world bifurcated in a domain of truth and discovery (science) and one of values and judgement (politics) is no more then a modernist fairytale.

If there is no detached point from where to analyze reality this evokes for the more radical versions of practice theory the problem of relativism. Scientific statements can be and are used for the support of political projects – whether scholarship is used to legitimize violent democratizing action (Russett 2006), or to reject political action to be taken on climate change or security analysis enables securitization it wants to avoid (Huysmans 2002), – these are questions that put ethical questions to the fore. As Donna Harraway (1992: 187) has put this concern "So, I think my problem and 'our' problem is how to have simultaneously and account of radical historical contingency for all knowledge claims and knowing subjects, a critical practice for recognizing our own 'semiotic technologies' for making meanings, and a non-nonsense commitment to faithful accounts of a 'real' world, one that can be partially shared and friendly to earth-wide projects of finite freedom, adequate material abundance, modest meaning in suffering, and limited happiness." Harraway and others suggest that a solution cannot be found in convictions of epistemology, whether defined by 'best practices' or ideas of 'the' scientific method. Harraway (1992) argues that objectivity is possible, if we acknowledge and take responsibility for our necessary situatedness, and for the recognition that we are located in and produced by sets of partial connections. John Law and Annemarie Mol suggest the term of an 'ontological politics'. This is a term that stresses that truth is not the only arbiter for research: "in an ontological politics we might hope, instead, to interfere, to make some realities realer, others less so. The good of making a difference will live alongside – and sometimes displace – that of enacting truth." (Law 2004: 67). If objects, institutions, reality are enacted and re-enacted in research this makes it possible "to think about which realities it might be best to bring into being" (Law 2004: 39).

Such a position not only hinges on the notion of taking the knowing scientific subject as a partially connected, but also seeing subject-object relations as non-linear but dialogical. Whether such a research object is a physicists particle (Knorr Cetina 1999), a rain forest (Latour 1999) or

history (de Certeau), scientist are engaged in a process of enactment of mutual conversation with the object. As Ian Hacking has nicely coined this, "our preserved theories and the world fit together so snugly less because we have found out how the world is than because we have tailored each to the other (Hacking 1992:3).

Praxeology: Knowing from within and Methodological Multiplicity

If reflexivity is all about taking a critical stance towards the own practices, towards the partial connections, relations, associations and situations any knowing subject is embedded in and taking responsibility for the consequences of this interconnectivity and the reality we enact, 'praxeology' refers to the mutual labour of engaging with research objects.

As shown, practice theorists focus on practices, repertoires of action, the creativity and contingency of agency and practices, how agents make sense about situations and how they relate to each other and how they create orderliness. As such practice theorists reject a mechanistic worldview and try to unravel the repertoires of practical knowledge that shapes these domains. The concept of a practical knowledge emphasizes the ability of actors to give meaning in contingent situations and to act what "requires a situation" which follows more a knowing how or a "knowing from within" (Shotter 1993: 4) than a rationalist knowing that.[17] As Maarten Hajer and Hendrik Wagenaar (2003: 20) have pointed out from a policy studies perspective, practice theories are "an attempt to develop a unified account of knowing and doing. It expresses the insight that knowledge, knowledge application and knowledge creation cannot be separated from action; that action is the high road to knowing." The sociality of a situation is constitutive for the acting and knowing of agents and thus, knowledge cannot be freed from historical and situational contexts. Hence, actors gain their practical knowledge about the world by acting upon it. In sum, practice theories suggest a quite different epistemological path than textualists accounts which primarily grasp knowledge in textual and symbolic structures and thereby tend to overintellectualize practitioner's actions by assigning language an omnipotent status (Reckwitz 2002: 254).

As IR scholars such as Kratochwil and Hellmann have stressed producing practical knowledge means that theory needs to be build in a pragmatic way as always beeing related to situations and actions, and a certain responsiveness of scholarship to the needs of fellow non-experts needs to be kept in mind. Annemarie Mol, whose research has always been partially mission-oriented research, calls this research nicely praxiography. A praxiography entails the notions of reflexivity

[17] Several scholars refer either directly to the Aristotelian concept of *phronesis* as opposed to *techne* and *episteme*, or to Habermas notion of the research interest directed to practical reason. Both notions, although the intentions associated with mentioning these terms are valuable, are problematic: the Aristotelian trias hardly covers contemporary modernities interdependency of techne and phronesis; the Habermasian idea of knowledge interests over-emphasizes the differences between a critical and a practical knowledge interest.

mentioned before, works with the tools of ethnography but keeps generalization as secondary objective in mind, and attempts to contribute to the repertoire of knowledge of the actors being studied.

While practice theorists agree that there is no best (or one) scientific method and epistemology is no more then an ongoing discourse of making sense of our practices towards research objects, as a methodological guideline, many practice theorists have advocated for a maxim of 'scarcity of presuppositions' (Boltanski). French Pragmatism, Actor-Network Theory and the ethnomethodological wings of practice theory are united in there scepticism towards any models, assumptions or distinctions not derived from the world being studied. Hence they attempt to enter empirical research with no more than a basic ontological vocabulary and try to take all other distinctions from the actors, practices and processes to be studied. As Latour clarifies this point the vocabulary is voluntarily poor, "it is not a metalanguage but an *infra*language. Its core principle is not to limit a priori who or which are the actors and their properties" (Crawford 1993: 262). Studying how practices are vehicles for meaning-making and ordering the world, does not mean that the search for order, rigor, and pattern is by abandoned. It is simply relocated one step further into abstraction, so that actors are allowed to unfold their own differing order. In other words, orders or structures can not be the starting points for an empirical investigation, but instead are the outcome of the scientific work.

Actor network theory is maybe the wing of practice theory that became most attention for the claim that research needs to "follow the actors themselves" and to reconstruct not ready-made knowledge but study knowledge-manufacturing in action. The narratives produced by actor network theory have however been rightly criticized for being un-reflexive towards their choice of actors they follow and of which of the actor practices they follow. Although Latour has meanwhile developed more efficient criteria of how such choices can be made (Latour 2005), other practice theorists see the solution either in a focus on situations (pragmatists) or in following objects and there re-enactment (Law, Mols). The pragmatists solution to start with the situations, carries the advantage of working towards the secondary goal of generalizations across situations. The more contingent solution of a praxiography in turn carries the advantage of placing scientific research more directly in the context of practitioners (or clients of research), which is for instance the case when Mols and Law studies the multiple meanings and enactments of a disease (e.g. alcoholism) and try to identify the clashes between these. The methodological toolset of these wings has been in the first place that of ethnomethodology. Berard (2005: 216; italics in original) rightly stresses why, it is because "these methods can be employed in a wide range of substantive fields, because they draw attention to those practices that are truly *generative*

of structures and orders, in the sense *claimed* but not *compellingly argued* or *empirically demonstrated* in Giddens's and Bourdieu's work."

Whether we now set up on practice theory to study the international system as one heterogeneous field of practice, to study the subsets forming it and their interactions, focus on world political situations of doubt and uncertainty, or on the enactment of world political objects, such as the globe, war, peace or security, practice theory does not lead us to a clear guideline of methods to be used in IR. Practice theorists call for methodological multiplicity. The choice of method is hence a creative one and whether ethnographic methods are combine with statistical analysis (such as done by the French pragmatists) or a discourse analysis with participant observation, the choice is a practical choice defined by the situation a researcher is embedded in. In contrast to many wings of textualism, practice theory's ontology does not favour or imply a concrete method.

3.6 Summary

If we successfully managed in our section two to draw a map for navigating in the jungle of contemporary cultural theorizing, we hope to have now shown what gives practice theories its distinctiveness. Practice theories offer a different social ontology, and with these they have sought innovative ways of coping with the persistent problematiques of social science research. In sketching these strategies it should have become clear that although practice theory focuses on action it would be wrong to see it only as an additional variant of classical action theories and to equate practices with regularly patterns of actions. Further, practice theories have much in common with IR's discourse analysis but add important features. Yet, as we suggested practice theory is not a unified research programme, but there are more radical and more conventional versions of practice theories that can be used more or less snugly in IR.

4. Flying Rockets, Terror and Practice

Let us now consider as a third strategy of inquiring into what practice theories are and how they can be practiced, a fresh empirical example to see what difference a practice theoretical inspired research will make. We move to an example that is a 'hot' issue in current International Relations and international relations: How to understand the new global terrorism?

Research on terrorism after 9-11 is a telling example for demonstrating the added value of practice theory for studying phenomena of world politics. Although terrorism research is certainly an interdisciplinary field of study (Müller 2007), at least since the US-led 'war on terror'

IR scholars want to have something to say on this theme. The case of terrorism forcefully shows that IR cannot grapple with Al Qaeda in an ontology assuming it to be a stabile entity equivalent to actor conceptions IR has relied on, such as states. Rather practice theoretical insights seem to equip us well to make sense of Al Qaeda in understanding it as a field of practice with fluid, overlapping and dynamic character.

Al Qaeda as complex global microstructures

Knorr Cetina (2005: 214) has given us a surprising understanding of terrorism in comparing new global terrorism with financial markets. For Knorr Cetina both are what she calls 'global microstructures' – whereas terrorist global microstructures have different constitutive elements. The new global terrorism is characterized by forms of connectivity and coordination that combine global reach with microstructural mechanisms that instantiate self-organizing principles and patterns (Knorr Cetina 2005: 214). Hence, she suggests that the surprising power and success of Al Qaeda global microstructural configuration is caused by its *avoidance* of complex institutional structures (Knorr Cetina 2005: 215).

Knorr Cetina (2005: 214) relies upon John Urry's *Global Complexity* and stresses similar to assemblage approaches, that primarily the asymmetries, unpredicatibilities and playfulness of complex (and dispersed) interaction patterns – or more generally, practices – are the key microstructural principles of global systems. Complexity results from a situation and cannot be contained in an institutional order, and order is not the outcome of purified social processes but is always intertwined with chaos. Knorr Cetina (2005: 215) proposes a research strategy which focuses on the micro-level to identify microstructural patterns in national and local institutional contexts, as well as on the macro-level, the global scope of these complex microstructures.

Elements of global microstrcutures/elements of terrorist practices

Knorr Cetina identifies different elements which constitute the practices and orders of terrorism and form a global microstructure such as Al Qaeda:

Firstly, members of Al Qaeda follow to a certain extent a 'transcendent time' as a mean of orientation which is constitutive for the parallel living of terrorists. Although the members of Al Qaeda are by no means improvisers, they do not act to strict schedules and modes of control which characterize rationalized systems of planning. Furthermore, the patience and preparedness of the terrorist not to act in hurry demonstrate the fluid but robust character of Al Qaeda in its ability to regenerate itself. Hence, this transcendent temporal structure refers to the overlapping and meshing character of such a field of practice, in which the members are bind together

although they form a dispersed and diverse community across national, cultural and language boundaries, even with different Muslim religious orientations (Knorr Cetina 2005: 219).

Secondly, the activities of Al Qaeda demonstrate the materiality of practices and the engagement with things, especially with information technology. The role of teletechnologies can be seen as a main component of terrorist practices which enables and shapes the global communication within the terrorist project. Knorr Cetina (2005: 221) points out that the media technology (television channels, the web, videotapes) guarantees the "scopic" system in which the members become assembled and channelled, exemplarily in bin Laden's video messages. Yet, the engagement with technology does not mean that the highest standard is necessary, what the knives as weapons of the hijackers in the planes illustrate. Communication technology enables the fluid character of the network in a practical sense, the mobility of its members with changing identities, but via scopic media also religious content is transported which draws on established religious practices and performances as stabilizer for the diasporic community (Knorr Cetina 2005: 224). As Knorr Cetina (2005: 221) describes these processes: "a network is an arrangement of nodes tied together by relationships which serve as conduits of communication, resources and other coordinating instances that hold the arrangement together by passing between the nodes."

Thirdly, the dual organizational form of Al Qaeda demonstrates the dynamic order which is interwoven between an internal structure and outsourcing Islamic agencies, for instance cells in foreign countries which are independent and self-contained as well as television channels as Al Jazeera which overtake outsourcing tasks for Al Qaeda by broadcasting terrorist messages (Knorr Cetina 2005: 226).

In sum, Knorr Cetina gives a good impression how such a global microstructure is constituted by practices on the micro-level, which are linked by an ordering principle of global scope, in particular the transcendent time. However, while this concept is appropriate to give a picture of Al Qaeda as a mesh of practices and orders, it is one path beside others to illuminate terrorist practices. Ethnomethodology can add to such a picture by providing us with even more details of terrorist practice and as such can complement the global micro-structural picture. Such a telling perspective is for instance taken by Thomas Hauschild, who is more interested in the routine actions of concrete individual agents and their daily life. He elaborates on stories of how, for instance, an ordinary man such as Mohammed Atta is bound to the terrorist orders through practices.

An Ethnographic take on terrorists

Hauschild's perspective is an explicit ethnographic point of view. In reviewing current research literature Hauschild (2005) comes to a disillusioning conclusion. While we meanwhile seem to

know nearly all details and "hard facts" about the terror network Al Qaeda (historical and political context, financial flows, organization structure), we know nearly nothing about the knowledge that drives the hijackers and we still are unable to answer the question why young men turn into "living rockets" (Hauschild 2005: 35). Paradoxically, the many reports titled, for instance, "Inside Al Qaeda" (Sifaoui 2004) give no answer.

Hauschild (2005) opts for a practice theoretical path in conducting what he calls an "ethnography of Al Qaeda" in relying on some predecessors (Kermani 2002; Kippenberg/Seidensticker 2004/2006; Croitoru 2006). However, for such an ethnography, conventional ethnographic methods (participating observation and interviews) are hardly useful.[18] Instead, Hauschild suggests that we have to ethnographically 're-transcript' material and data which was primarily collected by un-ethnographic methods. Hauschild (2005: 35) describes his methodology, in the tradition of Latour, as a social microscopy, which tries to get a more exact picture from and of the terrorists by analyzing the ostensible unimportant details in the accessible sources like communiqués, video messages and assault strategies.

Why do young men turn into "living rockets"? – The Spiritual Manual as a Source

Hauschild (2005: 42) tries to analyze several videotapes of Al Qaeda, which give an impression of the social embeddedness of the terrorist activities. For instance, in one prominent video bin Ladin talks with a Saudi Arabian sheikh about the terrorist attacks of 9-11, but they do not talk about political strategies or military details.[19] Rather, they communicate about terror in a manner as a family business, including jokes and adages. The main part of the talk is a description of a dream in which the victory over the Americans is predicted in form of a soccer game. Bin Laden serves as a "dreamfather" who frames the dreams in rationalist termini and contexts. At first sight such details could be interpreted as not important, but they give intimate insights of Al Qaeda (the clothing, religious practices) and can tell us more about the inner life and the character of the network as Hauschild (2005: 44) rightly points out.

Another source which discloses the terrorist practices of Al Qaeda in an insightful way is the *Attacker's spiritual manual,* which most likely also served as a guideline for the hijackers of 9-11.[20]

[18] Paradoxically, we learn in the insider reports often more about the fear of the journalists to get discovered than about the fears and hopes of the terrorists, who are the real objects of research (e.g. Sifaoui 2004). Thus, the participating observation is no *guarantee* to get "better knowledge" about the terrorists.

[19] This video represented for politicians as well as for journalists as a claim of responsibility for the terrorist attacks, because there was no official statement from Al Qaeda presented after 9-11.

[20] The document of the spiritual manual was found in three places after the attacks of 9-11: the first one in a suitcase of Mohammed Atta, which did not make it into plane; the second one in the car left by Nawaf al-Hazmi (hijacker of the Pentagon plane); and the third one in the crashed third plane. Although there was the suspicion of a forgery, Kippenberg and Seidensticker, who analyzed this document in all details (2004/2006), could debilitate the allegations (Kippenberg 2006: 1-9). According to Ramzi Binalshib, the author of the *Manual for a Raid* was Abdulaziz al-Omari

The fact that the *Spiritual Manual* was completely disregarded in the *9-11 Commission Report* shows the political attitude to grasp terrorism exclusively in its objective structure and not "from the inside".

The *Spiritual Manual* can be read as a detailed script for the hijackers what they have to do in every stage (the last night, at the airport, in the aircraft) before the assault. While the majority of the text refers to religious prayers, there are also instructions which refer to religious practices in its bodily engagement. For instance, the first paragraph of the text refers to the last night in the following way: "Mutual pledge to die and renewal of intention. Shaving off excess hair from the body and perfuming oneself. Performing the greater ritual ablution (or washing oneself/taking a shower)." (Seidensticker et al. 2006: 11). While some passages express the conviction as martyr: "Purify your heart, cleanse it from stains and forget or ignore that thing named 'World' […] How much of our lifetime did we waste!" (Seidensticker et al. 2006: 12); other passages refer more to practical hints "Check your weapon before departing and again immediately before departing, and 'each one of you must sharpen his knife in order to relieve his slaughter animal' "(Seidensticker et al. 2006: 13). Some instructions refer to religious practices in their bodily relationship "Tighten your clothes well. This is the way of the pious forefathers as they used to tighten your clothes prior to battle. Then tighten your shoes well and wear socks so that (your feet) will stick in the shoes and will not slip out of them." (Seidensticker et al. 2006: 13).

What is shown in these instructions which seem a bit odd at first sight for the observer is the interwoven character of these practices. As Hauschild (2005: 45) explains every practical action is embedded in a religious context: military and spiritual preparations are interwoven with tightening the shoes and cleaning as well as breathing techniques and praying. Thus, it is necessary to relate these instructions as practices in its context. Every ideal statement has its practical, bodily connection, and thus both forms (the ideal and the body) are combined in the assassination as a ritual. Every step is part of the killing ritual: from the taxi to the airport, in the plane, the struggle in the cockpit which is religious interpreted in the *Spiritual Manual* as a raid in so far that the martyrs have "to take some booty, even if it is just a cup or a glass of water you drink from and offer it to your brothers" (Seidensticker et al. 2006: 17).[21] The end of the ritual follows the same scheme of a religious practice linked to a bodily action: "When the true promise and the zero hour approach, tear your suit and open your chest welcoming death on the path of God" (Seidensticker et al. 2006: 17).

Hauschild (2005: 46) concludes that the whole *Spiritual Manual* can be interpreted as a long regulation of breathing, speaking and bodily moving on the way in the nothing. All these

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(Kippenberg 2006: 4). In this paper we refer to the document in the translation of Kippenberg/Seidensticker as *Spiritual Manual*.

[21] Following Hauschild (2005: 46) the symbolic raid can be referred to surah [8] of the Koran.

practices together form an action of ritual regression. In a condition of ritual nakedness with tear clothing Mohammed Atta and his combatants go into the catastrophe (Hauschild 2005: 46).

What this detailed description of the martyr ritual unravels is that knowledge shapes actions. Hence, the attack of 9-11 is not understandable by only referring to religious discourses or abstract references to religious sources as the Koran. The conspirative key to the understanding of such actions lie in the practices of these terrorists in relation to their contexts. As Kippenberg (2006: 49) stresses, following Joas in this point, the definition of a situation (the attack) rests on the creativity of the actor, who selects the practical model of his acting out of a stock of transmitted doctrines, norms, values and paradigms and establishes by means of his choice the reason for his acting. Thus, human action is not contingent on a situation, but the situation is constitutive of action. Further, "religion should not be regarded as an immutable heritage, but as means of positioning oneself in a context – religion is not baggage, but a positioning system." (Kippenberg 2006: 49).

Hence, to make sense of the terrorists' actions it is necessary to understand the particular individual position, which is related by practices to the particular context. As Hauschild (2005: 48 p.) concludes it is the bundle of different factors which make such actions rather understandable:

1) the combination of modern nihilism with thoughts of Islam in suicide attacks which refer to earlier traditions, for instance to the kamikaze flyers in Japan (Croitoru 2006)
2) the spiritual and bodily dimension of drill, meditation, dance, prayer, military training, breathing techniques, the desire of masculinity and the codex of honour, based on the struggle between men in the killing ritual
3) a father – son relationship to charismatic figures which stabilize the chaotic situation of such disoriented men
4) Al Qaeda could refer to earlier experiences with the Ottoman military enthusiasm and other popular religious practices in Sufi doctrines

Summary: Terror, Global Micro Structures and Ethnography

To understand terrorism, Al Qaeda in particular, as a field of practice or as complex global microstructures from a practice-oriented perspective promises a different understanding and an added value in contrast to recent research accounts, which focus primarily on commando structures and lists of terrorist members or want to subscribe a strategic planning mentality to terrorism. Further, it would not make much sense to grasp the Islamic terrorists in a textualist understanding by referring to Wahabi or Salafi inspired doctrines. In this way, it is also doubtful if poststructuralists would have something new to say by studying Western discourses on 'the other' terrorism. As Knorr Cetina and Hauschild point out it is first of all the hybrid locus of

terrorists' between practices and social contexts which makes their action understandable. While the studies of Knorr Cetina and Hauschild follow different objectives. Both attempts, clearly rooted in practice theory, give new insights to the phenomenon of terrorism. Knorr Cetina grasps the new global terrorism as a complex global microstructure characterized by local practices on the micro-level which are closely linked to the global reach of Al Qaeda and hence makes it a global structure. What already Knorr Cetina stresses is the fluid and dynamic relationship between terrorist practices which are nested in wider social and religious contexts as well as the materiality of practices what is a main point of Hauschild's ethnographic work. Hauschild's detailed micro focus is convincing to see terrorist's actions not in a causal link to religious doctrines, but in mesh of religious and bodily practices and rituals linked to religious contexts, whereas the single individual is positioned in this system and makes sense of its own actions.

5. Conclusion: Practice and International Relations

In this paper we inquired into the question of what IR theorists mean when they call for a (re-) turn to practice. We demonstrated that scholars stress practice, not because they plainly want to focus on world political action (a position that we called a vulgar understanding of practice), but because they see in practice theory a promising new social ontology. Such an ontology, first, helps to re-focus on action, while not falling into the traps of utilitarian or norm-based understandings of action. Second, practice theory while falling in the larger domain of cultural theorizing is a counter-offensive against these tendencies reducing social science and IR to a study of discourses. Third, the ontology of practice theorists contributes to re-thinking some of the major *problematiques* in IR and social science. We are invited to see the relations between agency, practice and orderliness in a new way. We are encouraged to place social change and stability at the centre of research and to re-considerate the material dimensions of our being. Finally, practice theories suggest liberating us from too tight methodological and epistemological clothes and rather taking responsibility towards our scholarly practices.

We adopted three strategies to stress these points. First we showed how the classification narrative of Reckwitz can provide us with a map, in which we usefully can sort practice theory in. This classification also provided us with a negative backdrop of what practice theory is not, by contrasting it to its culturalist (br)others. Second, we puzzled with the practice theory vocabulary to identify its coherence and multiplicity. We discussed practice-structure relations, change, the material and implications for research practice. Practice theorists, although seeing the social as gaining its stability by routine, differ over their emphasis on complexity and contingency. Finally,

as a third strategy of knowing, what practice theory is, we discussed an illustrative examples falling into the domain of IR, to show how practice theory can be practiced. However, we did not suggest that practice theoretical research is superior to other ways of doing research, but we stressed what we might loose, if practice is not woven into IR considerations.

Our paper served the objective to throw some light on the ominous concept 'practice' and how it is enacted in practice theory. Our story of what practice is, is however one of many other stories, stories already told – and cited or not in this paper –, and one of the many stories to be told about practice in future.

17.500 words.

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