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

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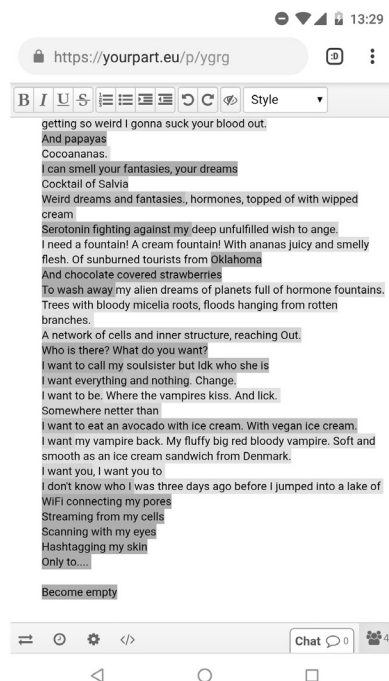
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The cover image consists of three screenshots taken by Magdalena Götz related to the art workshop "Weird Read Intensive" led by the artist duo Dorota Gawęda and Eglė Kulbokaitė, founders of the Young Girl Reading Group (YGRG).

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

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

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

Introduction

Sam Hind et al.

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

Genesis of the Collection

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

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

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

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

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

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

Genealogy of Media and Practice

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

What is a Practice+ Approach?

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

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

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Configuring and Being Configured: Parasitic Practices Through Salesforce

Sebastian Randerath

Who configures and who is being configured? The use of platforms and enterprise resource planning (ERP) applications in organizations requires permanent configuration practices to customize and adapt them to the purposes of these organizations. At the same time, the actor's practices in organizations are adapting to the specifications of the platforms and ERP applications.

The concept of "sociomaterial practices", which has been developed by Wanda Orlikowski, does not assume a distinct theoretical reduction of "practices" to actions or technologies (Orlikowski 2007). On the contrary, the focus on practices here means the acknowledgement of different perspectives on technologies and organizations. According to Orlikowski, these perspectives cannot be reduced – neither to an anthropocentrism nor to pure technology determinism (Orlikowski 2007: 1437).^① The shift to practices therefore does not mean reducing them to one perspective, but rather taking their "constitutive entanglements" in everyday life into account (Orlikowski 2007: 1435). In other words – according to Orlikowski – materiality is continuously practiced, and thus "sociomaterial".

Hence, the concept of practices focuses on the entanglement of material and social *relata*, rather than on the exploration of isolated *relata*.^② As Lisa Conrad argued, this understanding of "sociomaterial practices" is an acknowledgement of the epistemology of "stepping in-between", which was largely developed by Michel Serres (Conrad 2017: 12). Serres' philosophy was concerned with a fundamental critique of a dialectical understanding of technology (Serres 1987).

Instead of an isolated analysis of these *relata*, according to Serres, one moment is decisive here: "stepping in-between" (Serres 1993: 102). For Serres, a specifically information-technical moment of this "stepping in-between" is marked by "noise", which he subsumes under the concept of the logic of the "parasitic". This parasitic logic adds an economic component of the "constitutive" to the "interwoven": the parasite enters between the relations of "socio-material practices" and becomes constitutive

by restructuring the relations of the hosts through practices of (information) exchange (Serres 1987: 59). Since parasite and host are "constitutively entangled" here, noise becomes an everyday practice. This leads to a multi-sided understanding of "socio-technical practices".

Multi-sided (information) exchange has recently been addressed primarily by Platform Studies in the term "multi-sided markets" (Rieder & Sire 2014: 197; Rochet & Tirole 2003). Platforms can thus be described as (digital) businesses like Facebook, Uber or Amazon that insert themselves between producers and consumers, enabling transactions in such "multi-sided markets" (Srnicsek, 2016). Hence, platforms unite different user or consumer groups through a platform and generate profit based on their interactions (Rieder & Sire 2014: 199) or to put it in Serres words, various "parasites" step in-between and thereby co-constitute the platform (Serres 1987: 59). This multi-sidedness of platforms cannot only be seen in online marketplaces, but also in organizational technologies such as the process management platform Salesforce. Hence, organizational platforms such as Salesforce transform the "constitutive entanglements" between technologies and organizations (Orlikowski 2007: 1435) that I refer to here as "parasitic practices". Based on interviews on two exemplary practices of configuring Salesforce in companies, the paper asks whether the concept of parasitic practices is suitable to complement the view on the constitutive entanglements of organizational platforms with a more distinct focus on different power relations.

These parasitic practices will be analysed in relation to the configuration work by third-party developers, as well as business consultants, that try to implement the platform in existing organisations. In order to do so, the paper refers to five interviews conducted with third-party developers of German companies and consultants from globally acting agencies that were involved into configuring processes with Salesforce in 2019.

Configuring: Salesforce "Lightning Components" as a Parasitic Medium

Salesforce.com is a company offering a cloud computing platform named Salesforce that is used primarily for performance measurement and the automated management of customer data in sales processes. Thus, the platform Salesforce standardizes workflows, measures customer performance and is used for the "automation of routine tasks" in sales and customer management processes (Nyckel 2020: 5). Therefore, the platform automatically captures and measures every user's interactions and shows them on a graphical dashboard. This allows the users to view their performance data in real time in relation to specified metrics, so-called "key

① As Borbach points out in the epilogue in this collection, historically motivated media theories in the tradition of Friedrich Kittler followed a "media techn(olog)ical a priori" that has often been contrasted to anthropological perspectives on media technologies (p. 35).

② Other forms of *entanglements* and *disentanglements* can be found in the articles of Och and Götz in this collection.

performance indicators” (KPIs). Salesforce promises to be able to measure not just data of real-time or past transactions but predict the purchasing power of future customers, so-called “leads”, by the use of accumulated data. Hence, capturing, measuring, and visualizing work and sales across the dashboard, using collected data, is a main tool for controlling organizations by Salesforce.

Salesforce business model as a platform is based on its application into sales and customer management processes in existing companies – its “host organizations”. Companies apply Salesforce to measure, optimize and partly automate existing sales and customer management processes in-between their own organization. This business model seems to be inherently ‘parasitic’ by stepping in-between sales and customer management processes of an existing company and collecting data through its platform’s cloud infrastructure. The following paragraphs will show how Salesforce becomes a “parasite” in-between its host organizations on a technological level.

As Neil Pollock and Robin Williams showed, Salesforce was attractive to fledgling companies because, as a so-called “software as a service”, it could be rented rather than outright purchased (Williams & Pollock 2009: 50). As a result, the initial costs of implementing the platform into existing companies were low. However, a key aspect of the proliferation of Salesforce is its programmability. Programmability in the case of Salesforce means the possibility to configure pre-defined software modules via a programming interface to develop customized applications. This programmability of Salesforce is enabled through an application programming interface (API) called “Lightning”.^③ Its API made Salesforce the first ERP vendor with scalable and connectible applications (Lane 2016). This Lightning API consists of so-called “Lightning Components”, predefined modules which developers can use to build scalable Salesforce based applications. Thus, the API enables the integration of the platform with other in-house applications and databases.

As an interviewed third-party developer said, the adaption of the platform through the pre-defined modules or Lightning Components, is much easier than coding them from scratch. By switching from the object-oriented programming language “APEX” that required a high level of expertise to Lightning Components as an easy-to-configure set of modules, which connects pre-defined applications via Salesforce’ API, Salesforce can be applied without specific coding skills. As a result, customizations in Salesforce can be made simply by “drag and drop”.

More specifically, Lightning is a “Runtime Environment API”. These “Runtime Environment APIs” can according to Anne Helmond be defined as APIs that run within the infrastructure of the platform and allow to access data from third-party developers’ applications (Helmond 2015: 5). While host organizations outside of Salesforce can easily develop their own applications based on the modularity of Lightning Components, these applications still run within Salesforce’ cloud infrastructure. On a technological level the Lightning API enables Salesforce’ cloud infrastructure to become a parasite through the applications developed by its host organization – it can be understood as an inherent parasitic technology (Bucher 2013). Hence, its customizability and programmability are key concepts for Salesforce’s proliferation.

Customizability and programmability enable human actors to become parasites by stepping in-between the parasitic platform and its host organization by customizing and programming applications. The API enables adaptation practices for third-party application developers in the host organization. Thus, Salesforce’s proliferation is linked to practices of programming and their application to organizations. Returning to Orlikowski, these coding practices can be understood as “constitutively entangled” (Orlikowski 2007: 1437) with the parasitic platform via its API. The API enables Salesforce to not only become a parasite on a strictly technological or material level.

Code and Coding: Third-Party Programming as Parasitic Practice

Third-party developers as employees from host organizations themselves have no access to the platforms’ code structure behind the Lightning API of the platform. They step in-between the entanglement of the platform and the host organization by combining existing modules without having complete insight into the actual code behind the API of the platform. Hence, they choose and combine pre-defined Lightning Components for organizational tasks in their host organization. Although Salesforce enables the connection to other applications via its API, it also specifies certain process structures right from the start, said an interviewed third-party developer. These include Salesforce’s databases, which cannot be customized by third-party developers. One way for the third-party developers to adapt the platform to the organization is therefore to purchase existing apps and plug-ins, rather than modifying the existing Salesforce databases, as the interviewed third-party developers assume.

③ More on how APIs can be studied from a ‘practice+’ perspective, see Hind and Seitz in this collection.

According to an interviewed third-party developer, there are limits to the database integration of the platform's own analysis tool. Salesforce database solutions provide the third-party developers with a framework in which they can integrate their data into the platform. Another developer reported a case where he wanted to generate customized performance metrics based on 1,000 analysed records in a single database. However, this module was limited by the database of a Lightning Component, which allowed only 100 records in the analysis tool. Therefore, the performance metrics had to be adjusted based on this limitation according to the interviewed third-party developer. Hence, Salesforce inscribes itself into performance metrics which are used as the bases for performance evaluation of its host organization through its application modules and API. By applying performance metrics in their host organization to predefined modules of the platform, third-party developers are becoming parasites in-between host organization and parasitic platform. The work of the third-party developers here is mainly based on the combination of existing modules and the coordination of information exchange between the host organization and the platform. They merely adapt to the platform's code rather than coding themselves.

Being Configured: Parasitic Configuration and Consulting Practices

In addition to third-party developers, business consultants take part in the sociomaterial adaptation process. By trying to apply the host organization's customer management processes to platform metrics and automation modules, they become parasites in-between the platform, the host organization and the programming work of third-party developers. This "parasitic relationship" in-between the platform, the host organization and the third-party developers is based on a specific type of business consultant, so-called IT consultants.

Already in early 20th century forms of business consulting that followed the ideas of scientific management, media for the datafication of organizational processes enabled a specific form of knowledge and control outside the organization itself (Hoof 2015). Even for these forms of business consulting, the datafication, mediatization and formalization of the organizational process was central to generate organizational knowledge outside the host organization. Since the 1990s, "IT Consulting" has evolved into a stronger combination of digital information technology (IT) and management consulting by combining business process reengineering and the configuration of large digital software infrastructures and especially ERP systems, such as SAP or Salesforce (Mische 2018: 91). This form of consulting is

not just seen as a pure technological implementation of IT in companies but reaches deeply into the host organizations themselves, e.g. by the modification of valuation metrics, as will be shown below.

The adaptation process to Salesforce varies between different levels of customization that happen inside the host organization. According to an interviewed consultant, it is crucial whether a company already uses ERP software or has a digital corporate infrastructure or pre-defined performance metrics. Some companies want to automate, but do not know how this automation refers to their own organization. In such a case, companies ask for exemplary applications and want to transfer these to their organizational processes, according to the interviewed consultant. The parasitic organization as a solution, therefore, precedes the problems to be solved within the host organization by providing the consultants with exemplary Lightning Components and solutions for process automation. In this case, standard applications are to be formed as a basis for the host organization. There are hardly any adjustments made to the platform by the consultants. In such cases, the actual work of the consultants is mainly the transfer of access rights and existing applications in Salesforce to the host organization.

Even with greater adaptations in host organizations that already integrated ERP systems and digital infrastructures into their organizational processes, the consultants usually start from standard processes and the Lightning Components of the platform that combine them, as an interviewed consultant reported. The process of consulting is therefore based primarily on an adaptation of the host organization to Salesforce and not vice versa. Therefore, the consultants work is based on restructuring the relations of the host organization regarding the application of Salesforce' predefined modules.

However, an interviewed third-party developer said, that from the consultant perspective the process of implementing the platform is linear. According to this interviewed consultant, the consultation work is mainly based on the adaptation of the host organization to the platform and the moderation of this adaptation process by the application of management frameworks. Hence the consultants become parasites in-between the (self-)configuration of the platform and the configuration by the platform. As parasites, their work has no intrinsic purpose except by stepping in-between the information exchange of the host organization and the platform by its application. On the other hand, the platform as a parasite is entangled with its installation and configuration practices, as it has been shown above.

Conclusion

The implementation of Salesforce has highlighted various aspects of multi-sided configuration practices that help the platform to become what I have referred to as a “parasite” in-between the “host organizations”. By these “constitutive entanglements” (Orlikowski 2007: 1435), human actors like third-party developers or consultants become parasites as well. Firstly, it had been shown that the proliferation of Salesforce is based on the customizability by modules, so-called “Lightning Components”. Secondly, it has become clear how third-party developers step in-between the platform and the host organizations by adjusting the platform to the host organization and vice versa. Thirdly, the adjustment practices of business consultants in order to manage the adjustment of the host organization to the platform have been highlighted.

Hence, coming back to the initial question, whether the concept of parasitic practices is suitable to complement the view on the constitutive entanglements of organizational platforms, it has been shown how different actors step in-between the relational configurations of the platform and the host organization. Thus, the logic of the constitutive entanglements of installing and configuring the platform are, to quote Serres, “parasitic” (Serres 1993: 102). Applications for customizability and programmability, like Salesforce API, foster its parasitism. However, as the case study has shown, this parasitic relation is not primarily technically deterministic, since it has to be “practiced” in multi-sided configurations between the platform, host organization, third-party developers and consultants. Hence, in regard to Orlikowski’s “sociomaterial” definition of practices (Orlikowski 2007: 1437), the work of configuring the platform while becoming configured by the platform can be understood as a “parasitic practice”. Thereby, the lens of “parasitism” on these practices does not just explain practices as constitutive entanglements but enables a more distinct account on multi-sided constitutions of different power relations in parasitic practices.

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(Dis-)entangling YouTube Practices: On Broadcasting, Watching and Researching Online Video Content

Anastasia-Patricia Och

Introducing // Hidden Practices and Messy Layers

When it comes to practices on YouTube, the platform already tells you what to do at first glance: ‘broadcast yourself’. The platform’s slogan refers to the original idea of YouTube as a video platform providing free uploading and uncomplicated sharing of videos by private users. The uniqueness of the idea 15 years ago is the most likely explanation of its fast-growing popularity.

Looking at the word YouTube, its reference to traditional television or old tube televisions, respectively, is obvious. ‘You’ offers a twist and underlines the platform’s unique offer of uploading one’s own (home) videos. The slogan ‘broadcast yourself’ strengthens this aspect even further. Both, name and slogan, significantly point towards uploading as key element – or key practice – of YouTube, as well as to a fundamental streaming quality that was realised with the subsequent addition of the live function.

Uploading and streaming, while performed by a mass of users, still imply a form of one-to-many-communication, as is the case with traditional television. However, this does not seem to be the case today, as YouTube is increasingly becoming a social medium. It is therefore not sufficient to focus only on the broadcast aspect when it comes to researching ‘YouTube practices’. Instead, it is useful to also look at practices that go beyond uploading and watching and may not be directly associated with YouTube at first glance, but are related in a more hidden way.^①

In this article I will look at the diversity of practices² on and around YouTube and try to unravel them. I will concentrate on the videos themselves, on platform inherent possibilities of participation and on possible implications for further use beyond YouTube expressed in the videos. In this context, I will reflect on implications towards methodological approaches

and research on YouTube from media linguistic as well as (media) ethnographic perspectives and I will use beauty videos and FIFA Let’s Plays as examples for analyses. In addition, I will briefly highlight the reception of YouTube videos and its research, focusing on my research project on teenage media usage. I try to examine not only individual practices, but also their connections in an analytical triad of the levels of production, product and reception. Accordingly, I will focus on broadcasting and watching YouTube videos and integrating them into everyday life, as well as the respective sub-practices that form a collection of rather messy layers.

Broadcasting // Platform, Production and Video Practices

Providing an overview on possibilities of sociolinguistic YouTube research, Androutsopoulos and Tereick (2016) examine various strategies in YouTube video production. In that respect, they focus on (language) practices interwoven in participatory discourse, especially in social and political contexts. Accordingly, “discourse practices” (2016: 345) can already occur at the level of video production, such as remixing (combination/modification of video elements) and embedding (re-framing video clips and thus changing their meaning) (ibid: 358).

The authors suggest that practices can be part of other practices. Thus, the practice of remixing could be part of commenting (e.g. by using overlay captions), blending (combining video elements) and transformation (modifying the original video) (ibid: 358). This reveals creative strategies³ used by content creators to generate meaning in videos and, thus, to contribute to various discourses. Also, these rather advanced practices demonstrate how complex practices on YouTube can be, and emphasize that before attempting to disentangle ‘YouTube practices’⁴, it is necessary to grasp the extent to which individual practices are entangled with each other. Against the background of a practice+ approach, it is indicated here that practices do not just occur next to or behind each other, but together and/or on different levels.

For further elaboration, it is useful to first look at basic production practices to which every video upload is subject, such as conceptualizing, providing filming equipment and, inevitably, filming.

① Regarding taking practices seriously and taking things seriously as a practice, see Neumann in this collection

② I use the term ‘practices’ to refer to the concept of collaboratively performed actions, which in turn are only performed and understood against the background of the practice involved (Schüttelpelz & Meyer 2017; Habscheid 2016; Dang-Ahn et al. 2017). According to this integrative concept, practices can be described on many layers, as practices themselves affect several layers of society: general (social) practices (such as media practices), communicative practices (such as texts, in terms of *empraxis*, etc.), and, as part of the latter, verbal practices (with language as a system). Also, practices can change constantly, and they do so in practice itself.

③ Roig (2020) also speaks of “creative practices” on video platforms as DIY practices, focusing on (fan) practices like vidding in the context of spoofs or fan movies.

④ This is in itself a diffuse term, which in turn reflects the complexity and interconnectedness of various sub-practices it encompasses, which are recontextualised, newly produced or fused together.

Also, certain platform-specific practices are part of the production process, like choosing a thumbnail or filling in the description box. For more elaborate productions, which are particularly common against the background of an increasing professionalism of YouTube content, advanced practices are conceivable, such as writing a screenplay, creating a storyboard, adjusting the lighting, recording voice-overs or editing. These practices may appear trivial in film making contexts, but are quite advanced in contrast to the simple upload of home videos. Additionally, production practices differ depending on each genre. For example, a typical setting in beauty videos is to choose the camera position so that it faces the YouTubers directly, shooting at eye level in a medium shot or medium close-up, giving the impression that viewers are sitting directly in front of the YouTubers. In Let's Plays, on the other hand, YouTubers tend to use their facecam, sitting in front of their screen, or they don't film themselves at all.

The use of advanced production practices draws attention to the fact that there has been a shift on the platform: larger companies and professional filmmakers (or those who have become professional YouTubers) are using the platform for publishing. While the original idea of a platform for private use and distribution of videos in the sense of 'broadcast yourself' still exists, YouTube videos are increasingly the result of professional production processes. In addition, the majority of users mainly watch videos but do not upload them.

However, the platform's surface is constantly changing: in 2020 the mobile version received a new design that places the upload function ('create button') in the center of the bottom navigation bar (see fig. 1) and thus prioritizes uploads over notifications by simultaneously changing the user practice.^⑤ From a semiotic perspective, this makes the interface more akin to social media platforms like Instagram and encourages users to upload content rather than just watch it. The live-stream function as well as the Stories function provide the opportunity to upload unplanned and more spontaneous video content not only from home, but also on the go.

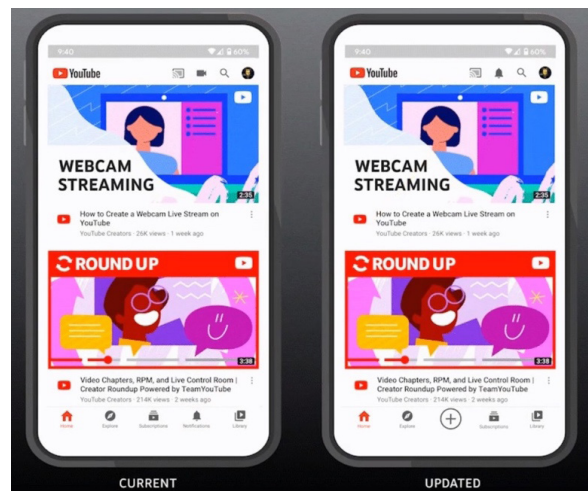


Fig. 1: The new create button in central position has replaced the notification bell, which is now placed in the upper right corner (Digital Information World 2020).

Of course, the implications of the platform can only be assumed at this point. In order to gain a deeper insight into the production of videos one would have to ask content creators themselves. Abidin (2016), for example, has conducted media ethnographic research on influencers and internet celebrities and has accompanied them over a period of time. In this process, she not only gained insights into the production of individual videos, but ultimately also into the job 'YouTuber'. This highlights the fact that many YouTube practices are embedded in commodified contexts that turn users into YouTube stars and influencers. The most prominent practice, which has its origin in YouTube and is now well established, is influencing, which affects certain topics (e.g. gaming, beauty, comedy) and in turn includes many other practices, such as instructing (e.g. in tutorials), testing (e.g. gadgets or styling products), or reviewing, which can evolve to consulting, promoting and, ultimately, (implicit/osmotic) advertising (Meer 2018). In a sense, influencing can be understood as a meta-practice, as it comprises several other grassroots practices that are inextricably entangled.

Nevertheless, influencing on YouTube can also occur independently of commercial interests, as in the case of online activism. Finally, YouTube can also be used for documenting^⑥, as Androutsopoulos and Tereick (2016: 355) point out:

"Besides consuming a large amount of web traffic and filling people's time with pastimes such as watching funny cat videos, it has gained considerable

^⑤ In addition, YouTube Shorts creates a counter-model to TikTok, which in turn wants to provide the option of uploading longer videos in the future. More on how platforms can influence user practices in a parasitic way, see Randerath in this collection.

^⑥ This is by no means an exhaustive list of practices or content on YouTube. There are many other topics that would be of interest, such as teaching in educational videos or practicing in the context of music or (media) art. For a deeper insight into social media and media art practices, see Götz in this collection.

political power as a publishing space for videos which document, among other things, police violence, war crimes and natural catastrophes.”

Which practices are used during production is, of course, decided by the content creators and is also dependent on the respective topic. The practices visible in the videos, however, can be investigated in the context of a product analysis.

Watching // Practices in Beauty and Gaming Videos

In my research I mainly focus on beauty/style videos as well as FIFA Let's Plays, both genres, which are widely popular in Germany, represent large communities and are particularly gendered at first glance. Strikingly, genres (resp.: text types) like Hauls, First Impressions, Tutorials, Reviews or Let's Plays and Pack Openings take up practices from other contexts and integrate them into new contexts that have developed on YouTube exclusively.

For example, Beauty-YouTubers test new products or gaming channels test new FIFA versions and integrate them into corresponding test formats (such as First Impressions or LPs) that have become established and popular on video and streaming platforms like YouTube⁷ in particular. Therefore, various practices are key factors when it comes to distinguishing and analysing certain text types, that have been created through processes of hybridisation and differentiation (Hauser & Luginbühl 2015).

Also, the text type terms (often mentioned in the video title or thumbnail) already provide clues towards various practices on YouTube. These terms themselves are products of processes of differentiation and hybridisation and describe new formats, which are constantly evolving. They often indicate certain actions performed by the YouTuber and/or refer to the community – like 'Let's Play', which reads like a call to play together, or 'First Impressions', which implies someone testing or trying something out and sharing their initial experience, and therefore can hint towards text type-related main practices. Here, the connection between YouTuber, video and user becomes relevant, as style and gaming videos always refer to various bodily/embodied actions and practices and take the user into account.

Accordingly, Hauls, for example, take up 'everyday practices' of shopping, showing each other new things at home, or trying on clothes again at home (Meer & Staubauch 2020), while FIFA Let's Plays refer not only to the practice of playing online, but also to playing football on the field as well as gambling, if actual money is involved. It should be pointed out here that these are practices that can be classified as gender-specific from

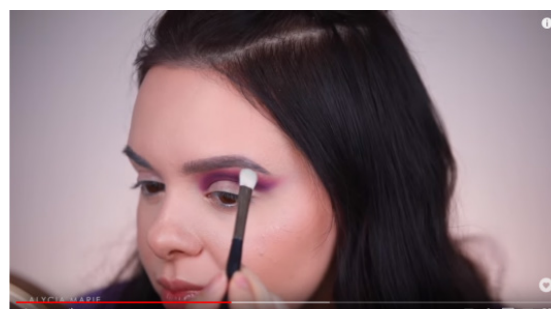
a traditional or conservative perspective. Although this interpretation does not hold in the light of gender studies, it should not be overlooked that journalistic media or advertising relating to beauty and football still address a gender-specific target group.

In addition, YouTubers perform a variety of actions that can be understood as linguistic or physical (cultural) practices, which also differ depending on the respective text type, such as commenting on their own actions (Schmidt & Marx 2020) either while playing FIFA (along with empractical actions or response cries [Lasch 2019]), or while doing makeup, swatching makeup, trying (on) clothes and testing beauty products. These practices can also include reacting to comments, in beauty or style VODs (videos on demand) as well as in FIFA live streams. On the one hand these practices happen simultaneously, picking up on the everyday practices just mentioned. On the other hand they happen at different levels that need to be considered in product-level analysis. This highlights the need for a multimodal analysis approach enabling holistic analyses of actions – and practices – within the videos and on their surface.



wir brechen allerdings den konter AB;
but we fend OFF the counterattack;

Fig. 2: German YouTuber Paluten commenting on FIFA game play, involving the audience (Paluten 2018)



und die setze ich n bisschen HIER unter die augenbraue;
and i place it a little HERE under the eyebrow;

Fig. 3: YouTuber Alycia Marie doing her makeup while explaining each step (Alycia Marie 2019)

In this sense, concepts of semiotics and conversational analysis can provide an appropriate framework for product analysis, as verbal or audiovisual practices can themselves be understood as semiotic practices. Therefore, semiotic modes as language, picture

⁷ Besides Twitch.

Considering this, I decided, regarding my research, to combine focus group discussions with a joint viewing of the videos, in order to gain information not only about the teenagers' opinions regarding the different videos, but also about their own use of the platform, their preferred content and the extent to which YouTube is integrated into their everyday life. Also, describing one's own practices with and around YouTube, as well as attributing certain content to a specific target group, enables the gaining of information on gender as a relevant category, whether YouTube practices are also gender practices, and how follow-up practices are 'doing gender' (West & Zimmermann 1987) practices. What is interesting is the extent to which certain practices take place both during and after the use of the platform, and if/how they are inspired by platform-specific parameters or video content. For example, one focus group participant shared how she watches test videos on drugstore make-up and purchases items afterwards, e.g. concealers, recommended by her YouTuber of choice.

Generally, of course, YouTube practices can be considered with a variety of research practices.¹² The media-ethnographic approach proposed here offers one possibility, which in turn can be combined with conversation analysis evaluation methods. In this way, it is possible to evaluate the interconnectedness of practices in use and the extent of their being entangled, while disentangling the different levels on which they take place at the same time.

Concluding // Researching Practices on and around YouTube

As this paper highlighted, YouTube practices are entangled in unique ways exclusive to the context of the platform. These (social/communicative/verbal) practices occur on several layers around broadcasting, watching and integrating, and transitions are not always clear. Hence, research has to consider both the connections and interplays between practices and their disentanglement.

I have stressed the relevance of identifying connections between media/online practices on YouTube, everyday and media practices that are part of platform usage, everyday practices that are referred to in videos, everyday practices embedding watching YouTube videos or everyday practices that are inspired by video content.

Digital media practices could be identified as one category of different practices, which are relevant on two levels: first, on the level of production and publishing of videos (e.g. filming, uploading) and second,

on the reception level, concerning the viewing of videos on many different devices as well as the specific participatory practices embedded in the platform (e.g. commenting, sharing).

In addition, videos with different content and genres partly contain or take up certain practices in different ways. Video-inherent communicative practices, such as para-interactive and verbal practices, have been observed, which are particularly interesting from a media-linguistic perspective. It became clear that new practices can unite other sub-practices within themselves. Also, (online) media practices can spread beyond YouTube, such as following the YouTubers' accounts on other social media or playing (online) games.

Additionally, everyday practices are significant on several levels. Firstly, watching YouTube videos can be understood as a practice that is incorporated into daily routines. This practice can in turn be integrated into other sub-practices or appear simultaneously with others. Secondly, everyday (leisure) practices, such as shopping, gaming or testing, are digitally translated into new online formats and various text types on YouTube, e.g. Hauls or FIFA Pack Openings. This mainly concerns practices that are linked back to the YouTubers' bodies (e.g. doing makeup, hair styling, playing football) and/or imply a proposal towards the users' bodies (e.g. copying presented makeup looks) or incite similar practices based on what is shown (such as playing FIFA in different game modes).

Especially against the background of the increasing commodification of videos and content, it becomes important, which criteria inspire viewers to actually take actions based on them. Particularly with regard to influencing, the question arises if the frequency of watching a certain YouTuber is also based on a practice of trusting. This becomes chiefly crucial when a target group of teenagers is addressed, who are supposed to spend their money either on game advantages or on fulfilling beauty standards, which in turn involves practices of doing gender.

This article illustrated the extent to which YouTube practices occur at different levels, are interrelated, intersecting and blending, and vary for producers and recipients. Because of the way they are entangled with and around each other, instead of speaking only of an 'adding' (as in practice+), it seems more appropriate in this case to speak also of a multiplying of practices, i.e. practices². Moreover, practices displayed in YouTube videos and the use of the platform itself can become part of individual everyday practices and from there, in turn, can be picked up again online in videos on YouTube or other social media, which indicates not only a differentiation and hybridisation of text types, but also of practices.

¹² Burgess and Green (2018 [2009]) provide an overview on various approaches for YouTube analyses.

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

Magdalena Götz

“To make things queer is certainly to disturb the order of things.” (Ahmed 2006: 161)

“Queer becomes a matter of how things appear, how they gather, how they perform, to create the edges of spaces and worlds.” (Ahmed 2006: 167)

Becoming With: Deconstructing Dichotomies and Intersecting Practices



Fig. 1

Weird Read Intensive is the title of a reading, writing and performance workshop¹ led by artists Dorota Gawęda and Eglė Kulbokaitė, founders of the Young Girl Reading Group (YGRG). The workshop focuses on experiencing reading otherwise: collectively, bodily, and mediated via smartphones. It is taking place at an exhibition space at NRW-Forum Düsseldorf in an installation created by the artist duo. Using polystyrene

blocks covering the floor, digital mobile devices, screens, semi-transparent banners, colorful lights, and an artificial waterfall with their self-designed fragrance, the workshop is situated in a material, bodily, and sensually perceptible and digitally mediated surrounding.

Artistic projects with a queer/feminist² stance that involve digital mobile media, like that of the YGRG, bring actors together to form collectives in material and digital infrastructures, aiming at deconstructing dichotomies in support of entangled³ relations. While artistic practices materialize in physical space, they simultaneously become present on-screen and with digital mobile media, such as smartphones, as well as within social media platforms. As such, they create distributed practices, spatialities, and temporalities as well as affective relations of participating, of being and *becoming with* (Haraway 2008: 244) and *in* non/human agencies (Giffney & Hird 2008: 2). Combining diverse intersecting practices, this text entangles describing of and *writing on* artistic practices with practices of *writing up* and theorizing about these practices, while interweaving them with layers of visual practices of documenting the artistic doings in my research practices. As these layers become interrelated⁴, researching and participating in queer/feminist artistic practices constitutes *circular thinking* and *becoming with* the very practices I am researching.⁵ Positioning practice-theoretical stances as *always already* entangled with theoretical and methodological approaches in gender, feminist and queer studies⁶, and thus, advocating the need of drawing together practice the-

² Relating to “techno-ecofeminism,” Yvonne Volkart defines “queer/feminist” as queer and feminist deconstructions: as practices of “‘queering’ of powerful dichotomies. [...] Those who help to break through these dualistic hierarchies in the direction of complex relations and entanglements of agents always take action, one could say, in a queer/feminist or ecofeminist way: [...]”, cf. Volkart (2019: 119).

³ For the notion of entanglement, cf. Barad (2007).

⁴ Regarding interrelated (social) media practices and “messy layers” see also Och’s text on “(Dis-)entangling YouTube Practices” in this issue.

⁵ For the practice of ‘circular thinking’ and of ‘becoming with’ in the process of working on this publication as a whole see: Hind et al. in the introduction of this issue, on the “Genesis of the Collection”.

⁶ Thinking practice together with knowledge, Silvia Gherardi proposes practice as entangled and “collective and knowledgeable doing” (Gherardi 2019: 1). Focusing on distributed, collective aesthetic practices, she offers a rare feminist and (organizational) aesthetic approach to practice theory. While she positions practices as “situated modes of ordering and ‘agencing’” (ibid.: 8), I intend to focus on modes of disordering, disturbing and disorienting.

¹ The workshop *Weird Read Intensive* took place on 5th and 6th of July 2019 at NRW Forum Düsseldorf as part of the event “Digital Imaginaries” initiated by the “Akademie der Avantgarde” in cooperation with “Institut für Kunst und Kunsttheorie” at the University of Cologne, see: <https://www.nrw-forum.de/veranstaltungen/digital-imaginaries>.

ory with media artistic practices, aesthetics and queer/feminist studies⁷, this article conceptualizes artistic uses with, of and surrounding digital mobile media as *queering practices* and positions them as a twofold approach: as the practice(s) of queering as well as the queering of practice(s). To interweave practices with queering, I draw on queer theoretical concepts as suggested by feminist scholar Sara Ahmed: “queer objects” or “queer devices” (Ahmed 2006) as well as “queer use” (Ahmed 2019). By analyzing media and artistic practices that enable smartphones to become *queer(ing) devices*, I argue for a specific *queer*, that is disordering and disruptive, *use* that potentially queers spaces, objects, and practices which are not inherently queer. Conceptualizing practice(s) as revelatory and generative, and by analyzing the retooling of technologies and their disorienting effects on bodies, spaces, and things I intend to frame queering practices as potentially collectivizing, performative and disturbing.

Challenging Orientations: Ordering and Disturbing Practices

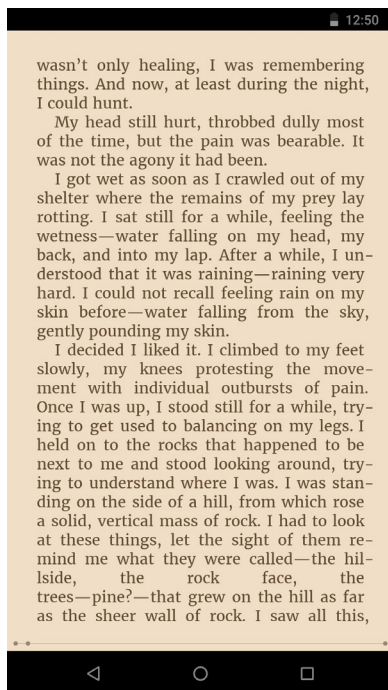


Fig. 2

7 Conceptually combining practice theories with gender studies often focuses on the proximities of praxeology and *doing gender*-approaches, concepts of practice and performativity, and on critiquing short-circuited objectivity, cf. Völker (2019: 509). For a thinking together of practice and media theories with gender and post-colonial perspectives see Bergermann (2021). Focusing on the media practices of queer theories and their effect on media studies, Köppert proposes ‘queering media studies’ (Köppert 2019: 5).

We gather on the soft blocks spread in the art space, with our smartphones in our hands. Via our digital mobile devices, we share texts the artists have selected. We open the e-book of science fiction author Octavia Butler’s *Fledgling*, a novel about a young, black-skinned vampire^⑧ living in mutualistic symbiosis with humans, portraying queer sexualities, and challenging normalized power relations on the level of race, class, and gender. We read together from our phones. We listen to each other pronouncing words out loud. Our eyes follow words on screens. We search our way into the text, the narration, the space, the collective reading, our relations to each other, our emotions, our bodies, our digital mobile devices. While reading, we look for new postures, lie down on, over, next to the blocks, someone reads upside down. In open search movements we bodily, cognitively, and affectively engage with unknown and unfamiliar (reading) practices. A collective reading group is forming out of individuals and mobile devices.

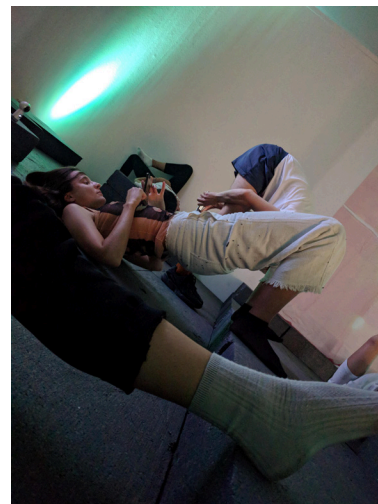


Fig. 3

Understanding “media as practice” (Couldry 2004: 29), media practices can be described as practical doing with media that are situative, bodily, processual, cross-media, infrastructural, historical and socio-cultural (Dang-Anh et al. 2017: 7). Framing praxis as specific, singular and situated but at the same time circulating independently of singular subjects positions praxis as eluding common dualisms (cf. Völker 2019: 509). Researching artistic practices using digital mobile media, therefore, requires an entangled approach expanding the question of “what people do with media” (Couldry 2004: 118) to what media do with people (Dang-Anh et al. 2017: 15), with non-human actors as well as with

⑧ Another form of parasitic being, Michel Serres’ figure of the parasite, can be found in Randerath’s article on “parasitic practices through Salesforce” in this issue.

practices as Nick Couldry indicates in asking: “what is the role of media-oriented practices in ordering other practices?” (Couldry 2004: 129) Against this backdrop, I want to argue that (media) practices like reading collectively using digital mobile devices are not only *ordering*, but also *disturbing* other practices, such as normalized practices of reading, of bodily (be)coming together and of solitary smartphone use. While our gazes are focused on phone screens, we are simultaneously and constantly being made aware of the physical presence of bodies in physical space, by giving our voices to the texts we read, by finding new postures. Using smartphones in this way, thus, disturbs how bodies interact and devices are used, they become disoriented. In this, Ahmed’s “queer phenomenology” (Ahmed 2006) positions the concept of (dis)orientation as central and thus the situating of bodies in space(s) and time, towards or away from objects that (dis)orient them (cf. *ibid.*: 1). Following Ahmed’s concepts of “disorientation device” (*ibid.*: 172) and “queer devices” (*ibid.*: 179), I discuss the potentiality for objects, practices, and spaces to become queer, thereby, challenging orientations.

Collaborative Practices: Queer(ing) Reading and Writing in Fragile Cooperation

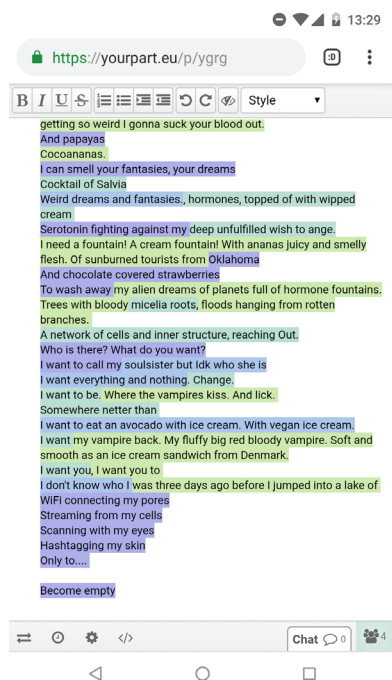


Fig. 4

Inspired by what we read the day before, we set out to compile a performance text together. To write collaboratively we use our smartphones and the web-based text editor Etherpad. With different colors assigned to each of us, we compose together, write with, across and over each

other, weaving a colorful text, without talking. Associating, referring to one another, as well as to vampires, social media and pop culture, we collectively produce a 94-line text we title *sand witch craft – scent which crafts*.



Fig. 5

Drawing together collaborative digital media use and artistic practices, I inquire which practices become relevant in artistic projects, ‘how they are established and through which organizational, technological, institutional, and aesthetic interconnections they are formed’ (Schüttpeitz & Gießmann 2015: 9).⁹ Following artistic practices using smartphones, I suggest that media and artistic practices are mutually, cooperatively and continuously produced, and distributed among various actors and agencies. In the workshop, these mutual cooperative practices constitute spatial and temporal relations, while relying on technical devices and software as part of the infrastructure for cooperation.¹⁰ Reading together from screens, pronouncing words out loud, engenders their vocalization and embodiment, thereby it queers the practice of reading as a solitary practice, and it makes collaboration a queer practice in itself. Instead of idealizing the notion of cooperation and mutuality, however, I want to stress the volatility that is shaping the practices,

⁹ The original German version reads: “Im Vergleich und in der Verbindung von Medienpraktiken, insbesondere in einer orts- und situationsbezogenen Forschung, wie sie in Siegen durch das DFG-Graduiertenkolleg »Locating Media« entwickelt wird, stellt sich nämlich für jede Medienpraxis die Frage, durch welche organisatorischen, technischen, institutionellen und ästhetischen Verkettungen sie zustande kommt und am Laufen gehalten wird, [...]”.

¹⁰ In their text in this issue on “Agre’s Interactionism” Hind & Seitz in looking at “Agre’s articulation of the relationship between practice and computational representation” are “providing an account of how digital technologies iteratively shape, manage, and control practices” (p. 22).

¹¹ Lämmerhirt in this issue conceptualizes (health) “data donations as cooperative practices” between people and media (p. 30).

which are in themselves fragile and transitory, thereby, refusing to align all too neatly onto a narrative of positivistic, *straightforward* cooperation. For instance, seeing each other type on screen in real time *orients* but also continuously *disorients* our thoughts and words, that form and get reshaped as others add, delete and propose other threads to weave with.

Retooling Smartphones: Collectivizing, Performative and Disturbing Practices

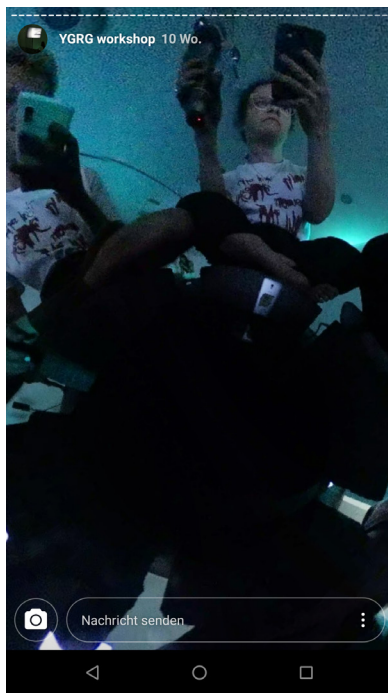


Fig. 6

We then stage the text for our performance in the art space. Using the blocks, we form a circular structure, sitting down on it and reading the text from our smartphones in distributed roles. Our reading spreads out through the room via microphones and loudspeakers. We are filming ourselves with a CCTV camera, transmitting an eerie black and white image to a big screen in the center of the room. Simultaneously, a 360-degree camera is documenting the performance, distorting images, space, human and machine bodies. One performer acts as a visual jockey: using a search engine on her laptop she associatively looks for (moving) images matching the text, which appear on the middle of one of three wall screens. On the left screen we are broadcasting our collective writing process via the automatic timeslider function of the Etherpad, on the right screen we share the process of reading together using one performer's smartphone display for transmittance.

Collectively reading out loud from screens seems as if they have cast a spell on us, putting focus on the smartphones, the text and our (be)coming together. Transmitting our writing process via the timeslider function creates a cinematic component in the art space, depicting an uncanny appearance of words as if guided by a ghostly hand; just like the visual jockey's live broadcast mimicking a flow of thoughts and images in one's associative brain. The cameras create partial, distorted images of our bodies and devices in the space, contributing to a rather *weird* and *intensive*, a *queer(ed)* impression. Thus, allowing to share texts, to read, write and perform together in collective practices, enables a retooling of smartphones to support queering their solitary use. Digital mobile devices can, thereby, allow for collectivizing, performative and disturbing practices that can be described as practices *queer* to their intended use, as queering practices. As such, smartphones can potentially become queer and queer practices surrounding them. In this, I propose that not only objects but also practices potentially become queer, as "queer objects" (Ahmed 2006: 157) are deeply entangled with the practices that make them. The question of how something becomes queer centrally focuses on the practices of queering and "becoming queer" (ibid.: 163), of "disturb[ing] the order of things." (ibid.: 161) Queering is, thus, understood as specific appearance, gathering, performing, as a disturbance of order. In this sense, *queering* constitutes a deviating from *straightening* practices of institutions, bodies, and things within a dominantly hetero-normative society, while producing orientations towards other kinds of practices.¹² Queering, thus, establishes an ethico-political orientation towards other kinds of (dominant) practices, and in doing so creates its own category.¹³ In positioning smartphones as potentially "queer devices", I translate Ahmed's line of argumentation onto technological objects.¹⁴ Following the example of the table, she describes how it is transformed from a straightening, hetero-normalizing

¹² As Borbach also points out in the epilogue to this issue, "media practices can potentially 'queer' the supposedly given structure, order, and usage of technological digital objects," thus, "queering media through practice which should be programmatic and symptomatic for our practice of media research" (p. 37).

¹³ I am thankful for Sam Hind's comments and discussion of these aspects with me.

¹⁴ Thinking together Ahmed's concepts of orientation with media, Nelanthi Hewa proposes a "media phenomenology" that "attends to the relationship between media and the bodies that turn to – and are turned – by them" and asks: "what might it mean to be hailed by the machine, and turn away?" (cf. Hewa 2021: n.p.). Franziska Wagner brings together disorientation with virtual-reality films and argues with Ahmed for their queer potentials and perspectives in these bodily mediations (cf. Wagner 2019).

dining table into a “reorientation device” “when the kitchen table supports feminist writing” (ibid.: 61) and into a “supporting device for queer gatherings, which is what makes the table itself a rather queer device” (ibid.: 179). In a similar way, smartphones in the workshop reorient us by supporting reading, writing, and performing together, thus, making the mobile devices *queer(ing) devices enabling queering practices*.

Queer Use: Potentially Queering Spaces and Things



Fig. 7

During the workshop, the artists are taking photographs and short videos of the space, the technologies, themselves, and us while reading, writing and performing with our smartphones. They are using their own digital mobile devices, capturing screens and interfaces. Then, they are sharing them as a story on their Instagram account under the title “YGRG workshop”, adding captions, tagging people. In their grey-blue-greenish colors, their selective, at times distorting picture sections, and their use of mise-en-abyme effects, the photographs have an eerie, uncanny visual quality; disturbing the all too perfectly staged and fluffy colorful flows of Instagram feeds.¹⁵

¹⁵ I am very thankful to Kristin Klein for our shared in-depth experiencing and analyzing the practices of the YGRG. In her article “Auditions for Audacity” Klein looks at YGRG’s work to exemplify how digitality is articulated in the artistic in terms of body, space, materiality and image circulation by critically reflecting on concepts of postdigitality and Post-Internet, cf. Klein (2021).

Using digital mobile devices to collectively read texts, write a performance script, to perform, document, and share content on social media, smartphones are put at the center of the workshop practices. Use, in its practice, as *using*, signifies the making use of, connecting human with non-human actors. Thus, defining use as a or one “way of being in touch with things”, as “giv[ing] us a sense of things: how they are; what they are like” (Ahmed 2019: 21), hints at *how* we relate to things is generated in active use, that is, *in practice*. Using things as *practicing*, can thereby be understood as their epistemological quality: *things in practice* can become revelatory about their specific being and becoming with.¹⁶ Or to use Ahmed’s words who considers “how usefulness can be evocative: use as how we handle things; use as how we mingle with things” (ibid.: 22) – and, as I want to add – how we mingle and practice with technological things. In the context of artistic and media practices with smartphones, I want to argue with Ahmed for a potential “queer use” – a use that is not intended, but rather extended and transversed, a use queer to the use expected or how something is used “by those other than for whom they were intended” (ibid.: 199). This queerness, however, has to be activated: “[q]ueer uses would be about releasing a potentiality that already resides in things given how they have taken shape. Queer use could be what we are doing when we release that potential.” (ibid.: 200) Here, I want to stress the *doing* necessary to release the potentialities of how things can be queered, by queering their use, by *queer using*. As such, the potential becoming queer of spaces can depend on “how those who identify as queer make use of spaces. [...] The implication here is that uses are queer because spaces are not: queerness as what is injected into spaces by queer users.” (ibid.: 200) Consequently, queer spaces per se do not exist, neither do queer things – it is their *use* that makes them potentially queer spaces or things (cf. ibid.: 200). Smartphones, thus, can become *queering devices* when used queer to everyday use in artistic practices such as in the YGRG workshop. Thereby, I suggest, queer use is always situative and temporary. Localizing the potential for queer use in the spaces “somewhere between our bodies and our worlds” (ibid.: 201), I argue for practices as the connecting (and potentially dividing)¹⁷ tissue in realizing queer uses and devices.

¹⁶ Neumann in this issue also argues for a situated disciplinary stance, for “taking things seriously as a practice”, and for a sociopolitical agency of performing arts (cf. p. 28).

¹⁷ For an in-depth analysis on media (theories) and their potential to connect and divide, also in relation to gender, see Bergermann et al. (2021).

Queering Practices: Sticking with the Messiness and Queerness of Practices



Fig. 8

In the workshop, practices of queering are enacted on various levels: firstly, as queering of reading and writing practices, in using queer/feminist texts, queering of normative narratives, and collectively reading and writing; secondly, as queering of bodily performing and (be)coming with and together in physical and digital space as a joint using and creating of plural spaces; thirdly, as queering of visual practices as a queering of familiar imageries, their production and reception, in using and combining cameras and screens; and fourthly, as queering of technologies and media practices as a queering of isolated, solitary media use of smartphones by collaborative practices of reading, writing, performing, and documenting via digital mobile devices.

Analyzing queer/feminist artistic practices with digital mobile media I have suggested that queering provides an alternative and additional concept to understanding practices and their potentialities. These *queering practices* can be understood in a twofold way. Firstly, as the *queering of practices*: of media, technological, artistic, bodily, cultural technique practices. Secondly, as the *practices of queering*: as the potentially, situative and temporarily disturbing of things, spaces, bodies and their practices and as such, the deviating from straightening practices. In this context, I want to conceptualize queering as a critical media practice, as it considers and enacts things, matters and relations otherwise. In making and using “queer objects”, ar-

tists and participants of the YGRG workshop *queer* intended and everyday practices of smartphone use. As such, queer/feminist artistic practices are probing and countering the straightening, the „aligning“, the (hetero-)normative forming mechanisms of smartphone uses. Conceptualizing practice in their queering potential as “queering practices” unfolds and reflects practice as potentially generative, revelatory, collectivizing, performative and disturbing. As such, queer practices can have a diverting effect in disorienting normalized straightening practices. Thereby, it is the practice of *using* things, media, and spaces in a queer manner that potentially queers them. Localizing the potential for queer use between bodies, spaces, objects and media, practices constitute the connecting tissue in actualizing queer uses and devices. Emphasizing the need for “a meta-language of describing practice”, Nick Couldry postulates that “we have to point to things as one practice as distinct from another practice, as distinct from something that’s just messy and confused and isn’t anything at all.” (Genner 2020: 6) While I agree that describing practices calls for a critical use of language, I argue that immersing oneself in and researching practices, such as (media) artistic practices, necessarily is *messy* and *confusing*, especially because practices entangled in media and the artistic are themselves not as „distinct“, nor as *straight* as one might hope for. Therefore, claiming to be able to clearly distinguish one practice from another, runs the risk of drawing boundaries where entanglements are, while smoothing over the messiness and disorder centrally inherent to practice and its notion. Thus, I want to propose being a “feminist killjoy” (Ahmed 2017) and sticking to, and “staying with the trouble” (Haraway 2016) of, the messiness and queerness of practices.

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Photo credit:

The images in this article consist of screenshots taken by the author from the Instagram account of the Young Girl Reading Group (@y_g_r_g) from the story highlight “YGRG workshop” (<https://www.instagram.com/stories/highlights/17864136457432608/>) (1, 6, 7, 8); screenshots taken from the author’s smartphone screen during the workshop from the e-book of Octavia Butler’s *Fledgling* (2) and the collective writing process using Etherpad (4); photos taken via the author’s smartphone showing collective reading and writing (3, 5); and a screenshot of an Instagram post by Dorota Gawęda (@tuniatunia) (https://www.instagram.com/p/Bzf_bHzIiNu/) (7).

Agre's Interactionism

Sam Hind & Tatjana Seitz

Introduction

Philip Agre has become a key thinker in certain strands of media studies, especially on data collection and processing (Sprenger 2018), platform labour (van Doorn & Badger 2020) and algorithmic culture (Rieder 2020). In much of his work he is interested in the everyday practices of modern-day workers: from those in call centres and office jobs, to those in fast food restaurants and airports. Yet, whilst Agre has done much for the study of how work practices have changed with “computerization”, he is rarely described as a theorist of practice. Rarer still, is an understanding that Agre has developed any kind of comprehensive theory of practice. In this paper we hope to provide the first steps towards attending to these issues, by looking towards Agre’s articulation of the relationship between practice and computational representation, or what he refers to as “interactionism”. We do so principally, by considering his “novel vision of work-discipline” he calls the “empowerment and measurement regime” (Agre 1995: 167). Our hope is two-fold. Firstly, that this analysis of Agre’s interactionism can complement other more familiar practice approaches, from Garfinkel (1967) to Schatzki (Schatzki et al. 2001), by providing an account of how digital technologies iteratively shape, manage, and control practices. In other words, how they structure and formalize activities. Secondly, in doing so, Agre’s technical focus on system design (beyond Agre [1994]) is appreciated as methodologically useful to the study of contemporary issues around digital practice, accountability, and power. We provide a preliminary insight into the application of Agre’s interactionism with reference to two cases: social media APIs and automotive navigation systems.

The Politics of Accountability

In *From High Tech to Human Tech*, Agre (1995) examines an emerging discourse within management and information technology, which he diagnoses as an “empowerment and measurement regime”. In a business context, empowerment “refers to a process by which employees are freed of bureaucratic constraints and given control of their work in order to make decisions and reorganize their local-work processes in accord with their own judgement” (1995: 170). A key facilitator of these processes has been what Agre (1995: 178) refers to as “distributed computer technology”: Apple’s desktop model as oppo-

sed to the “centralized world of IBM” (1995: 177). Measurement, in the context of this regime, is the process by which the (work) activities of the “empowered” employee are captured and fed back into the modulation, and management, of these activities. As Agre (1995: 176) contends, whilst these two processes of empowerment and measurement are well-known within business, they are “rarely identified as a single, coherent system”. Agre’s synthesis is an attempt to codify a relationship between empowerment and measurement, practice and representation. In other words, to not only contest the claim that empowerment is the freedom to make decisions, but to articulate how distributed decision-making is enabled by “simultaneously centralizing control through measurement” (1995: 179).

But what are the kinds of practices that Agre has in mind, and what tangible effect does their representation have on the practices themselves? Agre’s point of departure is the proposition that during transitional phases, in which established routines are rearranged, “many things [become] visible which are ordinarily obscured” (1995: 190).^① For Agre, writing in the mid-90s, the desktop computer was responsible for this rearrangement, handing workers new possibilities to do things. To elucidate these rearrangements, Agre looks to Lucy Suchman’s (1992) sociological work. However, Agre takes up Suchman’s analysis not only for her rigorous analysis of computer-mediated office work, but also for translating “Garfinkel’s critique of sociological representation into a critique of computer system design” (Agre 1995: 186). In this, Agre sympathizes with Garfinkel’s insistence on the materiality of representation (see, 1995: 185). Rather than speaking of representation in general, Garfinkel’s interest is in how people use representations in their specific everyday activities. That is, in practice.

In her analysis Suchman (1992) explicates the role of technology in coordinating the operations of an airline at a regional airport, and how workers “account” for the work they do in managing aircrafts, passengers, and baggage. As Agre suggests, this accountability “is not just a formal relationship or an outside force, but a practical process of exhibiting reality” (Agre 1995: 182), in which workers are engaged in the “process of representing the[ir] work” (1995: 182), such that this accountability becomes work in itself. As this “new style of work is heavily ‘staged’” (1995: 182), i.e. the product of a meticulous design process, Agre proposes to extend Suchman’s work through a historical analysis of the design of tech-

① The representation of human activity through software but also through terminology is not least a concern Hannah Neumann discusses in her piece when she discusses the vocabularies that each research community has developed to speak about practice.

nology, here computers, that make such work representable to the computer, and thus accountable to management. As stated by Agre: “[a]lthough many technologies are involved, distributed computing technologies play a crucial role in creating, storing, accumulating, manipulating, and transmitting [...] representations” (1995: 182). In other words, that computers actively, and continuously, shape practices of accountability.

Working Interactionally

Agre’s diagnosis leads to both a normative critique and a methodological proposition. The normative critique of technology makes explicit how relations of power and control shape practices of accountability, an aspect that some practice approaches tend to ignore. This critique is guided by Habermas’ (1987: 355-356) definition of “colonization”, through which the “reorganization of communities’ systems of meaning” (Agre 1995: 180) takes place, such that “existing concepts are given technical definitions and thus subordinated to a technological order of knowledge and power” (1995: 180). Agre is therefore concerned with the world-making capacities of technology. More explicitly he takes a medium-specific view to explicate the role of computer technologies in working communities of practice. When Agre talks of communities, he is specifically interested in so-called “occupational communities” (1995: 180), that is, “doctors, mechanics, accountants, secretaries, drivers, and so forth” (1995: 180).

Whilst much of his conceptual understanding of human activity is in spirit with Garfinkel’s theoretical work on practice, in fact, Agre is more interested in developing an “interactionist research methodology” (Agre 1988: 22). Foregrounding “interactionism” (1988: 20), rather than practice per se, or “situated actions” (Suchman 1985), Agre shifts attention to structures and processes of system design. Here, computational representation and human activity are not isolated, but are inextricable, as the “inside” and “outside” of a coherent system. Components of this effort are the computational implementation of a “theory of activity” (Agre 1988: 247; Agre & Chapman 1987), and the development of an “interactionist theory of representation” (Agre 1988: 171). Thus, Agre’s critique of colonization becomes more than just an observation that technologies shape realities.

The methodological proposition considers how colonization requires the development of so-called “grammars of action”, through which certain work practices are “captured”. Agre’s point of departure is the acknowledgement that computers and software run on highly simplified representations of human activities as formalized discrete entities. To represent human activity in a mathematical language a “gram-

mar” is needed as a “stand in” for the computer readable version of human activities. Such grammars are derived from, but not identical to, the pre-existing vernacular language of a community of practice. Agre provides the example of a grammar of restaurant activities which include terms derived from the professional language used by waiters, cooks, and managers including: “orders”, “change”, “items”, “customers”, “tabs” or “tips” (Agre 1995: 183). As they “stand in particular relationships to the activities from which they are derived and upon which they are imposed” (1995: 183), Agre (1994: 109) calls them “grammars of action”. His interest, thus, is the impact of such grammars on work itself and how workers make themselves accountable through these mechanisms.

Grammars and capture processes are in a continuous relationship with one another. Computer systems are designed to capture work processes in a formalized manner and “re-inject” (Agre 1995: 184) a re-formalized, or redesigned, representational schema for workers to interact with machinery or devices, software and interfaces. In so doing, the computational representation, or grammar, overcomes a coding functionality, standing in for or describing an action, and instead “becomes a resource in the activity itself” (1995: 183). For the human aspect upon which capture operates, Agre points out that when the capture mechanism is at work, it never is just a technical system but always also a sociopolitical system. Capture, accordingly, is “never purely technical but always sociotechnical in nature” (Agre 1994: 112).^② It follows that when the capture process is accompanied by a design process that aims to formalize a pre-existing grammar, then the sociotechnical system and its functioning should be critiqued on the ground of its ideology.

Methodologically, what can we learn from this? Firstly, that grammars of action can be studied in a situated mode, hence, Agre’s interest in ethnomethodology. However, ethnomethodology alone is

② In his contribution Danny Lämmerhirt investigates the German Corona-Datenspende App and finds that the variety and velocity of captured fitness data exceeds the needs of pandemic research. Privacy has a high priority in this case of data exchange, because two powerful institutions are coupled with each other: private business enterprises and government-related organizations. In the process of capture, it is revealed that companies realize user’s privacy rights not by system design but only in a subsequent step of further processing. The donated data can sometimes only be donated in a package with other data that is not requested by the scientific community. The illusion that capture is a technical process is no longer sustainable for private companies. To understand this sociotechnical phenomenon Lämmerhirt approximates these practices with a set of praxeographical tools.

less able to establish a contextual critique of the capture mechanism at work. For instance, in reducing the question of representation to a simple critique of transparency, the wider business discourse on empowerment and measurement is ignored. Contrasting the insights of a critique of transparency with his own analysis, he sees its shortcoming as being ahistorical. Hence, secondly, he develops a technically precise but sociologically informed analysis of the material nature of the empowerment and measurement regime, “plac[ing] the social relations of workplace representation firmly in their historical context” (Agre 1995: 189), such as the professional tradition of engineering, or the alternation of popular management thought. The reason for this historical approach is to analyse and define both the distinct features of the capture mechanism while simultaneously preserving the “complementary orders of ‘technical’ and ‘human’ affairs bound together within a dynamic tension” (1995: 190). We briefly expand on the utility of Agre’s methodological approach by considering two cases: social media APIs, and automotive navigation systems.

Case Study 1: Social Media APIs

The first example concerns Facebook. Apart from the user facing services, there are also developer facing services on Facebook for Developers, known as the Platform. The Platform provides services to external developers to programmatically interact with Facebook’s data servers for data exchange. The “primary way” (Facebook 2020, n.p.) to use these software products is through the Graph API. The Graph API is a meticulously designed, highly formalized computational representation of grammars directly derived from user activities with and on Facebook. Put otherwise, the Platform can be understood as an infrastructure for the exchange of grammars of action. Examples of the grammars of a photo-like activity within the Graph API include “id”, “gender” and “user_friends” for the individual actor and “user object”, “created_time” and “location” for the image or “picture object”, itself. There are a total of more than 100 possible grammars that can be captured for the representation of the activity when someone likes a photo of someone else on Facebook. These grammars are not only contextualized, they are also continuously updated, capturing user activity in real-time and “re-injecting” them into the frontend offering users “new” ways to interact with Facebook, thereby re-establishing previously existing representations to make activity accountable on the platform.

As much as the Graph API is a technological infrastructure, it is equally the documentation of Facebook’s organizational decisions. Placing these representations firmly in their historical context, as

Agre (see, 1995: 189) suggests, we can start analysing the Graph API design within the terms of its political economy. Here the analysis of the “Facebookleaks” documents³ (Campbell 2018) provides the historic context. The analysis of these documents shows that following an internal estimation of each grammar in terms of its economic benefit, in 2014 the Graph API was redesigned to more efficiently meet Facebook’s business objectives. While the old Graph API pre-existed the economic business model, the new Graph API was explicitly designed to make user and developer activities accountable in economic terms.

Case Study 2: Automotive Navigation Systems

The second example concerns the “datafication” (van Dijk 2014; Sadowski 2019) of automobility. In this, new interface technologies are being integrated into contemporary vehicles that allow drivers to issue navigational requests. On the one hand, the likes of What3words enable drivers to input locations according to unique, three word strings (such as “cave. wood.grills”) rather than using standard addresses and postcodes. On the other hand, these novel addressing systems are being integrated alongside voice-control systems, meaning drivers no longer have to use unresponsive search boxes, clunky dials or even external sat-navs. Instead, drivers merely issue vocalized instructions. Together, historic places, neighbourhoods or specific street names are replaced with randomized, essentially meaningless, word strings.⁴ It is, therefore, a case of what Agre refers to “semantic colonization” (Agre 1995: 186), in which established, arguably community-derived place names are “subordinated to a technological order of knowledge and power” (1995: 180), as mentioned above. Further, that in imposing themselves on the established practices of navigating whilst driving, these technologies also colonize existing driving communities too. In this case, these dual technological developments – of an addressing system and an information retrieval system – combine to offer a contemporary example of how novel representational forms and technologies reshape, and re-organize existing, established navigational activities. Quite plainly, both establish a grammar of acceptable action (three word strings, vocal instructions), that dictates the words or utterances of the driver, making them accountable in a remarkably different manner (no postcodes, no typed searches).

³ The Facebookleaks documents contain internal communication between Facebook’s top management in which they discuss the major redesign of the Graph API.

⁴ The authors wish to thank Aikaterini Mniestri for inspiring us to develop this argument.

Conclusion

In this short text we have sought to do two things. Firstly, to excavate Agre's work on "interactionism" in order to establish him as a theorist of practice. But, secondly, to suggest that Agre is also peculiar in the way he attends to the question of practice. Here, we have argued that Agre binds together particular technologically-oriented processes that, at the time, were not necessarily considered as part of the same logic. That is, by drawing together "empowerment" and "measurement" within a specific "regime", Agre was able to articulate the role that distributed computer technologies were having on work practices in the 1990s. In intending to "specify the precise role envisioned for computing technology in implementing [this] emerging regime" (Agre 1995: 180), Agre turned to the question of accountability, and the role technologies were having on how work activities were made accountable by workers. Following Habermas (1987), he establishes a critique of such processes of representation, in which pre-existing, "indigenous" work languages are "colonized", with the effect of re-formalizing, or reconstituting related work practices. As a way to build on this critique, Agre makes a methodological proposal, foregrounding interactionism, which he later refers to as critical technical practice (Agre 1997). In providing short cases of how Agre's work can be applied with respect to contemporary digital technologies, such as social media APIs and automotive navigation systems, we believe his work has much more to offer, both conceptually and methodologically, on the subject of practice.

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Taking Things Seriously as a Practice

Hannah Neumann

I am doing research on theater in crisis areas, with a focus on Afghanistan. When I think about practice in the context of (theater) scholarship, I am primarily concerned with taking things seriously. I understand taking things seriously not only as a form of ethical action, but as a specific, scientific method.

In theater studies, practice can of course mean something else. Likewise, there are also differences to (Siegen) media studies. From time to time, small misunderstandings arise which illustrate how important it is to have clear definitions at hand. Even if it is tedious to unravel which disciplinary or geographical direction a term is used, it can be useful for one's own scientific location to take a closer look at some terms from the point of view of one's own discipline.

Conceptual Classification of the Term Practice in Relation to Theater Studies

In the context of theater, practice is first understood as actively making theater. In the study of theater, the question often arises whether one wants to stay in academia or go into practice. But here, the term 'practice' is also found in the scientific context. The meaning may change as the object of research in theater studies varies and goes beyond art theater.¹

Despite the different interpretations of the term, 'practice' is given a high status in theater studies as well as in the social and cultural sciences in general because it is assumed that practice itself forms social orders and that practices ultimately even order the social world (Kotte 2002).²

1 In the German-speaking world, theater studies has included "performance" in its field of research; in the Anglo-American world, on the other hand, performance is used as an umbrella term, which can then include theater as a subset. There, theater studies primarily researches so-called „art theater“; in the German-speaking world, the object of research is more expansive. That a broader interpretation of the research field of theater studies makes sense is also confirmed by the many terms and expressions that are used for social and societal areas and are borrowed from the theater context: playing a role (*eine Rolle spielen*), making theater (*Theater machen*), staging something or oneself (*etwas oder sich in Szene setzen*), in English 'to act', or even the concept of theatricality (Willems 2009) have long been part of the unquestioned jargon in other cultural and social science disciplines (Klein & Göbel 2017).

2 Despite the similarities and overlaps with these, differences then develop in the use of the concept of practice: building on Bourdieu and Foucault, the (post-)structura-

Practice of Seeing

In the field of theater, practice is found not only in producing: whether in directing, acting, or dramaturgy (not always part of the curriculum, but part of the interest) – but also in the practice of seeing. During their studies, theater scholars learn to analyze performative and theatrical processes in detail. Theater studies in the German-speaking world not only look at what happens in art theater, but in a wide variety of (social) performative acts. For this purpose, methods such as certain forms of observation can be tested in art theater. Theater studies, as a science that analyzes and explains society, can use its practices of viewing and observing to repeatedly zoom into small moments, but also to look at the big picture.

Viewing and observing are thus among the most important methods and practices of theater studies, as is the case with many other social and cultural sciences. Over time in theater studies we have acquired certain practices of looking or "professional vision" (Goodwin 1994) as our gaze has been trained in a certain way.

By learning certain ways of looking, seeing and observing (not only on the part of theater scholars but also on the part of the audience in general), a certain practice is demanded in art theater. This demand must be met by the theater makers as well as by the audience. The practice is worked out together, especially on the part of the audience not through theoretical knowledge acquisition, but through routine. This poses a certain problem: an increasingly differentiated practice often involves the exclusion of those who do not (or could not) go along with this form of professionalization. This sometimes results in rejection.

Rejection of this Practice of Seeing

This rejectionist attitude which is partly caused by the (increasing) demand on the viewing habits of the audience also shows itself to me at the university in theater studies seminars within media studies departments: I have made it a habit to ask at the beginning of the semester how often the seminar participants go to the theater. As a rule, they say they have been to the theater an average of two to four times – in their entire lives. In conversations, it then

lists see practice as a language that follows its own grammar – based on routines and repetitions. Thus, practice is something permanent. The micro-sociological position sees practice rather as performatively generated knowledge. Here, practice is the bodily consummation of social phenomena and thus less permanent. Based on Harold Garfinkel, the self-presenting side of practice is illuminated (Klein & Göbel 2017).

turns out that the reason for their absence from theater is that they simply do not dare to go. They do not bother because theater is something elitist for them. Again and again, I hear they do not like the fact that everyone runs around naked on stage and splashes blood, but also that they do not know how to behave. They fear not understanding the codes, the context, the deeper meaning of what is happening on stage. In addition to discomfort, this can also simply lead to boredom. A lack of understanding of theater can therefore already be found in related disciplines such as media studies.

And Now?

That is why I think that we, theater scholars in particular, need to rethink our work. To a certain extent it is also up to us that there is a skepticism towards theater. Part of the problem lies in the way theater is talked and written about. It starts in school where it is still the so-called classics that are read. But a play is not theater. Theater is constituted in the performance. When a class attends a performance together at some point, there is often an annoyance: as if out of nowhere, the students do not see a production of Schiller's "Robbers" in historical costumes, but a modern adaptation. It is true that the handling of plays and productions or performances in school has improved a little in recent years. But not enough: there is still a lot of room for development. It is therefore more than understandable if (especially younger) theatergoers cannot immediately make the transfer from a play text to a modern adaptation. As I said, theater is practice: our viewing habits are based on a certain routine which forms our practice of viewing.

Theater scholars acquire their own practice during their studies. I still remember how we went to a Swiss folk theater performance in our basic course. For us students, it was a fun evening of theater: not one to be taken seriously. More earnest were the visits to Marthaler, Pollesch or Rimini Protokoll. Or those: the off-off scene. Here, the staging could be bad, the performance unsuccessful, but we still took it seriously. Popular theater or musicals, on the other hand, were not taken seriously. This is also reflected in the professional journals and in professional literature, if at all. "The Lion King" or popular "Tell" performances are written about only with a certain distance. Of course, I also evaluate them. Thus, I put my good taste on display which can certainly be read as a performative practice of one's own position in society.

Value System

Our practice of seeing, writing about and analyzing is thus based on an unspoken value system. Such value systems should not be used without skepticism as it sometimes unintentionally underpins hierarchical structures. A separation that distinguishes "high quality" theater from "mainstream" theater is set primarily by theater scholars and critics (who in turn are mostly theater scholars).³ The separation, however, does not only take place in terms of evaluation, but also in terms of understanding and accessibility. If theater (and the cultural scene in general) becomes too self-referential, it excludes others.⁴

In the field of theater, this exclusionary system of values and knowledge does not go unanswered: Repeatedly, there are calls for cuts in theater subsidies. Even if one does not approve of this, one can understand it to a certain extent. Since these calls are not only due to the fact that special productions are not appealing and attendance figures therefore leave much to be desired in some places, but also because of the attitude that surrounds art theater. From the memoirs that students in my seminars have provided about visits to theaters over the last ten years, I have received a good impression of the arrogance with which the partial 'ignorance' of new theatergoers is sometimes acknowledged by the 'established' ones.⁵ This scares away potential audience members and artificially creates a rift.

3 In the music field, this division is made by classifying music as 'Ernst' (serious) and 'Unterhaltung' (entertainment).

4 Incidentally, it is not only problems of understanding that can have an exclusionary effect, but also the practical approach can have an exclusionary effect. The Bayreuth Festival is a good example of this: it is still a social event at which one can present one's social standing and also underpin it through this presentation. Accordingly, the ticket prices are exorbitant and allocated (even unofficially).

5 From harsh reprimands when taking a drink into the hall, as in the cinema, to eye-rolling when they clapped in the wrong place. Not to mention the student who had a microphone passed to them. She could not formulate a response, but the actor kept holding the microphone out to her, much to the amusement of the other audience members. Personally, I do not find this the least bit funny. It scares off new theatergoers. In any case, this student is guaranteed not to go to any more performances in the near future.

High Culture

This contradicts the aspirations of the theater scene which actually claims to oppose elites and hierarchies. In reality, however, there is hardly a more elitist cultural medium than theater. We theater scholars play our part in this: we are somewhat snobby towards musical productions and we only write about popular theater with ethnographic perspectives in mind. At the same time, we have not been able to communicate across the board why it makes sense to transform Schiller's "Robbers" into the present, just as we have failed to make contemporary plays and performances accessible to a broad audience. Ignorance and lack of understanding on the part of the audience are often met with arrogance on the part of the self-proclaimed 'cultural scene' experts. This creates a distance that leads to even more incomprehension – and also rejection, especially with regard to innovation, be it new works, forms or adaptations. The topicality of theater is often not seen; rather, many locate theater primarily in the 18th and 19th centuries. It is therefore hardly surprising when conservative currents and parties calling for a return to "classic German plays" or even a "renaissance of German culture" find an audience. Unfortunately, we are responsible for that. Not because we agree with it, but because we have not been able to integrate the cultural practice of watching theater into society. We sometimes pretend that 'the masses' are not society, exclude musicals and popular theater, and focus only on certain productions that we agree are relevant. We then write about them for a certain clientele and are surprised when we lose a large portion along the way. That is not their fault. It is actually our job to make sure that we get as many people on board as possible.⁶

Taking it Seriously as a Practice

Many theater mediators⁷ and theater educators are already working on getting more people excited about theater again (Twickel 2021). But scholars and critics should also consider how to facilitate broader access and greater understanding and interest. This is not about ingratiation, but about taking things seriously. In this way, we also take theater to a new level in all its forms and, above all, in its power. The skepticism that theater encounters is not only due to

a lack of understanding, but also due to the uncertainty about what theater can achieve. In conversations, I often hear concerns about how theater could have a negative impact on so-called 'cultural values' and also upset moral concepts.⁸ Positively, people see theater as having an influence on that. (Negatively, theater is seen as the source of all evil.⁹) What leads to heated discussions in German-speaking countries is even more existential elsewhere: theater productions fall victim to censorship in some countries because of their often oppositional tone. Governments are afraid of the power that a performance can unleash. And when a performance is attacked in countries like Afghanistan, it is not due to aesthetics, but because it might have an impact.¹⁰

The fact that art is believed to have a great effect is also clearly shown by a recent decree in Afghanistan which prohibited girls and women over the age of 12 from singing in public (Saber 2021). Even though the decree was withdrawn a short time later due to immense pressure from the Afghan public, two things can be seen from this. First, the performing arts are believed to have a certain power which some political forces believe they must regulate. Secondly, this regulation underpins certain political and social positions. In Afghanistan for example, the Taliban have recently become officially part of the government again. Such a ban thus has a great symbolic impact since it foreshadows the direction and severity with which certain parts of the government want to rule in the future. Culture can therefore also be used to demonstrate the political direction that is in power or being pursued. Theater, as part of the cultural fabric, is affected by such demonstrations with above-average intensity. So it happens that theater can be seen not only as an artistic contribution, but also as social resistance which is also a place of negotiation in and of free spaces.

I am therefore of the opinion that theater is not simply part of our culture, but that it can negotiate – in an entertaining way – social concerns, and that possible realities can be tried out there.¹¹ That is how it can have an effect. But that only works if everyone plays along – and not just within a small circle.

⁸ As already written above, I hear repeatedly especially from young people, the prejudice that in the theater everyone would always be naked on stage. This prejudice is brought forward as a moral reproach.

⁹ I am regularly surprised when students are bothered by naked actors on stage, but not in films. This leads to the conclusion that they believe that the stage event has a greater (moral) impact due to its immediacy. One feels more urged to position oneself in some way.

¹⁰ Quoted from a conversation with Beate Schappach, 2020.

¹¹ The Young Girl Reading Group meetings can be viewed similarly. For comparison, see Götz in this volume.

⁶ By this I do not mean that texts addressed only to a specialist audience should be dispensed with. Their importance is beyond question and is not at issue here.

⁷ The fact that Audience Development was able to become an area of work in the theater at all shows where we currently stand.

Remain Readable

In this respect, I plead for taking it seriously as a practice. For us academics, this could mean eliminating our fear of contact with popular forms of theater. It could mean writing not only in professional journals, but in more accessible formats – and in doing so, attempting to remain readable. More complicated theories need to be understood. But just as my doctor does not expect me to be medically up to her level, we should not expect everyone to know what is meant by all the different manifestations of practice theories. I expect my doctor to explain issues to me in a way that I understand what needs to be done. The same applies to us: we should become more understandable again. Medical findings are also based on research with many technical terms. Nevertheless, the result can be communicated clearly. The same applies to media and culture. Indeed, to any science.

The examination of the concept of practice was worthwhile for this purpose. First, it shows how different disciplines can learn from and enrich each other. It is important to first specify this in order to be able to talk to each other. From this, new ideas develop. And only those who speak a common language can also work well, and above all, effectively with each other. In a second step, however, the results must be formulated in such a way that they can be widely received and understood – not only across disciplines, but also far away from scientific discourse. If this does not happen, if one gets bogged down with technical jargon and declares one's own practice to be the ultimate, it quickly becomes a pitfall. An abyss that can be found in all disciplines: just as we theater scholars need to work on our practices of seeing and mediating, other disciplines should also critically reflect on their practices and approaches to mediation. This also includes breaking down fears of contact with the so-called mainstream. After all, the ultimate goal of science is not only to establish itself within its own discipline, but to have an impact beyond it: with a precise definition in mind, but also a clear language. It might be a start if not only peer-reviewed articles counted, but also those that made it into popular magazines.¹² It should be celebrated more if one made it into "Vogue" – because then begins what science is there for: a communication, a knowledge exchange with all actors of societies. A mutual taking things seriously.

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¹² For comparison, see Hind & Seitz in this volume on Agre and his observations on human action and everyday activities.

Health Data Donations as Cooperative Practice

Danny Lämmerhirt

Increasingly, a vast array of data can be mobilized and algorithmically manipulated to turn seemingly unrelated data into health data. Data portability and associated technological infrastructures enable people to exchange health data from electronic records, consumer genetic companies, fitness and nutrition trackers and various apps which can now be multiplied and co-exist at the same time across computational systems (Prainsack 2019b). Unsurprisingly, how health data should be governed, exchanged, processed and integrated in life became an important debate in recent years (Sharon & Lucivero 2019) that has only gained importance during the Covid-19 pandemic and recent calls for “data altruism” (European Commission 2020). Particularly, the notion of a “data donation” (Krutzinna & Floridi 2019) has gained currency during the pandemic, enabling people to give researchers access to data for research. Data donations follow a longer participatory turn within biomedicine (Rose & Novas 2005) and center heavily around the reification and circulation of digital data across various platforms, computational systems and publics such as loved ones, doctors, researchers, insurers and others. They are part of altruistic or solidaristic ideals of data infrastructures that shall inscribe a new social contract into the infrastructural, legal and organizational design of data mobility. Increased scholarly attention is being paid to the potential design of such arrangements (Greshake Tzovaras & Ball 2019; Kariotis et al. 2020; Milne et al. 2021) and normative debates have ensued on how to best qualify different health data exchanges as acts of *sharing*, *donation* (Prainsack 2019a, 2019b), *investment* (Kain et al. 2019) or *bartering* (Fourcade & Klutetz 2020). Often, such debates are accompanied by narratives of democratisation, empowerment, shifting power balances and value in the biomedical sphere and beyond.

Yet, these debates usually bracket how health data exchanges are practically accomplished, with implications for our understanding of precisely how agency, norms and values are becoming redistributed (Marres 2012b) by health data donations. What could we learn if we investigated data donations as a cooperative practice in which people and media provide the constitutive practices for exchanging health data? Unlike other contributions to this collection, I do not intend to add a novel conceptualization to practice theories. Instead, I engage with a long tradition of pragmatism (Dewey 2012), empirical philosophy and its praxeographic program (Mol 2002), as well as STS perspectives on material participation (Marres & Lezaun 2011), to make a case for the empirical and normative value and the challenges of a praxeography of data donations. As I will describe below, a focus on how data donations are practically accomplished steers us away from poli-

tical ideals of self-contained individuals acting autonomously, and towards the situations, forms and formats, media, as well as actors involved in donations. This opens new perspectives on agency, choice and consent, inclusion and exclusion, and the increased role of private infrastructure providers underpinning data donations. These elements create tensions around the flows of data, and how data could flow differently.

To do so, I take the case of a recent data donation initiative in Germany, namely the Corona-Datenspende App (CDA). This initiative asked German fitness tracker users to share their heart rate, step count, and sleep data, as well as some demographic and geographic information. The data is used by the Robert Koch Institute (RKI) to predict a potential infection with Covid-19 and the information be used to plan interventions for the management of the outbreak. To do so, a Datenspende App was launched that enabled people to authenticate themselves and authorize researchers to access data from their personal accounts. The practice of sharing personal data is not in itself interesting as it is fairly common among self-trackers. Rather, one reason why the CDA is an interesting case is because it functions as a politically charged experiment of ‘material participation’ whereby health data becomes reified and turned into an object to be given away for a broader public good.

Such a perspective connects to a longer line of scholars who have rearticulated the formation of public life, participation and publics along their processual and material dimensions (Dewey 2012; Marres & Lezaun 2011). Publics become materialized not only around an infrastructure as a matter of concern, but are constituted by infrastructures (Baringhorst et al. 2019) that form the idiosyncratic conditions (Kelty 2008) for a public to exist. The material turn in STS and political theory connected with such debates to scrutinize technology beyond their ontological fluidity (de Laet & Mol 2000) or their latent politics to operate as quasi-laws (Winner 1986). It asked instead how material objects, devices and settings gain normative and political power in their own right to enact particular forms and formats of citizenship, participation or democracy (Latour & Weibel 2005; Asdal 2008; Marres & Lezaun 2011; Marres 2012a). This raises questions of how objects co-articulate political action with other societal spheres to attain value (Zelizer 2011; Marres & Lezaun 2011), how material objects and settings co-produce participatory forms and formats, how an object’s powers of engagement are articulated and contested, and ultimately how data donations hold together as cooperative situations (Marres 2012b).

The CDA created controversy because it connected private infrastructures (such as fitness trackers and cloud accounts) with individuals and public health authorities (RKI). Not only did it face tensions of including and excluding people based on their tracker brands and on the question of whether these trackers can balance privacy and data access. It also faced questions as to whether giving data on a large scale for the planning of

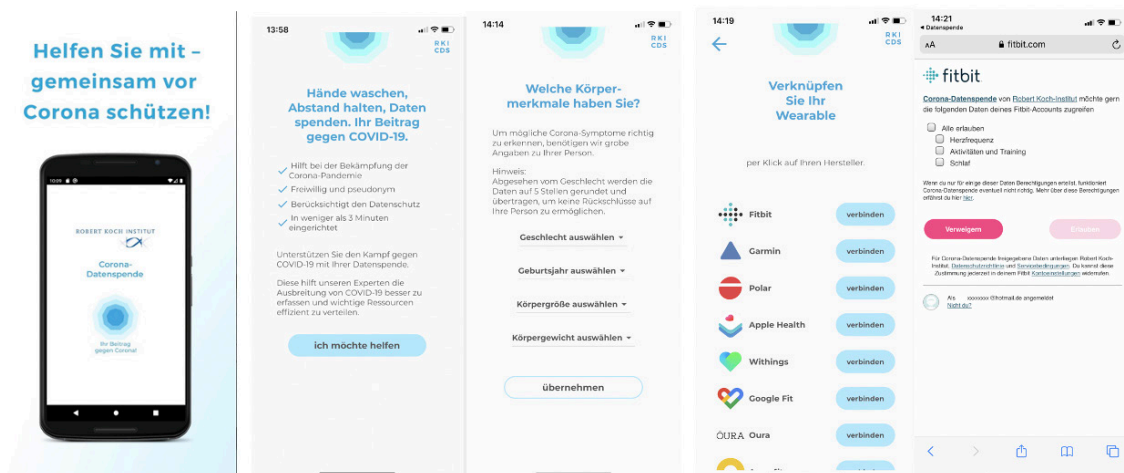


Fig. 1: Selected pages of the CDA user interface

Covid-19 management was achieved and whether data access aligned with the intended (yet open-ended and experimental) purposes of the app. I suggest that these tensions can be brought to the fore through a practice-theoretical study of the constitutive practices as well as associated (con-)tests of the app (Marres & Stark 2020).

Similar to other object-centered forms of participation (Knorr Cetina 1997; Ruppert 2015; Gießmann & Röhl 2019), eliciting such controversies requires a methodological approach that decenters the notion of ‘practice’, commonly associated with agency, on-site face-to-face interaction and associated (troubling) situations that are crucial for ANT, symbolic interactionism, or the sociology of critical capacity, among others. The CDA was promoted to be a fully automated system to capture and analyse health data. Once users have authorized the donation, the app operates in the background without further user interaction, rendering the situation of app use into fleeting moments. I suggest the CDA can be empirically studied by attending to the interface affordances (Gibson 1982; Bucher and Helmond 2018; Paßmann & Schubert 2020) the app furnishes as conditions of donating data and that allow to organise and scale cooperative practices across situations (Knorr Cetina 2009). To complement interface analyses of the intended use cases of an app (Dieter et al. 2018), I briefly discuss the usefulness of app reviews as a practice that can give accounts of how users deal with troubling situations vis-à-vis automated technologies (Marres 2020).

Mobilizing data through CDA's App Interface

The CDA materializes participation, reifies data as an object to exchange and furnishes a setting and format for participation. An app walkthrough allows one to study the app's normative commitments and intended purposes and goals (“*Hände waschen, Abstand Halten, Daten Spenden. Ihr Beitrag gegen Covid-19*”). People can collect some demographic and biometric data by hand (such as

weight and height) to enable data scientists at the RKI to associate analytics to different sub-populations.

The centerpiece of the CDA is a Software Development Kit (SDK) using the OAuth 2.0 protocol to request authorization from the servers of fitness platforms like Fitbit or Apple HealthKit to access various health-related data including heartbeat, sleep rate and step count (see the last two images on the right, figure 1). The OAuth 2.0 protocol includes various practices, such as user *authentication*, *authorization* and *synchronization* of health data across apps using APIs.^① These practices are crucial elements for various self-tracking applications (e.g. the integration of self-tracking data into platforms like Strava). They manage the boundaries of infrastructures (e.g. between the Fitbit platform and the CDA) and thereby enable automated data donations. Furthermore, they legally enable data donations and distribute rights to data by authorizing data access and managing (revocable) user consent. Part of the OAuth 2.0 based transmission are permission scopes. Permissions define the types of data that may be addressed by a third-party, as well as the actions how data may be mobilized across computational systems (e.g. ‘GET’ allows a third-party to request data from a wearable device account, while ‘POST’ allows to write onto the account). Because permissions grammarize what types of data can be moved across systems, they are a key computational element for managing relations between data donors and others. Depending on the API design, permission scopes may represent to users a broader data category which they can consent to in order to share more granular health data points. The management of these boundaries, however, also created tensions in the implementation of the CDA and foregrounded

① How graphical user interfaces and APIs afford data donations by normatively charging consent while gathering authorization and synchronising data is akin to the layering of practices as observed in Och's contribution.

various political, ethical and infrastructural problems when relying on data retrieval from various consumer devices. Since the CDA was configured to request a limited selection of data from the APIs of fitness device manufacturers (see Fitbit resource manager, image to the far right, figure 1), only a small fraction of device manufacturers could be supported for automated retrieval. As German data protection officer Ulrich Kelber said in a later statement, device manufacturers are a significant problem for the data donation app as they tend to share many health data unrelated to the app's purpose (Kelber 2021).^②

A document analysis of public statements on data protection issues of data donation drew attention away from the CDA and to its data sources. Consumer device APIs configure the circulation of health data in different ways which depends on their integration in a wider ecosystem of health applications which they have to support. The developers of the CDA wanted to provide a transparent donation where people know what data they are sharing and can control the types of granular data they are donating. This was partly the reason that the CDA only supported a very limited selection of devices from Fitbit, Apple, Oura Ring and Garmin, as well as devices compatible with Apple HealthKit, Google Fit and Samsung Health. The developers pointed out that Apple HealthKit's requires data access from a user phone which enables users to 'cut' (*mitschneiden*) the data they want to donate, but wanted to also include fitness trackers that share data via cloud accounts. The limited support of devices led to many frustrated users who wanted to contribute but were excluded.

App Reviews to Contest Donation as a Practice

To study user engagement with the app, I retrieved app reviews from the Google Playstore resulting in roughly 9780 unique comments written from April 7 to August 27. The original goal was to experiment to what extent app reviews can give account of troubling situations of app use in highly automated contexts and document how users make sense of the data donation, inquiring into how they configure, use or perceive the donation of data (Marres 2020). A first content analysis enumerating the word frequency and a following qualitative content analysis suggest that the lack of

support for more devices was a significant issue for people. Some users supported or contested the idea of data donation arguing that they can finally give data for something useful (*"endlich werden die Daten für etwas nützliches eingesetzt"*). Several users expressed their hope that the app will be helpful against Covid-19, while others expressed privacy concerns. A larger fraction of users, however, focused on difficulties to set up the app and compatibility issues, providing instructions of how they set up the app, or voiced frustration about the lack of support for their devices, despite their willingness to donate data. This non-representative selection of user comments may not suffice to understand how people perceive the use of the app, but it gives insights into the many infrastructural issues of setting up a data donation, as well as the desire of users for participating with their devices which may not be suitable legally for data donation as they might share too much data.

nicht (8157) die (5509) **App (3771)** mit (3761) ich (3512) **Samsung (3215)** und (3099) der (3038) ist (2838) **Google (2144)** kann (2096) das (1972) aber (1914) Ich (1835) **leider (1786)** auch (1621) wird (1447) für (1415) eine (1408) **Leider (1405)** noch (1404) gerne (1341) **Daten (1331)** sich (1199) **funktioniert (1151)** werden (1147) keine (1116) man (1109) Idee (1104) bei (1098) von (1090) mich (1071) **unterstützt (1056)** Die (1050) nur (1037) **Fit (1011)** möglich (1004) **Huawei (973)** meine (937) auf (923) über (882) ein (870) **Health (843)** **Schade (829)** habe (817) würde (788) den (780) wenn (739) **Anmeldung (732)** helfen (699) **Garmin (653)** Tage (642) hat (632) mir (594) gut (584) **Fehler (578)** verbinden (572) dem (565) oder (565) **Verbindung (554)** dass (554) sehr (554) dann (545) fit (542) **Watch (537)** anmelden (530) wieder (505) diese (502) immer (490) dabei (489) geht (475) wie (475) **Funktioniert (471)** sie (468) 403 (451) was (450) nutzen (437) **Smartwatch (423)** sind (420) mein (417) **Galaxy (416)** mehr (415) jetzt (408) **Gear (404)** Bitte (403) **Fitbit (398)** **Hersteller (397)** zur (395) nach (382) meiner (381) RKI (371) Würde (368) wäre (363) gibt (362) schon (358) Tagen (357) Das (354) schade (351) viele (350) mal (350) Uhr (345) **Band (341)** Kann (337) als (337) meinem (328) hätte (328) eingeben (328) kein (323) Konto (317) Fitness (312) app (306) einen (303) **Tracker (300)** **Xiaomi (299)** können (297)

Fig. 2: Word frequency of issues associated with the CDA, Google Play app reviews

Figure 2 lists some of the most mentioned words and issues, showing the prevalence of technical issues, mentioning missing support for certain brands, synchronization issues or a support of device producers. While the amount of reviews represents a very small fraction of all users (less than two percent), it foregrounds how users may address device-based data donations and points out tensions in the implementation of the donation, when relying on multiple data sources with different approaches to data sharing and data protection. The case of the CDA demonstrates that notions like data portability, data altruism or data donations do not only require attention to data intermediaries and how they enable data donations, but also the technical boundaries of commercial platforms which are currently unregulated and which may decide what kinds of health data are getting shared and how much granular control users are afforded. The CDA also points to possible future tensions around data donations, where participatory settings are furnished by data use purposes, and which require access to limited data points. Future data donation apps may need to balance various (conflicting) values of automation (for instance

② The suggestion that data donations distribute practices across wearable device APIs and the data donation app connects with Randerath's notion of platforms as parasites stepping in between. Data donations show that the tables might turn. An intermediary like the data donation app can become a parasite in between wearable devices and the RKI. The praxeographic approach presented here differs in that it highlights the normative dimensions of gathering and limiting data access from wearable devices.

tapping into OAuth 2.0 and APIs), user agency (enabling choice to select data) and participation (making choices which devices).^③As the case of the CDA demonstrates, attending to the material dimensions of data donation practices may help raise various issues with how consumer devices govern health data, foreground the important position some devices have already gained as providers of health research infrastructure and point to how values in the design of such apps may be revised to inform the design of future data donation applications.

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③ An API-based data donation like CDA pre-structures the choices for sharing data, which is a feature of computational systems (as per Hind's and Seitz's contribution). This structuring of choice may gain a problematic valence in contexts of data donation if the data to be donated cannot be adequately selected and controlled.

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Epilogue: Media Scholars Determine their Situation

Christoph Borbach

German Media Theory

Theorizing media from a historical, theoretical, supposed to be “techno-materialist” perspective, Friedrich A. Kittler opened up his well-known *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* with the often-cited phrase that media determine our situation (1999 [1986]: xxxix). This opening phrase also became the opening paradigm and a programmatic watchword – if not a battle cry – for what has been credited and termed a genuinely German media theory, tracing media genealogically back to war-related improvements and intelligence (Kittler 1996) and conceiving media as a precondition for human perception (Kittler 2002: 30). Borrowing a prominent concept from Michel Foucault and turning it from a historical into a media techn(ological) *a priori*, media – following Kittler – “define what really is” (1999 [1986]: 3).

Affiliated to and inscribed into the momentous phrase that media determine our situation was a far-reaching claim. For one thing, singular (analogue) media – such as the gramophone, the film, the typewriter – pre-format our way of thinking and our self- and world experience. That way, the romantic conceptions of mind, subject and thinking would, in fact, have a media historical index and human perception could be replaced by codes, archives and discourse networks.¹ In addition, the thesis of media determinism² has its methodological substratum: media inspired discourse analysis (not restricted to written texts but also including block wiring diagrams or source code) as a form of ‘knowledge archaeology’ with its material normativity does not really have to care about the way lay people (with their alleged ‘computer illiteracy’) cooperate, interact or even counteract with media through practices (which can have a potentially queering constitution – I will come back to this later on). As a consequence, observable human approaches to technical media have typically been of less interest for classical German media theory.

¹ To quote Kittler himself: “[s]o-called Man is split up into physiology and information technology.” (1999 [1986]: 16)

² In order to defend Kittler against praxeological and sociological influenced criticism, it has to be added that Kittler himself never precluded the inverse way, meaning that “our situation” – that is practices, chains of operations, human bodies, symbolic or gestural or mimic regimes – could potentially determine the media, and that he indeed did reflect the human situation: “[m]edia determine our situation, *which* – in spite or because of it – *deserves a description*.” (1999 [1986]: xxxix, emphasis added)

Our Postdigital Situation

Nowadays, ‘our situation’ has changed fundamentally. Since the advent of the postdigital era (Negroponte 1998) – the outset of the ubiquity of digital media, that is media that are exclusively determined by their infrastructural being and their practical variability – classical media boundaries or media limits and academic limitations of media on singular technical objects are no longer functional (if they ever have been). The same holds true for their methodological investigation in a theoretical, historical or aesthetic sense. Media nowadays are solely infrastructural media. That is, they are dependent on large physical systems mainly invisible to the user (undersea networks, data servers, big data processing capacities) and on information or data infrastructures (datafication, user data, data politics, data practices etc.). This implies that media researchers in investigating this infrastructural setting and constitution of media nowadays have to go one step further. Instead of asking what can be seen (e.g. on a screen, a social platform), the question now concerns the conditions of visualization itself (i.e. the infrastructural dimension). Ergo, media researchers need to leave the field of singular objects and their (historical, theoretical, aesthetic) analysis in favor of their cooperative inter- and inner-systematic agency.

In returning to the postdigital and Negroponte’s vision, the phrase ‘the digital medium’ appears even more oxymoronic. Digital media are always media in the plural. It is the situated presence of digital media (with all their invisible media ecological background and environment) and the copresence of human actors that determine the status of each other reciprocally instead of any causality in the sense of ‘usage determines media’ or ‘media determine situations’. On the one hand, it is not only the human being that takes action as Gilbert Simondon considered, claiming that technical objects exist on the “same level [gleichen Ebene]” as humans (Simondon 2012 [1958]: 116). On the other hand, it is the cooperation of human practice and technological object that decides what digital media in their interconnection are, since – as Kittler has already pointed out – the digital computer (be it in the artifactual form of desktop computers, laptops or smartphones) can simulate every former (analogue) medium. This means, the situated usage decides on the very status of the medium. This fundamental conviction culminated in the recent practice turn in media studies (see recently e.g. Bergermann et al. 2021).

What is at stake and should be avoided now – as in the case of every turn, even though the contributions to this volume do not claim a practice turn (once

again) – is the overemphasis of the turn’s term³, in this case ‘practices’. As Till Heilmann has criticized Erhard Schüttpelz’ prioritization of chains of operations over all entities involved (Schüttpelz 2006) – be it humans, tools, machines or media – it is the media-technical dimension that runs the risk of being neglected when focusing exclusively on chains of practices (Heilmann 2017). Likewise, following Heilmann, it is this aspect of the irreducible media technical materiality and operativity that should be crucial to media scholars. What will be in vogue in media studies with a cultural studies focus – as is the case within the German *Gesellschaft für Medienwissenschaft* – is an epistemic mixture. In other words, both profound knowledge of the media as hardware, software and infrastructures (what could be phrased the ‘media science part’ in the research practice of media scholars) and an in-depth interest in the actual configuration and practical dealing with and of technical objects, regarding the situated usage.

Media = Artifacts + Practices

It is an ‘and beyond’ from two formerly divergent but both necessary sides that can cultivate productive, elaborate and contemporary media research: A focus on the materialities of communication, as well as the technicality of media, but also their situated practicality, their operation and dimension of use. These two sides do not necessarily ‘complete’ each other, but do help to understand media as ‘two in one’: as artifacts and practices *at the same time and in time*. Following this assumption, the (media) research question has to be twofold. Not only “what do people do with media?” (Sebastian Gießmann as cited in Genner 2020: 7) or “what do media do with people?” but more of a reciprocal, recursive, repetitive chain in the mode of “what do media do with people, people in turn with media, media in turn with people, with media, with people...”, as Götz suggests in her contribution (referencing Dang-Anh et al. 2017). A solely praxeological approach cannot comply with this (as it black boxes media technical aspects), nor can a conventional German media theory approach achieve this (insofar it does not account for the practical variability of media). This is at the same time the reason for Hind and Seitz to consider the work of Agre since he “develops a technically precise but sociologically informed analysis of the material nature of the empowerment and measurement regime” (in this volume). This is also why Randerath borrows from Wanda Orlikowski the concept of “sociomaterial practices” (Orlikowski

2007), to avoid laying too strong an emphasis on either actions or technologies, avoiding both anthropocentrism and technological determinism.

This is also my reading of the methodological positioning of the volume itself. Media research has to follow a ‘practice+’ approach and – at least in my understanding – this means practice + materiality and practice + operativity (that is, media ‘operations’ as executed by either human or non-human actors in the broadest sense). Such an approach can help identify a different scaling of practices, an interrelation of practices (online/offline, embodied/linguistic among others), different levels of practices (as is the case with “YouTube practices” as Och ascertains in her contribution), as well as a wide range of gendered, experienced, standardized, potentially automated, embodied, affective and symbolic practices. Further, the categorization of different cultures and politics of practices is not restricted to human actors but can just as easily occur in algorithmic media infrastructures too (as is the case with datafication in Lämmerhirt’s contribution). On a fundamental level, however, the surplus of looking at practices from a media perspective may be not only to take practices and their disciplinary situatedness serious (as Neumann does in her contribution) but to also insist on the irreducible techno-material or socio-material condition of practicing communication, cooperation and collaboration. Such an approach would also get rid of the practice theoretical reservations regarding putative techno-determinists or (French) post-structuralists. Why not mix Friedrich Kittler with Sara Ahmed, Bruno Latour with Karen Barad, Michel Foucault with Harold Garfinkel? Why not perform a practice-theoretical (u-)turn and re-read Kittler (against Kittler) or Foucault (against Foucault) with a focus on their (implicit or explicit) practice dimension? Or – as in the case of this exemplary collection – why not apply Michel Serres’ philosophical parasite to practice theory or information theorist Philip Agre’s interactionism, alike?

Media studies has been an outsider discipline – a discipline ‘for all and none’ [für Alle und Keinen] to seize on Claus Pias, who adapted a Nietzschean book title for the field of media studies (Pias 2012). Now, after the broad institutionalization of media studies, again, media practice theory and history is a field ‘for all and none’: it is the practitioner’s, the researcher’s, task to take up a position and to determine the own situation. This volume documents exactly this. It is a thinking, trying, theorizing, experimenting and elaborating of fresh methodological possibilities to think in media practices not “from the outside” (see “Introduction”) but “from the very inside” since there is no established canon of media practice thinkers. Put differently, there is no outside of media practices, we cannot escape from media practices, be it in everyday life or academic research. The term

³ This could be of interest for a sub-discipline that focuses on turns from an interdisciplinary perspective, Turn Studies to be established.

media practices reminds us of the fact that media and practices are not only the focus of our research but at the same time the condition for doing our research. Every kind of research, across the humanities and the (social) sciences, is embodied, technological, social and finally practiced alike.

Queering Media through Practice

At long last, I want to argue that queering media through practice is both programmatic and symptomatic for our practice of media research. In this, I understand media practices as having a potentially irreducible *queerness* insofar as the situated usage of technical artifacts decides upon their very status. Whereas German media theory based its research methodologically on materialities, going hand in hand with the assumption of a material conditioned normativity of media, it is the thesis of *becoming* instead of *being* media – the media in (the) action – which *Locating Media* made strong. Sure, this sociologically influenced perspective has a much longer tradition within other disciplines such as the theory of space, gender studies or disability studies where it is common sense that space, (dis)ability, gender or race is not (a) materially or bodily given but socially or politically practiced and imagined. Media are not normatively predetermined but offer practical variability through unintended usage and counter-strategies. Or, what Kittler ironically termed “misuse” (2014 [1988]: 152). If queering is understood as the “specific appearance, gathering, performing, as a disturbance of order” (Götz in this volume), then every media practice has the capability of following a parasitic logic (in the sense of Michel Serres), that is being unexpected, disturbing, noisy, induced by material technical objects but realized through (human) practice.

As Götz points out, in accordance with Ahmed, she understands queering things as act of disturbing their (inherent or allegedly given) order (cf. Ahmed 2006: 161). Based on this, I understand with the act of ‘queering media through practice’ that media practices can potentially ‘queer’ the supposedly given structure, order and usage of technological (digital) objects. There may have been materially predetermined media practices in the analogue era of Kittler’s *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, however, our digital culture is exponentially distinguished by an irreducible ‘openness’, a practical variability of technological artifacts. It is not ‘the media’ that solely determines situations, it is the queering of media with unanticipated, alternative, and often unforeseen usage, practices, “the media in the making” (Schüttpelz 2017: 36), that is distinctive for our understanding of media in digital cultures on the one hand, and for our own methodological practice of media research on the other.

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