

Practicing Media—Mediating Practice

Introduction

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More than a decade and a half after the concerted application of practice theory to media and communications, this *IJoC* Special Section “Practicing Media—Mediating Practice” aims to assess, apply, and expand on the diverse approaches to practice theory. Our focus on contemporary practice theories as well as empirical practice-based research comes at a time when the understanding of mediated and mediatized social life as practices is proliferating across research settings that may not explicitly engage with practice theory literature. This editorial introduction begins with the historical emergence of practice theories and the paradigmatic implications of engaging with practices as essential elements of the social world. Second, it considers the particular tensions emerging when considering both mediating practices and practicing media. In so doing, we outline the contributions to this Special Section, dividing them into three sets of articles that deal with (a) media practices as constituent elements of the social; (b) the employment of practice as a lens through which to make sense of processes of media production and its

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interpretation; and (c) the foundations of practice theories, their limits, and potential combination with other theoretical approaches.

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More than a decade and a half after the concerted application of practice theory to media and communications (Couldry, 2004), this *IJoC* Special Section "Practicing Media—Mediating Practice" aims to assess, apply, and expand on the diverse approaches to practice theory (Postill, 2010; Reckwitz, 2002; Schatzki, 2001). Our focus on contemporary practice theories as well as empirical practice-based research comes at a time when the understanding of mediated and mediatized social life as practices is proliferating across research settings that may not explicitly engage with practice theory literature. Multiple generations of scholars have focused on practice as being central to our understanding of the social, but disparate fields of study beyond media and communications have similarly begun to employ practice-based approaches.²

Given the concerted and focused examination of practice theory, foundational literature, and its application to media and communications taken up by our section contributors, this editorial introduction situates their contributions within the broader contexts of practice theories. More specifically, this editorial introduction develops as follows. First, it discusses the historical emergence of practice theories and the paradigmatic implications of engaging with practices as essential elements of the social world. Second, it considers the particular tensions emerging when considering both mediating practices and practicing media. In so doing, it also outlines the contributions to this Special Section, dividing them into three sets that deal with (a) media practices as constituent elements of the social; (b) the employment of practice as a lens through which to make sense of processes of media production and its interpretation; and (c) the foundations of practice theories, their limits and potential combination with other theoretical approaches.

Practice Theories and the Ontology of Media and Communications

A seemingly simple question that often remains in the background of scholarly studies concerns the basic unit of analysis when engaging with media use and the social worlds, which such practice creates and, at the same time, of which they are a part. Several social theorists, notably Bourdieu (1977) and Schatzki (1996, 2001), have focused on practices as the binding element of the social in an attempt to resolve the structure–agency conundrum between individual conduct and social relations. Rather than requiring only a methodological response, these questions beget a number of ontological challenges.

Practice theories have what at first seems to be a rather straightforward answer to such questions. Practices represent the already-always social understanding of interpretable actions, of doings and sayings

² See Schatzki (2016b) and Reckwitz (2002) for a survey of earlier theorists who have worked to define and refine idealized models of practice theory. See Burchell in this Special Section with regards to its take up in the field of international relations.

(Schatzki, 1996). Human conduct can only be considered a practice in this social sense when it emerges across diverse spaces of activity, extending temporally from past experience toward future applications of action (Schatzki, 1996). In this manner, practices are a fundamental manifestation of the social, binding societies together through the legibility and diversity of action as practices.

Practices, then, represent both an operationalizable unit of analysis for research as well as a fundamental element of our social world. Practice can only find shared meaning manifest as and across sets of human activities. As Swidler (2001) proposes, it is the social character of practice that contradistinguishes these recurring sets of activities from our more colloquial notions of habit or routine. Practices carry more than just the repetitive force of an idiosyncratic way of doing things, although they are shaped by that habituation and routinization of conduct. Practices can be undertaken without explicit reflection, intimately known through their situated or corporeal enactments, materialized through the succession of practical steps, and understood even if inexplicitly as an ordered process of tasks and activity (Shove, 2009, p. 25; Thévenot, 2001, p. 56). There is a definitionally necessary connection between this understanding of practice and its inherently social character: To undertake a practice is to engage with something shared, whether that is in engagement with others or in action toward a type of conduct that can be practically understood.

Practices are socially legible conduct. If we conceive of practices as the fundamental elements of the social, it is across the "field of practices" where "knowledge, meaning, human activity, science, power, language, [and] social institutions" (Schatzki, 2001, p. 13) can be engaged and understood by scholars. It is amid practices and across fields of practice that social relations are manifest, reproduced, and changed as and through practice. Yet, those relations contribute to the shared understandings that are woven throughout any given set of practices. Practice offers a unit of analysis for understanding social relations; practice and social relations are mutually constitutive and, therein, fields of practice are sites across which the reproduction and transformation of social life itself occur.

Practice, Bodies, and Knowledge

Praxis, from its Greek origins, carries the notion "to go all the way . . . to end, to cross" that blends the spatial and embodied nature of movement, or change of state, through action with simplicity of purpose held by its meaning "to do or to act" (Balibar, Cassin, & Laugier, 2014, p. 820). There is also, however, a temporally bounded notion of achievement when praxis denotes the idea of completion or accomplishment of something that is recognizable as a practice. In French, practice carries this more purposefully oriented notion of particular endeavors, whereby practice amounts to the "execution, enterprise and conduct" (Balibar et al., 2014, p. 820) of focused or clustered activity. In English, praxis spans a more diverse cluster of temporally differentiated meanings from performing a practice through to the experience gained through practice, and toward the culturally compounded notion of practices as customs accrued over time.

Contemporary practice theories, on the other hand, offer distinct ways of seeing the body as already-always entangled at the scale of particular endeavors as well as accrued experience and cultural conventions. It is through practices that the intersections of knowledge, embodied action, and social life are made clear. Reckwitz (2002) sees "the place of the social" (p. 252) as manifest and enacted not only in embodied conduct, but also mental routines of practice. The knowledge accrued through, and performed

amid, practice is a matter of assessing, interpreting, and acting within a social setting. The forms of knowledge associated with practice, however, are limited to those of action. Schatzki (2001) argues for such a delimitation of practice so that it does not wholly stray into the domains of belief, desires, and purposes: Practice remains tethered to the embodied capacities of knowledge, the “know-how, skills, tacit understandings and dispositions” (p. 7) of knowledge in practice.

Knowledge is additionally accrued through practice, reinforcing the role of practice as a unit for analysis of human conduct and representative building block of social life. The know-how that cannot be disentangled from practices themselves speaks to motivations as well as aims, and therein also to expectations and a knowledge of outcomes. This knowledge speaks of emotions as well as tensions, through which the relational aspect of practices is always socially situated even if not a specifically interpersonal practice. These knowledge bases are exercised and routinized through practices, but it is the possibility for the interpretation and acknowledgment of certain action as a particular practice that is given its meaning beyond the mental routines of the actor. John Postill (2010) stresses that practices can only be understood in “specific practical contexts” (p. 10) where, as Rouse (2001) explores, the shared “attitudes and responses” (p. 192) that offer an identification of actions as a practice are “only contentful amidst our intra-action with the world” (p. 198). His choice of *intra-action* rather than *interaction* stresses that practices are always and only in the process of their performance, situated and relational in the world, rather than being distinct and existing apart from those contexts.

Media and Practice

Many authors before us have given excellent overviews of the adoption of practice theories in media and communications (e.g., Postill, 2010; Stephansen & Treré, 2019), and also several of the contributions to this Special Section historicize and contextualize practice theories in relation to mediation. Therefore, rather than reproducing those accounts, we have chosen to highlight a few questions that some authors have started to address in the next pages and that we think need further addressing in subsequent studies on media and practice. In a nutshell, our concern is that media and communications scholars should engage more critically with actual practice theories by actively questioning their ontological and epistemological assumptions instead of uncritically subscribing to one or the other theorist, as is too often the case. This is not theorizing for theory’s sake, but to gain a deeper understanding of the mediated social world and to fully benefit from practice theories where they can help us analyze and critique the world differently.

In fact, our concern is not entirely new (see Couldry, 2012; Couldry & Hobart, 2010; Nicolini, 2017), but it goes further by adding a few specific questions that will hopefully advance research on mediated and media-related practices. Nicolini’s (2017) distinction between weak and strong programs of practice is a good starting point. Practice studies in the weak program, he argues, focus on the performative nature of practices but often merely describe and catalogue practices. Traces of this can also be found in Couldry’s (2004) provocative piece “Theorising Media as Practice.” It succeeded in making more tangible what non-media-centric media studies could be by pointing toward media-oriented or media-related practices (e.g., cooking while listening to a podcast). Yet, it also sets the tone for audience studies, as well as citizen and activist media studies (Stephansen & Treré, 2019), to map or index what people say or do in relation to media in particular sociomaterial contexts (see also Couldry, 2012). The strong program goes

beyond the cataloguing of practices by trying to explain the emergence, wider entanglement, or disappearance of practices. Examples of this in media and communications are abundant (e.g., Bräuchler & Postill, 2010; Thorhauge & Gregersen, 2019).

Nicolini's (2017) distinction relates to how practice theories are used—or not used. Studies in the weak program tend to have a loose relationship with practice theories and often focus on people's activities, although one could ask what difference the use of *practice* instead of *activities* really makes for such analyses. In the strong program, that difference is clearer, also through these studies' implementation of practice theories' conceptual framework. Yet, there are different ways one could implement theory, ranging from borrowing others' concepts to subscribing to underlying paradigmatic positions, or even questioning those positions and using a personalized version of the theory. Our point is that, even in the strong program, there is too much of the former and not enough of the latter. We also need a deep program of practice, in which the media practice community contributes to revising and fine-tuning social and cultural practice theories.

Earlier and similar calls have found little resonance in the media and communications literature thus far. Although Couldry and Hobart (2010) have their differences, they agree "that media studies, and the study of media practice, without critical philosophical debate is sterile" (p. 81). Yet, Postill (2010) also observes that "there is a general lack of explicit engagement with practice theory" (p. 6). More recently, Stephansen and Treré (2019) echo this and specify two issues that need further consideration. The first issue here is whether practice theories are rather theories of social reproduction, or whether they also explain social change. See, for example, Reckwitz's (2002) oft-cited definition of a practice as "a routinized type of behavior" (p. 249), in other words, as something that recurs. Second is the structure–agency question: Instead of thinking of the social in terms of individual agents and institutions as stratified in micro and macro levels, Schatzki's (1996, 2001, 2016b) radical yet widely adopted practice theory argues that there is only one level, that of social practices. Nothing exists outside the field of practices. This flat ontology, however, is highly controversial. Couldry (2012), for example, finds it too far-reaching because it prevents us from studying important topics such as institutionalized media power. Stephansen and Treré make a similar comment regarding the study of citizen media, which focuses particularly on hierarchical power relations and agency.

Although we applaud these authors for pointing out some of the challenges implied by Schatzki's flat ontology, what of the suggestions for overcoming them? Couldry (2012, p. 42) has previously proposed that we could supplement practice theory with actor–network theory; yet, Latour's (2007) is also a flat ontology, albeit in a different manner. Stephansen and Treré (2019) reason that a way forward is complementing practice theory with other theories or concepts, such as political economy or the public sphere; they call this a "pragmatic and theoretically pluralist position" (p. 19). If Schatzki (2016b), however, explicitly rejects the compatibility of his flat ontology with multilevel ontologies, we could consider different options, such as choosing or adjusting (other) practice theories that are ontologically better suited with stratified social realities, for example.

A useful starting point for this task is Porpora's (2015) incisive critique of practice theories. We lack space to discuss his analysis in detail, but we would like to invite media scholars to reflect on what he refers to as many practice theories' problems as "conflationary" and "actualist behaviorism" (pp. 109, 110; see

also Archer, 1995). To understand this, let us first remind ourselves of Schatzki's somewhat radical propositions of a flat social ontology. Although not all practice theories go as far, Schatzki (2001) argues that practice theories contrast with "accounts that privilege individuals, (inter)actions, language, signifying systems, the life world, institutions/roles, structures, or systems in defining the social" (p. 3), thereby collapsing agency, culture, and structure into the black box of practice (i.e., conflationary). Yet, how can we understand possible causal powers of structures such as media institutions if they only exist in the performance of the social practices that substantiate them? Scholars must carefully consider any utilization of conceptions such as institutions, cultures, and social structures in conjunction with the strong program of practice theories, for which these are all constituted in and through practices (i.e., actualist behaviorism).

As we hope is clear by now, practice theories ask tough theoretical questions and require more reflexive and critical thought regarding their paradigmatic postulations and how compatible these are in fact with our own paradigmatic positions. Only complementing practice theories with other theories presents numerous challenges when seeking to build a coherent and analytically sound framework for studying media and communications. Some of the authors in this Special Section make the task of developing a deep program of practice theories a bit lighter by advancing theoretical debates on media practice (see especially Bakardjieva, Lunt, and Pentzold's articles in this Special Section).

Mediating Practices

Habit, routine, and practice are just some of the competing and overlapping terms used to describe the preponderance of everyday mediated conduct and those practices that relate to the use of media technologies and the consumption of media content. Practices of everyday communication and use of media technologies are often characterized in more narrow terms of repetitive habitual, if not wholly purposeful sets of actions. Examples are checking interfaces and clearing notifications of mobile phones, e-mail inboxes, or social networking sites. Concerted practices of communication management emerge to manage the flow of communication, in turn ordering and reshaping opportunities for practices of mediated sociality (Burchell, 2017). Ann Swidler (2001) defines this as the "anchoring role" that some practices have in relationship to others. When so many contemporary media practices involve engagement with the interfaces of platforms and devices, these opportunities are also subject to mediation of protocols and default settings alongside the ordering role of metadata and algorithms (van Dijck, 2013).

Wendy Chun (2016) follows the habitual character of media use through to processes of individual reflection on and changes to media practices. When a sense of crisis emerges as routine media practices are complicated by the influence of network effects, then an update to personal practice is sought: A situation or event forces a decision to adjust the routine ways of relating to, or through, a networked device, platform, interface—or as Chun succinctly states, "Habit + Crisis = Update"—adding that this offers users "a taste of real-time responsibility and empowerment" (pp. 69–70). Couldry (2004, 2012) presses further in this trajectory in two complementary directions, first to move beyond considering only explicit media use, including additionally the wider arrays of everyday practices that are intertwined with, oriented around, or related to media as constituent manifestations of social life. Second, with the necessary reminder that media use is productive and that users must consider this amid practice: Mediated traces of past practices persist; are often socially observable; and have implications for the sorting, displaying, and spreading of

informational as well as social opportunities on any given platform. The mediation of social practices challenges what it means to be embodied, situated, and social.

Our Special Section opens with three articles that engage with these notions of mediating practices in terms of the publicness of practice, the collapsing contexts that distinguish between types of practices, and opportunities for change through the plasticity of practice.

In the first article of the Special Section, Christian Pentzold and Manuel Menke investigate a neglected aspect of practice theory by focusing on the specificity of mediated communicative practices as a form of social practice. The authors argue that mediated communicative practices are inherently expressive performances because, to be recognized as communicative, these practices must be performed in public to some degree. Pentzold and Menke illustrate the relevance of their perspective through a study of mnemonic communities that gather online and remediate the past in nostalgic ways. The materiality of media technologies of the past emerges as central in the construction of a nostalgic frame circulating in the online communities through the digitization and curation of older media artifacts. From pictures and movies, to songs and other media, their research participants expressed nostalgia toward media technologies that made up past realities, and users added personal narratives, contributing to the reconstruction of a collective past. The authors show that adopting a practice theory perspective shifts the analysis beyond the verbal dimension of communication, including the expressive potential of the body alongside the representational affordances of media technologies.

In the next article, Jesper Pagh focuses on people's doings and sayings related to their daily Internet usage for a number of routine activities. The author scrutinizes three sets of practices as individuals perform them with the help of various stationary and mobile media devices: first, practices related to making an income, then practices that concern private life and affects, and finally practices that allow for community engagement. Looking at the Internet as a technology able to expand spatial and temporal boundaries, Pagh also notices its strong influence on the process of context collapse, according to which people experience the blurring between a wide array of practices that they perform on a daily basis. In doing so, the author illustrates how the intertwining of doings and sayings works in the framework of practices, casting light on a relationship that is usually taken for granted in practice theories. More specifically, he suggests that these two elements are certainly interlinked, but not necessarily and not always in a consistent manner.

Next, Alice Mattoni offers a revision and update to the application of the praxeology perspective to communication processes within social movements. Her contribution focuses on what activists do with media and how they incorporate those practices within the wider field of social movement activities. Whereas most practice theory studies of social movements can be understood from the perspective of activism as media practice or from what Couldry (2004) calls the "media-oriented practices," Mattoni proposes yet another way to apply practice theories to the study of activism, that is to consider "media-in-practices." Hence, the author's investigation starts by examining the role that communication technologies have in various social movement practices. Such an approach, however, is not solely centered on the materiality of media devices given that Mattoni conceives of practice as a nexus of three interrelated dimensions—the material, the symbolic, and the social—whose interconnections constitute practices that, in turn, constitute other practices. Using the example of one specific practice—coordinating the daily workflow related to grassroots

political engagement—the author casts light on how it is possible to investigate each of the three dimensions both separately and together, focusing attention on how media-in-practices are able to constitute other types of practices. In doing so, Mattoni explores how the combined use of portable media devices, social media platforms, and instant messaging services contributes to foster practices of deconstructing and reconstructing the boundaries between activities related to grassroots political engagement and activities related to family care, work commitments, and leisure occupation.

Practicing Media

The complexity, largeness, and scale of social relations represent a persistent challenge engaged by and debated among practice theorists. The second grouping of articles in this Special Section moves beyond what Schatzki (2016a) calls the “small nexuses” of action and interaction that are accessible to the researcher through “experience, participation, and observation” (p. 4). The “flat ontology” (Schatzki, 2016b) of practices as the fundamental manifestation of social relations avoids the scalar distinction among micro, meso, and macro levels of society, within which the individuals and their interactions are found on an assumed lower level than functionalist conceptions of higher-level societal conglomerations. Practices can still offer, however, an ontological lens for engaging with diverse scaling, complexity, and the largeness of social phenomena.

Again, however, scholars are faced with the proliferation of overlapping terms and competing concepts. According to this ontological lens, practices can form, in Schatzki's (2016b) formulation, “bundles” and “arrangements” of practices, of which “constellations” represent various concentrations and patterns across the wider “plenum” of practices. Across a variety of competing theoretical schema, these relationally linked or sometimes institutionally concretized groupings conceive of particular types of knowledge, conduct, and practices as variably forming, depending on which author is employed, bundles and complexes, networks or systems, or institutions and fields.³

Media and communications studies, however, have long examined the material infrastructures that mediate practices as well as the networks of institutional arrangements through which media production practices occur. Borrowing a term from entertainment media production, Melissa Gregg (2015) reminds us that when we move past the embodied small-scale nexuses of media use or consumption practices, we find that “below the line” of the content or interface there are the dispersed and often-overlooked sites of production practices. This relational network of practitioners and sites of practice are known to, and traversed by, the programmers, producers, and journalists in any given sector of the media industry.

In journalism studies, Witschge, Anderson, Domingo, and Hermida (2019) call for a practice-oriented approach to understanding both stability and differentiation across bundles of news production and

³ See Schatzki (2016a) for a review the numerous contributions to understanding such complexity of relationally linked and institutionally grouped or otherwise compounded practices from Shove, Pantzar, and Watson's (2012) “bundles and complexes,” Nicolini (2013) or Latour's (2007) “networks,” as well as Bourdieu's (1990) “fields,” Giddens' (1979) “systems,” and Foucault's (1991) “apparatus” or “*dispositif*” in the original French.

news production-related practices. With the distinctions between once discrete domains of media use and media production collapsing, for example, when social media use and reporting practices mingle, then the conceptual dichotomies often relied on in scholarship are challenged. The publicity and opacity of media production practices are complicated by the norms of professional in contrast to personal conduct, and institutionalized flows of information dissemination are convoluted by the vagaries of social networks and interventions by nonjournalistic actors. By embracing the inconsistency of norms, complexity and diversity are found across bundles of journalistic practices that “may not necessarily be a consistent whole, but do appear to be coherent” (Witschge et al., 2019, p. 656). In the field of app studies, Dieter et al. (2019) correspondingly call for the multisited understanding of mediating processes, where the differences in the “infrastructural situatedness” of particular platform practices will differentially “enable specific, embodied, and often context-dependent” (p. 12) opportunities for user practices. This move away from studying the Web and app content shows how, below the line, there is an infrastructural relatedness of affordances and opportunities that can best be understood, in part, through engagement with media practices and their networked platform contexts.

With this complexity in mind, careful application of practice theories can provide an ontological position flexible enough to understand how the diversity of media production practices, both relationally and infrastructurally mediated, cohere into institutions, and therein institutionalized norms, standards, and consequently power. Over 50 years ago, Berger and Luckmann (1967) were already examining the habitualization of human conduct in terms of possibilities for its institutionalization by arguing that institutions are experienced as “over and beyond the individuals who ‘happen’ to embody them” (p. 58). The characteristic dimensions of the institution are reflected on as part of the adherents’ biography, yet also perceived as external to and persisting beyond their own actions. The institution, then, is reproduced as embodied by practitioners and, crucially, in the reflexive nature of their practices.

Across the particular relational networks of a given media sector, within which practices are recognizable and therefore reproducible, a field for ordering and anchoring of practices emerges. Know-how crystallizes into recognized roles. Specializations emerge. Across such fields of practice, then, the distribution, differentiation, and divisions between particular forms of knowledge, practice, and labor are manifest as an institutionalized ordering of social relations. As scholars, if we can accept the “objectivation” (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 60) of practices as institutions, both internalized and externalized by practitioners, then their embrace of particular constellations of practice as institutional becomes the vehicle for the persisting power of that claim and the related social relations.

The next four articles in this Special Section rise to the challenge of engaging empirically with media production as a relational field, where diverse practices are understood in terms of ordering and complexity across relational fields of practice that are still embodied sites of meaning-making and understanding with ramifications for larger media processes.

In his article, Stephen Ostertag examines the news as “relational social practices” of news production and news consumption, characterized by a relationship of mutual support and dependency. Focused neither exclusively on individual actors nor on the totalities of news organizations, industries, or fields, this praxeological approach challenges three enduring dichotomies that link news to human history,

that distinguish professional news practices from those of citizens, and the tendency for scholarship to examine news production in terms of similarities and differences of its context. Addressed in tandem, these dichotomies are challenged when news production practices are understood to be contingent, deeply tied to specific technologies, conventions, and collectivities.

In the next article, Christoph Raetzsch and Margreth Lünenborg turn attention to the converging field of consumption and production practices in which audience and journalist practices are understood in relation to, and circulating among, "nonprofessional, noninstitutional practices of public articulation" (this Special Section). Drawing on Swidler's (2001) work, the authors specifically examine how four practices anchor the contested multiplicity of practices in which media are understood as resources for public connection, for both audiences and journalists alike. Each anchoring practice represents different degrees of publicness. Practices of information retrieval and practices of social orientation are more oriented toward individual navigation across the media landscape. Others are more oriented toward public engagement such as practices of self (-representation) or practices of public intervention. These practices, the authors conclude, are today equally anchoring for both news professionals and other types of noninstitutional actors, including citizens in their consumption of the news. Adopting a practice theories perspective on how public connection works today, then, has the consequence of studying practices of professional journalism in relationship to other social actors within a complex field of possible communication practices.

Asen Ivanov, in the next article, examines how news media professionals navigate the construction of television news archives, through which a vast reserve of visual resources function both as historical documents and a repository for the production of future news. To understand the backstage production practices involved in archive development, the author draws on Swidler's (1986) toolkit of the theory of culture to analyze the cultural dimension of practice: how people develop an understanding of what they do and when they do it. This involves a twofold consideration of practice's cultural dimension: Understanding in practice can be contingent on the situated context within which the practice is performed, rooted in the practitioners' subjective experiences, but such understanding can also be more generally shared and understood beyond the situated performance of practice itself, and as such, it is rooted in the codes and rules of the institutional context of practice. This dual cultural dimension of practice is employed to analyze the construction of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation news archives. Through the use of in-depth interviews and participant observation, Ivanov explains how media practices might be looked at as a cultural field in which both situated and institutional frameworks for understanding in practice combine in the creation of news archives as well as in media production practices more generally. In so doing, the author suggests that practices might of course be routines, but that they should not be understood simply as mechanical performances carried out unconsciously.

Kenzie Burchell's article develops a practice-based lens for the multilingual comparison of international news production practices covering the ongoing Syrian war. Methodologically, the study focuses on the traces left behind by diverse news production practices, each trace used to infer distinct reporting contexts across the highly digitized global news environment and the multisited theater of war reporting. John Postill (2010) argues that employing practice theories alongside existing theoretical models can result in a "frame of analysis" within which the agency of media practitioners can be tracked across spatial and temporal sites of practice. Analytically, this serves two purposes, meticulously mapping the "practical ramifications" of

complex processes such as global media events, which in turn permits the retrospective analysis of “fields of media production and their changing power relations vis-a-vis other fields” (Postill, 2010, pp. 12–13). By coding and comparing both geographic and temporal metadata of coverage from five international news agencies, Burchell follows shifts in news production practices as military sieges unfold: from event-space reporting to dislocated coverage and commentary further afield; from breaking news reporting to the circulatory reporting of available information. When flash-points of global conflict and ensuing crises are covered in different ways, circulating different stories globally, this practice-based lens highlights “the stressors and fault lines inherent to responsible reporting” (this Special Section) as a field for possible political inventions that seek to orchestrate particular conditions for reporting and news production practices.

Advancing Practice Theories/Practice Theories at a Crossroads

The closing contributions of this Special Section engage with how practice theories can offer a powerful heuristic for conducting research through the foundations of practice theory prior to its application to media studies, the limits of the practice turn through a potential marriage with other approaches and, finally, the breadth of its current and future applications.

In her piece, Maria Bakardjieva aims to more effectively situate the utility of practice-based approaches within the broad field of media studies. She revisits three critical approaches to examine their contributions to understanding what people do with the media: uses and gratifications theory, the British cultural studies tradition, and domestication theory. Bakardjieva demonstrates how each approach is stymied by its preoccupation with media effects. Although the field of media and communications has long been open to everyday practices concerning the media, the author identifies potential for cross-fertilization in using practice as a sensitizing concept to help researchers recognize and explain media as well as media-related phenomena. We should understand the “(at least) three-fold capacity” of media as “technologies, institutions, and cultural forms” (this Special Section) while engaging the practices as producing as well as organizing or ordering those capacities. Bakardjieva proposes that researchers go beyond the flat ontology that characterizes practice theories to reassert a focus on notions of power and agency in the study of media and media-related practices.

Next, Peter Lunt critiques practice theories through an interactionist approach, which he suggests might be a promising tool to embed in the former. By examining Pierre Bourdieu’s foundational contributions to practices theories, Lunt demonstrates how Bourdieu’s theory of practice represents a departure and sharp critique of structural anthropology, while combining phenomenological and interactionist perspectives. Bourdieu’s work is surveyed alongside another influential sociologist of the time, Erving Goffman, for whom interaction was considered a central element of social practices. According to Lunt, it is the indeterminacy of interactions and, therein, their constitutive openness, that reinforces the importance of agency and the strategies of social actors through practices. Lunt posits that a cross-fertilization between practice theories and interactionism offers a wider range of conceptual tools to understand how people engage with media in contemporary societies.

This Special Section concludes with a summative article from our Special Section coeditor, Christian Pentzold. To gauge the synergy between practice theories and other approaches in culturalist media and

communication studies, Pentzold starts from the ontological and epistemological premises of practice theories: Social practices constitute the essential elements of sociality, and it is only by looking at practices that we as scholars can understand how societies work. Practices, once again, emerge as a lens through which scholars can hone their awareness of the “potency of habitual media usage” (this Special Section). He examines three avenues of a connate, practice-inclined media and communication research agenda, each of which leads toward the subsequent inquiry. This involves investigations that examine our changing social orientation toward media, which is mutually constituted in relationship to our changing media ensembles, leading next to those studies that interrogate the presence of such ensembles in mundane activities and across people’s everyday lives. A final shift of focus then highlights the sociomaterial aspects of such ensembles, in which practice theories provide a perspective on the affordances of media technologies in use. Each of these avenues, much like our wider goals across this Special Section, demonstrates the generative potential of praxeological perspectives for media and communications studies.

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