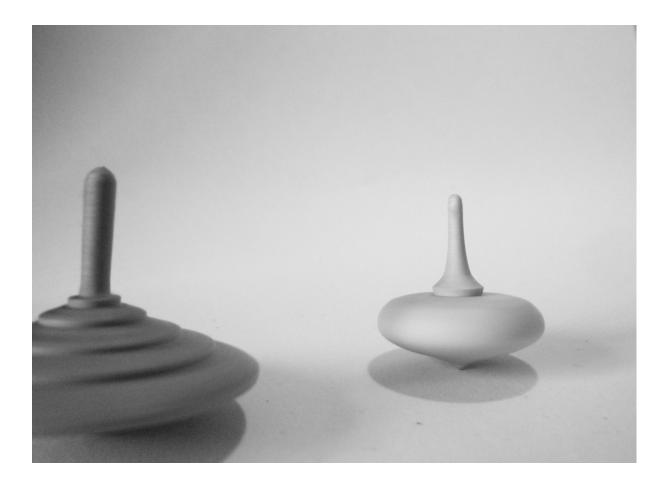# To Everything, Turn, Turn, Turn?

Taking Stock of the Practice Turn in Social Theory, Sociology, and Media Studies

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Inhalt

Abstract This article reviews the "practice turn" (PT) in sociology, social theory, and media studies. In addition, it develops a sociological perspective on turns in general. As other turns, PT presents itself as heterogeneous and interdisciplinary phenomenon lacking clear conceptual and institutional boundaries. In order to grasp this fuzziness inherent to PT, I regard PT as a "sign-post" (Wittgenstein 1984) giving rather vague directions and thus "assembling" (Latour 2005) a heterogeneous research community. Thus, my main question is as follows: How does PT guide research and how do researchers follow PT? Drawing on interviews with researchers involved in PT, I distinguish two major ideal-typical ways of following PT. Revolutionary approaches aim for overcoming existing ways of doing research by turning to practice. In contrast, reformative approaches aim for a renewal of disciplines. Whereas revolutionary approaches mainly arise in interdisciplinary fields and various "studies", reformative approaches flourish on the margins of sociology. In exploring this pattern, the article develops a sociological way of reflecting PT and turns in general. Thereby the article establishes an institutional perspective drawing on the work of Boltanski and Chiapello (2007).

Keywords Practice Turn, Practice Theory, Sociology of the Social Sciences, Turns

1. Introduction

The humanities and the social sciences have taken many turns during the last 30 years. A literature search quickly brings to light more than a dozen distinct turns. Just to name a few, there have been the linguistic, the cultural, the interpretative, the performative, the spatial, the educational, the postcolonial, and most recently the ontological turn. In this article, I will review a particular turn, that is to say the practice turn. Moreover, I will develop a way of reflecting the "practice turn" and turns more generally in a sociological way. For the purpose of this article, I will use terms as "practice turn", "practice theory", or "practice thinking" interchangeably and "PT" as their acronym.

PT presents itself as a fuzzy phenomenon. One will encounter manifold ways of defining "practice". Like other turns, PT has stimulated research in various disciplines and interdisciplinary cooperation. Rather than to sort this fuzziness out by identifying family resemblances, as e.g. Andreas Reckwitz (2003) does, or to provide an exhaustive thematic list of literature, my aim is to develop the means necessary for understanding the heterogeneity and messiness of PT from a different viewpoint. My main question is as follows: How does PT guide research and in which ways do researchers follow PT? In order to tackle this question, I draw on eleven semi-structured interviews conducted with researchers engaged in PT in late spring 2018. A review of relevant literature complements the interviews. It lies beyond the scope of this article to include all disciplines and fields in which PT flourishes. Thus, I limit my review to sociology, social theory, and media studies as core areas of PT. The author of this article is a sympathetic outsider to PT and the research contexts just mentioned. The analytical viewpoint presented here evolved from the interviews. However, developing an analytical viewpoint on PT also altered my approach to the interviews and shaped my reading of PT literature. Thus, writing a reflection of the whole research process in the appendix suits this article better than a methods section including only technical aspects of the interviews.

I address the main research question in three sections. The first section focuses on the specific normative claims inherent to turns, be it e.g. the practice, the linguistic, or the performative turn. Turns contend that we have paid far too little attention to a certain issue so far, here practice, and that we should change

that. Turns attract attention and offer orientation. They tell us what is important and what to do next. Applying a notion from Ludwig Wittgenstein (1984: §84), I regard turns as "sign-posts" in the scientific landscape. The heterogeneous, pluralist and fuzzy nature of PT is a result of the vague ways in which it provides direction and guidance. The second section moves on to identifying two major ways of interpreting and following the sign-post of PT. I distinguish between two ideal-types, namely revolutionary and reformative ways of turning to practice. Revolutionary takes on practice promote a radical change to an existing field of research whereas reformatory takes aim for a renewal of established fields of research.

Comparing revolutionary with reformative ways of turning to practice provokes the emergence of a pattern. Revolutionary approaches prosper in interdisciplinary fields, especially within "studies", whereas reformative approaches emerge from the margins of established disciplines. The third section is dedicated to exploring this pattern in detail. The conclusion suggests that the perspective developed here is useful to reflect and review other turns as well.

2. Practice Turn and Practice Theory as Fuzzy Sign-Posts

The label "practice turn" first appeared as a title of a volume edited by Ted Schatzki, Karin Knorr-Cetina and Eike von Savigny in 2001. The book followed an international conference titled "Practices and Social Order" at Bielefeld's Center for Interdisciplinary Studies in January 1996. According to Ted Schatzki (interview), the publishers came up with the title and the editors rather reluctantly gave in. Proclaiming a turn had been proved a successful strategy for attracting attention and funding before. Turns claim that a crucial feature of the world (e.g. practice) has slipped from the attention of existing research. As Doris Bachmann-Medick (2016: 16) rightly states, turns transform the category at their core from an object of study into an analytical category. The PT wants to draw "our" attention towards the underestimated but fundamental role of practice in social life.

From a PT point of view, practices are not mere articulations, actualizations or manifestations of an already existing underlying structure. PT challenges the status ascribed to practices within existing social theories. Turning to practice is giving them priority over structures, actors and other analytical categories. From the beginning, PT has been a theoretical debate. The basic promise of the aforementioned volume is as follows. If "we" start with practice in order to "investigate such phenomena as agency, knowledge, language, ethics, power, and science" (Schatzki 2001: 22), we arrive at better and more accurate descriptions and explanations of the social world. However, the concept of practice remains cloudy and fuzzy. How one exactly turns to practice is open to interpretation.

> "It bears emphasizing that nothing unifies the 'practice' accounts other than the centrality of some notion of practice either to their understandings or their analyses of their subject matters." (Schatzki 2007: 98)

It is useful to regard PT as a sign-post in the scientific landscape, which calls for our attention and provides instructions how to continue from there. The vagueness of the directions given should not bother us. As Ludwig Wittgenstein (1984: §87) writes: "The sign-post is in order – if, under normal circumstances, it fulfills its purpose." It is open to interpretation and does not unambiguously determine how to move from there (Wittgenstein 1984: §85). Reviewing PT, then, is not about clarifying the instructions but understanding the ways it "assembles" (Latour 2005) a heterogeneous community and provides analytical guidance.

There are different types of sign-posts in the scientific landscape understood as an "intellectual attention space" (Collins 2002). In calling for our attention, sign-posts also assemble a community (Latour 2005) in interpreting and following their instructions. Different types of sign-posts represent different ways of assembling a community and practicing science.

Using "schools" (Tiryakian 1979) as a contrasting example, the characteristic features of "turns" become clearer. Schools resemble noble aristocratic houses in their hierarchical structure, lines of command and disciplinary techniques. They are characterized by a fundamental distinction of master and disciples (Tiryakian 1979). The "worthiness" ["grandeur"] (Boltanski & Thevenot 1991) of individuals in this context depends on their degree of closeness to the master and his legitimate heirs. Loyalty is valued highly. Schools distinguish rigorously between insiders and strangers. They maintain and cultivate rivalries with competing schools (e.g. critical theory and system theory in Germany). Controversies are opportunities to display commitment, loyalty, and trustworthiness. Through engaging in controversies, disciples can prove their own worthiness. Within schools, fights ensue over the line of succession and the legitimate heirs.[1]

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1 Schools are not only concerned with their intellectual heritage. After the passing of media theorist Friedrich

The origins and the deceased masters of the school are kept alive in anecdotes and exegetic work. The "message" from the school's founder is continuously systematized and passed on as a "tradition" (Lena 2012: 46-52, 160-164). In short, schools in academia (like noble houses) value hierarchy, loyalty and tradition. Speaking with Boltanski and Thévenot (1991), schools assemble the social according to the "cité domestique". A cité is a repertoire of reasoning which actors use in order to establish and justify status hierarchies. In a heretical move away from Bourdieu's determinist critical sociology, Boltanski and Thévenot highlight social actor's abilities to establish, justify and criticize social order. Hence, the authors call their own project a sociology of critique.[2] Overall, Boltanski and Thévenot identify six cités as ideal types. In a situation shaped by the cité doméstique, the relative closeness of individuals to an ancestor or master establishes authority and hierarchy.

In contrast, PT values heterogeneity over systematization, connections over boundaries, similarities over differences, dialogue over controversies, and cooperation over competition. PT assembles researchers according to normative standards emblematic for the "projective city" [orig. "cité par projets"] (Boltanski & Chiapello 2007).[3] The "cité par projets" promotes "renouncing stability, rootedness, attachment to the local, the security of longstanding links" (Boltanski & Chiapello 2007: 123). It celebrates diversity and plurality and highly values establishing of connections across fields. It calls for an open-minded, adaptive and communicative attitude and a versatile mind-set. Hierarchies are depreciated. PT is not about safeguarding a tradition but presents a vision calling for activity, enthusiasm and creativity (Boltanski & Chiapello 2007: 103-164; Boehler & Reinhart 2014).

Whereas schools worship a glorious past ('the founder and his message'), PT praises an open future. Turning to practice promises to create infinite possibilities for future research. Speaking with Niklas Luhmann (1976:141), the PT "futurizes" the future, it increases the degree of its openess. Turns accept the premise that science is as an open-ended and infinite process in which every research result is open to a potentially infinite number of questions (Luhmann 1992: 590). One could go on forever when turning to practice.

The openness inherent in PT (and turns in general) is meant to undermine the idea of a definitive, systematic and universal theory of practice. According to Schatzki (2001: 13), practice theorists "are generally suspicious of 'theories' that deliver general explanations of why social life is as it is." Differing viewpoints call for neither systematization nor controversy. Instead, they call for tolerance. Thus, a moral message lies in the self-descriptions of PT which strongly promotes plurality, diversity and heterogeneity. Almost all interviewees claim that they are more interested in creating connections and building bridges than starting turf battles. The almost complete lack of controversies (in scientific literature) within PT despite there being opposing viewpoints on many issues (e.g. human and non-human agency, realism) adds further evidence to these statements. As Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello (2007: 124) state, "it is thus realistic to be ambivalent" in contexts defined by the "cité par projets" because "the situations people have to confront are themselves complex and uncertain."

Consequently, the meaning (and function) of theory changes. It is not a systematized set of assumptions but a process of mediation between different and conflicting positions. Practice allows to, as Stefan Hirschauer (interview) puts it, "read such authors as relatives in mind who actually inhabit different planets."[4] Reading works from different (and even conflicting) traditions as contributions to PT provides a fertile ground for experiments. "Practice" serves as a "vision" (Boltanski & Chiapello 2007: 104-128) calling for individually elaborated practice theories which in turn expand and strengthen PT as a "loose, but nevertheless definable movement of thought" (Schatzki 2001: 22). Herbert Kalthoff (interview), too, stresses the openness and experimental character of PT:

> "Practice theories are at the stage of an experiment with an open ending. This becomes visible from their present developing as well as from their quite variable conceptualizations. It also remains an open question to me as to what the theoretical element of PT amounts to."[5]

Kittler, each of his closest pupils inherited one of the master's ties.

2 For a discussion of the relation between a critical sociology and a sociology of critique, see the published conversation between Honneth and Boltanski (2009).

3 I will stick to the original French expression.

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4 „[…] Autoren als Geistesverwandte zu lesen, die eigentlich durch einige Ozeanmeilen getrennt sind."

5 „Die Praxistheorien sind ein Experiment mit noch offenem Ausgang. Erkennbar wird dies etwa an den aktuellen Entwicklungen und auch an den doch recht unterschiedlichen Konzeptualisierungen. Offen ist für mich auch die Frage, was das Theoretische an der Praxistheorie ist."

The heterogeneity of PT as a research field and the vagueness of its key category makes sense against the background of the "cité par projets" (Boltanski & Chiapello 2007) which values an experimental attitude in theorizing. As Randall Collins (2002: 879f) suggests, the growing number of intellectuals leads to increasingly crossing the borders between schools, traditions, and disciplines in search for new combinations.

3. Revolutionary and Reformative Ways of Turning to Practice

PT's becoming fashionable in a variety of research contexts adds to its overall fuzziness. A non-exhaustive list encompasses organizational studies, international studies, educational studies, geography, history, archaeology, or management studies. These contexts do not necessarily take notice of each other although the edited volume (Schatzki et al. 2001) serves as their common reference point. 'Practice' is a traveling concept, and Ted Schatzki has participated in countless conferences and workshops spreading the word of PT, thus becoming a traveling visionary. Given the plurality of contexts, PT is not one sign-post, but a loose network of multiple sign-posts (in which the edited volume and Schatzki are probably the most important nodes).

I identify two major within overall four ways of interpreting and following the sign-posts of PT regardless of the specific research context each of them is embedded in. The four ways of following PT represent also different ways of embracing the "cité par projets". These four ideal types result from characterizing PT by two dimensions. The first and main dimension concerns the way in which an existing research context should change when turning to practice. The notion of practice may be used either to reform or revolutionize an existing research context. Whereas reformative approaches are common in sociology, neighbouring fields such as media and organizational studies attach more radical agendas when using the notion of practice. The second dimension concerns the interpretative flexibility of the notion of practice. Coming up with an overall theory of practice reduces interpretative flexibility and this presents a case of closure. By contrast, increasing the interpretative flexibility, e.g. by doing experimental empirical research, is a way of opening up the notion of practice and extending its applicability.

Characterizing the ways of doing PT according to these two dimensions results in four ideal-typically distinct ways of turning to practice as the following diagram (Fig. 1) shows. Each quadrant represents one way of turning to practice.
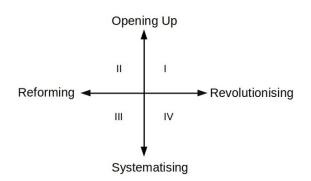

Figure 1: The Four Ways of Turning to Practice

The four quadrants representing the four ways of practice, then, are as follows: revolutionize/open up (I), reform/open up (II), reform/systematize (III), and revolutionize/systematize (IV). The diagram offers a way of schematizing the heterogeneity of PT. The loss of nuance should not bother too much (Healy 2017) since the diagram offers a new way of reflecting PT. Most importantly, it enables to move beyond the commonplace statement that PT is heterogeneous. The four quadrants characterize how PT sets about to challenge or alter a specific field of research.

Revolutionary approaches located in the quadrants I and IV take the notion of a turn to practice quite literally. Speaking of a turn in this context implies some kind of radical change. The notion of turning has a lot less significance and relevance for the kind of research which I locate in the left half (quadrant II and III). The notion of a "turn" is used (if at all) for only "strategic reasons" as one interviewee puts it. Researchers tend to be sceptic if not dismissive towards the notion of "turning". They reject the idea of radical change. By contrast, they tend to highlight continuity between PT and their own disciplines. Research located in the upper half of the diagram (quadrant I and II) usually stresses the importance of empirical research and tends to use the notion of practice in a more "pragmatic" or "instrumental" way as Nick Couldry (Couldry & Hobart 2010: 77-84) puts it. Turning to practice is closely linked to specific empirical research projects. In contrast, research in the lower half (quadrant III and IV) highlights the need of systematizing and theorizing that is a form of closure. It is here, where doing PT is valued for the sake of it.

I will address each of the four ways of interpreting the sign-post of PT in a subsection. I begin with the revolutionary ways (quadrant I & IV) and move on to the reformative ways (quadrant II and III).

3.1 Revolutionary ways of turning to practice

Turning to practice in a revolutionary spirit is concerned with overcoming established ways of doing research. Surprisingly, such radical ways of turning to practice do not flourish in sociology and social theory, but in neighboring interdisciplinary contexts. Prime examples are media studies, organizational studies, international relations, European studies, and management studies. Within established disciplines like geography, archaeology or history, referring to PT presents a radical challenge to existing research routines. In both cases, PT also serves as a hub for importing newer developments and trends from sociology and social theory in a rather selective way. This transfer of knowledge may not be limited to theoretical concepts but may include methods from the social sciences as well.

I identify two different ways of revolutionizing an academic context by turning to practice. Either, one might use notions of practice to address new topics for empirical research (revolutionize/open up). Alternatively, one might merge different notions of practice into one systematic theory which radically challenges the prevalent theories in a field (revolutionize/systematize).

Revolutionizing and opening up

I will use the works of Nick Couldry and Silvia Gherardi as paradigmatic examples for a revolutionary take on practice. Both stress the importance of empirical work. Nick Couldry's work focuses on media practices. Back in 2004, he called for a "new paradigm" in media studies (Couldry 2004). In the interview, he recalls:

> "I decided that I was just going to write a polemical piece about how the whole direction of media studies was wrong because it was studying the wrong thing. It was studying this narrow object we call 'interpreting a text' or 'being a fan' or whatever specific bounded practices were taken for granted in media studies and audience research at the time. And I thought that there was actually an infinity of things, potentially, that people were doing with and around and in some way related to media." (Couldry interview)

Understanding media as practices bears far-reaching consequences. It means to leave functionalist and determinist theories of media behind (Couldry 2004). Instead, turning to media practices requires introducing the notion of human agency and social

science methods. As he points out this leads to bringing media studies closer to social sciences.

PT provides a "meta-language" (Couldry interview) which supports the empirical study of the "infinity of things" that people do with media, especially social media, and the ways they orient themselves towards (or away from) media.

> "I suppose what I would say is, in general terms, that a practice is what people are doing that's sufficiently organized or configured socially, so it is able to be recognized as something. So, the concept of practice very much relies on a meta-language of describing practice. 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." (Couldry interview)

As he highlights, following the news is a practice, which can be performed in many different ways but still forms a recognizable practice. In its fuzziness, the notion of practice allows for engaging with the fuzziness of the real world. Studying media as practices, then, extends and radically alters the scope of media studies. Consequently, the strong philosophical tradition within media studies drawing on the works of Friedrich Kittler, Jean Baudrillard, Gilles Deleuze or critical theory becomes obsolete. This makes turning to practice both a revolutionary and an empirical project.[6]

However, it seems to be usual that sociology and social theory rarely recognize (and cite) the contributions to PT in their neighborhood. The works of Silvia Gherardi, Davide Nicolini, and their research group RUCOLA[7] then might be the exception that proves the rule. Gherardi's work on practice roots in her work on organizational learning. In her view (2012: 201), PT melts together a revived activity theory

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6 Couldry's "polemic piece" caused a major (and fierce) controversy in media studies and media anthropology, (Couldry & Hobart 2010). In my view, the controversy stems from the differing backgrounds and ambitions of Couldry and Hobart respectively. The former wants to transform media studies into a regular social science thereby relying on Bourdieu and a realist interpretation of Wittgenstein. The latter's understanding of practice is informed by the crises of representation in anthropology and aims for radically challenging ethnocentrism within our ways, that is practices, of thinking. Hobart's project embraces a radical constructivist viewpoint. Interestingly, this anthropological viewpoint is completely absent in the discussion within sociology.

7 The acronym stands for Research Unit on Communication Organizational Learning and Aesthetics.

(e.g. Engestroem 1990), actor network theory,[8] communities of practice (Lave & Wenger 1991), and 1980s cultural theory (Ortner 1984). These theoretical developments of the 1980s correspond with the study of social phenomena, which were ignored by "classic" sociology. Unsurprisingly, Gherardi (interview) thinks of PT as a "break with the previous theorists, with Giddens, with Bourdieu, with Ethnomethodology and so on. Otherwise, in my view, there is no reason to talk about the practice turn if it is just about taking practice one step forward." According to her, the concept of practice enables us to leave the dichotomies of "classic" sociology, e.g. individual/society, nature/culture, subject/object behind.

Moving forward limits itself not to intellectual progress but includes institutional entrepreneurship as well. She has created a group of research (RUCOLA), edited various special issues (e.g. Gherardi et al. 2013) and collaborated in projects in applied social sciences (e.g. on telemedicine or on safety of construction sites). The aim of these efforts is forming the "bandwagon of practice theory" as she calls it (Corradi et al. 2010). Turning to practice is one way to leave the idea of theory behind and move forward to a post-humanist and post-epistemological way of thinking through empirical research. Referring to the works of Donna Haraway (1988) and Karen Barad (2007), she understands theory as situated and partial knowledge (Gherardi 2017). Again, turning to practice is about leaving an established canon of theories and themes behind through novel empirical work.

Both, Couldry and Gherardi develop sophisticated and philosophically elaborated theoretical positions. However, they do not consider doing theory as an end in itself. Rather, it enables them to extend, transform or support empirical research. This makes their work a prime example for following the signpost of PT by radically challenging their respective research contexts through empirical research.

3.1.2 Revolutionizing and closing

The difference between opening up and closing becomes clearer if we contrast Nick Couldry's work with the "Siegen approach". In German media studies, the Collaborative Research Center "Media of cooperation" at the University of Siegen plays a key role in pushing PT.[9] An edited volume with

the title "Connect and Divide. The Practice Turn in Media Studies" following a German Research Foundation symposium with the same title in 2015 will be published in 2020 (Bergermann et al. 2020). Various edited volumes and special issues (Thielmann & Schüttpelz 2013; Zeitschrift für Medienwissenschaft 2012) appeared only in the last years. PT, then, is a rather recent phenomenon in German media studies and still unfolding (cf. Gießmann 2018).

Whereas PT in British media studies results from extending audience research and media anthropology to digitization, the German debate focuses on theories. The branch of German media studies deeming itself a "cultural science" [Kulturwissenschaft] traditionally does not engage in systematic empirical research, and only recently reinvests itself in methodological discussions (see e.g. Gießmann 2018 and Schüttpelz 2019). As Sebastian Gießmann (interview) ironically puts it, in culture-oriented [kulturwissenschaftlicher] media studies "the new good theories count as methods."[10]

Thus, the context of German media studies demands theoretically sophisticated justifications for new ways of doing research. This may involve "constructing philosophical genealogies" [philosophische Genealogien zu konstruieren] (Gießmann interview) in order to legitimate media practices as an object of study. Turning to practice in the context of German media studies is to produce a grand theory, which challenges the existing grand theories in the field.

Whereas Gießmann's approach raises the question "What do people do with media?", the "Siegen approach" aims for an overall theory of mediation. Practices are not necessarily human practices. Therefore, research includes historical work as well, e.g. Gießmann's (2014) own work on the history of networks and his current project on the history of cashless payment. PT is not necessarily linked to a specific object of study, e.g. social media. Instead, PT should be "adaptable" [anpassungsfähig] and "flexible" [flexibel] enough (Gießmann interview) to deal with all kinds of topics and data.

However, the Siegen approach forms neither a coherent nor a consistent approach. Gießmann stresses that there are three versions or streams of PT in Siegen, drawing on Ethnomethodology, Science and Technology Studies (notably the works of Bruno Latour and Susan Leigh Star, see e.g. Thielmann & Schüttpelz 2013 and Gießmann & Taha 2017), and French Neopragmatism (Boltanski & Thevenot 1991, see e.g. Potthast 2007), respectively. Regarding these differences, Gießmann (interview) adds: "I am not

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8 Gherardi thinks of actor-network-theory as an extension of ethnomethodology (Gherardi interview).

9 As I have learnt, the center is also referred to as the "Schüttpelz cult". Erhard Schüttpelz initiated the centre and served as its director [Sprecher] until recently.

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10 "[…] dass die jeweils neuen guten Theorien die Methoden sind."

sure yet whether we have fought certain controversies which possibly arise from this constellation."[11] This matches my own observations. The edited volumes already published bring together different authors with their own programmatic visions for a practice theory. Whether the "Siegen approach" culminates in a new systematic theory and whether empirical work follows remains to be seen.[12] Schüttpelz and Meyer's (2017) manifesto laid the groundwork for a systematic approach and established a common theoretical vocabulary.

So far, the "Siegen approach" has committed itself to creating a radically new theory of media practices. It presents a challenge on a theoretical level to German media studies (as cultural science [Kulturwissenschaft]) as a theory-saturated field of research. This makes PT a potentially revolutionary project with a strong tendency to closing through theorizing.

3.2 Reformative ways of turning to practice

If we think of the PT as a loose network of sign-posts, the work undertaken by Ted Schatzki and various German and British sociologists form the key nodes of this network. When turning to practice, neighboring fields always refer to the edited volume by Schatzki, Knorr-Cetina, and von Savigny (2001) and the debates emerging from it in some way.

Ironically, those whose work is identified with a turn to practice are reluctant to speak of a turn at all. Ted Schatzki (interview) prefers to speak of the "emergence of practice thinking". For most sociologists, turning to practice does not refer to some revolutionary project or some kind of rupture. It is not about leaving a certain body of literature behind.

Instead, sociologists and social theorists highlight the continuities between PT and the sociological traditions. Turning to practice, then, is a means to renewing sociology and social theory. PT presents itself as a way to altering ossified routines within the discipline. PT promises a more experimental approach to doing theory and empirical research. Roughly speaking, German sociology inspired by PT tends to focus on theorizing (closing) whereas its

British counterpart is more concerned with empirical research (opening up).

3.2.1 Reforming and closing

Sticking with the sign-post metaphor, one can approach PT from many directions. Several researchers I talked to highlight the importance of Pierre Bourdieu's (1979) early ethnographic work on the Kabyle society and regard it as paradigmatic study for following a practice-based approach.[13] Others take a strong interest in micro-sociology, e.g. Harold Garfinkel's ethnomethodology, Bruno Latour's actor network theory, or Erving Goffman's interactionist work. As a rule of thumb, those with a background in micro-sociology seem to be interested in reaching out to a macro level. Those who come from a macro-sociology or social theory become intrigued by ideas from micro-sociology.

Using micro-sociology as a starting point, Stefan Hirschauer (2017) aims for a theory of doing differences. Hilmar Schaefer (2016b) has shifted his focus from theoretical to ethnographic research. Terms such as "trans-" or "inter-situational dimension" ["Inter- or "Transsituativität"] indicate that the problem of macro- and micro-levels takes a new form within PT. Being deeply rooted in sociology, researchers are not interested in leaving sociological traditions behind as Silvia Gherardi suggests. Such radical claims are met with mistrust and seem to cause a certain confusion in sociology and social theory.

Although German sociologists approach practice from different directions, I identify three main commonalities within the German context. PT here is about:

1. Finding a way to think about meaning and materiality. On the one hand, researchers criticize actor-network-theory for its rather mechanist view of the social. On the other hand, they stress that classic theories of action or interaction pay little attention to materiality. Hillebrandt (2014, 2016) merges Bourdieu, Mauss, and Latour into what he calls a "poststructuralist materialism." Alkemeyer takes a strong interest in the materiality of the body (Alkemeyer et al. 2009). Potthast (2007, 2017) combines the work of Boltanski and Thévenot (1991) and Latour. Kalthoff infuses Heidegger into social theory (Kalthoff et al. 2016). Schatzki (who is closely

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11 "Ich weiß noch nicht, ob wir bestimmte Kontroversen, die sich daraus ergeben können, wirklich auch ausgetragen haben."

12 Within sociology, there seemed to be a certain unease with the Siegen way of theory building which appropriates social theory in a rather selective way. However, with the digitalization of Garfinkel's archive well under way in Siegen, these reluctances recently gave way to various cooperations.

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13 Several interviewees stressed that the German reception of Bourdieu within sociology has focused mainly on social injustice and habitus. The re-reading of Bourdieu in the context of PT focuses on the ethnographic aspects of his work instead.

linked with the German context), too, combines a Heideggerian interest in materiality with a Wittgensteinian approach to language and meaning (e.g. Schatzki 2013).

Focusing on practice is also a way of overcoming poststructuralism and its interest in discourses and deconstruction, at least partially. However, turning to practice is not necessarily about embracing realism. Most sociologists would probably not agree with Schatzki's (2001) claim that the social actually consists of practices.

2. Overcoming methodological individualism. PT refutes the idea that the social is made of individuals and their decisions. Thus, one has removed the human subject from center stage. This leads to a reconceptualizing human agency and intentionality (Hirschauer 2016). PT challenges classic theories of action including pragmatism,[14] and the hermeneutic branch of the sociology of knowledge. Occasionally, this has led to a few polemic reactions (Bongaerts 2007).

Stefan Hirschauer and Robert Schmidt highlight that methodological individualism is built into our everyday lives. We see ourselves as individuals who make decisions. Thus, Hirschauer (2018) considers methodological individualism a "folk theory". According to Schmidt (interview), most of the social sciences perform a "collective going native" ["kollektives going native"], when analyzing lifeworlds inherently structured by methodological individualism whilst using concepts which are actually rooted in methodological individualism.[15]

Whilst PT takes an interest in meaning and interpretation, it rejects a purely hermeneutic perspective, which regards humans and their ways of making sense as foundations of the social. Thus, PT presents a challenge to a hermeneutical tradition relying on the work of Alfred Schütz.

3. Stressing the importance of empirical research without actually doing it. Although researchers usually stress the importance of empirical research, PT has not yet produced a body of empirical work deemed paradigmatic for PT. The majority of my interviewees regards the lack of major empirical work as one of the biggest shortcomings of PT.[16] Being a theoretical debate from the start, the lack of major empirical studies comes as little surprise. The rather theoretical works of Ted Schatzki and Andreas Reckwitz, notably his tome on theories of culture (Reckwitz 1997), serve as key reference points.[17] Although PT has changed the status of theory, it seems to fit quite neatly into the long German tradition of armchair sociology.[18] PT does not emerge from specific empirical projects. To be fair, PT has stimulated and strengthened ethnographic research within German sociology, notably on the PhD level. Compared to American sociology, German sociology lacks a strong ethnographic research tradition. Equally important, the German academic system regards professors as teachers and civil servants rather than researchers. Thorough empirical ethnographic work seems to be a privilege of PhD students. Whether or not the growing number of ethnographic PhD theses will eventually change the foundations of German sociology remains an open question.

Despite these commonalities, the self-characterizations of PT as a paradigm, a research program, or a movement respectively, are hardly accurate. As Robert Schmidt (interview) puts it: "Maybe the idea that there were this one field of PT presents a misperception from an outsider's point of view. But I think the view from inside is different, and necessarily needs to be so."[19] Coming back to the sign-post analogy, every researcher tends to set up his or her own sign-post. Although the German

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14 There is a growing interest in pragmatism in German sociology, e.g. Bogusz (2018) or Dietz et al. (2017). However, this debate is distinct from PT. Work drawing on the work of Boltanski & Thévenot (1991) fares under various flags, e.g. "French neopragmatism", "sociology of critique", or "sociology of conventions". This stream of research is loosely tied to PT, the exception being Potthast (2007).

15 Methodological individualism also lies at the core of an institutional crisis in German sociology. Hartmut Esser and like-minded sociologists left the German Sociological Association [Deutsche Gesellschaft für Soziologie] and founded their own association called Academy for Sociology [Akademie für Soziologie] in 2017, see also Hirschauer (2018).

16 I asked my interviewees what they consider the most important empirical work. Some refused to answer the question. Most referred to Bourdieu's early ethnographic work, others mentioned the work of their postdocs. Several see the lack of major and visible empirical work as the biggest shortcoming of PT.

17 It is important to mention that Schatzki does not regard himself as a theorist. Currently, he pursues a historical research project (Schatzki interview).

18 Prime examples for German armchair sociology are critical theory in Frankfurt, notably Habermas and Honneth, systems theory in Bielefeld, namely Luhmann, or the work of Beck on risk and the risk society.

19 "Es ist vielleicht auch eine täuschende Außenwahrnehmung, als gäbe es dieses Feld der Praxistheorie. Die Innenwahrnehmung ist aber glaube ich eine andere und muss auch notwendigerweise eine andere sein."

debate shows a strong interest in systematizing and theorizing, it remains inherently pluralist. Edited volumes assemble different practice theories. They display activity and often contain rather programmatic contributions calling for further activity and even more visions of PT. There seems to be little interest in establishing a shared systematic viewpoint. This leaves PT a "poorly integrated field" [schwach integriertes Feld] and a "loose conglomerate" [loses Konglomerat], as Schmidt (interview) says. If we regard a research paradigm as a coherent set of institutionalized routines, then PT in its current state can hardly be considered a paradigm. There are no textbooks, methods books, conferences, or journals dedicated to practice-based research. A growing number of edited volumes forms neither a paradigm, nor a research program, nor a movement. Despite the popularity and visibility of the notion of practice, according to my interview partners PT has been peripheral and marginal within German sociology.

3.2.2 Reforming and opening up

Not all sociologists faring under the flag of PT share the German passion for theorizing. Practice-based research in Lancaster emerges within applied and empirical research projects on energy, environment, and resources (e.g. Shove & Spurling 2013). This creates the impression that practice-based research is limited to these topics. However, this is not the case as Elizabeth Shove (interview) insists: "People in the UK say it's all about environment stuff which is rubbish. It's just a number of people, me included, being in that field."
Like her German colleagues, Elizabeth Shove is highly critical of methodological individualism. However, her research context is different due to the focus on applied research. She tries to smuggle a sociological viewpoint into an academic and political environment shaped by methodological individualism.

> "So in a way, my job is not about practice theory. It's about sociology. It's about developing an offering, a more systemic social view of what happens in the social world, and practice theory is enfolded within that really. But I would never say practice theory to an engineer, I mean, you know, that's no way to go. Often they don't get the idea of what a paradigm is let alone that they have one." (Shove interview)

Methodological individualism is built into scientific work as well as into policies focusing on individual behavior. A "more systemic social view" highlights the shortfalls and negative side effects of such policies. A prime example are energy efficient technologies (Shove 2018). More energy efficient air conditioning does not necessarily lead to less energy consumption. It may also contribute to the diffusion of air conditioning by making it more affordable. In turn, more people take low indoor temperatures for granted and expect air conditioning. Thus, promoting energy-efficient devices will not have a positive impact on overall energy consumption. From a sociological point of view, we do not consume energy but services, which require energy (Shove 2018). Thus, policies incentivizing people to consume less energy are likely to fail. Shove's work is about challenging truisms emerging from methodological individualism and rational choice. However, the sociological perspective is a marginal one in these debates. Shove (interview) admits:

> "It's difficult. So we've tried quite hard in the DEMAND centre to kind of sneak in those ideas without those words. So we've made a series of little films, you know, why practices matter and what's important with energy. And we tried really hard to say things without jargon language, like, 'I don't know whether that will work or not'."

She also avoids the jargon in most of her written work because there is no journal dedicated to PT. According to her, PT is a marginal phenomenon within British sociology. There is the group around SHOVE in Lancaster and another one around Alan Warde (e.g. Warde 2016) in Manchester. Whereas the former draws on the work of Anthony Giddens, the latter uses Pierre Bourdieu as a starting point for his work on consumption. According to Elizabeth Shove, there are several research groups in neighboring disciplines, e.g. Public Health. However, these groups seem to be at best loosely connected.

Like their German counterparts, British sociologists with an interest in PT see no need for a radical break with the traditions. Whereas German sociologists mainly promote a more experimental attitude to theorizing, the Lancaster approach is about establishing a sociological viewpoint on topics like sustainability (Shove & Spurling 2013), Nordic Walking (Pantzar & Shove 2010), or energy efficiency (Shove 2018). In British sociology, PT takes place within specific larger empirical research projects.

4. Turn and Discipline

Looking at the four ways of turning to practice, a pattern becomes visible. Turning to practice driven by a revolutionary spirit has its place in the neighborhood of sociology. By contrast, sociology and social theory themselves follow a more reformative agenda when it comes to PT. However, PT remains a marginal phenomenon even within German sociology. This demands an explanation.

In the neighborhood of sociology, PT allows to set up new standards for themes, methods and theories. On the flipside, this means to either leave behind or overcome an established standard. Silvia Gherardi wants to skip the classics; Nick Couldry wants to overcome an approach treating media as texts; the "Siegen approach" intends to replace a theory concerned with specific media (e.g. internet) with a more general theory based on a common vocabulary (Schüttpelz & Meyer 2017). Revolutionary takes on practice are appealing in fields of research, which either lack a strong tradition or for which established traditions have little to offer. Thinking about media as texts has its limits when it comes to studying social media. The sociological tradition may have little to say about learning in organizations.

Revolutionary ways of turning to practice aim for establishing a new canon of topics, theories and/or methods. They are particularly successful in contexts where disciplines and their disciplinary mechanisms are less influential. This applies to the variety of "studies" popping up during the 1980s such as media studies, organizational studies, management studies, postcolonial studies, European studies, just to name a few. As rather young and interdisciplinary fields of research, studies are particularly liable to radical ways of turning. It is salient that most of the turns are successful in such fields (Bachmann-Medick 2016).[20]

In contrast, established disciplines such as sociology have strong traditions. Reformative ways of turning to practice within sociology and social theory reflect the power of the discipline to discipline researchers. Turning to practice within an established discipline is not a matter of implementing a new canon of topics, theories and methods. Instead, turning to practice is about loosening the straitjacket of established research routines. PT calls for a more playful approach. Re-evaluating the canon of the discipline in the light of the "cité par projets" (Boltanski & Chiapello 2007) facilitates experimental takes on the classics and interdisciplinary cooperation (e.g.

Alkemeyer et al. 2013).[21] The notion of practice also enables extending the scope of sociological analysis. As revolutionary ways of turning, the reformative approach is particularly successful in areas of research in which traditions and their disciplinary mechanisms are less influential. Neither energy (e.g. Shove 2018), the body (e.g. Alkemeyer et al. 2009), infrastructures (e.g. Potthast 2007) nor materiality (e.g. Hillebrandt 2016, Kalthoff et al. 2016) present key issues in sociology.

[Anonymous1] and [Anonymous2] coined the diffusion of turns in a theorem: turns discipline research in areas in which disciplines do not (Anonymous conversation). This is especially true for fields lacking a strong tradition. However, the theorem does not grasp the difference between revolutionary and reformative ways of following the sign-post of PT. Revolutionary approaches aim for setting up a new standard or replacing an existing tradition. However, for researchers in established disciplines, turns offer a way to circumnavigate disciplinary mechanisms. Topics left aside by the mainstream of the discipline are particular apt for more experimental approaches. Comparing revolutionary and reformative approaches to practice allows to develop the aforementioned theorem further. Returning to the sign-post analogy, I suggest the following reformulation of the theorem: I) turns provide meaningful orientation in contexts in which disciplines and their traditions do not. II) Within established disciplines, turns facilitate extending the theoretical, methodological, and thematic scope of the discipline. III) Within interdisciplinary fields such as the various "studies", turns present a surrogate for a not yet existing canon of theories, methods and topics in a newly established field of research. The four ways of turning to practice present also different ways of embracing the values of the "cité par projets" in distinct institutional settings.

5. Conclusion

Drawing on interviews with researchers in the field of PT allowed me to develop a new perspective on PT. Instead of categorizing research by theme or theories, I developed a different approach using insights from Wittgenstein (1986), Latour (2005) and

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20 The exception proving the rule is anthropology. Its foundations have eroded in the wake of the publication of Malinowski's diary, the crisis of representation, and the debate on writing culture.

21 However, interdisciplinary cooperation with fields outside of the social sciences and the liberal arts is rare in German sociology. The exception coming to my mind is the fieldwork of Tanja Bogusz (2018) among French marine biologists. The biologists named a newly discovered species after the fieldworker (joculator boguszae).

Boltanski & Chiapello (2007). Notably, I regarded PT as a sign-post offering guidance and serving as an assembling point. Sign-posts are inherently normative in that they give instructions how one should proceed. Since PT embraces heterogeneity, pluralism, and openness, its normativity mainly relies on the "cité par projets" (Boltanski & Chiapello 2007). The first section contrasted the normativity of turns with those of schools.

Building on the sign-post analogy, the main section has described four ways of turning to practice. Using paradigmatic examples, I distinguish between revolutionary and reformative ways of turning. Further, the focus may be on opening up or closing with regards to the interpretative flexibility of the notion of practice. Radical takes on the notion of practice are located in the neighborhood of sociology and social theory. However, a reformative spirit shapes the core debates around PT within German and British sociology. It is salient that there is a strong interest in theorizing (closing) PT in Germany, which is, as I suggested, probably due to historical and institutional reasons. Looking at the various ways of turning to practice, a pattern emerges. PT provides meaningful orientation in contexts in which disciplines and their traditions do not. Thus, PT spreads in the periphery of disciplines and in fields lacking strong traditions or established protocols.

Looking at turns in general, it is remarkable that the rise of turns in general correlates with the weakening of disciplines and the growing importance of third-party funding since the 1980s, especially in Germany (see e.g. Luhmann 1992, Muench 2007, Muench 2009: 164-178). Massive institutional changes in higher education in the last 30 years likely contributed to the boom of various turns in Germany (Bachmann-Medick 2016). Interestingly, "turns" materialize themselves in specific institutional formats such as Collaborative Research Centers (such as the "Media of Cooperation" Center in Siegen) or graduate schools (e.g. in Oldenburg[22] and formerly in Vienna). Such institutions are in fact projects (Luhmann 1992: 339) operating within clearly defined timeframes. This makes them flexible and adaptable frameworks. Thus, they are prime examples for institutional materializations of the values of the "cité par projets" (Boltanski & Chiapello 2007). More importantly, these institutional frameworks promise to deliver similar goals as turns: assembling heterogeneous research communities, doing future-oriented research, creating connections between various viewpoints, and engaging in interdisciplinary

cooperation. However, it lies beyond the scope of this article on PT to delve deeper into the institutional developments linked to turns. Yet, with the number of research fields and academics still growing, the question remains as to whether PT in particular and turns in general will be able to provide meaningful orientation in research contexts in which the power of disciplines keeps decreasing. Once "we" stop turning to practice, will there be other categories to turn to? Or will there be novel kinds of sign-posts demanding our attention and our following?

Acknowledgments

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22 The Oldenburg graduate program's full name is "Selbst-Bildungen. Praktiken der Subjektivierung in historischer und interdisziplinärer Perspektive."

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Appendix

The process of interviewing not only revealed different takes on PT but also tacit assumptions of the interviewer. I wrongfully presumed that all my interview partners commit themselves to turning to practice with a revolutionary spirit. The interviews quickly made me realize that different researchers want to accomplish different goals by using the notion of practice even if they have a similar understanding of the category. Consequently, I gave up the idea of categorizing research by different definitions of practice. Instead, I became interested in what is at stake for researchers by turning to practice in their fields.

While the framework provided by Boltanski & Chiapello (2007) was useful to grasp the normative dimensions of PT on a general level, it did not suffice to make sense of the differences within PT. With the interviews and conversations revealing contradicting opinions on PT, I became interested in the structure of these contradictions. Starting from identifying and contrasting revolutionary and reformative ways of turning to practice, the diagram continuously evolved.