

## **Jumping on the Practice Bandwagon: Perspectives for a Practice-Oriented Study of Communication and Media**

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The article proceeds from the interest in a practice-oriented vocabulary in culturalist studies of communication and media. It assesses whether a jump on the practice bandwagon can be justified by the contribution of praxeology to scholarly work that seeks to contextualize communicative routines or the production and appropriation of media. Setting out from the principles of recursivity, relationality, and expressivity characterizing media practices, I look at the ways in which media ensembles are constituted through the articulation of their technological, discursive, organizational, and institutional features. From that, I outline perspectives for a practice-inclined analysis of the transformation of collective orientations to media, the maintenance of media-saturated everyday lives, and the modification of media affordances.

*Keywords: theories of practice, praxeology, cultural studies, culturalist communication and media research, media-related practices, affordances, Bourdieu, Giddens*

Talking about practice has itself become a familiar practice in the social sciences and humanities, including in communication and media studies. Yet despite the current preference for terms like *performativity*, *performance*, or *praxis*, it often remains unclear if they are being used conterminously with words such as *action*, *habits*, and *customs*, or if the use of these vocabularies is intended to invoke wider assumptions about the practice-based constitution of social life.

It is in this respect that practice theory—or, to use another name, praxeology—has emerged in social philosophy and cultural sociology (Ortner, 1984; Reckwitz, 2002). The field is constituted by a number of loosely coupled contributions that treat practices as socially intelligible, bodily and materially based sequences of situated actions. The different propositions agree on this premise, Theodore Schatzki (1996) summarizes, “that practices are not only pivotal objects of analysis . . . , but also the central social phenomenon by reference to which other social entities such as actions, institutions, and structures are to be understood” (p. 10). Ontologically, social practices thus constitute the basic elements of sociality, and their cohesion cannot be explained by mental plans, rationality, norms, or interactional stratagems, because practices do not manufacture themselves outside of the context of sequenced actions (Gherardi, 2012). Epistemologically, this means that practice theories aim to start from the “ongoing accomplishment of the

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concerted activities of daily life" (p. vii), as Garfinkel (1967) wrote. It is on this basis that the "objective reality of social facts" (p. vii), he said, can be reconstructed.

While a growing array of scholarship in media and communication, media anthropology, and cultural studies shares an orientation toward practice, only few rest on these ontological and epistemological premises (for overviews, see Askew & Wilk, 2002; Boyer, 2012; Bräuchler & Postill, 2010; Duranti, 2012; Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod, & Larkin, 2002; Spitulnik, 1993). Notwithstanding the common lexicon, distinctively praxeological tenets are just about to become acknowledged (Ang, 2006; Bird, 2010; Couldry, 2004, 2012; Göttlich, 2013; Postill, 2010). As a result, the existing approaches are diverse and merely start to form a recognizable area of inquiry (e.g., Barassi, 2015; Mattoni, 2016; Pink, 2012; Witschge & Harbers, 2018). Even more mainstream concepts that seem to be compatible with the trend, like pragmatism or symbolic interactionism, do not explicitly engage with key claims of practice theory.

In consequence, the task of this article is to provide an analytical overview and to formulate more palpable perspectives for an empirical investigation into what people do with media. It offers a conceptualization of what media practices are and how their theoretical significance can be used to specify the linkage of media structures and media agency. With this, the article especially contributes to culturalist studies of media and communication that focus on the everyday enactment of communicative routines and on the mundane accomplishment of producing, appropriating, and regulating media—practice theory appears to offer considerable purchase on such phenomena.

Note that this endeavor cannot do justice to the minutiae of praxeological thought. On the contrary, it seems necessary to first carve out essential aspects and identify what a practice-based orientation has in store for the study of communicative processes and the circulation of media technologies and content. To this end, the article refers to core principles associated with practice theory and makes use of existing practice-oriented studies into media and communication. The article assesses whether a jump on the practice bandwagon can be justified by the contribution of praxeology to this scholarship.

The presumption is that, for all their incongruity, practice theories offer a distinctive program that rests on the shared preoccupation with the ways in which the interdependency of social structures and situative actions is enacted, as well as an interest in the material and corporeal entanglement of human action. This can help us to better grasp the swiftly changing media environment, especially since digital media have been entering the scene.

Commencing from the nexus between the reproduction and the transformation of media practices enables us, on the one hand, to engage "with the experience that our world is increasingly in flux and interconnected" (p. 2), Nicolini (2012) says. On the other, a turn to practice can make us aware of the potency of habitual media usage. It shifts our attention away from disruptive innovations and brisk swaps, and instead stresses the importance of habituation and repetition through which media become seemingly indispensable. In effect, media corporations seek to emulate the most mundane activities, such as connecting to friends, sharing photos, or searching for information, in their services. Penetrating a particular activity, Facebook, Instagram, or Google has therefore become almost synonyms for such everyday routines. These two elements of change and of stability in media practices only appear to be paradoxical.

Indeed, a praxeological perspective emphasizes the work that goes into modifying media forms and habits; at the same time, it reminds us that the continuation and maintenance of existing media-infused settings need to be actively achieved and do not simply persist.

To set the scene for a more extensive engagement with practice theory and to discuss why this is worthwhile, the overview offered in this article follows four guiding questions: What distinct conceptual tenets does practice theory offer that can help us to better understand how media prefigure most, if not all, walks of life? Where do communication and media studies already share similar viewpoints with praxeological theory, what do they notice, and what are they missing? How can its principles be used to trace the ways in which media ensembles are established, upheld, and transformed? What analytical perspectives does a practice-based point of view open up?

### **Recursivity, Relationality, and Expressivity in the Praxeological Program**

When trying to define media practices, we face the problem that there is not one theory of practice. Instead, we find a family of constructs whose unity becomes only evident in retrospect and that is yet postulated to be a paradigmatic shift (Ortner, 1984; Schatzki, Knorr Cetina, & von Savigny, 2001). This proclaimed "practice turn" has been criticized for neglecting related culturalist theories, such as Mannheim's sociology of knowledge, the constructivism proposed by Berger and Luckmann, or Schutz's social phenomenology (Hui, Schatzki, & Shove, 2017; Nicolini, 2012; Reckwitz, 2002). Although the terms *praxis*, *practice*, and *performance* are used here interchangeably, they also might come to be associated with rather distinct conceptions. For instance, the notion of performance features in speech-act theory and its focus on the work that utterances do; it is a core reference for anthropologies of theatrical presentations; or it is used to describe interactional rituals, like Goffman (1971) proposed.

At this stage, my aim is not to resolve this ambiguity. Instead, I identify recursivity, relationality, and expressivity as core principles that characterize practice theories and set them apart from cognate approaches in performance studies and cultural analysis. Following Hesmondhalgh and Toynbee's (2008) suggestion, I understand these tenets as "useful abstractions" (p. 3), meaning that their utility will need to become evident when translated into more concrete analytical perspectives. Limiting the range and intricacy of conceptual thought to three key ideas necessarily implies reduction. Yet this due restriction will arguably help us to better recognize what a practice-based orientation can add to culturalist studies of communication and media.

In essence, theories of practice link the constitution of agency—and of social reality writ large—to the recursive accomplishment of practices. Their reproduction, which is bound by space and time, is ontologically and epistemologically the ultimate "site of the social" (Schatzki, 2002, p. 44). So the realization of practices is structured by, and in turn structures, the social, semantic, and material settings in which it is positioned, and which it instantiates, reproduces, and transforms. When cultural systems of meaning are recursively enacted, they become translated into bodily performances. At the same time, these corporeal activities inform the inscription of tacit understandings. Hence, recursivity means that social practices are not taken to be ordered by antecedent and taken-for-granted worldviews, social rules, or acts of individual sensemaking. Instead, their properties are, in Giddens' (1984) account, "both medium and outcome of the

practices they recursively organize" (p. 25). Practices, in other words, can be understood as a coextensive articulation of patterns of action and patterns of meanings, which is why dualisms of micro versus macro, body versus mind, or stasis versus dynamics can at least be considered problematic.

Theories of practice share a concern for the relationality of body movements, systems of knowledge, and materials, and especially for the ways these relations are "continuously maintained and continually altered by the doings of their components" (p. 238), as Warde (2005) stated. They thus underscore the associations, which knit together somatic, semantic, and sociomaterial properties that provide the joint basis for people's ability to take part in action. In these entanglements, "the contours of material and social agency are mangled in practice," as Pickering (1995) explains, "meaning emergently transformed and delineated in the dialectic of resistance and accommodation" (p. 23).

The relations cannot be reduced to spatial conditions or ties in social networks, but constitute, as Giddens (1984) wrote, the fundamental "settings for interaction" (p. xxv) or, as Bourdieu (1984) put it, the "social fields" (p. 95) within which practices and practice-based relationships unfold. They shape the capacity of practitioners to perpetuate or reshuffle ways of doing and saying, and provide arrangements in which practices are situated. This allows for spontaneity and improvisation when practitioners generate new ways of addressing contingently unfolding circumstances (Shove, Pantzar, & Watson, 2012).

What is essential to the principle of relationality is the belief that engaging in practices does not primarily rely on the propositional knowledge of facts, but on the knowing of skills. People acquire their latent capabilities, Wittgenstein (1953/2009) thus maintains, as the "'mastery' of a technique" (§150). Likewise, Giddens (1984) states that "what agents know about what they do, and why they do it—their knowledgeability as agents—is largely carried in practical consciousness" (p. xxiii). Such a notion of bodily inclinations is also at the core of Bourdieu's (1977) concept of habitus as the outcome and generating principle of practices. It is through active participation, he argues, that physical movements and the dispositions to act, think, perceive, and evaluate become embodied abilities that enable further participation.

Praxeological theories, furthermore, underscore the expressive performance of sequences of activity, something Goffman (1971) already stressed. Expressivity implicates that practices are publicly enacted and go hand-in-hand with sensemaking. So, it actually is a tautology to speak of "social practices," as if to set them apart from nonsocial practices, since all practices involve signification and implicate social intelligibility. As such, practices take shape in expressive acts that commonly involve symbolic signs like language, but can also be nondeclarative. They thus come into being through meaningful patterns of bodily activity that presuppose some kind of knowledgeable audience, perhaps only imagined, in relation to which they make sense. By emphasizing the expressive character of performances, praxeological theories point to the observable aspects of verbal sayings and more muted doings. But they are markedly disinterested in processes happening beyond these displays. Hence, they neither provide terms to address mental operations nor attend to assumedly hidden or concealed social mechanisms. In contrast, these phenomena, on the individual or collective level, are traced back to recognizable instantiations of particular practices.

At the same time, practice theories do not advance a situationism that is restricted to what is immediately and visually perceptible because their public enactment always already presupposes a cultural

background. It exists, Schmidt and Volbers (2011) explain, "wherever participants of practices, in their activities, attend to the fact that the artifacts, symbols, and practices given to them are also available to other participants" (p. 424). This kind of publicness, then, is not about a shared presence of situated performances in actu; it can also constitute across time and space for which media prove to be essential. For instance, Knorr Cetina and Bruegger (2002) show how financial markets congeal in local sites and through translocal communication technologies. They provide the setting for the practices of stock trading and banking, and render them accessible to observation.

### **Complementary Approaches and Selective Adoption**

Studies into communication and media have not altogether ignored the practical dimension of communication or the active engagement in producing and appropriating media. In fact, they connect with praxeological arguments in two traditions. These cannot be discussed in full detail here, but what should be evident is that both lines reflect on some aspects while not fully engaging with the ontological and epistemological conceptions offered by practice theories. What they essentially lack is a clear argument on what it means to view media as "a vast domain of practices" (p. 44), as Couldry (2012) put it.

The first tradition refers to cultural studies in order to appreciate the mundane ways of manufacturing and acculturating communicated texts and media technologies. Since its inception, the focus has rested on the semantic and material dimensions present in all forms of cultural expression (Williams, 1990). Culture was not taken to be a supplementary reflection of social practice; it was, as Hall (1980) held, "itself a practice—a signifying practice—and had its own determinate product: meaning" (p. 18). Proceeding from this, studies have turned to local and contingent rather than universal and permanent systems of ideas and values, and to the fabrication of difference in and across media-infused social and political configurations (Grossberg, 2006; Hannerz, 1992). Instead of taking for granted the existence of categories like gender, class, or ethnicity, they aimed to reconstruct their situated enactment as meaningful parameters that are used in communication to establish commonalities or to demarcate boundaries within and among collectives. Other contributions to this tradition were interested in the assembly and domestication of media content and technologies (de Certeau, 1984; Moores, 2005; Silverstone, 1994).

In sum, the studies in this tradition are compatible with sensibilities found in other practice-based concepts, which is why they are sometimes even considered a part of the praxeological camp itself (Reckwitz, 2002). Yet in spite of their related interest in the prosaic handling of media and a shared idiom, cultural studies approaches nevertheless overlook media practices as genuine analytical units. They thus treat them, as Postill (2010) remarks, "not as objects of study in their own right but rather as conduits through which to reach other research objects" (p. 4). By not taking practices seriously, they fail to grasp—ontologically and epistemologically—their properties as corporeal accomplishments within an increasing number of media technologies.

The second line of scholarship emerges from the partial application of authors who are considered part of the praxeological canon. Bourdieu's work (1993, 1998) is a key element in quite disparate approaches toward understanding media practices. For one, it features in investigations into the habitual formation of preferences for particular sorts of media outlets, formats, or content (Kuipers, 2006; Neveu, 2007). What

these studies take from Bourdieu is the idea that an appreciation for certain kinds of media is explained by looking at customary routines of consumption. They correspond to habitualized evaluations and distinctions that exist in between the relational positions of social fields and their uneven possibilities and constraints for action and assessment. Furthermore, there is a noticeable Bourdieusian tradition that traces the entangled formation of journalism, public relations, and the broad sector of the creative industries back to struggles over public attention and recognition that are tied up with material resources, innovations in media technologies, and the specialization of professional occupations (e.g., Benson, 2006; Ihlen, 2005; Park, 2014).

Scholars who use ideas associated with Giddens are drawn by his arguments regarding the mutual constitution of social structures and human agency (Banks & Riley, 1993; Webster, 2011). In this respect, studies have looked at the adaptive application of media technologies in organizations and the dynamics of institutional change that is stimulated by a more or less "faithful" or "ironic" use of new media (Orlikowski, 2000; Siles & Boczkowski, 2012). This body of ideas is also at the heart of analyses that stress the essential role of communicative routines and written documents for the constitution of organizations.

Overall, this tradition of a partial application picks aspects from the palette of praxeological thought while leaving out other significant considerations. Moreover, contributions besides those of Bourdieu and Giddens, like those found in ethnomethodology or actor-network theory, have not been widely adopted. Yet, to identify a genuinely practice-oriented area of research within culturalist communication and media studies, it would be instrumental to spell out more clearly what a distinctive praxeological viewpoint can add to our understanding of what people do when creating or using media forms and technologies.

### **Centering (on) Media-Related Practices**

The utility of a practice-oriented perspective should become evident when we attempt to think through how media prefigure most, if not all, walks of life. "Media practice theory," Ostertag (2014) declares, "is an effort to broaden the focus of media research to accommodate a media saturated world and the multiple nuanced ways media inform everyday life" (p. 48). So applying a practice lens can help us, as Couldry (2004) suggests, to set aside questions about clear media effects or about any political and economic predetermination of media production. In contrast to reducing the interrelations among media contents and services, patterns of media consumption, and the communicative making of collectives to functionalistic explanations, the praxeological impulse prompts him to ask two quite simple but far-reaching questions: "What types of things do people do in relation to media? And what types of things do people say in relation to media?" (p. 118).

These queries respond to the ontological choice implied by the recursive constitution and relational associations of practices. With that, the praxeological perspective moves away from references to stratified layers of reality or hypostasized superstructures and instead zooms in on a "confederation of practices" (Nicolini, 2012, p. 3). They are taken to be the main point of entry for specifying cultures of mediation, and they are privileged above other criteria such as intentions, norms, or a cost-benefit calculus within explanations of social conduct and cultural cohesion. Accepting such a view also demands that scholars make an epistemological decision that acknowledges the world-making capacity of practices. It suggests that the chief units of analysis should be, for example, editorial, reporting, or programming practices, not

agents such as editors, reporters, or programmers, nor constructed aggregates such as audiences, publics, and markets (Burchell, 2017).

At its core, the practice-oriented examination of the sequences through which media have become central resources for the constitution of social life therefore hopes to set aside the preoccupation with media. Doing so helps us to concentrate on the practicalities of their enrollment in a course of activities (Morley, 2009). Instead of supposing that media make an impact because of their pervasiveness or intricate functions, this approach concentrates on the ways in which media become interwoven within a number of social arenas. In this vein, Seo and Jung (2016), for example, have adopted a practice-based view to argue that competitive gaming in eSports is not only about self-contained play. It is not just the act of playing that is crucial because the activities of watching also engender an appreciation of gameplay as a form of sport, with skilled players and tournament rules. Hence, eSports integrate the playing of games with spectatorial practices that add an element of staged performance. Together, they construct eSports as an "assemblage of consumption practices" (p. 638) that is interrelated through shared understandings, tools, and competences.

In detail, Couldry (2012) characterizes media-related practices with respect to the closeness of their connection to and alignment with media. He distinguishes practices that are directly oriented toward media, such as the creation and perception of media content. Then there are activities that involve media, but without directly seeking to utilize or design their programs and technological functions. These cover most current professional and domestic practices that rely on the media's technology and discursive substance and encompass a diverse range, from informal customs of gossiping to the formalized procedures such as those we find in the banking sector. Moreover, Couldry (2012) names practices "whose possibility is conditioned by the prior existence, presence or functioning of media" (p. 36). As such, they refer to the overarching processes of mediation through which increasing parts of social life and culture are becoming entwined with media. In this context, the significance of media is about more than interpersonal communication and the reception of broadcasting programs, but spans a multitude of mediated arrangements and repertoires of media-related activity.

Not all media practices have the same importance, and not all are equally popular. Instead, we find forms of closure and staggered levels of specialization, making some practices the preserve of expert circles or elites, such as academic publishing or television production, whereas others seem to be more democratic, such as blogging and digital photography (Gómez-Cruz & Lehmuskallio, 2016; Siles, 2012). In both types, they form an integral dimension of mediated life-worlds, which again does not mean that they erase the differences in beliefs and customs, capabilities, and opportunities that characterize contemporary societies. Rather, it is through the uneven opportunities, abilities, and entitlements to engage with particular media practices, such as those of participatory journalism (Ahva, 2017) or peer-to-peer production (Pentzold, 2018), that these differences are actually brought into being.

### **Articulating Media Ensembles**

Practice-inclined analyses need to do more than merely shed light on the mundane aspects of life and describe practices in more detail. Going beyond such naïve empiricism asks us to commit to questions

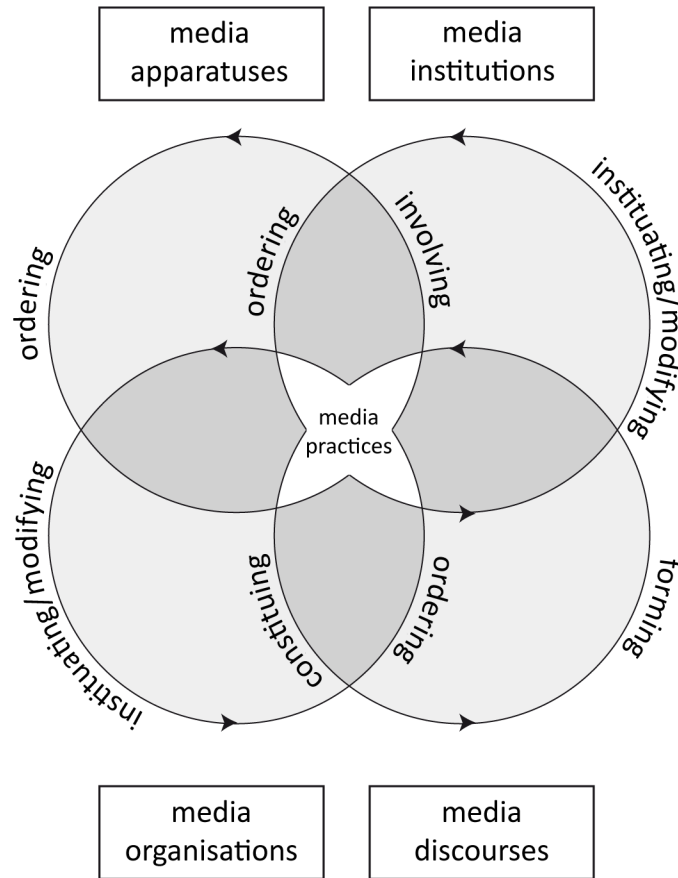
about the entanglement of media-related practices and the material, discursive, institutional, or organizational features usually associated with media (Figure 1).

The relation between the more structural dimensions of media ensembles, such as those we find in discourses, technology, or organizations, and the doings and sayings of media practices that bring these dimensions into being is recursive in character: It is a mutually constitutive interplay of recurrent patterns of rules and resources with practices that happen amid media ensembles. Understanding, indeed, a medium as a composite ensemble emphasizes the contingent and transmutable connection of its components. Therefore, a praxeological view is not so much interested in media as self-contained, holistic entities, but in the ways in which their technological, discursive, or organizational features are joined together or become unhinged through media-related practices. It thus enables us to appreciate the interdependent associations between media-related activities and the structural dimensions of media ensembles.

The move toward media-related practices as an ontological and epistemological vantage point requires us to further specify the recursive relations between the structural aspects of media and the moments of their situational instantiation. A practice perspective underlines the continuous effort that goes into creating what could be called media ensembles and their provisional as well as more permanent associations. Drawing on media practices' recursivity, relationality, and expressivity, the section will take apart this intertwining of media agency and media structures that constitute media ensembles. In a compositional sense, media ensembles encompass material, often programmable machinations, discursive formations, organizational establishments, and institutional rules and norms. These aspects are interlaced with recurrent and recombinant practices and have to be analyzed together.

When we speak of a media ensemble, this does not necessarily mean that the structural dimensions of media can be easily forged into a durable and harmonious compound. Instead, Lievrouw and Livingstone (2006) use the term *ensemble* because they want to underline the "dynamic links and interdependencies among artefacts, practices and social arrangements" (p. 3). With its emphasis on joining up semantic, material, and social features within a specific constellation, the notion of a media ensemble resonates with other concepts that invite us to treat media as an assemblage, a dispositif, or a network. As Slack and Wise (2007) draw out, these ideas favor "movements and flows of relationships within which things are created and animated, rather than as the accumulation of things" (p. 128). In consequence, a praxeological inquiry into media ensembles is especially interested in how these elements come to cohere, and thus in the practical effort that goes into bringing together a media ensemble's signature linkage of discourses, technologies, organizational forms, and institutionalized conventions and regulations.





**Figure 1. Schematic elements of a media ensemble.**

Foregrounding the character of media as ensembles is not meant to drift away from the precedence of practices. On the contrary, it should stress the contingent nexus of elements that, when connected, form the temporarily stable articulation of a medium. An articulation, Hall (1986) declares, is a "linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute and essential for all time" (p. 53). Given that they do not exist as such, but have to be actively realized, the task then would be to attend to the work of articulating the practices, representations, physical matter, and social establishments of a media ensemble. "Media, as reified and institutionalized frameworks formed out of a large number of (communicative) actions," Hepp (2013) thus posits, become "'powerful' in interwoven practices; and this process is neither a casual one, nor autonomously given" (p. 60). Media ensembles differ from other kinds of sociomaterial associations in that they prioritize communicative practices. They are, as Silverstone (1994) maintains, doubly articulated as material objects and conveyors of messages.

A praxeological perspective is interested in historically contingent couplings and in strategies to enforce a particular connection of elements deemed to make up a media ensemble (Pink & Mackley, 2013). In consequence, studies of the kind conducted by Preda (2009) on the implementation of the stock ticker, or the reconstruction of the prototyping practice for a file system provided by Suchman, Trigg, and Blomberg (2002), have moved away from looking at single media inventions or linear trajectories of progress. Rather, they focus their attention on how serendipity and strategy, as well as moments of innovation or frustration, give rise to a particular entanglement of features that are treated and distinguished as a new type of media ensemble.

In seeking to unravel a media ensemble, practice approaches rarely stay with one separate medium, but hope to track the interrelation of different ensembles within the settings in which they are brought forward and that they help to institute or alter. In these dynamics, ensembles usually take the form of nested arrangements in which social, technological, and ideological elements are bound together. In principle, examining the articulation of a media ensemble does not privilege one single aspect. It starts, in fact, with the concomitant media practices through which associations are construed, upheld, and modified.

Still, for methodological reasons, an attempt of this kind often prefers one facet before looking at others while still underscoring the ontological and epistemological primacy of practices. This does not imply skipping over important features and deliberately betraying holistic ambitions, but deciding from what angle the conjuncture of a media ensemble can usefully be analyzed. Consequently, in their study of routinized and creative media practices at the microlevel of social movements, Mattoni and Treré (2014), for instance, suggest that scholars using a practice lens need to bear in mind the multifaceted nature of media, but should prioritize one aspect from which other dimensions have to come in view. So, inquiries on social movements can, for instance, focus either on their support devices, or on favored meanings and communicated messages, or on the shifting relations among journalists, activist media practitioners, politicians, and social media users.

Starting with one dimension, a practice perspective can, for example, highlight the activities geared toward constructing and manipulating the materiality and functionality of media. In this respect, Orlikowski (2000) examined the efforts around implementing a groupware program in a large business. In reference to Giddens' theory of structuration, Orlikowski challenged the assumption that technologies embody structures built in by designers, but urged us to see media as "technologies-in-practice" (p. 407). Hence, instead of presuming that there are mandatory specifications that mechanically order user actions, she was concerned with what Boczkowski (1999) calls the "mutual shaping" (p. 86) of use routines and object features. They were not given or preset before rollout; rather, Orlikowski showed how office routines and software solutions gradually took shape within a changing setting.

Switching perspectives, a praxeological analysis can also foreground discursive practices constituting written texts, images, and audiovisual materials. Here, the impulse helps us to move away from a preoccupation with the representation of topics or worldviews and instead encourages us to look at how statements become mobilized in reproducing or modifying classifications and semantic differences. The interest lies neither in the features of language use, nor in enunciative orders, but in the "'doing' part of the production of meanings" (p. 5), as Hepp (2013) says. These knowledge-making practices become objects of inquiry because they are actively used to enact identities, give meaning to the material world, legitimize a certain distribution of resources, or spread opinions. From such a perspective, Ostertag (2014), for

instance, describes how people used U.S. news media not only to inform themselves about current events; the news also served as a means of social comparison and self-enhancement. Newspaper readers invoked civil society values like responsibility and rationality and linked them to normative expectations about following the news on a regular basis. So the periodicals also came to serve “as a topic on which battles over what is best for civil society and who deserves membership are waged” (p. 48), Ostertag concludes.

A further viewpoint stresses the role of media as institutionalized communicative forms and programs. An element of this focus on conventions and standards is the idea that the predictable flows of serial television have had a significant role in establishing the “continuous flow of conduct” (Giddens, 1984, p. 3) and a day-to-day sense of order: Cyclical daily routines tie with scheduled television or radio broadcasting. Attending to these processes of habituation and routinization allowed Postill (2010) to problematize the seemingly effortless interlinking of broadcasting timetables and media routines by stressing the labor that goes into creating and keeping up their ordinariness and regularity. Therefore, a praxeological explanation is especially suitable for clarifying the practical basis of the formation and transition of these temporal scaffoldings rather than ascribing them to automatic operations through which synchronized customs should be induced. This becomes specifically evident in regard to asynchronous digital media formats such as those we find on streaming platforms that require us to revisit the practical conditions of such chronological attunement.

Still another perspective can take the organizational dimension of media as its point of departure. Here, a praxeological approach builds on a strand of communication research inspired by Giddens’ argument about the duality of structure and agency, which has shifted attention from seeing organizations as fixed entities to examining how practices of organizing are enacted in ongoing conversations and how they become manifested in documents. In effect, this perspective’s analytical focus departs from privileging chains of command, professional norms, or restricted membership when defining what an organization is about. Quite the contrary, all types of organizations, including media organizations, come to be viewed as “precarious accomplishments realized, experienced, and identified primarily—if not exclusively—in communication processes” (Cooren, Kuhn, Cornelissen, & Clark, 2011, p. 1150). So the focus lies on the achieved nature of organizations, yet it moves away from a preoccupation with the symbolic exchanges through which organizations are assumedly talked into being. Going beyond such textual implications, practice theories prefer to look at an organization as a “practice-arrangement bundle” (Schatzki, 2005, p. 472) that is communicatively, but also materially and technically, grounded and that involves the knowledge, understandings, and competences of practitioners. Besides investigating the ongoing enactment of organizations through their organizing practices, the praxeological perspective is also interested in explaining how people get to know and perform the material procedures and ways of understanding that are the basis for occupational identities in the first place and that help to establish organizational hierarchies and demarcate an organization’s boundaries.

In this regard, Ahva (2017), for example, was able to study citizen journalism through its set of anchoring practices. She moved away from industrial or professional frameworks and value-based definitions of journalism qua norms of objectivity or political autonomy. The practice lens allowed her to cast the net wide enough to include numerous sites beyond the newsroom and a variety of actors that make journalism happen. By so doing, she produced a nuanced reconstruction of a spectrum of participation

practices that were becoming increasingly important for the journalistic domain. Besides forms of participation in journalism, Ahva found evidence for what she called "participation around journalism" (p. 1537), where news-talk extended to neighboring arenas such as exhibitions or public debates. She also came across "participation with journalism" (p. 1537), where people sought personal contact with journalists, for instance, by friending them on Facebook.

### **Examining Media Practices and Media Ensembles**

To provide praxeological perspectives for culturalist communication and media studies and to demonstrate the utility of such approach, it will not suffice to offer a somewhat new reading of the way in which the use of media hangs together with its more consolidated manifestations in organizational forms, discursive patterns, institutions, and artifacts. More than that, the practice approach should lead to palpable avenues for empirical research, which are laid out in this last section by reviewing a number of studies that are exemplary for this sort of approach. This will not point us to some definite spectrum, for the time being, but opens three alleys that link to inquiries already found in culturalist studies of communication and media. They enable us to specify the praxeological principles of recursivity, relationality, and expressivity: The first perspective interrogates the dual dynamics of shifting media ensembles and a changing collective orientation toward media. Focusing on the habitual accomplishment of media-related practices, the second perspective studies the maintenance of order in media-suffused lives. The third perspective looks more closely at the enabling of media practices in connection with capacities, meanings, and technological designs.

### ***Transforming Collective Orientations Toward Media***

The first perspective applies the praxeological viewpoint to understand how a field mutates from its integral media-related practices and in connection to the expectations of shifting media requirements deemed relevant by practitioners. In this respect, Driessens, Raeymaeckers, Verstraeten, and Vandebussche (2010), for example, examined the oft-described personalization of politics. Their interviews with Flemish politicians concentrated on the way in which political day-to-day duties responded to anticipations of media images (Sims, 2014). Thus, personalization did not emerge by systemic assimilation. Instead, as Driessens and colleagues hold, it originated from the effort of political actors to reflect on the developments they perceived in their media environment and political scene in order to manage their public image, to draw boundaries between what should be private and public spaces, and to control the impact of the media on their agency and on politics per se.

For instance, members of parliament were keen on maintaining their reputation as capable and hardworking "briefcase politicians" by personally asking an increasing number of questions during parliamentary question time. At one point, this practice even seemed to have dominated to such an extent that the speaker of the house considered taking measures to limit this exercise in order to avoid crowding out the capacity of specialized committees and to ensure the operations of the assembly. The strategic commitment to or avoidance of certain media-related practices was characterized by gender differences, too. Female politicians voiced concern that a focus on their professional duties would convey an image of being power-obsessed careerists, which they hoped to counteract by accepting invitations to entertainment programs such as game shows. Participation in media-related practices was also regulated along party

coalitions; political extremists, such as delegates from the right-wing populist party Vlaams Belang, were excluded not only from government, but also from popular broadcasts.

Considering the everyday working lives of politicians helped Driessens and colleagues (2010) to concentrate on the formation, conversion, and regulation of communal orientations toward the changing discursive and institutional dimensions of media ensembles, namely television, press, radio, and the Internet. Studies following this analytical avenue should not assume that media are definite factors of social transformation, but need to look at the "centering processes" (Couldry, 2012, p. 23) through which media actually turn out to be resources of agency within a social field.

### ***Maintaining Order in Media-Saturated Everyday Lives***

The second perspective invites us to look more closely at the presence of media in people's lives and their role in conducting mundane affairs (Morley, 2000; Silverstone, 1994). This research is interested in how media helps people to sustain, as Bausinger (1984) already stated, the "set of conditions of lived life" (p. 343). It examines the vital relationship between routines and media that engenders the continuity as well as the transformation of a "media-saturated" (Couldry, 2012, p. 40) daily grind.

Along these lines, Pink and Mackley (2013), for instance, conducted an ethnography of UK households. They looked at the places and uses of media within the continuous arrangement of the household that was accomplished over the course of the day. On one level, media ensembles permeated homes through their content. The acquisition of information and entertainment offered by books and newspapers, television, radio, computers, smartphones, and new media applications became usual domestic activities and consumed a more or less extensive share of the available time budget. Mediated meanings were also applied to a range of domestic matters and thus directed people regarding the layout of furniture and rooms, forms of familial conduct, and the cultivation of hobbies as seen on television or learned from the Internet.

In their materiality, media ensembles also became a trivial yet essential dimension of the home that was experienced as being orderly as long as the required or expected devices were available and functional. Through "mundane and not usually spoken about routines of everyday living," Pink and Mackley (2013) argue, "media are engaged for affective and embodied ways of making the home 'feel right'" (p. 678). Accordingly, they witnessed practices of switching media equipment on or off in the morning and in the evening in accordance with other recurrent chores such as getting dressed or undressed, turning the lights on or off, and tidying up.

Studies that adopt a similar analytical approach can employ praxeological sensibilities to think through how the different dimensions of media ensembles become enrolled in existing and potentially modified tasks. These routines could depend on the forms and functions of media, and they may be inseparable from media, but they may also seek to get around them (Bird, 2010; Woodstock, 2014). By looking at the multifaceted ways of accommodating media, practice-inclined examinations can show how the quotidian activities that are entangled with media help people to retain an "ontological security" (Giddens, 1991, p. 37). Yet the habits by which media are drawn into people's conception of an orderly life

do not have to be merely conservational—they can also convert existing patterns of familial relations, household order, temporal schedules, or mobility. Indeed, the handling of domestic media encompasses both iterative persistence as well as remaking and invention.

### ***Forming Media Affordances***

Drawing on the notion of affordances, the third perspective underlines the mutual formation of the sociomaterial aspects of media ensembles. It assumes that the exposure to and manipulation of media in their material dimension neither follow reified physical imperatives nor dissolve into free interpretation. In communication and media studies, such a move toward the co-constitution of media technologies and media practices has been welcomed because it bypasses both technological determinism and social constructivism in order to explore the middle ground of a “mutual shaping” of media affordances (Boczkowski, 1999).

On that note, Graves (2007), for example, tracked the genesis of news blog affordances as a particular communicative genre that adapted established journalistic practices. News blogs maintained and altered tasks such as filtering, comparing, or cross-checking information within the functionalities of blogs. In this process, newsroom practices were modulated. Rather than preceding the publishing of final messages, editing and commenting on news became a supplementary exercise, reworking notices that had already been released. In the same vein, Siles (2012) described the genesis of weblog affordances in general as an interplay of variation and stabilization. He delineated a process taking place in the second half of the 1990s through which chronologically ordered websites were increasingly used as private diaries, distribution portals for personal texts, and collections of links. In turn, the provider of the then popular software package adjusted the code to facilitate these practices and penetrate the market.

Media affordances are often taken to be the “possibilities that they offer for action” (Hutchby, 2001, p. 447). Most of the studies that employ the notion set out to map the stock of effective possibilities made available by a certain media device or application. From a practice-based position, however, affordances are not perceived attributes that media possess by virtue of their materiality and functional composition. In contrast, affordances’ conventional social understandings and technological practicalities stem from the interplay of embodied capabilities and material design. “The ‘affordances’ of technological objects,” Bloomfield, Latham, and Vurdubakis (2010) thus write, “cannot be easily separated from the arrangements—that is the shared understandings, discourses and conventions, participant constellations, places and time, institutions and organizations—through which and amid which they are realized” (p. 428). In this respect, the idea of media affordances encourages our engagement with the broad palette of prefiguring qualities of media objects that are realized in practical accomplishments and do not collapse into a binary choice between constraint versus possibility. Rethinking the projection of media-based agency into durable media structures, it seems that neither is self-contained; instead, they are placed in convertible media ensembles (Costa, 2018).

### **Conclusion**

Practice theories offer an opportunity to see how the polymorphic fields of engaging with media are created, perpetuated, and altered in ongoing media-related performances. They are inscribed in

corporeal capacities and understandings and materialize in technologies, discourses, institutional configurations, and organizational forms. This involves, but also goes beyond, the more narrowly confined areas of media production and media consumption.

The perspective provided by practice approaches staked out in this article acknowledges how people physically perform and carry out media practices. It turns to the processes through which these practitioners are enrolled in media practices and the horizons of understanding and evaluation that open up for them through active participation. Hence, their engagement also implies the incorporation of adequate norms of correctness, criteria for evaluation, and a register of feelings and needs in relation to producing, consuming, or regulating the multiple facets of media ensembles (Reckwitz, 2002).

Analytically, the proposal of practice theory to locate media ensembles and communicative forms in a social world populated by doings and sayings has contributed to the formation of a non-media-centric media studies (Postill, 2010). It urges us to scrutinize the suggested precedence of media practices for the constitution and change of social life. Instead of assuming their ontological and epistemological priority as given, the focus is on the activities through which they become core resources of agency. This can also mean that practices of media avoidance are given more attention. Furthermore, the praxeological impulse seems to be of particular importance in considering media use in times of crisis or disruptive change (Siles & Boczkowski, 2012). Here, practice-inclined approaches go beyond the narrow analysis of one specific medium, thus acknowledging the media ensembles in which people act and the repertoire of communications that they mobilize (Mattoni & Treré, 2014). If scholars are to follow praxeological lines of inquiry, they require a sound style of research. It is in this regard that Bourdieu (2004) discusses the principle of reflexivity, arguing that scholarly studies have to adopt an attitude of "epistemological vigilance" (p. 91) so as to question the logics of their academic sensemaking, which are usually at odds with the practical logics they seek to describe. In fact, communication and media scholarship might itself be understood as a set of disciplinary practices. So, the communicative operations forming the basis for arenas such as journalism, public relations, or gaming become, as Craig (2005) argues, the objects of meta-communicative practices that reflect on their conditions and consequences and thus build up the field of communication and media studies.

By setting aside questions as to whether the stability of media structures or the transformation of media agency is most difficult to explain, theories of practice foreground the effort that goes into upholding or changing historically and culturally contingent articulations of media ensembles in conjunction with routinized and recurrent media-related practices. They do not assume that these settings either swiftly change or persist, that they foster or stifle creativity, or that they are widely accepted or met with criticism. Instead, their focus is on the importance of the active work necessary to bring media's features into being.

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