

Michael Jonas · Beate Littig
Angela Wroblewski *Editors*

Methodological Reflections on Practice Oriented Theories

 Springer

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Introduction

Abstract This chapter introduces the overall topic of this book and contextualises and summarises the articles it contains. It outlines the main characteristics of practice theories and also identifies their shortcomings with regard to methodological issues. The brief introductions to each of the individual articles also refer to these issues.

Since the proclamation of the *practice turn* back in 2001 (Schatzki et al. 2001), practice theory approaches have continued to gain relevance in the social sciences debate. Even though practice theories are fed by different sources and disciplines—and cannot yet be considered a unified, established theory—they are now finding increasing use in empirical research and publications. A range of different approaches establish the foundations of a practice theory perspective, including Anthony Giddens' structuration theory, Michel Foucault's concept of the technologies of the self, Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice or Erving Goffman's frame analysis. A common element in all these approaches is that they do not consider and explain human action and doings either primarily from an individualistic or primarily from a structural perspective. They seek instead to view doings as chains of actions and to analyse them from a perspective that incorporates both the opportunities for action open to the individual actors as well as the effects of socialised structures. A central concept in this respect is that of social practices.

Depending on epistemological interest, various other social sciences concepts also play a constitutive role in the conceptualisation of social practices. Central approaches here include those concepts which focus on the physicality of human doing, the routine aspects of behaviour, the relevance of tacit knowledge, the significance of material artefacts for behaviour and the effects of explicit and implicit rules. While social practices can be individually isolated for analysis, it is nonetheless assumed in the practice sociology debate that sociality is constituted by the overlapping and intersection of different social practices. Social practices serve on their own and in bundles as links between individual behaviours and the institutionalisation of structural elements. From a sociology of social practices perspective, the fundamental sociological problem shifts here from the question of the social advent of the coordination of actions to the question of the

maintenance and reproduction of specific social structures and configurations over time. Practice theory considerations and assumptions have recently been adopted and expanded in sociology and some of the other branches it inspires like science and technology studies and gender studies. As a consequence, the ‘site ontologies’ approach found, for example, in social philosophy has significantly expanded the explanatory reach and the explanatory potential of a social theory based on the concept of social practices (Schatzki 2002). Reckwitz (2002) has already presented proposals for a praxeological research programme with a culture theory bent. Performance theories have triggered a reorientation in gender research (Butler 1990). Ethnographic studies have likewise given strong impetus to praxeological research (e.g. Wacquant 2000). Practice theory approaches are also being used to productive effect in education research (e.g. Hager et al. 2012), in economic and consumer sociology (e.g. Jonas 2014; Warde 2005), in organisation research (e.g. Gherardi 2006), in scientific research (e.g. Knorr-Cetina 1999), and in spatial sociology (e.g. Löw 2000) as well as in the political sciences (e.g. Freeman and Sturdy 2014; Jonas and Littig 2017), in medical anthropology (e.g. Mol 2002), in geography (e.g. Thrift 2007) or in multidisciplinary discourses such as sustainability research (e.g. Jonas and Littig 2015).

The ‘family likenesses’ attested to practice theory approaches with reference to Ludwig Wittgenstein have been (and still are) frequently emphasised as an advantage of this theory perspective because it provides room for diversity and puts a stop to potential canonisation attempts. If practice oriented approaches are thus indeed heterogeneous, particularly when it comes to subject constitution and the conception of individual actors, then it is precisely this heterogeneity that poses significant method and methodology challenges to their empirical use. How practices can actually be researched in practice is, namely, still a matter of debate. Where and how do they manifest themselves? Through or outside human action? Who or what is observed, surveyed or analysed?

In more general terms, this raises the questions of whether practice theory issues require a specific method/methodological setting and to what extent traditional empirical approaches need to be adapted for use in practice oriented analyses. One key question here is the matter of what differentiates a praxiography of a social phenomenon from ethnography. Does a practice oriented analysis require a specific methodology or a specific analytical perspective or even both?

Last, but not least, we also have to look at the methods used. Is there really an ideal way to do practice oriented research? And does, as is frequently claimed, observation constitute this ideal way? How can interviews be used in this type of research? What about the combination of methods—both within the qualitative spectrum itself and the mix of quantitative and qualitative methods?

In comparison with the theoretical foundations, only limited attention has so far been given to methodological/method issues in the practice theory debate. But looking at these is imperative if practice theories are to become utilisable for

empirical research.¹ Ultimately, the goal of this anthology is to contribute to the ongoing development of practice oriented empirical research from a methodological and method perspective. Accordingly, the articles included in this book have been split into three different parts or subject areas. In *Part I*, we look at different practice theory methodologies and methodological aspects. *Part II* focuses on the conceptualisation and role of the individual and the body in praxeological empirical research. In *Part III*, we present a selection of empirical research studies, each of which adopts a practice oriented approach. These different topics and the individual articles are introduced in brief below.

In *Part I*, the discussion of methodological foundations, i.e. the practice theory reasoning for specific approaches to studying social practices, the authors select different practice theory approaches as their starting points. *Robert Schmidt* draws on Pierre Bourdieu's praxeological epistemology to develop an empirical approach to the analysis of everyday social practices based on the analysis of social processes. His approach centres on the procedure of praxeologising, which aims at grasping and reconstructing the modus operandi of ongoing practical, symbolic and performative accomplishments by the objects of study. The epistemological procedure of praxeologising is closely linked to an observation methodology, while interviews play a subordinate role. The observation of linguistic, bodily, tacit and pictorial practices is supplemented by the perception and interpretation of those performing a practice.

While *Schmidt* follows Bourdieu's practice theory and empirical work, *Davide Nicolini* orients himself in his empirical approach on Theodore Schatzki. Nicolini defines practice theory as a theoretical orientation towards the study of the social which gives handles to empirical researchers. In his article, he proposes four strategies for using the practice theory method package: situational orientation, genealogic orientation, configurational orientation and conflict-sensitive orientation. He argues that these strategies, which are derived from practice theory, enable researchers to present a view of the social that is richer, thicker and more convincing than that offered by competing paradigms.

Hilmar Schäfer focuses in his contribution on the complex relationship between practice theory and the actor-network approach (ANT). In doing so, he looks at ANT's contribution to practice theory and the resulting implications for the empirical analysis of practices. For Schäfer, their main commonality lies in the fact that neither subjectivity nor social structure should form the basis of explanation but rather the processes in which they are made and constantly need to be maintained. He also notes that both practice theory and ANT are relational. Accordingly, the challenge for empirical research is to follow the multiple connections between the heterogeneous elements linked in a relational network. Schäfer's approach, which

¹These questions formed the central theme of a two-day conference entitled 'From "Practice Turn" to "Praxeological Mainstream"?', which was held in spring 2013 at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Vienna. Selected methodology oriented presentations given at this conference have formed the starting point for this anthology and have been supplemented by further invited articles.

he himself refers to as a ‘transitive methodology’, allows these links and relevant intersections to be explored.

Michal Sedlačko formulates the principles of an ethnographic approach to practice theory issues, an approach which is characterised by a ‘sensitivity for practice’. In doing so, he focuses on four basic principles derived from and substantiated in the theory of social practices: a focus on what people actually do (and the materials they ‘converse’ with), a focus on everydayness, a focus on the work of assembling, structuring and ordering, and a focus on reflexivity.

Part II deals with the different concepts and roles of agents/actors and bodies in praxeological empirical research. While the individual is often viewed as the carrier of practices (e.g. Shove et al. 2012), it frequently remains unclear how practices that are independent of individuals can be conceptualised and captured in empirical studies. The different articles in this part of the book address these method/methodological gaps and endeavour to fill them using a variety of concepts and research approaches.

Jörg Niewöhner and *Stefan Beck* focus on a practice theory conceptualisation of bodies, referring in their article to two specific research areas in the natural sciences, namely neuroanthropology and epigenetics. They criticise that while social sciences practice theories do assume the incorporation of practices, such research essentially stops at the body’s outer shell, i.e. the skin. They point to recent research in epigenetics, which suggests that bodily practices, shaped by the social and material environments within which they are performed, imprint a body, making it highly susceptible both to past ‘experiences’ of and present changes in its social and material environment. Their article explains from a methodological perspective how some innovative approaches in the natural sciences can be transferred to the social sciences, thus establishing a social and practice theory-based ‘co-laborative’ research agenda of ‘embodied practice’ that stresses the somatic context, performativity, historicity and dynamic situativity of embedded bodies.

Anna Pichelsdorfer explores how theories of social practices can be used to reconceptualise actors and agency in social sciences research practices. She looks at the taken-for-granted notion that there is per se an actor in any given situation. Given its revised understanding of action, she argues that a practice-based approach opens up new ways to investigate actors. Her analysis is based on an ethnographic investigation of a public debate on assisted reproductive technologies.

Stefan Laube investigates the role of the body and refers to the empirical case of financial trading, a hybrid form of ‘white-collar bodywork’. He uses a practice-centred methodological approach that considers bundles of bodily movements, know-how, meaning and the usage of artefacts as crucial constituents of a practice. In his ethnographic study, he demonstrates that knowledge work (e.g. in trading rooms) is by no means a disembodied practice and that the body is in different ways a vital (e.g. disciplined, expressive) component of this work.

Marianne de Laet’s article focuses on quantification practices in an eating, health and exercise context. She explores practices in and the consequences of current deployments of the calorie and what it entails to take it on in a praxiographical approach. Implicitly addressing the methodological aspects of

praxiographical research, she follows the calorie in various practical settings. In so doing, she succeeds in raising it in its multiple enactments to a quasi-leading actor in her research.

The articles in *Part III* present the research designs used in various empirical studies of different specific practices and discuss how the corresponding method/methodological demands can be handled in an empirical research setting. In essence, they reveal that practice oriented research draws on the full spectrum of empirical social research methods.

Sophie Merit Müller and *Kai Ginkel* both discuss the methodological aspects of auto-ethnographic praxiography. In her research, *Sophie Merit Müller* focuses on practices in ballet and combines different methodological approaches—including video analysis and observation—in the description and analysis of practices. In doing so, she presents a case in which bodies and their conduct, skills and display are of crucial situational relevance, yet where the ‘thick’ of the practice is nevertheless still hard to observe. In his article, *Kai Ginkel* develops a practice oriented approach to sound. He focuses in his ethnographic study on the multisitedness of social practices within the field of noise music. Using his own experience as a performer in this field as a starting point, he examines which social practices are used to produce and exclude noise music and how these can be made accessible for sociological analysis. The analytical concept of multivocality he developed for this purpose allows, for instance, the inclusion and contrasting of different voices in the field.

While Müller and Ginkel focus on corporeal practices (dancing and hearing), the articles by *Bente Halkier*, *Lydia Martens*, *Sue Scott*, *Beate Littig* and *Michaela Leitner* concentrate on everyday practices in private households, a setting which poses its own problems from a field access perspective. In practical research terms, ethnography or the observation of other people is far more difficult in the private sphere than in public or semi-public realms. This is one reason why these authors make use, for instance, of qualitative and quantitative interviews, sometimes in conjunction with observations and video recordings, to generate data.

Sue Scott and *Lydia Martens* use their video analysis-based study of mundane household practices to address practices of looking. In doing so, they draw on methodological considerations regarding visual sociology and on corresponding insights from phenomenological anthropology. Three diverse strategies for looking and thinking about the video data are presented: ‘looking at performance’, ‘looking in performance’ and ‘looking for practices’. These are discussed with regard to their different epistemological and ontological backgrounds as well as their consequences from a method perspective.

Bente Halkier uses her research on the cultural contestation of food in everyday life to demonstrate the use of qualitative interviews in practice oriented research. In doing so, she rejects observation as the golden standard in methodology—and with it the corresponding assertions of some practice theoreticians. In her opinion, observation alone fails to capture the link between discursive practices and the embodied practices that form the subject of debate. She combines both types of practices in her ‘enactment of practices’ concept. When translated into method

terms, this calls for the observation of relevant aspects in the interview situation itself and thus constitutes a multimethod approach.

Beate Littig and *Michaela Leitner* also use a multimethod approach in their research on the transformability of the performance of everyday practices in a participative cohousing project. One goal of the housing project they studied is to break down the existing routine practices and use the configuration of the living space and conscious reorganisation efforts to establish (new) socio-ecological practices. The focus lies in this case on general household practices such as cooking, food shopping, childcare, waste separation, laundry, mobility or saving energy. These are captured and compared at two points in time using a broad set of qualitative and quantitative methods.

The articles by *Hannes Krämer* and *Sarah Schönbauer* address the study of work practices in the creative industries and in research. In his ethnographic study, Krämer looks at the social production of creativity in the advertising sector. Here, the challenge from a practice theory perspective lies in making creativity visible without recourse to socio-psychological measurement concepts. On the empirical side, he approaches the creativity phenomenon using interviews and observation. From a methodological perspective, he gives recourse to ethno-methodological approaches and to the ‘follow the actants’ strategy advocated in actor-network theory (ANT). Schönbauer focuses in her article on meeting practices in a laboratory setting, which are identified through participatory observation. In doing so, she reflects on her own roles both as a biologist and as a former participant in the field and as a social scientist who must distance herself from the field during the observation process.

Last, but by no means least, the final empirically oriented article by *Silvia Rief* uses Henri Lefebvre’s space theory approach (Lefebvre 2009 [1974]) to illustrate how the methodology applied in a study of rail travel can be designed in such a way as to incorporate not only the activities of rail users, i.e. the passengers and the railway personnel, but also those practices which play a role in the planning and construction of this mode of transport.

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Part I
Methodologies and Methodological Aspects
of Practice Theories

Sociology of Social Practices: Theory or Modus Operandi of Empirical Research?

Robert Schmidt

Abstract Practice sociology seeks to overcome the ingrained academic division of labour between blind empirical research without theory and ‘scholastic’ theory that immunises itself against being empirically questioned. To meet such demands, this chapter proposes *a procedure of praxeologising*, which combines empirical perspectives and theoretical tools within stimulating epistemic arrangements. This procedure closely ties in with praxeological epistemology, which subsequently is exemplified using three steps. First, by referring to Bourdieu’s praxeology, this study reflects on the differences between the practices of theorising and the logic of practice within the fields of activities to be studied and theorised. Second, it is illustrated how the procedure of praxeologising can employ a heuristics of game playing to focus on the tacit, bodily dimensions of social events and participants’ shared feel and sense of the game. Third, it is pointed out that to master the overtly public nature of social practices, praxeology particularly should work out applicative procedures and methods derived from observation.

Introduction: Procedure of Praxeologising

A vast majority of approaches that contribute to the discourse of practice theory emerged in close and constant touch with empirical studies and developed from reflecting experiences in empirical research. This holds true e.g. for ethnomethodology (Garfinkel 1967), Goffman’s (1967) naturalistic observations of everyday interactions, laboratory studies (Knorr-Cetina 1981a), case studies of actor–network theory (Latour and Woolgar 1986) and Bourdieu’s ethnographic studies of the Kabyle society in Algeria which provide the empirical background of his theory of practice (Bourdieu 1977). Thus, the practice turn also amounts to an empirical turn in sociology and social sciences. Accordingly, praxeological approaches are

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concerned with theory first and foremost for the sake of empirical research and not with the construction of theoretical architecture.

Despite this empirical grounding of praxeological approaches in sociology, at present, they are mostly being received as projects of re-orientating social theory and only rarely consider ways to examine empirical questions and problems. Current debates thereby not only tend to disregard the empirical–analytical objectives of praxeological concepts, but also trivialise the critical punch line, which these concepts bring into position against scholastic views and understandings of theory (Bourdieu 2000, pp. 9–92).

According to this criticism, scholastic concepts are epistemically biased. This is because they do not consider and reflect the peculiar empirical, social and institutional preconditions of theoretical views and practices. Such disregard results in two complementary shortcomings. First, scholastic views tend to universalise the particulate perspectives and social experiences of theorists, academics, scholars and intellectuals and are inclined to impute these perspectives and experiences to the social agents they study. The latter then are often depicted not as practically involved participants but as (notoriously underachieving) theorists of the practices they are involved in. In doing so, however, scholastic views miss out on the logic of practice in their respective fields of study.

Second, because they do not reflect their own logic of procedure, scholastic approaches get caught up in symptomatic epistemic fallacies. They, for example, tend to regard the theoretical models of reality, which they construct, as foundations of this very reality. This categorical scholastic mistake is particularly found in social theories, which are marked by underlying realistic and substantialist understandings of social structures, systems, rules, norms and other analytical concepts.¹

By critiquing scholastic views, praxeological approaches put at centre stage the relationships between the practice of researching and theorising and practices which are researched and studied. Praxeological approaches characteristically address questions of social theory using such a methodological twist. They aim at relating theory and empirical reasoning in a novel and reflexive way. In seeking to overcome the isolation of theoretical and empirical work and counteracting their mutual wilful ignorance, the program of practice sociology is not content with mere ‘empirically confirming’ or ‘falsifying’ theoretical assumptions. Such postulates are criticised for confirming ‘theory’ and ‘empirical research’ as two distinct and separated realms. This is because it is misleadingly presumed that ‘pure theoretical assumptions’ can be checked against ‘pure empirical observations’, which are not contaminated by implicit and unquestioned theoretical perspectives and presuppositions (Joas and Knöbl 2009, pp. 1–19).

¹Talcott Parsons’ normativist functionalism may serve as an instructive example. Parsons substantialises norms and values and depicts them as discrete and independent entities, juxtaposed to social action. For an accordant critique on Parsons’ approach, see Garfinkel (1967). Criticism of scholastic views also often refers to Levi-Strauss and his realistic understanding of structures. Levi-Strauss equates sociocultural structures with unconscious structures of the human mind. For an accordant critique of Levi-Strauss, see Bourdieu (1990a).

Consequently, in practice sociology, the separation of theory and empirical research is deliberately destabilised. Both realms are methodologically re-assessed in their mutual entanglement. That is, the initial point of practice sociology and methodology is to act on the assumption that all social theories are ‘empirically charged’ and may be traced back to the generalisations of particular empirical experiences. Similarly, all empirical observations depend on certain theoretical concepts and views. Thus, in practice sociology, theories are ‘empiricised’ and studied as ensembles of theoretical practices. At the same time—following the understanding of empirical observations being inevitably ‘theoretically charged’—a theoretically enhanced mode of empirical research is advocated.

Consequently, practice sociology calls for a novel understanding of theory. Theory should be constructed in such a manner that theoretical concepts are continuously irritated and revised by empirical observations. Such a version of theory seeks to ensure that theoretical assumptions (including, if nothing else, those incorporated in generating and collecting empirical data as well as those which determine empirical data) are not excluded from being empirically questioned, altered and reconstructed. As Bourdieu demands, referring to Kant, practice sociology seeks to overcome the ingrained academic division of labour between blind empirical research without theory and empty scholastic theory without research (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p. 162).

This program is adopted using the procedure of *praxeologising* which combines empirical perspectives and theoretical tools within stimulating epistemic arrangements. The praxeological construction of the ‘object’ of sociological research is the main issue of this methodological procedure: praxeological studies situate their objects in fields of embodied and materially mediated activities and processes, which are organised by collectively shared forms of implicit know-how. Moreover, such fields of practices are conceived as sections of an all-encompassing sociality, which is devised as the ‘total nexus’ (Schatzki 2001, p. 2) of interdependent social practices and fields.

Encompassing the fields of social practices—which, not at the least, also include academic and scientific practices—figures as the background and point of reference to investigate empirical objects and phenomena in question, which are conceived as being continuously produced and accomplished within bundles and networks of social practices. Despite its close relationship with empirical social reality, however, the sociology of social practices does not advocate an empirical and realistic, but rather a methodological and analytic understanding of social practices.

Studies of social practices present a change of perspective: they strive to study and understand social phenomena through their ongoing practical formation, accomplishment and alteration. From this methodological decision, it follows that declarative and normative *ex ante* definitions of the objects of research are to be avoided. Unquestioned presuppositions, which are frequently incorporated in research designs and well-established social theories, are transformed into objects of inquiry and empirical questions. Thus, categories such as class or gender are not conceptually pre-constructed in practice sociology; rather, they are conceived as the

preconditions and results of ongoing practices of ‘doing class’² and ‘doing gender’ (West and Zimmerman 1987).

In the following section, praxeological epistemology sketched out thus far is deepened and exemplified using three steps. First, some main features of the methodological procedure of praxeologising are carved out by referring to Bourdieu’s reflections on the differences between the practices of theorising and the logic of practice within the fields of activities to be studied and theorised. Subsequently, it is explained how the procedure of praxeologising can employ the heuristics of playing games: treating empirical events and processes to be studied as games played on social playing fields can be of great analytical value, because from this perspective, the linkages of cooperating participants and the tacit, bodily dimensions of social events and the shared feel and sense of the game (*sens pratique*) come to the fore. Finally, it is highlighted that praxeologising social phenomena includes an understanding of the overtly public nature of social practices and sense-making within practices. Tying in with this constitutive publicness and observability of social practices, praxeology in particular is admonished to work out applicative methodological procedures and empirical methods derived from observation.

Practices and Theoretical Models of Practices

Procedures of praxeologising which trace back categories or structural phenomena to empirically observable mundane activities and the academic practices of categorising or structuring are, among other approaches, most notably, developed in ethnomethodology. Ethnomethodology is aimed at uncovering how social orderings are continuously fabricated and established by members’ collective activities. To achieve this, social orderings are understood as situated accomplishments, which are observed in local practices and recurring scenes of social action (Lynch 2001). This methodological twist opens up new possibilities of offering explanations. It allows for an analytical sensitivity in grasping practical construals hidden in the taken-for-granted world of the everyday and methodologically guides detailed observations and descriptions of social situations, local occurrences and their formal structures.³ Ethnomethodology’s distinctive micro-analytical

²Bourdieu, in his dissection of class-related forms of domination, refers to the ongoing everyday activities of ‘doing class’. ‘Thus, the social agents whom the sociologist classifies are producers not only of classifiable acts, but also of acts of classification, which are themselves classified. Knowledge of the social world has to take into account a practical knowledge of this world, which pre-exists it and which it must not fail to include in its object (...)’ (Bourdieu 1984, p. 466).

³Ethnomethodology’s methodical focus on local occurrences is criticised for neglecting trans-local and trans-situative contexts, relationships and networks. Studying unrelated single scenes, settings and practical accomplishments, as Nassehi (2006, p. 118) claims, narrows down to a self-restricted form of sociology, which only deals with the islands of social ordering and ignores the surrounding sea of social structures. It, therefore, is a desideratum of ethnomethodologically inspired praxeology to contextualise local orderings within wider fields and networks of practices.

orientation⁴ towards local social orderings serves as methodological fiction and a presumption to guide detailed analysis. This procedure is meant to facilitate the bracketing of beliefs in everyday social facts as being simply given (Bergmann 2000). It is designed to help researchers to distance themselves from their own intuitive understandings and urge them to the reflexive use of the categories, classifications and pre-constructions they come with.

A similar mode of reflexivity hallmarks the praxeological program developed by Bourdieu: praxeologising in this program is devised as a twofold procedure. It is to be pursued with regard to not only the observed objects and phenomena but also the practices of observing. Bourdieu's theory of practice seeks to praxeologise the object, that is, explore members' activities of sense-making and classification in the respective fields of study, as well as demands to examine and reflect on academic and scientific practices of observing, classifying and describing to understand the effects derived from their specific relationships with the observed social activities.

Bourdieu points out that the outside sociological observer is discharged from the urgency of practical necessity within the observed fields of study. If this distance of the observer is itself left unquestioned, it will manifest in theoretical distortions and intellectualist projections. To avoid this, Bourdieu's reflexive praxeology insists on the difference between theoretical sociological models constructed to account for practices on the one hand and empirical reality and the real play of social activities and practices within the field of study on the other.

Following this, Bourdieu devises a twofold analytical task (Bourdieu 1977, pp. 72–158). To formulate a reflective empirical theory of practice, praxeological epistemology needs to conceptualise, first, a theory of theoretical relationships with the social world, and second, a theory of practical involvement in the social world is needed. Bourdieu completes the first task by elaborating a typology of variants of scholastic fallacies. To complete the second task, however, especially in his ethnographic works on Algeria, Bourdieu provides numerous empirical descriptions of the peculiarities of practical logic, that is, its fuzziness, vague analogies and insecure abstractions, among others (ibid.). But, at the same time, Bourdieu points out that it is impossible to develop a general and 'positive' model of the logic of practice⁵:

⁴This micro-analytical orientation and attitude in ethnomethodology is often linked to the empirical techniques of working with varying distances to the inquired objects and phenomena. In doing so, such techniques create alienation effects which are seminal and instructive for analytical descriptions: audio-visual recording, detailed transcription and examination in terms of conversation analyses amount to microscopically zooming in on an occurrence. Defamiliarising ethnographic descriptions increase distance (Amann and Hirschauer 1997).

⁵Referring to similar arguments, ethnomethodology also rejects attempts to construct a general and 'positive' theory of practice. According to ethnomethodology, such endeavors would merely conceal the fundamental divide between situated performances of practices and abstract detached accounts of those practices. Thus, they would not necessarily confront the epistemological problems and limitations of the theoretical mode of knowledge, but rather perpetuate them, preferably in methodological debates on appropriate empirical methods to represent social practices. As Lynch argues, 'it is pointless to seek a general methodological solution to 'the vexed problem of the practical objectivity and practical observability of practical actions and practical

'It is not easy to speak of practice other than negatively' (Bourdieu 1990a, p. 80). Thus, in addition to empirical case studies, the logic of practice can best be negatively grasped. The logic of practice is what theoretical knowledge by definition misses. Accordingly, praxeology is first concerned with the misconceptions and prevailing misrepresentations of the practical logic of social occurrences, events, doings and activities in the theoretical models designed to explain them. In Bourdieu's praxeology, social practices are spotlighted in this 'negative' and critical perspective.

This implies that praxeology is not just another theoretical vocabulary, but an epistemological critique of 'scholastic fallacies', endemic in both subjectivist and objectivist theories, which do not reflect their standpoints, perspectives and relationships with their objects of study. According to Bourdieu, praxeology is not about 'positively' elaborating on the 'scholastic' question of how to define a social practice and distinguish it from other phenomena such as social action and behaviour. Only the more theoretical approaches in practice theory are suggestive thereof as they strive for systematic theoretical re-constructions.

In its more reflective versions, praxeology comes to be understood as a critical empirical and analytic project which takes the difference between academic relationships with the objects of study and a practitioner's everyday social activities for its starting point. The sociology of social practices, therefore, is not as much about re-orienting social theory, but rather amounts to an empirical and reflective *modus operandi* of research, that is, a methodology of praxeologising.

There are two essential consequences to be drawn from Bourdieu's emphasis on the difference between theorising and the logic of practice in the fields of study. On the one hand, the distortions and limitations of the scholastic view, arising from a detached academic relationship with the object of study, are to be reflexively objectified. This is necessary to decipher the properties of social practices which theoretical logic misses.

Moreover, there is another research assignment to be deduced, which Bourdieu himself does not pursue: practices of theory are to be empirically studied from a praxeological perspective. As Boltanski critically points out, 'in the theoretical architecture that underlies Bourdieu's sociological work, practice is constructed in opposition to scholastics' (2011, p. 66). From this juxtaposition of practice and scholastics, it follows that scholastics and theoretical reasoning are portrayed merely as distorted and misleading views, but not as ensembles of scholastic or theoretical practices. The participants in academic and theoretical practices are not conceived as

(Footnote 5 continued)

reasoning,' because any abstract account of the logic of practice immediately reiterates the problem. The investigative task for ethnomethodology is, therefore, to describe how the logical accountability of practice is itself a subject of practical inquiry' (2001, p. 146).

being practically involved in theoretical study. Empirical research on such practices and involvements⁶ still poses an important desideratum in the sociology of practices.

Praxeologising and Heuristics of Playing Games

Praxeologising social activities and objects of study may be initiated by deploying an analytical technique of viewing, understanding and describing them as games being played in particular playing fields. Such a heuristics of playing games is used in many praxeological approaches to consider, explore and depict the phenomena of inquiry as practical performances and ongoing accomplishments. The sociology of practices to this effect can be portrayed as sociology derived from play.⁷ By viewing the social activities to be studied as games played in particular playing fields, the analyst's attention is drawn to participants' cooperative interlacement, their skilful performances, intuitive comprehension, anticipation and sense of the game as well as the temporal dynamics and tacit and bodily dimensions of interactions.

Such an analytical perspective derived from sports games is employed by George Herbert Mead, among others. In his lectures on social psychology, Mead (1934) draws on the examples of baseball and boxing to highlight the inter-subjectivity of social action comprising practical bodily and gestural cooperation. Mead thereby convincingly carves out the indissoluble relatedness of mental states, gestures and body movements in social practices. Wacquant (2004) adopts Mead's praxeologising in his ethnography of boxing.

Wacquant, in particular, aims at carving out the gradual fabrication of the 'pugilistic habitus' (ibid., p. 16). By practicing in a training gym and participating in amateur tournaments for several years and constantly reflecting on his experiences, Wacquant eventually was able to elucidate the tedious social and bodily process of *habitus in the making* using the example of his own mental, social and bodily transformations. In doing so, Wacquant emphasises the potentials of this method of auto-ethnography (Wacquant 2009). To the extent that the ethnographer gradually acquires bodily competences relevant to the respective field of study, this

⁶Wittgenstein alludes to this practical involvement of the producers of theory. According to Wittgenstein, it is not possible for the philosopher to relate to a position outside of everyday language use. 'A main source of our failure to understand is that we do not command a clear view of the use of our words' (1953, p. 122). Language games can only be described in ordinary language. As De Certeau points out, 'to discuss language ,within 'ordinary language, without being able, to command a clear view of it,' without being able to see it from a distance, is to grasp it as an ensemble of practices in which one is implicated and through which the prose of the world is at work' (1984, pp. 11f.).

⁷'Sociology derived from play' is an idea developed by Caillois (1961). It is being taken up and expanded to serve as a concept of cultural analysis by Gebauer and Wulf (1998).