

7 Practice as the House of the Social: Contemporary Developments of the Heideggerian and Wittgensteinian Traditions

In previous chapters I have suggested that many of the contemporary theories of practice build in one way or another on the legacy of Heidegger, Wittgenstein, or a combination of the two. While authors such as Bourdieu and Giddens only make indirect mention of the work of these two great ‘founders of discursivity’,¹ others developed their practice-based theories building explicitly on the work of the two German masters. Authors such as Charles Taylor, Ernesto Laclau, and Chantal Mouffe, Joseph Rouse, Berry Barnes, Andrew Pickering, and Theodor Schatzki² elaborated and refined Heidegger and Wittgenstein’s initial intuition that phenomena such as knowledge, meaning, identity, activity, power, language, social institutions, and transformation are ‘housed in’ and stem from the field of social practices. Although their views are often only partially aligned, so that there is no such thing as a unified Heideggerian and Wittgensteinian practice-based approach or school, these authors have all contributed to a common project according to which practices represent the basic component of social affairs, and as such they constitute the basic epistemic object of social theory. In other words, for all these authors the starting point for theorizing human affairs is social practices and their connections, and not well-formed individuals or overarching systems (in all the variants in which these theories manifest themselves). In a characteristic way, they thus suggest that social theory must start from the ‘meso’ level of practice.

As I shall show, what distinguishes this particular group of authors from other practice theorists discussed in this volume is the centrality granted to intelligibility in human affairs. The authors of the Heideggerian and Wittgensteinian tradition believe that at all times people mostly do (and say) whatever it makes sense for them to do (and say). Such sense, however, always manifests itself as part of an ongoing practical endeavour. It follows that practices, and neither sense nor the individuals that enact the sense-making, are the starting points for the investigation and understanding of human and social affairs. It

is thus to the accomplishment of real-time practices that we need to turn if we want to understand human conduct and social order.

In my discussion I will focus particularly, albeit not exclusively, on the work of Theodore Schatzki. Over the last two decades, the author has developed one of the strongest versions of practice theories. Building on insights from Wittgenstein and Heidegger (hence the title of the chapter), the author has outlined a far-reaching theory that takes practice as the principal constitutive element of social life in all its manifestations—including work organizations. In the process, he has offered one of the more explicit and clear illustrations of the implications of a practice-based approach, not only for the understanding and studying of social phenomena, but also for the reconceptualization of issues such as agency, normativity, materiality, and organization.

7.1 Why people do what they do

Schatzki's theory of practice builds upon a specific view of human action derived more or less directly from the work of Wittgenstein and Heidegger. According to his view, in all circumstances, people do what it makes sense for them to do. Taylor, another prominent practice theorist who developed the legacy of Wittgenstein and Heidegger, suggests that this is a fundamental anthropological trait of humans that distinguishes them (us) from other primates: 'we have to think of man (sic) as a self-interpreting animal' (Taylor 1985, p. 26). Both for Wittgenstein and Heidegger, in fact, it is characteristic of human existence 'to experience one's situation in terms of certain meaning' (ibid., p. 27). This in turn can be thought of as a sort of 'proto-interpretation' that pervades every aspect of our life. Put differently, people respond to their conditions of life on the basis of how they make sense of what is going on, although such sense-making ought not to be explicit and too like decision-making. Humans are thus neither serial rational decision makers nor cultural/rule/habitus dupes. Schatzki calls this condition 'action intelligibility' (Schatzki 1996, p. 118; 2002, p. 75).

Action intelligibility is different from rationality. At any point in time, in fact, several things make sense to people (there are several things that seem rational). However, while people could do a number of things, they invariably 'carry out those [things] that are signified to them as the ones to perform' (Schatzki 1996, p.188). Rationality, in this sense, does not make people act or act one way or another.

Action intelligibility is also different from rule-like social normativity as intended in the traditional functionalist way. What makes sense for people to do is not the same as what is specified by a set of explicit rules or beliefs or even what the actors knows to be the appropriate or right thing to do (smokers

being a good example). While action intelligibility is subject to constraints, these do not descend from the mysterious ‘force’ that norms and rules exercise, or from decisions that people take before action. This is because most of our conducts are unreflective reactions—they are not governed by conscious thoughts. This, however, does not imply that such conducts are either mindless or meaningless. Reactions (and actions) are indeed mindful and follow from what is signified by the existing conditions of life so that what a person does is structured by understanding and attunement. Understanding provides the logical component of the structuring of action while attunement articulates what matters and what people care about, and thus constitutes the ‘locus of the affective component’ of human conduct (Schatzki 1996, p. 122). Minding is heavily involved, but what counts as mind is different from traditional accounts that equate this to something that happens mainly between the ears.

As we will see below, practice is central to understanding human conduct because practices constitute horizons of intelligibility, and allow us to respond to different matters in different ways. In so doing, practices constitute conditions of life and worlds—and they do so ‘inexorably’ (Schatzki 1996, p. 115).

It is worth noting that the role of intelligibility is a watershed among the theories of practice examined in this book. According to Rouse (2006), for example, the importance accorded to active understanding at the point of action differentiates the group of authors discussed in this chapter from the likes of Bourdieu (who believes that people respond more or less blindly to the objective conditions carried by the habitus in the form of dispositions), Giddens (who gives space to rules and resources) and more traditional, non-practice-based views of culture and society.³ The centrality of intelligibility is finally also responsible for what Schatzki calls his residual ‘agential humanism’; that is, the idea to be discussed later in the chapter that practices are carried out by humans (although within a constellation of objects). First, however, we need to understand what practices are, and how they constitute the social world we inhabit.

7.2 Practices and their organization

Schatzki defines practices as ‘open-ended spatial-temporal manifolds of actions’ (Schatzki 2005, p. 471).⁴ Examples of practices include marking essays, cooking, and trading online. The qualifier ‘open’ suggests that actions perpetuate and continually extend practices temporally, and that practices inevitably entail irregularities and unexpected elements. Hence, practices cannot be reduced to regularity and routine alone.

At the most basic level, practices are sets of doings and sayings. Schatzki is adamant that we should not grant priority to either one or the other when

analysing practices.⁵ According to most practice theorists,⁶ in fact, the emphasis on bodily actions is one of the critical differences between practice theory and other traditions such as post-structuralism and hermeneutics which tend to privilege language over other types of activities.⁷ From a practice perspective, moreover, language cannot always fully and exhaustively capture the understanding that underlies practice, and yet the two are inseparable. Practice is thus always linguistically under-determined yet language actively enters practice and makes it possible to transform what we do.

Similarly to cultural historical activity theory discussed in Chapter 5, doings and sayings are hierarchically organized, and are composed of increasingly complex wholes which Schatzki calls, respectively, tasks and projects. Sets of sayings and bodily doings make up a task, such as opening the fridge, turning on the water, or asking for help. Opening the fridge can, in turn, be part of the task of ‘cooking a meal’ or ‘entertaining guests’. The same or similar sayings and doings can thus be mobilized within different tasks. In so doing, they come to mean different things. As several tasks in turn are usually involved in the accomplishment of a project (such as cooking a meal), the same term (e.g. writing) can therefore designate either a task (as in writing comments while marking) or a project (as in writing an article). In the first case, however, the practice is marking an essay, while the other is publishing an article which requires many more projects than just writing text.

Doings, sayings, tasks, and projects hang together according to a characteristic and meaningful organization. In so doing, they constitute integral and meaningful ‘blocks’, described here as practices. Accordingly, the term practice denotes a specific identifiable phenomenon and conceptual (and empirical) unit of analysis, not a generic field of human activity.⁸

The actions that comprise a practice (e.g. what goes into organizing a dinner party) are linked to each other through four main mechanisms: *practical understanding*, *rules*, *teleo-affective structure*, and *general understanding*.

In the accomplishment of a practice, actions are first linked together through *practical understanding*. Practical understanding refers to the knowing that derives from being a competent member of a practice. The concept derives from Wittgenstein’s view that knowing manifests itself as being able to proceed unhampered in an activity. To say that two sets of doings and sayings are linked by the same practical understanding means that they express the same understanding of what is going on, so that the action of one person would be intelligible to another (as long as they are both competent in that practice). The actions of two people can also be considered as linked by practical understanding if the respective judgment of what is required to carry out that specific action is mutually intelligible. Put crudely, actions within a practice are linked by a practical understanding when most participants agree on what it makes sense to do—or at least participants tacitly understand that there is one particular way to go about it (which means that

they can disagree, yet they still understand each other and what is going on). Because practical understanding only ‘executes the actions that practical intelligibility singles out’ (Schatzki 2002, p. 79), practice is never decided ahead of time, and action is never directly governed by habitus, norms, or systems of belief. Practising is a form of emergent coping guided by intelligibility. Intelligibility thus explains how particular, situated, and ‘free’ action is possible. In so doing, it carves a specific role for human actors as active carriers of practices. It is in this sense that Schatzki can claim that his version of practice is superior to that of Bourdieu and Giddens, whose notion of practice Schatzki accuses of being either over intellectualized (people need to decide at the point of action) or over-determined (people are causally governed by some structural principle).

Explicit *rules*, precepts, and instructions are a second way in which actions are kept together within a practice. Rules are programmes of action that specify what to do. In this sense they construct chains of actions and connect tasks and projects in complex arrangements. Although rules have to be interpreted against the background of the ongoing practice, there is nothing mysterious in their working. Rules connect actions because people take them into account when carrying out doings and sayings. In other words, they are elements of consideration when deciding what it makes sense to do; for example, when considering material consequences. They have the explicit purpose of orientating and determining the future course of activity, and it is for this purpose that they are introduced into social life by those with power or authority.

Thirdly, linking activities into a recognizable practice is its *teleo-affective structure*. The term refers to the fact that all practices unfold according to a specific direction and ‘oughtness’, or ‘how they should be carried out’. Here Schatzki builds directly on the work of Heidegger, who saw purposiveness as one of the most basic conditions of being human. According to the author, life unfolds in term of endeavours of which we are only occasionally fully aware: we talk, we cook, we write, we go to work, and only realize what we are doing when something interrupts our train of thought. All practices thus entail ‘a set of ends that participants should or may pursue’ (Schatzki 2002, p. 80), and a complex combination of tasks and projects that are necessary to pursue those ends. Coordinated with this internalized set of ‘where next’ and ‘how to get there’ questions are a set of emotions and moods⁹ that connote ends and project affectively (we feel happy when we win). This internal structure and affective colouring of a practice is learned by novices through instruction and corrections when they are socialized into a practice and taught how to see and make sense of things. It is then reinforced by repetition, sanctions, and peer pressure. It is in this way that it acquires a strong normative flavour that gives the impression that the structure of practice is what guides action. This is

not the case, however, as activity is always governed by practical intelligibility—the teleo-affective structure only contributes by shaping what it makes sense to do.

It is important to note that the teleo-affective structure is a property of a practice that is expressed in the doings and sayings that comprise it.¹⁰ It is not the property of the actors. The teleo-affective structure is upheld in a distributed manner by all participants; it is learnt and perpetuated through the socialization of novices. Novices embrace this structure when they learn a practice—in effect attuning to something that is already there to be understood and apprehended. The structure is also different from the explicit individual goals that people may seek to realize. In fact, the teleo-affective structure is subject to controversy because determining which ends, projects, and emotions are obligatory or mandatory is open-ended (Schatzki 2002, p. 83). Discussion, contestation, and a certain level of conflict are thus all compatible with practice. It is through such disputes that practices continually evolve in response to changes of circumstance. Conflict can continue until there is at least a basic agreement about what is acceptable or not in a practice. When such basic agreement falters, practices cease to exist, or the camps split, and the practice is divided into two or more distinct practices. Notably, all these processes need not to be mediated by discursivity. The teleo-affective dimension of practice may manifest itself in fact (and being treated), as a matter of fact, or as a matter of taste or feeling (we ‘feel’ that something is wrong).

Finally, the activities of a practice hang together through a set of *general understandings*. These are reflexive understandings of the overall project in which people are involved, and which contribute to practical intelligibility and hence action—as when a person on a walk remarks ‘there is no need to rush as we are here to have fun’ to his faster co-walkers. The general understanding of the project gives the practice its identity, both discursively and practically (and, in fact, faster walkers may slow down without the slower walker needing to speak aloud his/her comment).

In later writings, Schatzki added an interesting time-related dimension to this characterization of practice. In short, his suggestion is that practical understanding, rules, teleo-affective structure, and general understandings are perpetuated both by their repeated performance but also through what he calls collective or social memory (Schatzki 2006, p. 167). Social memories are unevenly distributed among participants, and they are inscribed in language, identity, and artefacts.¹¹ This state of affairs has far-reaching implications especially for those studying these phenomena empirically. To understand social life as it happens, it is not enough to grasp its real-time happening. One also has to grasp what is not happening. This means, firstly, that understanding a practice (or an organization) as it happens requires a considerable grasp of its past. Secondly, this means that to understand what is happening here and now requires understanding to some extent what else

could have happened. According to the Heideggerian tradition, in fact, any action is a coming together of a projection towards a future, a 'coming from' some past, and 'coping with the present circumstances'. All these dimensions are always present in real-time actions, and this is what gives human conduct (and life) its inherent teleological character (death makes this teleological dimension tragically evident and present by prospecting the end of it). Accordingly, to understand the accomplishment of a practice one has to take notice not only of its 'sequence' (as in the ethno-methodological tradition) but also of the landscape of the ends, purposes, and motivations that made one happen while others remained mere possibilities. In Schatzki's words: 'Fully understanding the real time in which an organization occurs requires grasping this nexus of pasts and futures' (Schatzki 2006, p. 172).

In summary, practices are open-ended, temporally unfolding nexuses of actions linked by practical understanding, rules, teleo-affective structure, and general understandings. The organization of a practice defines its distinctiveness and its boundaries: an action or task belongs to a practice to the extent that it expresses an aspect of its organization. In this sense, practices can easily overlap and the same doing can be part of two practices (as in the above example of writing). Practices, moreover, are by definition social phenomena, first because they keep participants together, and second because their organization and accomplishment depend on the working together of many people. It is in this sense that authors operating within this tradition insist that practices are not just what people do, and that adopting a practice approach is distinctly different from simply providing more accurate, or more detailed or 'thicker' descriptions of people's conduct.

7.3 Practices and materials

I have noted above that the centrality of the human body and of bodily skills is a characterizing feature of practice theories stemming from the Heideggerian and Wittgensteinian traditions. The body is, in fact, the locus of agency and affective response, and also the target of power and normalization. By mobilizing its capacity to act intimately with the world, the body supports a view of intentional action that does not require the mediation of language, representations, or decisions (Rouse 2006, p. 513). This is critical, especially for understanding social interaction, as people can respond or attune to the expressive conduct of others without the need to 'infer their intentions or articulate their meanings' (*ibid.*).¹² As we have seen, this in turns makes practices inherently 'heterogeneous' in that they include both doings and sayings intertwined in complex ways. Practice theorists, however, also recognize that other material aspects enter the accomplishment of practices. Cooking, teaching, and hiking

are always accomplished with, and amid, things. How objects and materiality participate in practices constitute, however, another major line of distinction between the practice theorists discussed in this chapter. While most of them would agree that the material world does not have an independent existence, and only becomes apparent insofar as it becomes an object of interpretation within meaning structures established by a specific practice, their views of how much work materials do, and how they do it, differ substantially.

At one extreme of the debate is the work of Bruno Latour. Although Latour is a reluctant practice theorist (he would not agree that practices are the basic unit of analysis of the social),¹³ he is adamant that artefacts and things fully participate in social practices just as human beings do.¹⁴ Social networks or practices consist both of inter-subjective relationships among human beings and heterogeneous interactions between human and non-human actors. To make clear what this means, Latour invites us to compare the sociality among humans with that of other primates. He notes that the fundamental difference is that for baboons, ‘the social is always woven with the social: hence it lacks of durability’ (Latour 1996, p. 234). In contrast, the stability of human social orders beyond particular contexts of action can only be explained when one allows for the active role played by objects—symbols alone do not resolve this puzzle. As the author writes: ‘by dislocating interaction so as to associate ourselves with non-humans, we can endure beyond the present, in a matter other than our body, and we can interact at a distance...’ (Latour 1996, p. 239). What makes human sociality distinctive, then, is that practices are not merely constellations of inter-subjectivity, they are also constellations of ‘inter-objectivity’. In other words, things that are necessary and active elements of human practice must be given equal citizenship in our analysis and explanation of the social (without deciding a priori who is doing which part of the work).

At the other end of the extreme are ‘agential humanists’ such as Schatzki. In open disagreement with actor network theory, Schatzki affirms that only humans carry out practices. While he concedes that artefacts do have agential power, he suggests that we need to keep human actions and material performance distinct at least for analytical purposes. Although human activity implicates a world amid which it proceeds, and albeit materials do exert a direct impact on human action (when something breaks or when a new tool is introduced), the two are set apart by the notion of intelligibility, and the fact that only human actions can attribute intentionality and affectivity. This is not to say that Schatzki endorses the idea that sociality is mainly derived from the interaction of humans alone. In fact, as I will clarify later, his view is that human co-existence and organized phenomena emerge from a mesh of people, things, and other entities (that he calls ‘orders’). However, activities and objects are not equal: human practices are, in fact, carried out within a social order that they contribute to, so creating a perpetuate (more about this

later) and, in the end, human action bears more responsibility for social existence than the context in which takes place (Schatzki 2002, pp. 105–122).

Several others authors have developed arguments that are positioned somewhere between these two extremes (authors who do not take into consideration the active role of bodies and materiality are not considered here as they cannot be considered practice theorists).

Pickering (1993) suggests that the agency of both humans and materials is not pre-given—it is not something that is inherent to objects or beings. Rather, both human and material agency emerges from the events they both contribute to determining. While human and non-human elements *are different*, in that intentional agency can be attributed to the former but not to the latter; such intentional agency does not emerge in a vacuum but within the temporally-emergent structure of real-time practices. The author here quotes a fragment of Deleuze and Parnet's *Dialogues* that is extremely enlightening:

Desire only exists when assembled or machined. You cannot grasp or conceive a desire outside a determinate assemblage, on a plane which is not pre-existent but which must itself be constructed. . . . In retrospect every assemblage expresses and creates a desire by constructing the plane which makes it possible and, by making it possible, brings it about. . . . [desire] is constructivist, not at all spontaneist (Deleuze and Parnet, quoted in Pickering 1993, p. 559).

Pickering suggests that what holds for desire in Deleuze and Parnet's quotation can be extended to agency as well. Agency is the result of the mutual dialectic of resistance and accommodation between the performativity of materials and human intentionality. In this sense, material and human agencies are mutually and emergently productive of one another as they emerge together. Actions, intentions, and ends are thus unstable, open, and emergent, just as the way in which the material will respond to such actions, intentions, and ends. The two are continuously reconfigured as they are 'mangled' together while the practice proceeds, and none of them can be said to prevail in determining the future.¹⁵

Barad (2007) addressed the same issue in terms of intra-action and entanglement. The author uses the neologism 'intra-action' to emphasize that most of the time, the components of a phenomenon are originally and agentially inseparable, and we can operate an agential cut (that is to say, we can attribute causality to one bit or another) only within a specified material discursive practice. Barad's argument goes as follows: imagine that a new lamp that emits special UV light and which reveals the presence of infectious bacteria is purchased by a university lab. The lamp can be turned towards the surfaces of the lab to check whether there are risks of infections, or the light emitted by the lamp can be examined to understand its effect on the bacteria, how the light works, and to discover a cheaper way to produce the same effect. The first case essentially describes the process of inspecting surfaces with a UV

lamp. In this case, the light is part of a diagnostic apparatus. In the latter case, the light itself is being measured and hence it is part of the object in question. Nothing about the interaction between the light and the bacteria alone fixes what property is defined by their intra-action, or where a cut occurs between the analysing and analysed components of the phenomenon. The ‘agential cut’ that establishes the different components of the original entangled phenomenon is part of a specific material and discursive practice (cleaning in the first case, engineering in the second). Such a cut is performed as part of a specific agential apparatus (to examine the light itself, you need an arrangement of concepts and instruments that is very different from those used in the other case). It is such a cut that establishes distinctions and defines what matters. The ‘phenomenon’, its components, what they mean, and why they matter are all the result of a specific way of configuring the world and resolving the original entanglement within a specific discursive *and* material practice. In other words, the phenomenon and its features are contextually made to be relevant, where ‘made’ is understood in a material, not metaphorical way.

What all these positions have in common is the notion that practices are inherently heterogeneous and sociomaterial.¹⁶ When we examine the world in terms of a (multiplicity of) practice, we cannot avoid taking into consideration the central role of artefacts and the entanglement between human and non-human performativity. More than this, the practice approach warns us that the nature and identity of objects cannot be apprehended independently of the practice in which they are involved—just as we cannot make sense of our practices without taking into account the materials that enter it. Objects, materials, and technology need thus to be studied ‘in practice’ and with reference to the practices in which they are involved.

7.4 How practices constitute action, sociality, the world, and themselves

To summarize, the Heideggerian/Wittgensteinian tradition directs us to conceive human affairs in terms of open-ended organized temporal manifolds of actions that take place amid, and thanks to, the active contribution of a variety of materials. Practices are social (they help people combine as a group), are set in motion by processes of intelligibility, and are given some coherence and identity by their inherent teleological nature.

Many of these elements, however, are not exclusive characteristics of this genus of practice theory, and they have been used by a variety of non-functional or post-functional approaches in the study of human affairs.¹⁷ What is distinctive to practice theory is the claim that practices are necessarily

where the analysis must start (and end). Practices are thus the basic unit of any analysis of social science and the necessary keystone of any account of social phenomena, including work organizations. This is for the following reasons:

Practices institute the spaces of intelligibility in whose terms they themselves proceed

Heideggerian and Wittgensteinian¹⁸ accounts of the human condition suggest that intelligibility, i.e. interpreting something as such and such, is only possible against the background of a prior understanding of the situation. We often refer (rather clumsily) to this in terms of context.¹⁹ A typical example would be Bateson's intuition that defining a situation as a fight or as a game constitutes completely different sets of actions and reactions, and also mental states and identities. This, however, requires that we first understand the difference between what constitutes a fight and a game. Both Heidegger and Wittgenstein argue that this background understanding is provided as a matter of fact by the practices in which we are involved. In Heidegger's famous example of hammering, we can understand a hammer (both as a tool or something we can talk about) only against the background of a set of practices. These provide: first, the general understanding of the context of carpentry (the idea of building with timber; what a hammer can be used for; the relation between hammer, nail, and boards, and between boards, etc.); second, they give a sense of how to proceed (you hold the hammer by the handle and hit the nail with the head); and third, a general sense of what would bring hammering to a completion (when we can say that a nail is hammered down and when we can consider it done properly—if it's bent, it ain't!) Practices, usually more than one at a time, thus constitute fields of action intelligibility that, in turn, inform participants about what makes sense for them to do next. They do so simply, but inexorably, by making things appear just so. Practices thus create the intelligibility spaces within which they proceed. Actions presuppose practices and only become 'actions' as a moment of a practice.

Heidegger referred to such spaces of intelligibility as clearings (as in the clearing of a forest, or the spotlight via which things are suddenly illuminated and which allows us to perceive them). Foucault had probably something very similar in mind when he developed his notion of discursive space and discursive positions. Schatzki prefers to call these openings 'sites' to indicate that human action and other phenomena take form within, and transpire through, these horizons of possibilities.²⁰ All these formulations emphasize the central concept that horizons of intelligibility are inherently collective and historically determined: they are social and not individual phenomena. At the same time, these horizons are local and situated: they are constituted by practices within specific material and power conditions, and as such they are subject to change.

Finally, these horizons do not have causal powers as in the old structuralist tradition where culture, or collective representations, or ideology, were taken causally as the motors of conduct and the direct trigger of emotions. Practices only provide the site, and the ‘work’ of living still needs to be done. In Schatzki’s words: ‘practices such as those of politics, cooking, gardening, and educations [are] collective, social arenas of action that are pervaded by a space of meaning in whose terms people live, interact, and coexist intelligibly’ (Schatzki 2005, p. 470).

Practices (together with materials) constitute social phenomena and ‘house’ them.

According to Schatzki and most other authors belonging to what I have called here (with some liberty) the Heideggerian/Wittgensteinian tradition, practices also constitute social phenomena and house them. Sociality (and organization) therefore take place amid and transpire through a nexus of interconnected practices and material arrangements.

Firstly, as I have indicated above, practices are collective phenomena and they make participants co-exist and come together within specific projects and horizons of intelligibility. Interaction is thus an effect of practices. As I suggested, harmony and sharing are not prerequisites for this to take place, and political controversy or even open conflict are forms of practice through which people are interconnected and some sort of relationship established.

Secondly, practices are largely responsible for the establishment of social orders, the arrangement of people, artefacts, organisms, and things in which we conduct our lives, and which make our life possible (think of the social orders of ‘office’ or ‘factory’).²¹ According to Schatzki,²² in any social arrangement such as a factory, hospital ward, or disco, humans co-exist and their actions are coordinated through three main social mechanisms—chains of actions (one action follows the other, as in the case when an action from a doctor leads to another by a nurse); commonalities in, and orchestration of, the ends, projects, and emotions (when people react together to the same thing without a need to agree); and prefiguration actions (through the establishment of how future things are channelled, in terms of constraints and possibilities). Human lives and conducts are also linked in a fourth way—through the material arrangements where they take place. Spaces, the position and layout of artefacts and objects, and also some of the properties of such materials (i.e. the capacity of phones to carry voices) are a further way in which lives of people hang together and co-existence takes place. In this sense, as I explained above, human co-existence is the effect of the joint work of human practices and the performativity of materials, and the existence of phenomena such as an office or a hospital ward would entail the presence (and tangle) of all these types of

relations. What is critical for our discussion, however, is that all these relations are largely established in practice:

- Chains of actions descend very much from the fact that actions presuppose practice, as explained above.
- Commonality, orchestration, and prefiguration descend from the teleo-affective structure of the practices, and the rules and general understandings associated with them. The same also applies for the non-human elements.
- Material arrangements (artefacts, objects, symbols, and how they relate to each other and are positioned) are themselves organized according to the unfolding of the practice and its teleo-affective structure.

People doing things together and social order (Schatzki's socio-material arrangements) are thus the outcome and effect of order-establishing nexuses of practices. Offices, hospital wards, and organizations, but also conferences, parties, concerts, weddings, and funerals, are thus the result of the coming together of practices and material arrangements. They are sites where practices are conducted and intertwined, each of them organized by their structure—telos, and understanding etc.—and where these practices are made possible (to be a hospital nurse you need a functioning hospital). Because our life is largely conducted in such sites (also including classes, gyms, bars, and households) we can state that practice and orders make up the site of human co-existence: 'Human lives hang together through a mesh of interlocked practices and orders, as a constitutive part of which this hanging together occurs' (Schatzki 2002, p. 70). At the same time, because human practices are carried out amid, and transpire through, socio-material orders, we can argue that social orders are at the same time also the site or 'house' of practices. The relationship is, broadly speaking, one of recursion and mutual emergence: practices establish the orders through which they transpire and proceed, perpetuate, and change.²³ In any case, if you want to make sense of social order on a grand scale ('society') or more locally ('organization') the place to start is necessarily the ongoing practices and the material arrangements that compose them.

The world is a vast nexus of practices

The mechanisms which keep actions together within a practice or a specific form of social order also sustain relationships between practices. For example, the same tasks and project may enter more than one practice and the outcome of one practice may become the input for another. Chains of actions thus quickly become chains of practices. The practice of setting up and conducting a review meeting is part of a wider set of practices that, when joined together, make an office or a company. Similar considerations apply to prefiguration and spaces. Not only actions but also practices are joined through prefiguration, co-location, and positioning. Practices can be conducted in remote and

dispersed places and times, and still compose arrangements. Finally, material arrangements and technologies also link practices both temporally and causally. The book you are reading establishes a relationship between me (the author), the publisher, the printer, the distributor, and you. As a ‘reader’, you are the result not only of your own reading practices, but also of the practices along the chain just described. The same applies to me as an author, the publisher, etc. We all depend on other’s people practices.

The result is an immense, evolving, and irregular mesh of practices and orders. These ‘bundles, nets, confederations, regions and dispersed and scattered practices are linked together as one gigantic, intricate, and evolving mesh of practices and orders. At its fullest, this web is co-extensive with socio-historical space and time’ (Schatzki 2002, p. 155). Within this mesh, practices do not live in harmony and instead they ‘overlap, interweave, cohere, conflict, diverge, scatter and enable as well constrain each other’ (ibid., p. 156). It is amid, and through, such a pulsating extended nexus of practices that modern life transpires and is made possible. It is for this reason that, for Schatzki and others, social theory should take a serious interest in practices.

7.5 Some further theoretical implications

To summarize from previous sections, according to Schatzki, who I take as representative of the Heideggerian and Wittgensteinian ways of understanding practices, sociality is established through practices and takes place within an immense array of interconnected practice-order bundles. Human lives hang together through a combination of ‘intentional relations, chains of action, the interpersonal structuring of mentality and intelligibility, as well as through layouts of, events occurring in, and connections among the components of material settings’ which are all effects of practices (Schatzki 2002, p. 149). For this reason, we are justified in giving primacy to practices as the basic building blocks of social theory, both theoretically and empirically.

At this point it should be clear why, at the outset, I claimed that Schatzki’s project was ‘far reaching’. In effect, what we are offered here is an extensive and detailed *micro foundationalist ontology* that amounts to a practice-based reconstruction of the social. As I have discussed above, this has relevant theoretical implications for a variety of issues—from how we conceive action, sociality, and order, to the relationship between doings and sayings, and between activity objects. However, this particular social ontology also has some considerable implication for the issues of normativity, meaning/identity, and agency. Let us examine briefly how these issues are reframed from a practice perspective.

As concerns normativity, many of the authors who uphold variants of the positions discussed in the present chapter argue that by rooting rules and norms in publicly accessible activity (instead of, for example, explicit rules or inner beliefs), we can readily explain their authority and force without incurring some well-known problems,²⁴ or presenting a weaker version of normativity. On the contrary, they argue, practice-based views of rules and norms are stronger, not weaker, than their alternatives. Rouse (2001, 2006) notes that practice theory has two advantages over competing explanations of normativity. First, and most well-known, practice-based approaches can solve the infinite regress identified by Wittgenstein (1953). The argument goes as follows. Because all rules (or instructions) need to be interpreted in order to be followed, to follow a rule (or an instruction) we need another rule (or instruction) that guides our interpretation, and so on. According to Wittgenstein (and Heidegger), in the real world we never encounter such a situation because when we run out of justifications, we say something like ‘this is simply what I do’ (Wittgenstein 1953, p. 217). Practice is thus the bedrock not only of meaning, but also of normativity, as rules are literally grounded in practices.

Secondly, practice theories help make such a position stronger thus preventing possible criticisms.²⁵ This is because contemporary Wittgensteinian practice theorists would slightly reformulate the above answer as follows: ‘things are so and so because this is what *we* do’. In other words, according to Rouse (1999, 2001, 2006), practices are a source of normativity because they are social and always constituted in terms of mutual accountability. The performance of an action ‘belongs to a practice only if it is appropriate to hold it accountable as a correct or incorrect performance of that practice’ (Rouse 2006, p. 530). Practices are thus normative ‘real life mechanisms’ that operate in the real world and select appropriate conducts (and acceptable attributions of intelligibility) through mutual accountability. They are not just descriptive devices that capture the shared dispositions that supposedly make us all act in the same way (as, for example, in the ideas of paradigm, *Weltanschauung*, habit, and certain views of culture). Such active selection is sedimented as action intelligibility through socialization and sanctioning in the ways discussed above. As a result, what is intelligible, and what is right and wrong are apprehended together as something that makes it present to us in the performance of a practice. It is according to this sense that I said above that practices create worlds inexorably.

The fact that rules are usually about things that matter to people gives them further authority and weight. In the performance of practices, resolving conflict regarding what is appropriate and what is not makes a significant difference to peoples’ lives. If you make a mistake in following the modern practice of being employed by failing to show up without providing a justification, you are likely to lose your livelihood. Thus, employment practices not only describe the recurrent pattern of activity of ‘going to work’, they also

establish the right and wrong way to carry out such an activity, and they do so in a consequential, that is, 'real' way.

The authority of norms as constituted in practice, and through practice, is not affected by the fact that rules (just like practices) are contestable and often contested. Contestation does not affect the validity of rules, and when the conflict is resolved, this is perceived as a turning point in how things ought to be done. Because the normativity is implicit in what we do, we move from one regime of mutual accountability to another with no gaps or normative vacuums. In Rouse's terms, 'normativity is an interactive orientation towards the future encompassing present circumstances within its past' (Rouse 2006, p. 533). Practices carry and sustain normativity, and practice-based ontologies derived from the Heideggerian and Wittgensteinian traditions resolutely oppose the idea of relativism (meaning all is in the eye of the beholder, and 'anything goes'), just as they discount any form of crude realism. While meaning is practically established through empirically observable processes as part of practising, meaning attribution at an individual level (making sense of things here and now) is cogent and 'inexorable'. It can be contested, but only by proposing an equally strong alternative form of 'inexorability'.

Social ontologies based on the notion of practice discussed here also have a significant bearing on the notion of meaning and identity. Meaning (what something is) and identity (who someone is) necessarily emerge from practices, and through practices. As concerns the former, this descends from the fact that to mean something simply amounts to being intelligible as something. As we have seen above, what something means depends very much on the practice at hand and the intelligibility space constituted by it. A hammer can thus be understood as a tool, but also as a prize, or a symbol of people power.

Identity follows the same fate. Identity, understood as being intelligible as someone, is very much linked to the position(s) we occupy within the flow of activities we are involved in. You are an umpire within the practice of an organized game of baseball. If baseball is forgotten, outlawed, and not practised any more, there is no more umpiring to talk about. Umpiring thus comes before umpires, and the same holds for other phenomena such as gender and leadership. Put another way, from the perspective analysed here, both meaning and identity are relational (something is, or someone is, because of the relations they establish with other elements within the practice); they are multiple (the same thing may change meaning depending on the practice at hand, albeit some meanings may be more entrenched than others, and hence more durable); and they are provisional (meaning and identity can never be fixed, and they always subject to contestation and negotiation).

Finally, the views discussed here have profound effects on how we conceive of agency. I have partly addressed this issue above, so I will be brief. At the basic level, what unites all the scholars that I have loosely collected under the

Wittgensteinian and Heideggerian banner is the belief that a focus on practice helps resolve the traditional opposition between the views that either individuals or the system are ultimate sources of agency. This is achieved by accepting that both aspects are at work all the time, and that human action and interaction is where the two meet and can be altered.²⁶ Most of these scholars also agree that practice theory offers a promising way to reintroduce localized action and discretion into the picture (through intelligibility) without the need to resort to the traditional device of the well-formed individual who makes decisions. Practice theory is, in this sense, neither individualist nor anti-individualist, but rather post-individualist. This is achieved through the idea that practice carries the possibility for action and opens spaces for people to occupy such spaces and take action (or not). In this sense, practice and practitioners emerge together; we cannot grant ontological primacy to each of them. If in doubt, we should grant *temporal* primacy to the practice and not the practitioner—this as a provisional corrective to the possible excesses of individualism. The position is also achieved through the notion that agency is always shared with other entities, and as such, is largely a networked process. While how and how much entities participate in agency varies, as discussed above, there is no doubt among late followers of the Heideggerian and Wittgensteinian tradition in practice theory that agency is an attribute of heterogeneous arrangements. Just as in cultural historical activity theory discussed in Chapter 5, agency (and agents) are thus an instantaneous apprehension of multiplicity that finds its unity in practice and through practice (for example discursive practices). Like actors on stage, we are never alone but part of a larger apparatus (Latour 2005, p. 46). Agency is, thus, necessarily the result of the swarming together²⁷ of an array of entities and other practices that are manifested through doers (both human and non-human). In empirical terms, this translates into an injunction (contra traditional approaches) to start the investigation into social phenomena not via roles and individuals and their actions (entrepreneur, leader, managers), but via the material and discursive practices that allow them to occupy such subject positions. More than this, this view of agency warns us that humans will likely try to receive all the merit, probably claiming that other entities do not do any of the relevant work.

7.6 Empirical and methodological consequences: a 'site' still under construction?

Schatzki claims that his practice ontology also has relevant implications for empirical research. Although the author is a first and foremost a philosopher, he explicitly addressed this issue following his crossing into organizational

research (Schatzki 2005, 2006). Paradoxically, however, this is where his project shows some of its limitations, demonstrating that in some ways Schatzki's site theory is still under construction.

According to Schatzki, studying organizations (and supposedly other social phenomena) implies three central tasks: identify the action that composes it; identify the practice-arrangement bundles of which these actions are part (using the local names as a starting point); and identify other nets of practices to which the practice-arrangements are tied. The suggestion is that to grasp the ties among nets, one has to focus especially on the 'commonalities and orchestrations in their actions, teleological orders, and rules; chains of action, including harmonious, competitive, and conflictual interactions; material connections among nets; and the desires, beliefs, and other attitudes that participants in one net have toward the other nets' (Schatzki 2005, p. 476). Most of this can only be achieved through participant observation, that is watching participants' activities, interacting with them (e.g. asking questions), and—at least ideally—attempting to learn (*ibid.*). Schatzki adds that investigators do not need to track and register the 'potentially labyrinthine complexity of bundles, nets of bundles, and so on', and that all that is needed is an overview of 'social phenomena and their workings that are couched in terms referring, not to the details of practice-arrangement bundles, but to entire formations and their relations' (*ibid.*, p. 477).

The problem is that while Schatzki's methodological intimations are powerful tools to sensitize empirical observation and theorization (in the sense of helping social scientists direct their attention towards certain aspects of the phenomena instead of others), they are, at the same time, so prescriptive and imprecise that they risk hampering, instead of facilitating, the work of empirical social researchers.

On the one hand, Schatzki's theoretical outline, no matter how sophisticated, is still what it says on the tin: an outline. In this sense, Schatzki's attempt to exhaust, through theory, all the permutations of practice—for example when he explains that all practices are linked together by four basic mechanisms—is problematic. This is because exploring how practices are linked together is an empirical, not a theoretical, question. For example, Schatzki does not provide any mechanism to account for how practices can be connected at a distance (one of the central topics of Latour's sociology of translation). This is, of course, a central issue if one is to study social phenomena in a highly interconnected and 'globalized' world. At the same time, the suggestion to use participant observation, while agreeable, is still vague, as it tells us very little about where to go, what to look for, etc. The limits of Schatzki's 'complete' architecture can be appreciated against the comparative strengths and pragmatic appeal of less prescriptive approaches such as actor network theory. Faced with the question of how to investigate and provide accounts for a heterogeneous world that is constantly made and remade, Latour pursued,²⁸ in fact, a different strategy that

is almost opposite to Schatzki's. Latour's solution was to develop and refine an open-ended infra-language that sets the scene for a performative material way of doing social science *without* however defining *ex-ante* the characters who will do it. By using 'open' concepts such as translation, stabilization, and actor network (all trademark concepts of actor network theory), Latour offered a grammar and toolkit for reconstructing the social in terms of a stabilized network of relations, without committing to specific mechanisms. Unlike Schatzki, Latour left the task of filling the blanks to social scientists and their empirical intelligence—a move that goes some way to explain the success of the approach. At the same time, Latour offered a powerful methodological principle ('follow the actor') that again addresses one of the issues left unresolved by Schatzki and many of his colleagues: that of how to view the bundle of practice and go about describing it. In short, the work conducted within what I call the Heideggerian and Wittgensteinian traditions often betrays their philosophical origin and actually highlights the limit of trying to study social phenomena from the vantage point of university offices or writing retreats. In this sense, as I elaborate in the final chapter, I see Latour's approach and Schatzki's sensitivity working together in spite of their differences—at least until practice theory develops something even remotely as powerful as actor network theory which is intended as an empirical orientation rather than a static body of theories.

While, on the one hand, Schatzki's approach is too prescriptive, at the same time it is also empirically contentious and ambiguous. One case in point is the idea that practices are identifiable phenomenon and conceptually (and empirically) bounded units of analysis.²⁹ While speaking of 'units' and arguing that practices have 'frontiers' to highlight what practices can, and should, adopt as the object of inquiry, the use of such spatial language has some far-reaching implications when the approach is put to work in social research. The idea of a 'unit' raises, in fact, the questions of 'where does a practice end', and 'what are the boundaries' of a practice'—questions that practice theorists have been asked,³⁰ and will increasingly be asked, as the approach becomes more successful. The problem, of course, is that these are the wrong questions from a practice perspective, in that they re-introduce structuralist and functionalist preoccupations that practice theory had tried to eliminate. Although practices can be differentiated and named, they do not have 'boundaries' as such. Thinking of the social in terms of well-bounded units and their relations is part of a theoretical discourse that is alien and, in many ways, opposite to that of practice theory. Practice theory starts, in fact, with process, and takes the emergence and creation of (provisionally) identifiable units (individuals, groups, organizations) as the thing to be explained. Practices are regimes of activity and processes. As such, they can be used as building blocks for theorizing and as objects of analysis, but they are not bounded 'units'. In other words, the attempt to bind the operational unit of analysis by drawing

up lists of inclusion and exclusion criteria takes us outside practice theory and more towards a traditional functionalist and positivist paradigm. It also orients research towards questions such as ‘how do individuals bridge the frontier between practices’. This is an inappropriate question with regards to a community of practice, as I discussed in Chapter 4.

While notions such as ‘unit of analysis’, ‘frontier’, ‘role’, and ‘collective memory’ are contentious as they expose this radical and innovative theory of practice to a potential reductionist reading—especially when the intuitions currently developed mainly at philosophical level are used in practice by social science researchers—others are simply ambiguous. The notion of teleo-affective structure, for example, while constituting a powerful concept that accounts for how practitioners experience participating in an ongoing practice, is difficult to grasp and describe in practice. To the extent that such a structure is indefinitely complex ‘due to the indefinite variety of circumstances’ (Schatzki, 2002, p. 83), and subject to contention and contestation, it is also empirically elusive.³¹ Arguing that such a structure is there is one thing, representing it as part of empirical research is another.

In summary, my view is that contemporary developments of the Heideggerian and Wittgensteinian traditions constitute a promising, yet still open, ‘construction site’. Several of them, including Schatzki’s monumental effort, beg for further development in order for their radical message to make a difference in the practice of researching and theorizing social phenomena. The question that I will take up in the final chapter is whether, instead of trying to develop these approaches, it is more appropriate to use them as part of ‘toolkit logic’ with some of other approaches described in this book. First, however, I need to address a final important issue—that of the relationship between practice and discourse.

Rolling case study: Telemonitoring as a practice-order bundle³²

Telemonitoring at Garibaldi is a practice-order bundle. The (human) practice involved in the type of telemonitoring carried out at Garibaldi embraces a range of ends and activities, and takes place amid a characteristic material order from which it derives its 'tele-' name. In turn, telemonitoring takes place within a wider nexus of practices and orders that is the hospital at Garibaldi. Telemedicine, by the same token, also takes place within the wider confederation of practices and orders that comprise regional and national healthcare services.

Several overall ends are pursued in carrying out telemonitoring at Garibaldi. One end is to give patients a better and longer life by preventing crises and reducing the time they spend at the hospital. This is achieved by monitoring their health over time and detecting early signs of deterioration. Another end is to reduce the costs for the hospital of Garibaldi, as admissions are extremely resource-consuming. Furthermore, telemedicine is also a way for Garibaldi to confirm its status as an international centre of excellence for the treatment of chronic heart failure (CHF).

In the pursuit of these ends, doctors and nurses implement a variety of acceptable and connected projects. These include: enrolling patients in the service; teaching them how to use the device to send an ECG over the phone; prescribing tests that the patients have to do; scheduling and carrying out regular phone calls; prescribing specific courses of action (such as an urgent visit to an emergency room) to patients; reporting and discussing the evolution of a patient's state of health; collecting data on the service; and sharing their experience with others through scientific publications and communications.

Each of these projects is composed of a variety of tasks and actions. For example, 'scheduling and carrying out regular phone calls' includes agreeing a frequency of contacts with a cardiologist; knowing when is the best time to speak with a particular patient (taking into account, for example, that older patients like to go out in the morning, while younger working patients prefer lunchtime or evening calls); keeping a diary; updating a patient's file and therapy sheet. These tasks, in turn, are constituted by specific normativised doings and sayings. For example, making calls requires knowing how to read a phone number and how to dial (in a hospital, one needs to get an external line). It also requires following

the conventions of ‘making a good phone call’, including: how to articulate greetings; how to ask questions in a manner comprehensible to patients; how to move a discussion to the next section, and how to formulate correct salutations. These sayings and doings are normativised in the sense that at each point in time there is a general agreement about what is acceptable or not acceptable in practice. The scope of this agreement is, of course, continuously under scrutiny. For example, at Garibaldi patients have to be treated with respect at all times. This can be tricky, as patients also do not want to be treated ‘coldly’. So it is up to nurses to balance the use of formal and informal speech, and to sense when it is appropriate to be kind and friendly, and when more detached and professional. In this sense, the agreement of what is right is continually shifting. However, the fact that patients need to feel respected is never put under discussion, and people come to hold this view as a matter of fact when learning to ‘do’ telemedicine at Garibaldi.

In Garibaldi’s hospital, the practice of telemonitoring remote patients unfolds as a sequence of regular telephone contacts and check-ups. The activities follow one another according to a visible organization that reflects the teleo-affective structure of the practice. Such structure manifests itself through instituting conditions of appropriateness for action; that is, articulating to practitioners what it makes sense to do next. If queried about why they proceeded in a certain manner, the practitioners would probably tell you that, ‘this was the right thing to do for making the patient feeling respected and well cared for’, or ‘this is the right way to make a phone call’. The teleo-affective structure links the actions of the nurses, patients, doctors, and others by making things meaningful in a certain way. It also injects into the practice a sense of urgency and concern, so that practitioners experience carrying out the practice in terms of things that ought to be done and matters that need to be attended to in order for the job to be (well) done. It also colours the chain of actions with a particular emotional tone (‘respect’).

It is worth noting that the way in which projects and tasks are organized into a specific teleo-affective structure characterizes the telemedicine of Garibaldi vis-à-vis both other ways of taking care of CHF patients but also other ways of doing telemedicine. For example, doctors and nurses in traditional hospitals also use the telephone, and often respond to queries from patients and their families. Yet they cannot be said to be ‘doing’ telemonitoring. At the same time, even within the same region in northern Italy, other institutions carry out different ways of ‘doing telemedicine’. Some, for example, did not have a pool of dedicated nurses who proactively ‘followed’ each patient, and used instead fully automated answering machines that the patients had to call to leave vital health parameters (software would then flag up anomalies to a clinical person who would call back the patient to check what was happening). Thus, the teleo-affective structure of the practice not only organizes the saying and doings, it also distinguishes one practice from another.

The practical understanding of all participants in the practice is reflected in the activities described above. This understanding consists both in knowing how to carry out actions and knowing how to recognize and respond to them. This is true for both practitioners and clinical staff. For example, during monitoring calls patients often do not wait for the nurses to ask about their vital parameters and instead offer the information at the ‘right’ time in the conversation. They also display competence in other ways; for example, by telling nurses that ‘of course they had carried out the tests they knew were needed’. This is because all members have become part of the pattern of ordering called telemonitoring, and during the calls and other activities they tune into the horizons of intelligibility performed by the practice. On these occasions, they are not ‘deciding’ how to act, in the traditional sense of deliberating in their mind or brain. They simply follow what the practice of telemonitoring made sense for them to do, or what it told them they ought to do next.

Several rules enter the practice of telemonitoring. Some were established by those in authority when the practice was initially assembled, while others were imposed by the Garibaldi institution. Indeed, other rules derive from regulations imposed by central health authorities. For example, one local rule is that all important decisions regarding monitored patients have to be shared with a doctor, even if such a decision has been made by one of the specialist nurses. The idea is that, in view of possible liability claims, it should always be possible to demonstrate that ‘at the end of the day’ a doctor was in charge. For this reason, following certain calls, the nurse has to go and look for a cardiologist—usually a really hard task—or alternatively describe and record her decisions and actions as provisional until the next review meeting. Such a rule was never formally written down, yet it was carefully followed and enforced. It was often mentioned during meetings and explained to novices as a way to orientate and determine their course of activity. Other rules had different origins. Some emanated from scientific bodies, others from administrative authorities. Doctors and nurses followed established clinical protocols that prescribed how, and when, to use particular medicines. Other rules prescribed what kind of patients the service could take on (this was a regional service, so inclusion and exclusion rules applied).

Amid what arrangements of entities are the ends of telemonitoring pursued, its rules observed or ignored, and its projects and tasks, rapid doings, and intermittent sayings carried out?³³ Telemonitoring takes place amid, and through, an arrangement of spaces, materials, and artefacts. The nurses sit in a dedicated room and make frequent use of the phone, fax, and other material tools such as the diary and the folders where they keep patient records. The artefacts they use are intimately involved in the practice and, in fact, they exert a clear causal impact on activities. For example, the nurses often mention the importance of the therapy sheet (now substituted by a

computer programme), which was a large A3 sheet to record information collected during different calls. The sheet allowed the comparative reading of the data recorded from a number of calls, allowing the evolution of the patient's condition to be followed. Because nurses needed to complete all the sections of the therapy sheet, they often followed the order of the headings in the sheet during their calls. In their words, *'the therapy sheet... guided our calls... especially when we were still inexperienced... it was certainly the first thing we showed our colleague'*. Because the computer software replicates the order of the questions in the therapy sheet, it continues to organize the sequence of the call (as in many other call centres).

The practice of telemonitoring is made possible by—and transpires through—a wider social order of people, relations, and entities. Such order has been patiently assembled by the founders of the service³⁴ who endeavoured for several months to set in place the necessary arrangement so that telemonitoring could happen. For example, telemonitoring requires the ongoing orchestration of the Garibaldi centre and a call centre with the equipment to receive data from the portable ECG, decode it, and relay it to nurses. The alignment was achieved by establishing agreed chains of action, and by connecting the two sites through a dedicated fax line which is continually maintained through personal contacts. The order that makes telemonitoring possible also requires alignment with the practices of the other part of the hospital at Garibaldi. For example, enrolling patients requires that nurses go and speak to patients before they leave the hospital. This, in turn, necessitates that nurses are informed when a patient is ready to return home. Finally, existing rules and identities also need to be aligned for telemonitoring to happen. For example, nurses had to learn how to become more proactive when engaging with patients than they were used to, and they had to be trained in how to administer powerful drugs. In effect, telemonitoring required a shift in professional identities so that nurses' perception of themselves fitted into the new arrangement.

In summary, the human practice of telemonitoring takes place within, and amid, this intricate fabric of practices, objects, meaning, and identities. Taken in its entirety, such a particular social and material order constitutes the 'site' of telemedicine. The complex mesh of people, things, identities, rules, etc., is at the same time the stage where telemonitoring is performed and the result of the practice itself.

The material, technological, and social mechanisms that kept the practice order together connected the practice of telemonitoring with other practice-order bundles. As we have seen, some of the practices of telemonitoring overlapped with those of other sites; for example, those carried out in the call centre and other parts of the hospital. The rules and protocols were shared with several other sites and linked the practices at Garibaldi to those, for

example, at the central offices of regional health authorities. Indeed, the practice carried out in those offices could, and sometimes did, enable and constrain telemonitoring practice (as on the occasion when funding was provided or withheld). Both the practice and the material order within which it is performed are highly interconnected. For example, use of a phone and other electronic instruments establish links with the phone and utility companies. Special links were established with the providers (based abroad) of the portable ECG. The very space where telemonitoring takes place connects its order with other aspects of hospital life (the nurses were still formally employed by the same organization; the room was cleaned by the same company). In summary, the mesh of practice and order of telemonitoring was connected in multiple and complex ways to other practice-order bundles and nets of them. We can imagine that such practices and the orders they create constitute bundles, nets, and a vast confederation (think, for example, of the immense nexus of practice that is a regional healthcare authority with all its offices, hospitals, and emanations). Linked together, they form a gigantic, intricate, and evolving mesh of practice orders. At its fullest reach, this web is co-extensive with socio-historical space-time.³⁵

■ NOTES

1. The expression is borrowed from Foucault who in one of his lectures explicitly used it in reference to Heidegger. See Foucault 1979, p. 147.
2. In organization studies this position has been developed especially by authors such as Chia and Holt (2006) and Tsoukas (2009).
3. See Schatzki (1997) for an extensive discussion and criticism of Bourdieu and Giddens.
4. Other formulations of the definition of practice include 'temporary unfolding and spatially dispersed sets (or nexuses) of doings and sayings' (Schatzki 1996, p. 89) or 'open, temporally unfolding nexuses of action' (Schatzki 2002, p. 72). An analysis of the evolution of Schatzki's thought as transpiring from these different definitions goes beyond the scope of the present work.
5. He calls this a 'unity in difference' (Schatzki 1996, p. 47). The approach thus makes room for meaningful doings and speech acts that are performed by expressive bodies and do not require the intervention of verbal or written discourse. Shaking the head or winking, for example, are meaningful actions that do not have a discursive nature.
6. See for example Schatzki 1996; Schatzki *et al.* 2001; Rouse 2006.
7. Although several of these approaches also build on the work of Wittgenstein and Heidegger, they are strongly rejected as based on a fundamental misunderstanding: Schatzki, for example, calls Lyotard's linguistic-only interpretation of Wittgenstein's idea of language game 'radically wrong' (Schatzki 1996, p. 126).
8. Similarly to activity theory, these sets of sayings and doings are composed of increasingly complex wholes that Schatzki calls tasks and projects. Accordingly, the same sayings and doings can occur in different tasks, and several tasks often enter into the accomplishment of a project. The same term (e.g. writing) can designate either a task (as in writing comments

- while marking) or a project (as in writing an article), although in the first case the practice is marking an essay, while the other is publishing an article.
9. A classic example would be the state of flow (Csikszentmihalyi 1997). Flow is the mental state of operation in which a person in an activity is fully immersed in a feeling of energized focus, full involvement, and success in the process of the activity.
 10. In this sense it is not tacit.
 11. ‘... memories are secured via complexes of actions, thoughts, and readinesses that are differentially distributed among participants in the practice: actions that pursue acceptable or enjoined orderings or that manifest general understandings; thoughts, discussions, and negotiations about which orderings are acceptable or enjoined or about what general understandings entail; all the sorts of acts of admonishment and sanction and readinesses thereto that contribute to the memory of rules; and feelings of satisfaction at certain events and distress at others’ (Schatzki 2006, p. 1869).
 12. This is, of course, where practice theory encounters the tradition of symbolic interactionism.
 13. Latour uses the concept of practice in different passages of his works (see e.g. 2005) but does not develop his theory of the social within the recognizable framework of practice theory. Indeed, Schatzki (2002) excludes actor network theory from the count of practice theories, and Latour probably did not shed tears about this. Latour’s debt to Heidegger and, less prominently, to Wittgenstein’s work is however not in doubt (see Latour 2005). Hence his inclusion here.
 14. See Reckwitz (2002) for an extensive discussion.
 15. ‘Accommodation’ and ‘mangling’ are constant traits of practices. We do not know in advance what a new artefact will do, as we cannot predict what other people, or even we ourselves will do. Therefore, pursuing a (scientific) practice always entail an important dimension of tinkering and tuning that, according to Pickering, works both ways, on human and non-human agency: ‘My basic image of science is a performative one, in which the performance—the doings—of human and material agency come to the fore. Scientists are human agents in a field of material agency which they struggle to capture in their machines. Further, human and material agencies are reciprocally and emergently intertwined in this struggle. Their contours emerge in the temporality of practice and are definitional and sustain one another. Existing culture constitutes the surface of emergence for the intentional structure of scientific practice, and such practice consists in the reciprocal tuning of human and material agency, tuning that can itself reconfigure human intentions’ (Pickering 1995, p. 21).
 16. The neologism sociomateriality without the dash was introduced in organization studies by Orlikowski (2010).
 17. See, in particular, Schatzki (2002) Ch. 1 for an in-depth discussion.
 18. Wittgenstein famously developed this view in reference to the question of how to follow a rule.
 19. Schatzki (2002) goes to some length to demonstrate that there are a variety of ways to conceive the notion of context, and that most of the current conceptions are faulty. Many authors tend, in fact, to equate context to a sort of static background against which events happen (not unlike the set in a play). Alternatively, context is used as a residual category: what we cannot explain we call context. Schatzki suggests that practice theory uses a particularly strong understanding of context which he calls a ‘contextured’ site. A contexture is a particular type of context where entities of different types co-exist. Contextured sites are contextures where entities are intrinsically part of their own context (p. 64). In simple terms, practices are both the cause of themselves and their outcome—so that practices perpetuate themselves, albeit imperfectly, in a quasi-recursive movement.

20. See Schatzki (2002).
21. The term 'arrangement' is used here to signal that sociality requires a minimal level of lives hanging together, and does not require the level of integration, coherence, and regularity usually associated with the term 'order'.
22. Schatzki provided different versions of this argument. My illustration builds largely on Schatzki (2002, pp. 38–47) and Schatzki (2005).
23. We can see here the roots of Schatzki's residual humanism in the discussion of the relation between people and objects above. While, ontologically, the world is a recursive mesh of practice and material arrangements, analytically we must start from the practices and not from the arrangements. This means that activities and objects are not equal—activities are more equal than their material counterparts (they carry more responsibility).
24. The issue of following rules and the foundation of normativity are, of course, two of the most debated issues in the history of human sciences. On the debate on the sources of normativity, see e.g. Korsgaard (1996).
25. Turner (1994, 2001) has raised a number of serious criticisms to this solution, arguing that no description of practice can exhaust all the variants of its performance, and therefore the 'regularity' of conduct among people cannot be explained terms of rules. People have different ideas of how to dress for the beach and to decide whether they are part of the same habitus or practice is impossible.
26. As we have seen in Chapter 2 Ortner (1984) calls this a theoretical triangle. Views diverge with regards to how durable such structures are. As discussed in Chapter 3, Bourdieu believed that habitus is very much constituted by existing objective conditions, or 'the system', while authors such as Pickering would strongly disagree.
27. The expression is from Latour 2005, p. 46. Latour uses the image of the actor on stage 'who is never alone but part of a larger apparatus'.
28. See in particular Latour 2005.
29. Schatzki uses the expression emphatically in most of his writing. See Schatzki (1996) and especially Schatzki (2002): 'It is important to emphasize that the organization of a practice describes the practice's frontiers: A doing or saying belongs to a given practice if it expresses components of that practice's organization. This delimitation of boundaries entails that practices can overlap' (p. 87).
30. See for example Turner (1994).
31. See Schatzki 2002, p. 83.
32. Background information on the practice of telemedicine is provided in the Introduction.
33. I am using the same words to be found in Schatzki 2002, p. 166.
34. I told the story of the emergence of telemonitoring in Nicolini (2010).
35. The two sentences are taken from Schatzki 2002, p. 155.