

As for the second point, Verganti pays overwhelming attention to managers and their super-mediations, compared with the almost non-existent attention given to the users. However, the latter do not just constitute the market through the expression of their present needs and desires. Users sometimes innovate too, through more distributed processes than the manager-centered ones privileged by Verganti.

Thus, Verganti's version of DDI can interestingly bridge innovation studies and STS, but, in order for the bridge to be solid, we still have much work to do.

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Vadim, Volkov, Oleg Xarxordin
[Kharkhordin]
Теория практик - Teorija praktik
[Theory of Practice]
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Alessandro Mongili
(Università di Padova)

Teorija praktik is a book addressed to the Russian public, which gives an overview of the pragmatic turn taking place in contemporary social sciences. Pragmatic Turn is also the name of a series of books published by the newly founded European University at Saint

Petersburg, where this book was published. In Russian culture, attempts to provide overviews of “western” approaches and theories are an established tradition, sometimes achieving great results. In this case, the authors have chosen to focus on a line of research rooted in the French and German tradition, with few references to symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology, as well as to workplace studies and learning theories dealing with the concept of community of practice. STS approach is not appreciated for its heterogeneous contribution to this pragmatic turn, with the sole exception of Bruno Latour, who is given credit for his key role in this field. Even if the book does not explicitly adopt a specific approach, it eventually follows a twofold order in the analysis of the theoretical reference framework. First, it traces a sort of genealogy of the main concepts related to practices in contemporary philosophy, with particular reference to Heidegger’s, Wittgenstein’s and Deleuze’s works. Secondly, it analyses the use and different ways of understanding practices, with regard to their origin, their causes and their effects, with an extensive analysis of the works of (among others) Marcel Mauss, Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, Michel de Certeau, Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot.

The increasing importance of studying practices in social sciences first emerged in the Seventies (following the studies of Clifford Geertz and Pierre Bourdieu), as a both semiological and cultural reaction to structuralism. Starting from that, the authors trace a genealogy of this perspective. Marcel Mauss’ research on gift, focus-

ing on background practices, and Max Weber’s analysis of traditional agency and power of conventions, are juxtaposed with a more established line of research, drawing on the philosophical speculation on this topic, which is here described in a history-of-ideas style. The authors are very detailed in pointing out Ludwig Wittgenstein’s contribution and explaining it to the Russian readership, with particular regard to the different role that ‘discourse’ and ‘word’ (both expressed in Russian by the same word: slovo) play in different situations, and how different linguistic games, or forms of life, can produce different conditions of significance in everyday language. Another important aspect considered is the relationship between rules, habits, and ways of using rules, a perspective that makes it possible to finally overcome any approach considering the regulatory aspect as a cogent factor. A similar importance is attributed to Michael Polanyi’s studies on personal and tacit knowledge, and to his relativization of the commitment to rules.

The authors recommend that practices should be studied following Wittgenstein’s invitation: “Don’t think, but look”. However, they don’t discuss this aspect in further detail, and do not make any reference to the abundance of fieldwork studies on this issue, just limiting their discourse to the need to observe visible practices and examine contrasts and discussions. Following a Russian tradition, they consider literature as an important source for social sciences, at the conceptual level too. As an example of a correct perspective in studying practices, they consider Andrej Platonov’s *evnux duši* and Daniil

Xarms [Kharms]'s idea that knowledge is "seeing" (*vidit'*) much more than *znat'* (knowing) or *uznat'* (learning). *Evnux duši* (The Eunuch of the Soul) is a character from *Čevengur*, a cult novel written in 1928-1929, but published only in 1988, who observes the overall transformation of society in revolutionary times, without adopting conceptual frames. Daniil Xarms was a prominent surrealist and a children's book writer, founder of the OBeRIu movement and very close to the trans-sense (*zaum*) perspective expressed by the great poet Velimir Xlebnikov [Khlebnikov] in the avant-garde art movement. Both of them were among the most popular *samizdat* (clandestine) authors in Soviet times. Surprisingly, the authors don't mention Mixail Baxtin's [Bakhtin] methodological concept of *outsideness* [*vnenaxodimost'*], while emphasising the same need to abandon *chronotopic* constraints in order to develop *ponimanie*, the understanding of processes.

The book examines the issue of practices in contemporary social sciences, following four axes: the causes and origin of practices, the role of things in practices, the role of discourses in practices and the centrality of practices in articulating relationships between power and everyday life. Referring to Norbert Elias's classical research on the western process of civilization, the authors stress two points, the "morality" and the regulatory performance of dominant practices and their embeddedness in bodies, conversations, emotions and spaces. They dwell on Pierre Bourdieu's extensive elaboration of the concept of practice, regarded as a result of an agent's posi-

tion in a field and of a *habitus*, which would make it possible to predict the practices of a certain agent. Here they agree with the criticisms recently made by Sloterdijk (2010), pointing out a contradiction between the "conditioned spontaneity" of predispositions and their "authenticity", both supported in Bourdieu's works, and conversely emphasize their unpredictability.

They also make a very interesting criticism of Bourdieu's concept of *illusio*, a pillar of the Bourdieusian theoretical framework, which is based on the assumption that "to play a game, one must believe in it". The authors argue that the well-known phenomenon of the absolute lack of belief in their system on the part of the Soviet citizens, back in the early Seventies, did not result in a refusal to play that huge game. So, practices are not generated by strategies, but result from processes, and their study has made it possible to bridge conceptual divides such as private/public, micro/macro, and so on. Surprisingly, the authors do not make any reference to the seminal work of Lev Vygotskij and Aleksandr Lurija, and in particular to their concept of *kollektivnaja dejatel'nost'* (collective activity, or practice), so influential in western practice studies (Cole 1998). They prefer to turn only to "Westerners", who explain the process of assimilation of new habits into a pre-existing, taken for granted, body of practices by virtue of their moral superiority (Wittgenstein) or due to a conflict between opposing forces (Deleuze, Fleck).

This attitude clearly emerges in their analysis of the role of things in practices. Latour's analysis of the pos-

sibility to develop analogous practices in different contexts and environments thanks to a network and inscription devices, and his idea that the same network develops agency as an infrastructure, as well as his theory on the assemblage of heterogeneous elements, regardless of their humanity or non-humanity, are presented to the Russian readership quite appropriately (considering that Latour is little translated into Russian, contrary to other authors quoted in this book). Vygotskij and his ideas about “acting with tools” are instead ignored, despite their reintroduction in contemporary western debate as “activity system” by Yrjö Engström and Michael Cole.

Analysing the role of discourse in practices, the authors present the most interesting part of their work, comparing the various perspectives of Michel Foucault, Michel De Certeau, Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot. In particular, they underline how Foucault studied “serious” discourses (such as medicine), while Boltanski and Thévenot developed a sociology of criticism focusing on an analysis of regimes of accountability or justification, studying the kinds of regulatory forms used in everyday reasoning in relation to behaviours and practices, and analysing the impact of these types of discursive commitments (engagement) and constraints (régimes of coordination). Similarly, the authors examine Foucault’s idea of power as a “strategy without a strategist”, a configuration of forces operating in everyday life through practices transforming the Self into a Subject, and compare it with De Certeau’s perspective, based on the double register of strategic practices –

the dominant ones, generating order, spatiality, effect of power, hierarchy, production of identity – and tactical practices, i.e. the “weak ones”, mimetic and conformist, aimed at avoiding stigmatisation, generating mobility, despatialisation, networking of small groups, manipulation of identities, slang and multiplicity.

However, the most surprising aspect of this book is its confidence in sticking to a divide between Russian and “western” (in this case) theory of practices, which seems to be taken for granted. This is a great sign of continuity with the Soviet tradition. In the past, in every Institute (Graham 1975) there was a sektor, or department, devoted to the study of “bourgeois” areas of research, which were obligatorily subject to criticism, with a number of scholars conveying the contents of western debates into the Soviet world (Mongili 1998). By doing so, they regarded “western” or “bourgeois” science (during the Soviet period) as a phenomenon apart from the Soviet (now Russian) culture. They often achieved a very high level of analysis, as we can see if we compare Steven Shapin’s (1995) review of SSK with a Soviet analogous work (Kelle *et al.*, 1988). However, the price for this kind of approach was not only the denial of any direct influence of Soviet thinkers (such as Vygotskij) on the western debate, but also of some original intellectual perspectives on practices, such as Baxtin’s. The only justification the authors have for this attitude is a meaningful discussion on the replacement of the Russian word for practice, *dejatel’nost’*, with the more westernizing *praktika*.

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Sophie Houdart
**La cour des miracles. Ethnologie
 d'un laboratoire Japonais**
*[The Court of Miracles: Ethnology
 of a Japanese Laboratory]*
 2007, CNRS Éditions, 335 pp.

Assunta Viteritti
 (Università di Roma)

In this very absorbing book, Sophie Houdart flits ably from one role to another, becoming in turn an ethnologist, an anthropologist and a sociologist of science. Laboratory life – that of humans both divided and united by culture (national, scientific, professional) and that of other species, in this case the drosophila fly – is enriched through a totally cultural vision of scientific knowledge (Pickering 1992; McCarthy Doyle 1996; Goodwin 1994).

The author tells the fascinating story of how a Japanese research laboratory describes and characterizes the homosexual gene of the drosophila fly in the 1990s. In fact, man is believed to be the ultimate branch on the tree of life. The research hypothesis is that the “forebears” of our sexual behaviour patterns can be found in animals, bacteria or flies. In its behaviour and in its genetic mutations, the fruit fly manifests many intermediate stages between hetero- and homosexuality. Above all, it focuses on the laboratory manager, Yamamoto, who evolves from being a lover of insects (*mushi mushi maniac*) according to the “naturalistic” culture prevalent in Japan, and becomes a laboratory scientist in line with the more “rational” western vision, without ever losing his cultural identity.