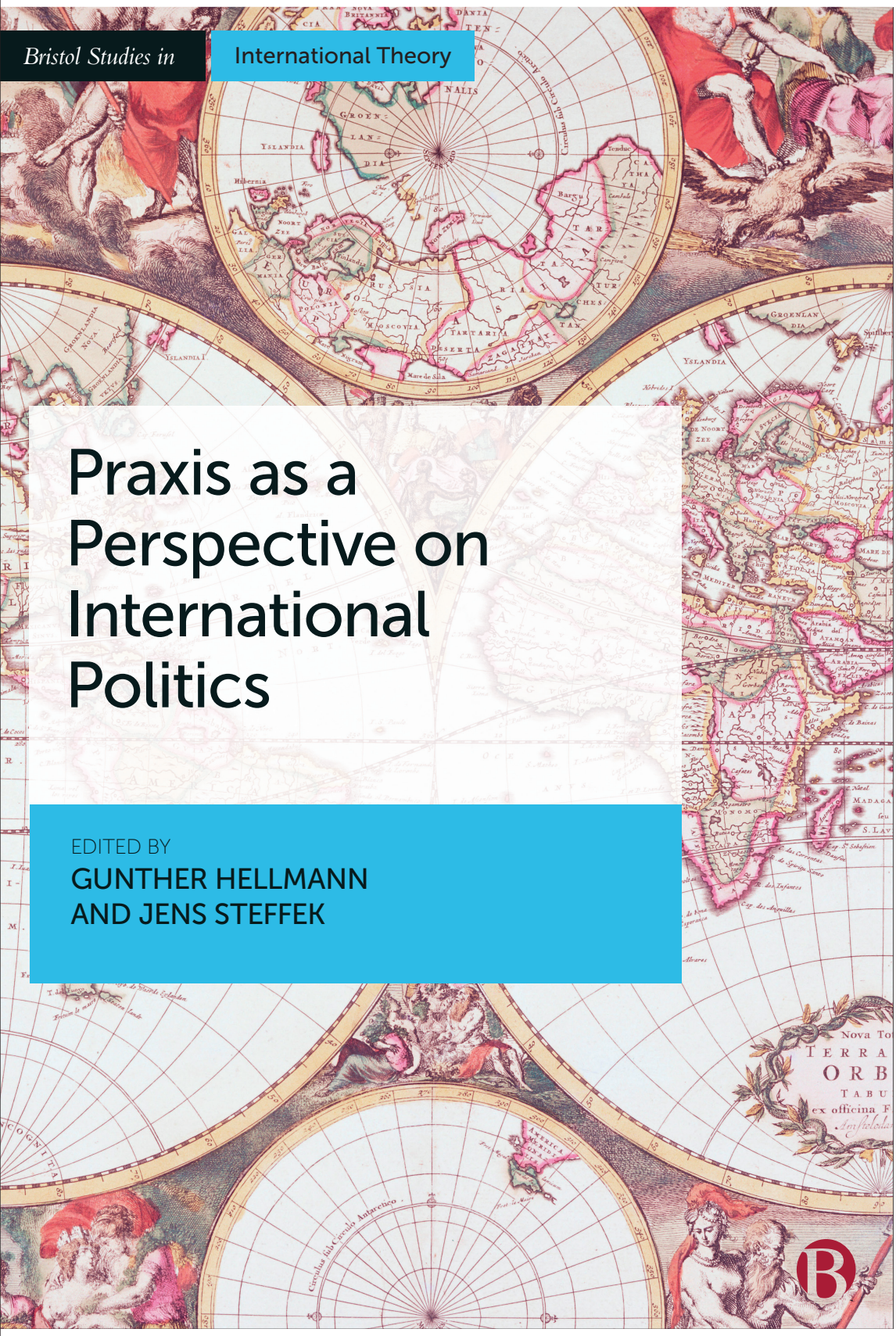
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Styles of Theorizing International Practice

Christian Bueger

Introduction

What do we mean by theory and how is it related to practice? The question has been one of the recurrent themes for negotiating the identity of the discipline of International Relations (IR). Debates concern what kind of knowledge scholars should produce and value, what should count as 'theory' and 'empirics', but also what status is granted to those that 'make' theory and those that focus on 'practice'. While these debates run through the history of the discipline, three recent developments have given them impetus.

A landmark debate in the *European Journal of International Relations* in 2013 explored whether the age of theory in IR had ended. Scholars asked whether they had witnessed a 'retreat from theory' (Dunne et al, 2013: 406), mourned the end of unifying grand theory that would order the discipline (Mearsheimer and Walt, 2013), and were worried about the proliferation of theories and naive hypothesis testing (Guzzini, 2013; Jackson and Nexon, 2013). The discovery of non-Western IR and theory from the Global South brought another source of discomfort to the discipline. The potential of post-colonial forms of knowledge cast new doubt on the extent and limitations of Western epistemology and its concepts of theory (see Acharya and Buzan, 2010; Shilliam, 2010; Seth, 2011). Yet the emergence of a movement of scholars associated with 'international practice theory' also called for new thinking on theory and for grounding it in practice (Adler and Pouliot, 2011; Bueger and Gadinger, 2018). In declaring 'practice' as the foundational unit of theoretical thought, they re-raised the tension between theory and practice in new ways.

The triple uncertainty over theory opens a new moment to rethink the making of theory in IR. Taking insights from these three debates into account, this chapter asks whether and how practice theories lead to new, innovative thoughts on 'theory' and the relation to practice. The mere label of 'practice theory' is interesting: it brings together two terms which are often seen as dichotomous or at least are keenly kept apart. How does practice theory open the space for rethinking the relation? As I seek to show, various innovative 'styles' of theorizing have become formulated that merge theory and practice in interesting new ways. In discussing these, my objective is to add to the more general debates on how to reconceptualize theory in IR. But I also intend to offer some insights for those primarily concerned about practice theory, considering that more has been written on the concept of 'practice' than about 'theory'. While ontological vocabularies are now well advanced, as is the methodological discourse, too little attention has been placed on how one theorizes with practice theory.

The argument proceeds as follows. I first review the new moment of theoretical uncertainty across disciplines and discuss the positions that practice theorists take in regard to theory. I argue that some of them promise innovation as they transform our understanding of theory substantially by shifting emphasis to process and activities. They foreground the creative acts of *making* theory and the 'practice of theorizing' gains centre stage. Such a move might be productive since it collapses or dissolves the dichotomy of theory and practice. It also opens up new discussions of the relation between theory making and other scholarly and non-scholarly practices.

I then continue to interrogate the contemporary practice theory debate to identify different 'styles of theorizing'. By a style of theorizing, I refer to a particular way of merging theory and practice. I detect four styles of theorizing practice distinguished by two axes: firstly, the site in which theorizing is situated (library vs field), and secondly, whether order or messiness is prioritized (generalization vs singularization). This leads to four styles: 'mechanism', 'meditation', 'method' and 'experimentation'. I discuss paradigmatic exemplars of each style. Thinking with and through such styles in the conduct of research allows for more reflexivity on what our research practices add up to. They also provide new points of orientation for newcomers to the practice of theorizing.

The new theoretical uncertainty

Given that 'theory' is one of the core concepts of social science, it was always under debate. Yet discussions significantly intensified in the past decade. Across the social sciences there is a visible new uncertainty over the meaning and status of the concept. Uncertainty prevails not only in IR but also in its neighbouring disciplines. Paying attention to the debates in sociology

and anthropology is insightful, as these have articulated many of the new uncertainties and opportunities much more forcefully. Scholars increasingly question what is meant by theory, if it should be the core objective and ultimately the gold standard of academic work, but also how it relates to 'empirics' and 'practice' more broadly.

Gradually scholars began to recognize that the concept of theory is much more contested than is often assumed. Usage of the concept differs substantially and, hence, it has a high level of ambiguity and polysemy. Dunne et al (2013: 406) cite Robert Merton (1967), who was already noting the problematic diversity of understandings of theory. In sociology, Gabriel Abend (2008: 174) has shown perhaps most forcefully the polysemy of theory, or what he calls the 'semantic confusion' around the term. Martin (2015) and Swedberg (2017) make similar observations and stress the multiplicity of meaning of theory. In IR, for instance, Dunne et al (2013: 407–12) have documented such plurality and suggested five different 'types' of theories: explanatory, critical, normative, constitutive theory and theory as a 'lens'.

Within sociological debates there have been strong calls to disassociate theory from the work of classical theorists. We should not equate theory with the work of a mastermind, they argue. Not only classic 'theorists' have theory. Equating theory with masters, whether that is Max Weber, Talcott Parsons and Niklas Luhmann in sociology, or Kenneth Waltz and Alexander Wendt in IR, is problematic; it distracts from how theory is actually made and done (Lizardo, 2014; Martin, 2015; Swedberg, 2017). Furthermore, the status attribution that comes along with the label of theorist is a concern. As Omar Lizardo (2014: 3) phrases it, 'one of the grave dangers … today is the continuing survival of an approach to theory that conceives of the theory field as an "aristocracy of theorists" ruling over mere empirical under-laborers. From this perspective, theory is something that is done by a select few who have a special vision; they are only discovered, never made.'

Yet the counter-tendency appears equally troublesome, that is, when proliferation occurs. Scholars increasingly tend towards making their own theories, rather than relying on a range of classic grand theories. In IR, Dunne et al (2013) see the proliferation of theories and the resulting plurality as highly problematic and call for an integrated pluralism that can avoid too much fragmentation and enables cross-theory conversations. Martin (2015) criticizes pluralism for its tendency that in order to make a career, a scholar is supposed to have her own theory. This may lead to the proliferation of verification, rather than falsification, as scholars need to prove that their theory got it right.

One origin for inappropriate theory building might be found in the increasing tendency of the social sciences to turn to method; while method sophistication is growing, theory literacy seems to be in decline. As Richard

Swedberg (2014: 1) notes, 'sociologists and other social scientists are today very methodologically competent, but considerably less skilful in the way they handle theory'. Mearsheimer and Walt (2013: 428) diagnose similar trends for IR when they suggest that the number of scholars that pay serious attention to theory is in decline, while the focus on quantitative methods and 'simplistic hypothesis testing' is on the rise. Yet it is not only the turn to methods, but also new ideas that scholars should prioritize (mathematical) models over theory (Clarke and Primo, 2012), should 'return to the empirical' (Adkins and Lury, 2009: 5) or focus on descriptivism enabled by the age of big data (Savage, 2009; Burrows and Savage, 2014), that lead to concerns over the status of theory.

In anthropology, likewise, there is a new debate on theory that adds the crucial importance of place (Harrison, 2016, 2017). Scholars such as Arturo Escobar (2008: 285), for instance, speak of a new 'theoretical moment'. As Harrison (2017: 28) summarizes this argument, 'there is an expansion of the space and, thereby, a multiplication of the sites (along with the networks in between them), where various modes and forms of theorizing take place and are being claimed and acknowledged as such.' This leads to the 'creation of more decentralized and decolonized conditions' of making theory and forms of knowledge beyond northern epistemologies (Harrison, 2017: 28). 'Ex-centric' sites of theory and knowledge production come to the fore (Harrison, 2016). Southern scholarship leaves the periphery and moves to the centre. Similar movement and moments have emerged in IR. Received notions of theory and epistemologies have become challenged by debates on non-Western IR, Worlding Beyond the West and post-colonialism (see Acharya and Buzan, 2010; Shilliam, 2010; Seth, 2011). Together they highlight the geospatial dimension of theory production, question that theory is only produced in the West and argue for incorporating other forms into the canon of IR.

In the following, I discuss the responses of 'practice theory' to the new uncertainty. This is to show what new avenues practice theorizers provide and hence to provoke some mental stimulation for those interested or planning to engage in practice theorizing. Much discussion on 'practice' and adjunct concepts has taken place, but less on the meaning of theory.[1]

The practice turn's 'theory debate'

'Theories of practice' and the broader 'practice turn' are widely recognized as one of the core recent innovations in social science. The 'turn' was triggered

[1] For other discussions of theory in IR's practice turn, see Grimmel and Hellmann (2019) and Hofius (2020).

by the critique that too much of cultural theorizing had abandoned action and overemphasized linguistic structure or belief, while not adequately considering the 'mundane' and 'everyday' or the importance of material objects and infrastructures (Drieschova and Bueger, 2021). Hardly any of the social sciences have been left untouched by this call for centring in 'practice'. Advocates for turning to practice, however, did not claim to introduce a new grand theory. Built on pluralist grounds, they agree that there is no unified or consistent 'practice theory', but rather a collective of theories and approaches with family resemblance that share a range of commitments (see Reckwitz, 2002; Adler and Pouliot, 2011; Bueger and Gadinger, 2018). Such diversity is seen as the strength of practice theories, as it makes them adaptable and sensitive.

The mere label of 'practice theory' combines two terms often seen as opposites. Friedrich Kratochwil (2011), for instance, has pointed out that the label is an oxymoron: there cannot be a theory *of* practice, since practice is contingent and varied across context, while theory stands for the generic and context-independent. While this argument is a bit more complex, as will be shown later in the chapter, Kratochwil's warning stresses the considerable tension built into the practice theoretical debate. Indeed, practice theories have not escaped the new theoretical uncertainty. While this is a gross simplification, and not everyone will agree with this, practice theorists advance the following three positions.

A first position is concerned with rescuing received notions of (grand) theory: scholars continue to work out comprehensive theories and then apply them. Practice theorists such as Pierre Bourdieu, Andreas Reckwitz or Theodore Schatzki arguably pursue a project of developing a logically consistent general vocabulary of practice, and a substantial number of researchers intend to apply their insights. A second position indicates the opposite route. Embracing romantic ideas of authenticity and distinctiveness, 'abandoners' suggest that, insofar as there is no 'general' and 'universal', the notion of theory is unproductive and energy is better invested in describing and analysing the particularity of practice. They call for giving up any substantial notion of theory and argue that if scholarship is interested in the more general at all, then it is the descriptivist search for patterns. This position can be associated with those naively drawing on the dictum 'to just follow the actors', advocating for 'grounded theory' or other forms of empiricism.

The third position, which I shall discuss in more detail, aims at redefining what we mean by theory. Appreciating many ideas developed by the abandoners, 'transformers' nonetheless suggest continuing to operate with and claim a concept of theory. They argue for a re-evaluation of what kind of mental tools and what kind of epistemic work we associate with the term. Scholars such as Isabel Stengers or Bruno Latour return to foundational moments of Western science, while others rely on American pragmatism or

non-Western epistemologies, or they base their reasoning in the observation of scholarly practices, taking a more inductive stance that investigates what scholars do when they make theory. Overall, the tenet is to fundamentally challenge the theory–empirics distinction. Scholars entangle themselves in practice not only in aiming at developing theory from within practice, but in understanding theorizing equally as a practice.

My interest in the following is to further elaborate on the position of the transformers. These invite us to understand theorizing as activity. In the next section I lay out some basic considerations on understanding theorizing as a practice.

Theorizing: some basic considerations and themes

What unites the transformers is the idea of shifting from theory to the practice of 'theorizing'. Scholars across the social sciences have made significant efforts to argue for such a move. 'To focus mainly on theory, which is typically done today, means that the ways in which a theory is actually produced are often neglected', argues Swedberg (2014: 1). According to Lizardo (2014: 3), 'we should begin to move away from our obsession with theory as a finished product or as canon of works and towards a conception of theorizing as a creative activity'. In IR, Guzzini (2013) has perhaps made this point most profoundly in arguing that we should shift to discussing 'modes of theorizing' and how they establish different relations to the world. As the anthropologist Harrison sums up the move,

> contrary to traditional thinking, theory has a symbiotic and dialectical rather than a dichotomous relationship to practice. Theory and practice are inextricably interrelated and mutually reinforcing modes of social practice. This approach propels a shift from a focus on a valorization of theory as textualized product to 'theorizing' as a form of creative work performed in diverse dialogic contexts. (Harrison, 2016: 172)

The shift to the verb and the valuation of the actual 'work' required to produce theory has substantial consequences: it suggests the need to de-centre the individual mind and understand theory as a collective achievement situated in a distinct milieu and locale; to focus on process and actions, rather than the object ('the theory'); to grasp the practical knowledge, various skills, material resources and artefacts that are assembled in the production of theory; and to recognize the multiplicity of forms or styles of theorizing.

It shifts focus away from epistemology, towards a richer understanding of science as practice. For Isabel Stengers (2000: 107), for instance, we need 'to refer the question of theory, not to a question of its epistemological status, but to the sciences as collective practices, and to avoid any epistemological

opposition between a "true theory", a legitimate theory, and an "ideological" theoretical claim.' As Stengers highlights, theorizing is a collective process and cannot be appropriately grasped from an individualist perspective. Any theorizer – a subject engaged in the practice of theorizing – works always in relation to and with others, even if those relations are only made within reading and referencing practices or by using preconceived concepts and tools (Knorr-Cetina, 2014: 43; Reed and Zaid, 2014).

The move to practices is also liberating as it shifts emphasis away from a concept of theorizing as following standardized general rules (of abstraction or generalization) towards a non-technical, more open, productive, creative, intuitionist or even affective understanding. Theorizing becomes a generative activity of revealing, making perceptible, and of nurturing and caring for particular phenomena, collectives or objects. As argued, for instance, by Annemarie Mol,

> a 'theory' is something that helps scholars to attune to the world, to see and hear and feel and taste it. Indeed, to appreciate it. … A theory helps to tell cases, draw contrasts, articulate silent layers, turn questions upside down, focus on the unexpected, add to one's sensitivities, propose new terms, and shift stories from one context to an-other. (Mol, 2010: 262)

Making such moves also opens up the possibility of drawing on practice theory to understand theorizing. This clarifies that even under the new openness, rules will still matter, yet tacit knowledge and forms of recognizing the practice of theorizing equally do. Drawing on Schatzki's (1996: 89) definition of practice, theorizing involves doing and saying, such as the articulation of statements recognized as 'theoretical'. But it also involves practical understandings, such as those standards of competence through which a practice is evaluated and by which acts are recognized as good theorizing.

Finally, theorizing also implies skills and tacit knowledge. Knorr-Cetina (2014), for instance, refers to intuitions and the use of tools and concepts a researcher learns via exposure to the state of the art of a discipline. Swedberg (2017: 191) likewise refers to theorizing as a craft and suggests that 'to theorize well, sociologists need to have practical knowledge of how to handle theory'. Yet more formal rules also matter for practices, such as the explicit standards formulated in philosophical trainings, textbooks or the more practical standards that Klein (2014), Weick (2014) or Swedberg (2017) call for.

Interrogating theorizing as a practice provides us with new concepts and categories of what is involved and at stake in performing theorizing. It clarifies that theory includes various actions and that tacit knowledge and practical understandings matter, as do explicit rules.

Relationalist theories of practice provide an important addition. Following actor-network theory advocates, such as Bruno Latour, Annemarie Mol or John Law, theorizing can be understood as an attempt to produce universals out of particulars. For Law (2004) this implies that theorizing is an act of arranging mess so that a particular order (universal) emerges. A universal, in turn, should not be understood as transcendental, but rather as an epistemic object that is able to travel. In Latour's (1987) words, theory can be understood as an 'immutable mobile', that is, an object that has the capacity to maintain a degree of stability across different contexts and places. It is immutable in the sense that it has achieved a certain degree of stability and coherence, so it can become mobile, that is, transferable to other situations. The immutable mobile is both particular in that it only becomes stable by having formed relations in particular situations, and general in that it becomes transferable across contexts. As Latour argues, producing such an immutable mobile requires considerable work and different actors and objects to act concertedly.

For Latour and others, acts of theorizing are flows, circulations and movements through which objects, activities and statements become related to each other and relations become more and more stable and coherent. Theorizing is then building relations that last. It is the fabricating of universals and immutable mobiles that can traverse context. Theorizing is dependent on various other practices, and it requires one to produce a collective which becomes inscribed in the theory and is interested in maintaining and nurturing it. In summary, to think of theorizing as a practice, we need to consider it as an activity, that is, creative, collective, situated, organized by tacit knowledge, emotions and normative understandings, and concerned about the production of immutable mobiles. While analytically it can be isolated from others, theorizing is always embedded in particular situations and related to other practices and collectives.

Styles of theorizing practice

Drawing on the previous sketch of theorizing as a creative, intuitive attempt to build relations that last, the goal of this section is to derive ideal types in conversation with a number of theorizers of practice. This is to appreciate that within the transformer movement quite different ideas of how to theorize have emerged. I shall call such ideal types 'styles of theorizing', borrowing from Ian Hacking (1992) and Chunglin Kwa (2011).

Two basic categories are particularly apt for grasping different styles of theorizing practice: 'locale' and 'purpose'. By locale I refer to the sites, places and arrangements from within which theorizing takes place. While in one way or the other all practice theorizers seem to claim that they initiate theorizing in the 'midst of practices' or from a 'problematic situation', how

the theorizing subject is actually situated differs substantially. As the major differentiation we can take the degree to which a theorizer relies on mediated experiences and received textual representations of practices or draws on immediate experience gained through proximity to practice in the form of bodily exposure, direct observations, unmediated learning and training and other forms of participating in a practice.[2]

The first subcategory we can label *library research* (Abbott, 2014). Theorizing relies here on 'found data', whether in physical or digital form, and the main sites of theorizing are the archive, the library or the desk. Many of the data that theorizers rely on will not have been created with the purpose of practice research or even research in mind. The majority of such data will come in some well-ordered form. Whether these are bureaucratic records, letters, a diplomatic cable or scholarly works, these texts are structured and written according to organizing principles. The second subcategory is *field research*. Although the term 'field', and some of the associated assumptions, have increasingly evoked criticism in anthropology and political science (Bueger, 2021), it is a useful denomination to describe those theorizers which rely on 'lived data' produced in proximity to practice. Such data might be fabricated through interviews and conversations, *in situ* observations or attempts to acquire and participate in a practice, for instance by conducting 'auto-ethnography'.[3] Library research hence implies interpreting found data for practice theoretical purposes, while field research faces the challenge of how to produce such data by translating practice theoretical concepts. Library research, in contrast to field research, allows for and often implies making claims on grander temporal and spatial scales, since texts are often already aggregated data. Historical and broad comparative research across scale is hardly possible from a field research position.

The second category is 'purpose', and here I refer to the ambition of theorizing to produce 'order'. While some theorizers have the motivation to work out and (re)produce the orderliness of practice through generalization, others argue that given the messiness of practice, any attempt to produce order through scholarly analysis increases messiness rather than reducing it.[4] By *generalization* I refer to the more or less ambitious attempts to produce concepts and statements which are seen as transferable independently from context and scale. They aim at producing figurations that can act as immutable mobiles and traverse context, time and space. By *singularization* I refer to those forms of theorizing that have the ambition to work out the specificities of a situation and represent its messiness. This might be

[2] 'Textual' representations might include visual documents, paintings, recordings or videos.

[3] See, for instance, Merit Müller's (2018) auto-ethnography of ballet practices.

[4] As discussed, for instance, by Law (2004).

Table 4.1: Styles of theorizing practice

		Purpose	
		Order and generalization	*Mess and singularization*
Locale	*Library*	'Mechanism'	'Meditation'
	Field	'Method'	'Experiment'

by studying the effect of a singular 'event', such as the invention of a new concept or technology, or an analysis of a particular action context, problematic situation or practical figuration and the requirements they spur. For the generalizers the purpose of theorizing lies much more in producing order, while the singularizer will often aim at disrupting and destabilizing taken-for-granted orders by showing how things could be otherwise, or by introducing and adding new concepts and elements to a context. In consequence, the scholarly arguments presented by the singularizer often will be about the mode of theorizing, rather than the form, in the sense that the objects produced and 'added' will not necessarily have any meaning outside the context or figuration that is studied.

These categories and subcategories provide us with four ideal types that form a useful heuristic to work out different styles of theorizing. They can be brought together in a graph, which is presented in Table 4.1. As with any other ideal typification, this has obvious limits. For instance, it would be hard to put a particular theorizer, such as Michel Foucault,[5] in any of the four boxes, as throughout his career he has moved between those boxes a great deal. My goal here is not to provide neat boxes so we can sort out and in scholarly work, but to provide orientation and a tool to trigger reflection for students of practice to consider how they have been practising or want to practice theorizing. In the following section I further flesh out each of the styles in conversation with selected practice theorizers. As Table 4.1 shows, each of the four styles congregates around a particular concept, that of mechanisms, meditation, method or experiment.

Exploring some exemplars

The following thoughts draw on a selective reading of recent practice theoretical works and how these deal with the problem of theory and practice. They present interesting instances of the categories discussed earlier.

[5] Assuming that he can indeed be read as a practice theorizer; see Bueger and Gadinger (2018).

As my discussion reveals, there is also an indication that we might have not paid adequate attention to the fourth type, that is, the experimental style. I shall start with a discussion of library researchers and then address those theorizing in the field.

Two recent practice theoretical books can be read as two exponents of theorizing in the library. Emanuel Adler's (2019) *World Ordering: A Social Theory of Cognitive Evolution* already carries the concepts of order and theory in the title and will be read here as an example of a style of theorizing that I shall call 'mechanism'. Friedrich Kratochwil's (2018) *Praxis: On Acting and Knowing* is, as the back cover states, 'devoted to theory building'. It serves as an example of a style that I describe as 'meditation'. Both books rely exclusively on found data.

Mechanism

While there are many varieties in what is meant by 'mechanism' (Levy, 2013), contemporary philosophers of science have described it as particular arrangements of parts. As Glennan and Illari (2018: 92) define it, 'a mechanism for a phenomenon consists of entities (or parts) whose activities and interactions are organized so as to be responsible for the phenomenon'. According to this understanding, known as the 'new mechanics', mechanisms have a number of features. They produce, underlie or maintain a particular phenomenon, that is, they do things; they have a certain kind of regularity, yet they are not necessarily deterministic, as parts of the mechanism might interfere or break down (Glennan and Illari, 2018; Craver and Tabery, 2019). Mechanisms are processes and may be incomplete. While an understanding of theorizing as designing mechanisms brings us closer to projects that aim to rescue general theory and might be misunderstood as such, mechanisms are always tied to the particular phenomena that they produce.

The mechanisms that Adler's *World Ordering* is interested in are those that produce the phenomenon of change in orders. He describes such changes as cognitive evolution, suggesting that such a viewpoint can bring both change and stability simultaneously into focus. He gives a concise outline of the parts he arranges that produce the phenomenon of evolution when he writes that 'social orders originate, derive from, and are constituted constantly by practices, the background knowledge bound with them, and the communities of practice that serve as their vehicles' (Adler, 2019: 2). In a second statement, his ambition to outline mechanism comes even stronger to the fore.

> Cognitive evolution theory claims that practices and the background knowledge bound with them are the structural 'stuff' that is passed on in replication in the sociocultural world, that communities of practice

> are their vehicle, and that practices account for both the consecutive and simultaneous change and metastability of social orders in general, and of international social orders in particular. (Adler, 2019: 3)

In the book Adler first puts in considerable work to capture this 'stuff', that is, the key components of 'practice', 'background knowledge' and 'community of practice'. He then sets out to describe how they hang together in mechanisms, alluding to evolution selection, meaning fixation and what he coins a 'master mechanism': epistemic practical authority (Adler, 2019: 3). Altogether he outlines seven mechanisms of how the parts hang together (Adler, 2019: 4).

As these quotes indicate, Adler is interested in generalizing, and he does so by working out mechanisms that explain a particular phenomenon, that is, the evolution of orders. How do data on practices feature in this process of theorizing? While primarily conducting conceptual work, in reconstructing mechanisms Adler continually draws reconstructions of practices into the discussion, such as those that order the European Union or cyberspace.

Meditation

Kratochwil's *Praxis*, in contrast, is less concerned about generalization and order; instead of laying out mechanisms and parts, his style is more concerned about process and tinkering. Meditation is a suitable description of such a style. Paul Rabinow (2003) provides a useful reconstruction of what is at stake when he lays out how Foucault conceived of meditation as one of the essential modes of knowing and caring (contrasted with memory and method). As Rabinow (2003: 8) suggests, 'in the late antique world, meditation differed profoundly … from today'. If today's understanding 'carries the connotation of either an attention to inward states or of attempts to empty the mind', meditation in the antique was an exercise of thought that 'prepared one for the lifelong battle against external events' (2003: 8, 9). These exercises, Rabinow (2003: 10) argues, required the elaboration of a 'tool chest' which would aid one in accomplishing the 'complex task of facing the future'. For Rabinow (2003: 10) meditation hence implies the elaboration of tools in order 'to have them ready when needed'.

In *Praxis*, Kratochwil continues a style of theorizing – or 'mode of thinking', as he calls it (Kratochwil, 2019) – that he described in his previous book as meditation (Kratochwil, 2014). Similar to Rabinow, his quest is to elaborate tools for the 'battles' of the future, which he describes as situations of action, or as 'praxis'. Praxis is the conceptual workhorse in these meditations. In situations of praxis, theorizing and other practices come together (see Hellmann, Chapter 5, this volume). Contrary to Rabinow, Kratochwil situates his meditations in particular disputes that have revolved

around problems of praxis. He spends considerable energy in his meditations to question and disrupt prevailing and received tools, above all concepts of (ideal) theory. His goal is to disorder in order to forge new but loose connections responsive to situations of praxis (see Wiener, Chapter 13, this volume). To do so he establishes particular relationships to the reader. Following along the lines of Francis Bacon's aphoristic writing style, he forces one to think with him and leaves many of the consequences of his meditations to the reader's own interpretation. The reader has to actively participate, allowing her to add interpretation and meaning. *Praxis* is not only *about* praxis. Reading Kratochwil is itself a situation of praxis and a singular event.

As Mathias Albert (Chapter 11, this volume) remarks, in taking this course, and aiming at examining the 'silent and not so silent pre-suppositions of thought' (Kratochwil, 2018: 392), Kratochwil develops an understanding of theory that can illuminate praxis. It is an approach that does not provide answers but widens our understanding of topics (Brown, Chapter 6, this volume).

Method

In contrast to library workers, field workers situate themselves in a field of practice. They rely on data that they gain through observation and participation. The majority of current practice researchers in IR seek proximity in such a way and intend to theorize from the field. This has led to two styles: one in which method translates between theorizing and the practices studied, and another that is more creative and experimentalist and implies not only participation, but also intervention in a practice.

The methods style looks to anthropology and the ethnographic spectrum of methods. It sprang directly from the methods debate in the practice turn.[6] The core argument here is that theory and methods form tight packages, as most profoundly expressed by Davide Nicolini (2017). For him, practice theory provides 'a set of concepts (a theoretical vocabulary) and a conceptual grammar (how to link these concepts in a meaningful way) that allows us to generate descriptions' (Nicolini, 2017: 24). It provides a way to allow 'the world to speak through it' (Nicolini, 2017: 25). For the methods style, 'practice theory is not a theoretical project (in the traditional sense), but a methodological orientation supported by a new vocabulary' (Nicolini, 2017: 25).

In IR, spearheaded by Iver Neumann's work on diplomatic practice, participant observation emerged as the gold standard for practice researchers.

[6] See Pouliot (2013, 2014), Bueger (2014) and the contributions in Jonas et al (2017).

The argument here is that practices need to be studied as they are performed in real time. Participant observation allows for the recording of bodily movements and the capturing of activities that do not entail speech (Bueger, 2014: 399). Only this would allow one to reconstruct practices and their organization, and hence in turn to theorize them. Yet, in reality, the majority of IR researchers admit that participant observation is too demanding and difficult (Pouliot, 2013). In consequence, the discourse turned towards what kind of reconstructions are possible from qualitative interviews, or the study of texts and other artefacts (Pouliot, 2013; Bueger and Gadinger, 2018: chapter 6).

In a recent study paradigmatic of the methods style, Adler-Nissen and Drieschova (2019a) set out to study how technology affects the practice of diplomacy. Claiming to rely on an 'inductive methodology', they blend participant observation, the analysis of textual artefacts (draft diplomatic agreements) and interviews with diplomats (Adler-Nissen and Drieschova, 2019a: 536). The study describes in detail how European Union diplomats in Brussels use the 'track change' function to negotiate documents. They claim that 'more general patterns' are identifiable (Adler-Nissen and Drieschova, 2019a: 536). This allows them to scale up their argument not only to the level of contemporary diplomacy, but also to that of world politics more generally. It also provides a basis for positing new conceptual tools of general value – the concepts of affordance, shareability, visualization and immediacy. The article is noteworthy for its sophisticated use of methods as the core translation mechanism that allows the authors to transcend scale and theorize in such a way. The article itself includes not only a lengthy discussion of methods, but also a 20-page supplementary data file that describes research design, details of observations and interviews and how the interpretation and theorization processes unfolded. It details the work that was necessary to combine 'insights and empirical material from observations of negotiations … to develop a deeper and more complete understanding of the fascinating, but understudied phenomenon' (Adler-Nissen and Drieschova, 2019b: 1).

The article illustrates how to theorize with methods, but also the gaze of generalization that often goes along with the style. It aims to tell stories of broader and general scholarly significance, and often to address macro phenomena, such as neoliberalism or diplomacy. It is 'method' that fills the gap between theorizing and the practices studied and that translates between the two.

Experimentation

The fourth and final style emerged gradually out of dissatisfaction with the methods orientation. This concerned firstly the growing recognition

of the performativity of methods (Law, 2004). Understanding methods as acts of practical world making implies that whatever methods one chooses, one finds oneself always entangled in the practice under study. A researcher will always leave traces. Couldn't that recognition be turned from an ethical problem into a virtue in its own right? The other observation was that the growing range of studies based on participant observation or proxies continued to rely on an outsider and spectator position (Eikeland and Nicolini, 2011: 167). Instead of relying on external standards, would it make more sense to rely on the demands, rules or standards of the practice itself as guidelines? Would it be possible to immerse oneself fully into a practice without requiring a recourse to mechanisms, meditation or methods to control the fear of becoming natives? It is here where the distinction between theory and practice fully collapses under practice as the sole concept. Theorizing becomes an activity that is always already inscribed in any practice.

There is considerable variety in how such a style is practised. Some researchers advocate for action research (Eikeland and Nicolini, 2011) or have turned to design thinking and composition (Escobar, 2017; Austin, 2019), while others experiment with forms of engaging with and writing about practice (Bueger, 2015; Bogusz, 2017). For lack of a better term, I call this style of theorizing experimentation. Not every researcher adopting this style will agree with this label. Yet it adequately captures two important aspects. Theorizing is experimental in the sense that it tries out new ways of engaging with practitioners, of being a scholar, and of writing and presenting academic work. Experimenting is, moreover, a practice that aims at producing; scholars share a concern with making, creating, producing when they intervene in the practice. They want to add theory to the practice within which they immerse themselves. This can involve the making of designs, concepts, models or other tools to be injected in the practice.

To provide an example from my own implementation of the experimental style, in a research project on the global governance of piracy, an invited 'lessons learned' project provided the opportunity for developing new conceptualizations for what practitioners were doing (Bueger, 2015, 2020). It was an effort at 'helping practitioners to articulate what they already do, and therefore somehow know', as Eikeland and Nicolini (2011: 169) phrase it. Working with and for the practitioners allowed for understanding and articulating practices such as communique writing and institutional work and how they structure counter-piracy governance. This intervention was hence designed to capture basic international governance practices, as much as it was an attempt to assist practitioners 'to see beyond the current horizon of their own practice and expand the existing practice in new and groundbreaking directions' (Eikeland and Nicolini, 2011: 170).

Theorizing creatively

A recent article on the relation between theory and practices argues that 'theory must not go on holiday' (Grimmel and Hellmann, 2019). But where should it go instead? The authors' answer is that it should return to philosophy and seek counselling by pragmatists and Wittgensteinians. Is more philosophy the route to better theorizing? This chapter has argued for taking a different course. Perhaps theorizers in IR and elsewhere do need some holidays. This would provide the space to get away from an understanding of theory as rule following or as administering data, and to recover theorizing as a playful, intuitive, emotional and creative practice of sensibilities and care.

The turn away from worshipping grand theorists and the new uncertainty over the status and meaning of theory creates that opportunity. Practice theorizing provides a new opening. As argued, not all the scholars that can be clustered around the term 'practice turn', however, subscribe to the idea of reformulating and reworking received understandings of theory. Some aim at rescuing them by turning to the elaboration of grand vocabularies, or by applying such. Others argue that we should abandon the term and turn our attention to descriptivism and other tools, such as concepts and models. Yet a significant movement across the social sciences strives for transforming understandings of theory by turning attention to how it is made, and what kind of 'work' it implies.

This chapter has synthesized core themes developed by scholars making such a move and thinking through theory as practice. Drawing in views from sociology, anthropology and sciences studies has given us an idea of how our understanding of theorizing shifts and what is at stake. We leave the realm of epistemology and the idea of theorizing as following philosophical rules and enter sociological and historical understandings of the practice. It aims to re-centre from the isolated theorizing mind to the collective. Tacit knowledge, emotions and intuition matter, as do skills received through training in theorizing. To theorize is to form stable relations to a host of things, actors and statements. It is to make relations that last and that can travel across situations. It is to merge theory and practice and to translate the concept and the concrete into each other. The new multiplicity of styles of theorizing that appears requires our attention.

To provide a point of orientation how the diversity of new styles might be organized and how one can travel in different directions, I have provided a typology organized around two axes: whether theorizing is based in the library or the field, and whether it aims at generalizing and reducing mess, or singularization and leaving mess to mess. Four styles of theorizing come to the fore. Organized around mechanism, mediation, method and experimentation, they imply different kinds of work and forms of merging and intervening into theory and practice. It is the last, the experimenting

style, which has so far received the least attention in IR, yet it holds particular promise. Let's experiment!

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