

Frank Hillebrandt

# The resources in practice. A new notion of materiality in sociology<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT:** *Sociologies of praxis focus on the materiality of artefacts and human bodies. This turn to the materiality of social life is related to a new concept of physical objects and human bodies. Both are conceptualized as dynamic basics of social life. Thus, material is not faced statically; it is understood as moldable through practice. According to Bourdieu and Latour, this new approach on materiality implicates consequences for social theory in general. It rejects both main approaches in sociology: structuralism and action theory. Society is not a collective reality of structures in which the individual agents only act like cultural dopes (Garfinkel) in the matter of the structural conditions (for instance in role taking). On the other hand, the individual agent cannot be treated as the central unit of analysis. As all skills of the individual, including his ability to make rational choices, are socially formed skills, they are incorporated sociality. As an alternative to these traditional approaches – structuralism and agency – praxis theory centers the material occasions from which practice emerges. Beyond structuralism and action theory (agency), the sociological theory of praxis is intended as poststructuralist materialism. This new approach to sociality is widely discussed in the sociological scientific community. What we can consider for the last years is, in some way, a new turn to the material in sociology, a turn that archeology already made years ago. In this paper, I outline the main implications of this new notion of materiality in sociology. This could elicit new ideas for theoretical use of the terms ‘material’ and ‘resource’.*

**KEYWORDS:** PRACTICES, PRAXIS, MATERIALISM, POSTSTRUCTURALISM, SOCIOLOGY, SOCIAL THEORY

In order to investigate materiality within the sociology of praxis, we must define ‘praxis’ as everything that materially happens to us and around us. Whether it is the kiss between two lovers, the scientific discussion, the game of chess, or even distant practices such as the Monterey Pop Festival in 1967, events represent praxis; they are defined by sociological praxis theory as the essential subject matter. Beyond this mundane ascertainment, it must be examined how the sociology of praxis can be contextualized. In other words, what is the reason for approaching sociality as a practice, and not to determine something like action, communication or interaction? This question has considerable consequences for the methods employed by the sociology of praxis. Sociologies of praxis move with their definition of sociality, maintaining the concept of practice as their central question. In as much as the physical performance of the praxis can be captured, the execution of the praxis has a quality of its own. In this way, praxis theories have an essential and unavoidable insight, whereas previous sociological theories do not have the means to capture in adequate manner. That means: In the performance of the praxis, praxis is constituted as an emergent reality. In other words, the interaction between different parts of the praxis produces something peculiar, which is visible and can be experienced only in the execution of the

praxis. Therefore, sociological research has to be collected in order to adequately describe the praxis.

Thus, the sociological praxis research has to be conceptualized in contrast to structuralism and the action theory, from which structural properties and intended actions of sociality emerge. Praxis research doesn’t posit those theoretical assumptions as prerequisites, rather as the effects of the praxis. It is likewise shortsighted to reduce all praxis to certain structural principles appearing as the unmoving mover of the praxis. Those principles involved in the performance of the praxis for its continuity are, in turn, effects of past or current praxis, and therefore cannot be accepted as timeless, but must rather be investigated as poststructuralist in their historic conditionality and genesis.

To avoid the previously identified reductions of methodological holism and methodological individualism, sociological praxis research raises physical performance of practices, that is, the poststructuralist *Materiality of the Practice*, to its central subject. Sociological approaches to a theory of practice, therefore, propose a modified understanding of the human body and the material things of the practice. According to their claim, they want the dynamics and requirements of the social world to be simultaneously justified. They oppose holistic and individualistic theoretic-

cal systems and avoid using essentialist concepts to analyze the praxis by following a dynamic, evolving theoretical structure. They posit concepts like performance and articulation into the centre of the study of practices and forms of praxis, rendering the uprising of the praxis objectively understandable. They are focused on the exploration of the cultural manifestations of the practice, therefore on symbolic and cultural forms, which can to this extent be understood inasmuch as specific variants of the sociology of culture. At the heart of their theoretical versions of the concept of praxis, they place the materiality of cultural practices and forms of praxis together, therefore going beyond classical approaches to sociology of culture.

These briefly outlined principles, conceptualizing the praxis itself as an evolving reality, fundamentally compel social theory to recast the concept of practice. In *post-structuralist* materialism of the sociological praxis theory, practices can be not only speech acts (sayings), but rather must be a combination of speech acts; physical movements (doings) are understood through the handle of things made possible by associating socialized bodies and material artefacts (cf. Schatzki, 1996, p.89; Reckwitz, 2003; Hillebrandt, 2014, pp.58ff.). Practices are always material, meaning that they are connected in their implementation with bodies and things. Besides, they are only imaginable as follow-up practices. They are always conditional and do not emerge out of nowhere. They occur following practices that have already happened and through this, produce praxis as a full reality, which is formed from the concatenation of individual practices as events.

This initially very formal definition of praxis, and thereby of the object of sociological research, has far reaching consequences for the formation of sociological theory. This is closely connected to the new methods of sociology of praxis in focus. With the standing, sociological research is forced to identify the variable conditions within the praxis's implementation, and thus to investigate the coming together and interaction of socialized bodies with material artefacts and things as well as discursive and symbolic formations. In this way, methods of sociology of practice can be drawn through the definition of the object, so that the central claim of praxis research – combining theory and method in the research to capture the physical realization of the practice – can actually be implemented. To further clarify this central point of sociology of practice, I will carve out the most important consequences of the proposed definition of the object of praxis as a nexus of physically conceived practices concerning body and thing. This allows me to relate the principles derived from a sociology of practice to the question of the methods within this emerging and, presently, intensely discussed research direction of sociology.

## Objective-body and subjective-body<sup>2</sup>

The concept of the body lends itself to illustrate what it means to define praxis as the event-based concatena-

tion of physical practices. The concept of the body is the defining argument for praxis theories, particularly because the enforcement of practice has a special quality the body applies. With this, there are the reasons to capture the central meaning through sociological research. As we all know from everyday life, we are involved with our bodies in many situations in practical life. We are physically touched when we cheer our team in a soccer stadium. We are involved in practices such as singing, clapping, cheering (at a gate of our own team), mourning (in case of a goal by the opponent), ranting, etc., which, in this sense, wouldn't have occurred outside the stadium. Our bodies noticeably become a part of praxis that is underway. This physical presence we also feel more or less intensively in other situations is an important part of the situational practices and those currently taking place. The performance of the praxis is not possible without this physical presence. This applies not only to praxis that is especially strongly aligned with the body, such as physical violence of the State, sexuality, medical interventions, or sports, but also to any observable praxis. Even reading books, the Internet, writing and reading of SMS messaging, video conferencing and others, often referred to as examples of disembodied sociality praxis, are senseless without the involvement of the human body. Human bodies are therefore part of the materiality of all praxis.

Therefore, in the words of Pierre Bourdieu (2000, p.136), it is, "to construct a materialist theory which (in accordance with the wish Marx expressed in the *Theses on Feuerbach*) is capable of taking back from idealism the active side of practical knowledge that the materialist tradition has abandoned to it". Human bodies in movement are this active side of praxis, making them a central precondition for practices to ever occur. Moreover, the physical participation in practices is one important reason that something happens in the substantive performance of praxis. In the sense of Wittgenstein's regress arguments and through the implementation, physical participation is exhibited to have a special quality, because following the rule is just an exercise that can't be enforced by the rules as they are currently written. The physical, bodily participation in practices generates the special dynamics of the praxis, which would make the sociology of the praxis visibly different, compared to methodological structuralism and methodological individualism as well.

It is now important that the sociological theory of praxis and the human body are not considered outside of the social, almost as natural conditions of practice. They are, rather, products and sources of praxis at the same time. Who would seriously want to argue that the human body is not socially conditioned? To see this, look at the subtle differences in the physical presence of actors from privileged and less privileged strata of the population (cf. Bourdieu, 1979). Forced via sociality, disciplinary order of the body in space, which, as you know, is a central theme of Michel Foucault's (1975) work, can be visualized in day-to-day activities like searching for and fulfilling jobs. And on the other hand, who would deny that we all influ-

ence the course of social practices through our physical presence? Imagine that you suddenly enter a room where a manageable number of people are discussing a particular topic. To show that these two, theoretically rich aspects of sociology of the praxis oriented to the concept of the body are not mutually exclusive, but rather two sides of the same coin, is the great merit of sociological praxis theories. Human bodies are both material conditions and materialization of praxis. The human body is involved in every practice, conditioning it as substantive. At the same time, the human body is formed again and again by every practice because practices are inscribed (*habitus*). It is important to see that the first aspect is not possible without the second aspect, and vice-versa.

Thus, it is no less said, that there is no original, semi-natural subjective-bodily experience. The concept of the subjective-body must not be dropped yet. In a post-structuralist theory of praxis, existential physical experiences such as crying or laughing are not represented as original or natural, but as socio-culturally mediated. If the subjective body I cannot objectify (in contrast to the physical body) but only perceive in very special, indeed existential way as my being-in-the-world (as opposed to the body and experience), has caught somebody, captures him in connection to the sociality incorporated, hence the *habitus* as Bourdieu faces it. With the perceptual experience of the subjective body, I know myself as a person who stands in the world. The subjective body is, as Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1966, p.273) wonderfully says, “the congealed form of existence itself”.

With the subjective-body I sensuously experience the world and, through this perception, I am a real part of it. We are enabled to perceive not only by awareness, but also by the subjective-body. This bodily experience of perception is frequent – if we disgust or shame ourselves – surprising and rarely transparent for the one who does it, so that it appears as a natural event. And yet, such experiences are only possible because previous dispositions for these experiences were incorporated. Even disgust, which completely grips us, is commanded by bodily properties and therefore commonly appears as a primal, inherent bodily experience, not natural, as Mary Douglas (see 1988) and already before her Marcel Mauss (1978) showed us. Such bodily experiences are only possible if certain dispositions in the body have inscribed themselves. Such inscriptions are suddenly relinquished under the conditions of disgust, shame, laughter, and crying, somewhat like an eruption of our incorporated sociality.

Therefore, in the sociology of the praxis the human body is not only summated as an object of communication or of discourse. The physical body of the human is an accumulation of sociality, and the subjective-body allows that. With this, the human body positions himself in the world, and furthermore, he is a substantive expression of the performance, through which the praxis is possible. Performance and *habitus*, the physical expressions in praxis and the incorporation of the praxis, are closely but not mutually intertwined. They are rather closely inter-

twined because they are mutually dependent. The physical presence in the world is inconceivable without the subjective physical positioning in the world. This is done through the incorporation of dispositions in the course of praxis, which is essential to the performative implementation of the practice. The objective-body as a means of expression is relevant not only for the stage appearance or interview, but in any situation involving the socialized body. Even if not consciously used as a means of expressing something, it always expresses something in the performance of praxis, which can be connected with new praxis. So, a particular body posture can affect practices that would have been impossible without this posture. This also shows that the influence of each individual on the expansion of the praxis, so on the practical reality of performance, depends on which bodily experiences are crucial to the individual in certain situations. We feel physically uncomfortable when a situation is not familiar to us, otherwise, when we are a part of it, we feel good in it like a fish in the water, feeling especially natural.

In sociology of practices, the body is more matter as formed by sociality. It is not only the object of the discourse and result of social construction. It is not only a product of sociality, but also produces it. The body is, in its real bodilyness, an expression of practice, enabling the activities, and practices as events to occur. It is indeed exposed – especially in the present society – as discipline, but cannot be reduced to its mechanical functioning. This is because the human body is an important source of performance and articulation, without which practices are not possible. The expression forms of the body are contingent, although or precisely because they arise as practices from a relevant bodily experience. Yet, exactly for this reason the body is not a free means, which consciously allows itself to be brought to expression. Nonetheless it is a form of expression of praxis, because it generates material articulations of praxis, which cannot simply be conceived mechanically. The Cartesian dualism between body and mind is overcome in the post-structural materialism of sociology of praxis, in the sense that everything human is conceived physically as the body, without negating the activities that actually emerge from this human physique and are not less than a point of departure for the emergence of practices. This activity is now understood, but not without understanding other formations of the physique, which occur in the objects and artefacts of the praxis. Human physique is never the sole and exclusive point of departure in the emergence of practices in sociology of praxis. It also requires objects and artefacts.

## Material objects and artefacts

The sociology of praxis is not to be understood as solely based upon the praxis of the human body as a post-structural materiality. Indeed, such research fundamentally proceeds from the fact that all practices or experiences occur unto themselves. This basic assumption,

with respect to objects and artefacts, compels one to take up a completely new and essentially different position than previous forms of classical sociology. This position can, by example, be enumerated by the actor-network-theory propounded by Bruno Latour. He states that “we are in a relatively similar position to the things with which we deal with on a daily basis” (Latour, 2000). And it is exactly this that compels sociology to comprehend the elements that are self-evident in praxis in a new way. Instead of defining certain objective fields as a closed-off system – as sociological theories are wont to do – and thereby isolating them from each other, the sociological research of praxis should identify and highlight the manifold aspects of praxis as materialistic entities in order to connect them with each other. Classical theory portrays itself through opposition – the separation of worlds: nature and culture, or society and materiality. In contrast to classical theory, the implementation of a sociological theory of practice will not be defined by *difference*, but rather through a collection of otherwise disparate fields. The development of this hybrid collection will be implemented in the middle part of the theory. Insofar as it concerns the sociology of praxis – in particular, the formation Bruno Latour puts forth – there needs to be a hybridity of thought in a hybrid world.

The sociality is by no means a special substance that can be defined by a separation from other substances. Rather, sociality consists of several different material components that synergistically work together in a specific way. For Bruno Latour, the earlier sociological aims are a hindrance to the possibility of an appropriate research level; namely, to define the objects of study as wholly disparate characteristics does not allow for an appropriate level of research. The type of social science stating that sociality is a field of truth entirely apart from reality, means for Latour that the social can only be explained by the social. Worlds which are entwined in the daily occurrences of life are, as a result, separated. Consequently, the material objects and aspects that constitute Latour theory of praxis cannot be appropriately comprehended; for sociological structuralism gives material objects the power to rule us. In contrast, sociological actor-theory reduces them to mere tools. More specifically, they are reduced to instruments and are simply observed as an extension of the social agent’s individual will. Through these socially engineered articulations of material objects, the blending of materiality and sociality is avoided. Accordingly, the blending of essences appears either as omnipotent monsters that take away our will and freedom. Or they are only conceptualized as instruments reduced to mere “stuff” that is still assigned to the concept of intention. By comprehending the material artefacts and objects as equivalent to actants of sociality, despite their humanly actant nature, Latour abolished the separation of the collective assumption and provoked the classical tradition of sociology. Indeed, he did nothing short of suggesting a fundamentally new theory of sociology. Not without self-consciousness did Latour contest to

free sociology from its current dilemma, which for Latour was constituted by Durkheim. With the help of objects, the theory could explain the objects itself.

Latour’s new conception of the social – which wants to avoid an aporia – is accomplished via the concept of a network. According to his “new sociology” the praxis of various actants arose from the interconnectedness. The actor-networks, as coined by Latour, are the hybrid sources of every action, which can in turn be methodologically represented. Whether humanly-isolated or otherwise, such actants are incapable of creating such methods. In such an applied theoretical construct – which places the network-concept in the centre – the question of the type of interconnectedness of actants arises as the central problem of a sociological research. Thus, the main question is: What interconnects itself in such a way? Accordingly, only the answer to this question reveals some information about the praxis of a generative collective and its reality and is to be understood as a practical efficacy.

The social world is, according to Latour, to be conceived of as a process of material interconnections of entities. Latour pleaded that the collection of hybrids shall be viewed as the starting point of sociology; thus, the post-structural materialism is to be considered as a genesis of material. “Beyond nature and culture” (Descola, 2005), in connection with Latour, must be reconsidered as societal, in order – due to various distinctive forms of appearances – to be able to be appropriately viewed. Likewise, the social must be gathered anew in light of the already overcome conflicts with the classical problems, as well as the traditional controversies of sociology. Behind this mode of thought is an insight Georg Vielmetter developed: “There is only one material world. As such, there is only one field for objects, namely materialistic or physical. The human being is a part of this world.” (Vielmetter, 1998, p.20)

With regards to Bruno Latour’s formulations, concepts such as culture and discourse are artefacts we, by bracketing out nature and materiality, have produced in the social and cultural sciences (Latour, 1991). The classical difference between subjects, who of course formed the world, nature, or materiality itself, and objects that were in turn formed by these constituents must accordingly be overcome.

With this argument, the actor-network theory rejects a demarcation between subject and object, and instead requires one to think symmetrically, which is to say each component part – things, artefacts, and other imaginable components of society (even animals) – is equally important for the formation of the praxis. “Objects and subjects can never be associated with each other; human and inhuman beings however can.” (Latour, 2001, p.109) While the concept of the subject likewise implied that an object is controlled, “human and non-human beings can sum up each other, without the opposite having to disappear.” (ibid.) Precisely that is what is important to overcome the dichotomy of subject and object – to fully leave it behind. Only then, and with the help of a fundamental thesis of

symmetry, which principally equates the human and non-human actants and their meaning for the actor-network, can the collection and association of disparate entities of society be thought of as such. An “actor-network” is, as Latour previously formulated, “what is made to act by a large star-shaped web of mediators flowing in and out of it. It is made to exist by its many ties: attachments are first, actors are second.” (Latour, 2005, p.217)

With the examples from his small “sociology of daily objects” (Latour, 1996, pp.15ff.) – which is somewhat of an attack on the technological door-closers, which of course leads to the unavoidable changes that occur when walking through a door, or even the consequences that occur in one’s dealings with keys – Latour renders a formerly unacceptable argument for sociology plausible. More specifically, he makes a theory of action plausible and more easily understood. What becomes apparent through these examples is that the material objects and artefacts are important components for the emergence of praxis. An example would be the act of walking through a door without the technological apparatus of a door-closer. And who would seriously assert that an implementation without computer technology is similar to a praxis with associated technologies en masse. Therefore as a generality, the non-human actants are active components of all praxis. They are not formed and used by subjects as objects, nor are they to be understood as such because they have an active influence on the formation of praxis. However, it is equally false to conceive of the technological artefacts as monsters that determine sociality. Instead of this asymmetry in observing technological artefacts, sociology of praxis conceives material objects and technological components as the components of a formation of praxis. Through such a collaboration of human bodies those practices can be created and reproduced. Only, if this decisive step towards an understanding of materiality is made and only if the classical dichotomy between subject and object, nature and culture, man and society, body and spirit has been left behind, those new questions on the materiality of praxis can be asked. Similar to how the human body can be re-imagined through a research into praxis, material objects (provided they overcome the classical dichotomy of sociology) can become visible in an entirely new sense.

Firstly, the material objects themselves will become recognizable as components of practice, since they form and affect them. In that case they are artefacts. Furthermore, they will be wielded in all forms of practice. In the sociological theory of praxis they are – similar to the human body – no longer simply themes of communication, social constructs of discourse or meaningful projections of acting agents. Rather, they are material components of practices that actively take effect on the execution of praxis. For instance, the practice of reading a text does not pre-require only a human body that is able to visually represent texts, but also a materialistic text that can be read itself. The manifestation of material texts is rare, and thus, there is hardly an abundance of wide spread texts through prints. The practice of reading texts is completely

different; as if books in all areas of life would be extensively accessible due to the accessibility and affordability of pocket books for virtually every type of citizen (in large part due to public libraries). The practices of reading such material require once more a large incorporation of reading abilities. For example, this was established in Germany only approximately 200 years ago. Yet today it can essentially be expected by everyone and for everyone. Bodily and materialistic grounded practices are, like the example of reading demonstrates, completely influenced by the formation of material objects. Not only human bodies that are incorporated with society (for example represented through a regularly available ability to read) are necessary for the development of specific formations of practices. Additionally, the specific formations of material objects (for example represented through inexhaustible dissemination of books and other products of writings by way of publications and libraries) are *constitutive* components of meanings for that emergence, as well as the specific types of linkages of practices.

One sees this as anything but a banal question; certain material objects are required by everything, so that a particular completion of practices can arise as such. An important question is how definite objects can be guessed in a completion of praxis, as well as how components of executed praxis can become anything at all. How important the identification of a practically relevant thing and artefact is, is shown when we for example prepare a breakfast coffee: normally, the coffee comes from a far off region of the world to our coffee table. Accordingly, it is a global component to an observable practice. The question that confronts our research of praxis is like the necessary components of cooking coffee in the morning, and how human agents are enabled to wield these coffeemakers in a specific way, that we find – as if all of a sudden – an enjoyable drink on our table before ever realizing that we wanted to consume it in the first place.

As a result, the global becomes localized (Latour, 2005, pp.173ff.). It is not practice-oriented, whenever it is in general defined as a principle of the modern sociality what happens to several theories of globalization. If the global does not let it be situationally localized as a fact of practice, it is not available for a research of praxis. Furthermore, the coffee example excellently demonstrates that all becomes visible once the global is situationally localized. In addition to the working conditions of the coffee-plantation in Guatemala, more actants appear to bring us the coffee: ways and means of transportation, the corresponding personnel, a coffee/distribution system as well as a world market for coffee with prices and professional distributors, sellers, places of sale, whereby the list of active components of the realization of coffee-cookers in a German kitchen can finally be distributed.

With the two concepts association and actor-network, the movement of a collection lets itself be portrayed by various actants so that the emergence and linkage of material practices become visible as a dynamic process which can bring forth the actor-network as a formation of

practices. These practices moreover reveal themselves a definite time of effects in the form of effected practices. To this point, the material components of the actor-network create through and in their collection of activities. In order to describe this collection of actants, they must first be identified in the controversies of the facts. That is to say that they must be identified at the places of praxis, where they (the collection) appear as new, and create a high expenditure of associative praxis in the form of communication and articulation. Actants becoming controversial facts penetrate into the formation of praxis and demand association. Nonetheless, for many things such a reconstruction is difficult because they have become uncontroversial facts of our praxis. Now, it is of course interesting, but only the paths to its arrival investigated the self-evident nature of the formation of praxis because the effects of practice let itself be understood only proximally.

The important question then is how these actants, which appear to us today as self-evident – came into the actor-network, and how they as facts – and, as material objects that do something – are associated. An example from the formation of the practice of rock and pop would be the electric guitar: first and foremost it must be understood as a lead instrument, so that it can exercise its immense effect on the formation of rock and pop. If one simply follows the path of this actant, one will quickly create a descriptive explanation like this association through the arrival of the electric guitar. Moreover, it is important to base these descriptions on actual situations of practice. For only then the implementations of praxis, which are connected to the actants, can be appropriately investigated. With regard to the strategy of recognition, we come to the methods of situational analysis put forth by Adele Clarke (2005). The claim of such a fixed socio-cultural research into the formation of praxis is nothing more than that of “Grounded Theory”: to push through onto an actual ground of phenomenon, and to describe satisfactory forms through categories. The post-structural materialism of a socio-cultural research of practices strives instead towards a meaningful description of the formations of praxis, which can be carried out with the help of tracing the paths of associations from material objects in the actor-networks. It, moreover, deals with “tracing the task and connections” (Latour, 2005, p.426). That means nothing less than that we, as Latour formulates, “study anew in order to understand what we are made out of” (ibid.). The sociology of praxis holds – as it should become clear here – that isn’t necessarily self-evident what society is consisted of. It is not defined as substantial as communication, action, interaction, or a similar, yet mysterious, substance. This has worldwide consequences for the definition of sociological objects, which Latour formulated two times in his fundamental works on actor-network theory. “To be social is no longer a secure and unproblematic characteristic, but rather a movement.” (ibid., p.21). “Social is not a place, a thing, a domain, or a kind of stuff but a provisional movement of new associations.” (ibid., p.238).

For the sociology of praxis, the social world is a constant movement of a collection of actants, who create in their interactions practices, and change themselves again and again during such a process; they complete themselves or are substituted by new forms or actants. The praxis consists of variability. This is moreover plausible when we see which actants have determined the formation of praxis just 50 years before. Who could have guessed 50 years ago how immense the practices of association would be shaped by computer technology? Already this illuminating example makes clear that this sociological research into praxis must once more ask the most important questions anew: What the components of praxis are and how these components collaborate. The central task is identify as many actants as possible, and investigate their associated connections and effects on praxis. It thus deals with the answer to the question of how one can make such an association Latour placed at the beginning of his sociology of an actor-network once more traceable. The points of the approach to this type of sociological research are the various controversies surrounding facts that do something to the world. Indeed, this is precisely the argument that material things can be identified as actant, which of course create new uncertainties in the formation of praxis and defeat themselves in silent articulations.

## **Body-object-associations and the principles of sociology of practice**

What have been previously stated points to something very important: first the interplay of the material body and material objects produces the observable praxis as a reality. If the praxis is researched, in this way, as a materialistic and bodily constituting process, then one avoids the scholastic regulation of operative intentions as well as of structural properties. Instead of this, it becomes possible to determine the conditions for the origin of complex and variable practices, without thereby placing theoretical logics over the logic of practice. Only in this way does praxis become visible as a reality. A sociological theory of praxis attaches, as a result, a definition of the body involved in praxis, in order then to relate this to a second, closely connected step for the definition of materialistic components of praxis. In this manifold nexus of conditions for practices, all components must be set variably in principle, in order to avoid reduction in the definition of practices that can chain themselves to praxis forms. Thus, not only the forms of praxis, but also the conditions for the emergence of forms of praxis can be conceived dynamically to a large extent. For this reason, praxis cannot be understood as an apparatus that is always reproduced in the same way, in other words deterministically. With this argument, praxis theory does not avoid the classic problem of sociology, which one could designate as the actor-structure problem, in which it is resolved structurally or

actor-theoretically (see only Giddens, 1979, pp.193ff.). The sociology of praxis proves exactly in this, placing this problem in the centre point of research of practices and praxis forms, in which it is reformulated as an association between socialized bodies and material artefacts and objects. Thus, they are taken strictly as only relevant and existent if they are perceived bodily. To this extent, all objects are material artefacts, in fact unimaginable without human activity, answering the question of where microbes were ascribed before they were associated in the experimentation of Pasteur with large reactions in the praxis formations (cf. Latour, 2000, p.175). On the other hand, in the sense of Latour's thesis of symmetry, to which I expressively connect myself, the human bodies are not conceivable without artefacts either. They are only existent through the association with material objects. Here, one can apply the Pasteur's example: what would Pasteur be as a researcher without microbes? The material artefacts are accordingly no less involved with the product of praxis formations as with human bodies. In order to research praxis, the diverse aspects without which practice would not have emerged must be brought together. These include not only the human body, but also material artefacts and objects, without which practices could not be implemented. The way that this combination of physical bodies and material artefacts becomes a product with its own quality allows itself to be determined paradigmatically as follows: the sociology of praxis assesses practices in its research, which are determined as *material events*. They are the final elements from which praxis is formed, in which practices interlink themselves. They are not thinkable without presuppositions, thus they emerge from nothing, because the product of praxis only allows itself to be conceived if practices chain themselves together, if they thus connect themselves to the practices already produced. With this *principle of events* thus composed, sociological praxis theory is simultaneously debarred – that practices can be conceived as epiphenomena of a totality of the same nature as always (cf. also Brandom, 1998), because they are not exclusively the expression, but rather primarily the point of departure for the formation of praxis. Since the praxis formations can only be established through practices, they are as well not a timeless entity, but instead “zones of intensity” of praxis generated through practices (Deleuze and Guattari, 1992, p.37). If practices indeed stand for something, and thus can be seen as the expression of praxis formations, they are always at the same time the events that form praxis. For this reason, they cannot be conceived as a component of previously defined structure alone, because this would not be just in their character as events (cf. Laclau and Mouffe, 2000, p.151).

In connection with Wittgenstein's argument of rule regression (1984, p.345; pp.286-290), content is given to this very formally defined concept of praxis, in which the material composition of practices is theoretically defined. This is because practices are always *bodily* and *materialistically* anchored, because every practice only emerges

in this way and can be linked to other practices, so that the *peculiar execution of reality of praxis* emerges, which has not an abstract but rather a *material quality*. This paradigmatic theoretical decision, which can be defined as the *principle of materiality* of sociological praxis theory, has considerable consequences for the development of theory of sociology of praxis. It compels, as retraced here, a new concept of the human body as well as a new concept of material objects.

Acts of speech such as articulations, screams, talking and contributions to conversation, are just as much practices as acts of movement – defined gestures, walking, driving a car or employing other means of transportation, movements in dance or the use of technical devices etc. – always bodily, thus proceed from the physical body as a source of praxis, and simultaneously act upon the body, where they are incorporated and thus a part of the objective bodily experience. Physical bodies, which are not only conceived as objects of communication or discourse, are always doubly relevant in sociological praxis theory: on the one hand, as a source of praxis, because practices emerge from human bodies, which link and consolidate themselves to praxis forms and formations. On the other hand, as a reservoir of sociality, because praxis inscribes itself in them, which then, as a result, becomes visible as an objective bodily experience – thus as *habitus* – expressive in a somewhat new way. Sociality and its symbols embodies itself through the objective bodily experience, which is always connected to the expression and thus the performance, also and exactly whenever the expression and performance are actually not intended, if the body thus is deployed as a form of expression, like in dance or with other stage appearances, but also in the daily stylization of the body through clothing, tattoos or behaviors. The objective body experience which engages us regularly – incidentally also with stage appearances in stage fright – and thereby defining our role in praxis, is always a product of sociality in the sociology of praxis. In other words, the manifold aspects of the human body, thus incorporation, habitual expression, embodiment, and objective body experience, are conditioned reciprocally in a sociology of praxis, so that the concepts of “Körper” (objective-body) and “Leib” (subjective-body) are not, as often happened in the history of thought, opposed to one another. Even less tenable is a differentiation between body and sense in such a bodily principle. The poesies of actors always proceed from their totality; it is always a product of the socialized body. Cognitive and emotional aspects of the body are not separated, because then the false impression is given that cognition could control emotion. The extent to which such a conception of the human body is unrealistic is regularly shown in the performance of praxis, even if only in situations in which emotions should be restrained – thus somewhat in a scientific discussion of field –, they regularly provide subtle manner. This example illustrates the grounding paradigm of every sociological praxis theory, that practices are always *bodily* anchored. The

poesies coming from actors are always connected to the socialized body (cf. Bourdieu, 1992, p.66), it is only to be understood cognitively, so that it in no sense defines human intentions in an a-historical manner. It would be just as nonsensical to conceive of human bodies as an ahistorical nature. They are always socialized, because without this socialization they are simply not capable of life. Also if, as anthropologists might object, this does not hold true for the vital scream of the newborn child, it is nonetheless necessary and sufficient for sociological praxis research to paradigmatically determine that the bodily components of practices are conceived as habitual skills of socialized bodies, which first are established in the confrontation with practice, as manifold forms of expression and activity. Bodies are, in the *post-structural materialism* (cf. Hillebrandt, 2015b) of sociological praxis theory, transforming products of praxis, impossible without practices because they emerge from them. Creative activities are not negated with this *body principle*, but rather conceived as the result of objective body experience, whose conditions are manifold and must be investigated by sociological praxis research in order to be able to investigate the creative aspect of praxis, thus the emergence of the new, proportionally as a product of the implementation of practices. This dynamic process does not adequately capture praxis if it is not observed that all practices are anchored constitutively as *materialistic*. The reason is that carrying out praxis cannot be conceived in which only human bodies are only associated with one another. Practices are always, even in the consummation of love between two naked bodies on a lonely beach, connected to material objects and artefacts; without them they could not emerge. Just as these are respective to the human body, sociological praxis theory is *post-structurally* respective to the axiomatic grounding presumption: Material objects and artefacts are not timeless – they are products of praxis, which again returns to the emergence of practices. Also considered respectively to this *material object principle* of social praxis theory is the notion that this sociological direction of research does not satisfy the immaterial defining of these things; in that, they are merely conceived as constructions of discourse or themes of communication. Instead, sociological praxis theories see the material constitution of all praxis as an important point of departure, conceived as a proper reality of performance. And this pertains self-evidently and also respectively to material objects and artefacts. These are products of the conditions for the emergence of practices, which only become a reality if socialized body and material artefacts are associated in specific ways. If these *body-object associations* are adjusted, the question of how the associations are possible is an important question of praxis research. In order to answer this question, it must be clarified, how artefacts come into association with socialized bodies, thus, how they have been made into important products of praxis. The *material object principle* of sociological praxis theory thus compels research *to follow the material objects of praxis, thus seeing them no longer*

*as a given, but rather to inquire into their path in the new formation of praxis.* In this way, manifold impetus of the emergence and performance of practices become visible. And only this identification of this *manifoldness of sources of praxis* allows shedding light on the *particular quality of the implementation of praxis.*

In order to expand the theoretical means of sociology of performance of practices, it is necessary to have a concept which is set at the level of practices and thus in connection to Bourdieu (1979) can only be understood as a *practical sense that can only be implemented in praxis.* The *principle of sense* of sociological praxis theory thus does not stand in opposition to material theory construction, but instead strengthens it. The reason is that sense can only be practically experienced, which also holds for the sociological observer of praxis. Sense is therefore not to be abstractly located in abstract in nontransparent consciousness of actors. Sense is also just as little something ahistorical, which is already at hand before praxis. Sense emerges in praxis and enables the association between bodies and artefacts. Only once material objects are ascribed to the socialized body does the handle of things emerge, which generates *body-thing associations.* Sense thus manifests itself in the relationship between socialized bodies and material things. It is documented as incorporation and reification. Both of these *modi* of sense are made compatible in praxis, through the accomplishment of practices. In this process, cultural forms and symbols are the material concretions of sense, which make the association between bodies and objects things more perceivable. Thus, the red flag is seldom no demand to place defined, socialized bodies in movement. The promotional emblem also leads people to practice a certain mode of consumption. And the specific symbolization of leading positions in an organization has consequences for the practices, if these symbols are also inscribed as corresponding dispositions in the body. Cultural forms and symbols are thus important agents in the production of body-thing associations. This is the central meaning of the sense principle of sociological theory of praxis. This is shown moreover, for example, in Pierre Bourdieu's sociology of social inequality (1979).

In the last step of development of the most important principles of a sociological praxis theory, the following factor must be emphasized: practices also create *formations of practices*, which are conceived as zones of intensity of praxis in perpetuity and as always occurring anew. This *formation principle* does not oppose the *event principle* of social praxis theory, because a formation of practices is not conceivable without practices as events, through which it must always form itself anew. With this *formation principle*, sociological praxis theory emphasizes the notion *that rules of praxis are only understood on a continuing basis, if they are investigated in their formations.* Here, sociological praxis theory leaves behind the theory of functional differentiation, because praxis formations, which can arise from and around materialistic themes, are not conceived as pure spheres in which only



a clearly definable – and discernible from other praxis forms – form of practices is constituted. In complete opposition to this, specific praxis forms and formations of praxis are only conceivable if the collection of different body-object associations is identified and investigated. Only then it can be seen that praxis formations, which are in their practical discharge of involved socialized bodies regularly indicated through articulations such as medicine, rock music, education or scientific research. These consist of diverse bodily, materialistic, symbolic and discursive components, which cooperate in their rhizomatic ways, thus in deep and manifold rooted formations. This is just as plausible in medicine as in the praxis formations of rock and pop. Conceived in the long term, these dynamically forming zones of intensity of praxis are investigated without functionalistic or structuralistic connotations *in their emergence*, without prematurely ascribing non-historical or generalizing consequences that would establish a general function or structure of praxis formations. The sociology of praxis is thus completely different from a situationalism (cf. Schmidt, 2012, p.204), which restricts itself to only the actual realization of practices in specific situations. Certainly, practices are, with good reason, not understood as forms of expression of overly situational structures. They can, however, actualize quite well as praxis formations. Entirely in this sense, then, the assignment of sociology of praxis is to find a reason why the actualization of defined formations of praxis as well as the practical manifestation of more actual, very renitent unequal structures happens. Yet, then it is just as obvious that the apparatus of social praxis theory, here presented as conceptually bundled, seeks and succeeds in capturing the *dynamic of formation of praxis*. Sociological praxis theory is, in its form systematized by me, a sociological theory of change and dynamics.

Thus, the post-structural materialism of a sociology of praxis forms itself around the *event, materiality, body, object, sense, and formation principles* as a sociological theory, which simultaneously justifies the *dynamics and regularities* of praxis, in which praxis is conceived of as a material reality of implementation, which always occurs anew as a real exception in hospitals, concert halls, universities, at kiosks and beaches, in forests or on the street. That praxis occurs can be presupposed, as it takes place, is however a question of sociology of praxis that remains to be clarified. The systematically defined concepts here are to be understood just as the emerging theory containing its paradigms – as instruments whose implementation is to be conceived as a specific nexus of practices which are sociologically substantial. And these instruments must be constantly reflected and extended, so that sociology of praxis can also investigate current performances of praxis. Here, the sociological praxis theory, in my opinion, must not fall back upon the principles I have derived, because then they would not just claim the particular quality of uprising of praxis, and therefore could no longer be understood as sociological praxis theory.

And precisely this paradigmatic approach of sociological praxis theory for researching sociality is hence an important reason for the development of new empirical methods or, better yet, an entire ensemble of methods, with which the sensual-physical of the praxis can appropriately conceive of the principles of sociological praxis theory. For if the particular quality of performance of praxis is to be captured, it is necessary not only to have a precise determination of objects, as attempted here, but also a methodical instrument proper for the determination of objects. This cannot remain confined to the classical methods of qualitative social research; it requires at least an expansion to the inquiry of bodily and other materialistic elements of praxis which are constitutive for practical realization. Here, the question of how dated practices of bodily and materialistic inquiry can be properly, empirically ascended, is first to be discussed, because a sociology of praxis self-evidently cannot be sufficient for researching practices only completed in the present, which can be comprehended in participating observers (cf. Hillebrandt, 2015b). This problematic compels a methodical discourse of the relationship between discourse and praxis, because discourse can relate to past practices, without depicting them as self-evidently congruent. Discourses are consequently always good sources for research of past practices. An analysis of discourse must, however, in the sense of praxis research, at least be expanded to the analysis of artefacts and socialized bodies. In order to exclusively analyze discursive formations, the object of sociology of praxis is not suitable. The formations must be placed in relation to the material aspects that praxis is concerned with, so that manifold and variable pictures of formation of praxis can appear. The point of departure of this empirical work are, ideally in praxis research, historical events, which can be investigated in their emergence as performance of praxis in which the diverse products of the event are identified and their cooperation traced. The ascertainment of necessary data is not confined by any border. It is only important to obtain the material formation of praxis with the help of respective methods in view. Situational analyses, multi-sited ethnography, actor-network research and *habitus* analysis are only four of the methods of approach which should be evaluated and expanded, in order to supply sociological praxis theory with empirical material, thereby bringing further development of this direction of theory. A separation of theory and empirical methods will, as already made clear in the beginning of this paper, be strictly avoided in sociology of praxis. In praxis research, a sociological theory is never possible without empirical work, and on the other hand, the empirical work is only possible with the help of a theoretical instrument to determine what should be investigated. Research simply cannot be begun without having theoretically determined what should be investigated.

## Notes

- 1 This paper is based on a German paper I wrote in 2015 (Hillebrandt, 2015c) and gives an essential overview on my way of doing sociology of practices as I outlined in a German book in 2014 (Hillebrandt, 2014). I would like to thank Erin Altman very much for translation and other help with the English language.
- 2 There is no useful translation between the German words 'Körper' and 'Leib'; 'Körper' means the objective body, which we can use in situations, while 'Leib' means the subjective body that surprises us in everyday life when we have to cry without willing it or when we have to laugh without willing it (see for the distinction between "Körper" and "Leib" in this sense Plessner 1982). Further on I will use the English words objective-body (Körper) and subjective-body (Leib) to mark the distinction between 'Körper' and 'Leib', which both have to be overcome in sociology of practices.

## Bibliography

- Blok, A. and Jensen, T. E., 2011. *Bruno Latour: Hybrid Thoughts in a Hybrid World*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Bourdieu, P., 1979. *La Distinction: Critique Sociale du jugement*. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit.
- Bourdieu, P., 1992. *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford: University Press.
- Bourdieu, P., 2000. *Méditations pascaliennes*. Oxford: University Press.
- Brandom, R.B., 1998. *Making it Explicit: Reasoning, Representing and Discursive Commitment*. Harvard: University Press.
- Clarke, A.E. 2005. *Situational Analysis. Grounded Theory After the Postmodern Turn*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F., 1992. *Tausend Plateaus*. Berlin: Merve.
- Descola, P., 2005. *Par-delà nature et culture*. Paris: Editions Gallimard.
- Douglas, M., 1988. *Reinheit und Gefährdung*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Foucault, M., 1975. *Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la prison*. Paris: Edition Gallimard.
- Giddens, A., 1979. *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure, and Contradiction in Social Analysis*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Hillebrandt, F., 2004. Die verborgenen Mechanismen der Materialität. Überlegungen zu einer Praxistheorie der Technik. In: J. Ebrecht, F. Hillebrandt, eds. *Bourdieu's Theorie der Praxis. Erklärungskraft – Anwendung – Perspektiven*. 2. Aufl. Opladen/Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, pp.19-45.
- Hillebrandt, F., 2014. *Soziologische Praxistheorien. Eine Einführung*, Wiesbaden: Springer.
- Hillebrandt, F., 2015. Die hybride Praxis. In: Th. Kron, ed. *Soziale Hybridität – Hybride Sozialität*. Weilerswist: Velbrück.
- Hillebrandt, F., 2015a. Die Soziologie der Praxis als poststrukturalistischer Materialismus. In: H. Schäfer, ed. *Praxistheorie. Ein soziologisches Forschungsprogramm*. Bielefeld: Transcript.
- Hillebrandt, F., 2015b. Vergangene Praktiken. Wege zu ihrer Identifikation. In: A. Brendecke, ed. *Praktiken der Frühen Neuzeit*. Köln, Weimar, Wien: Böhlau.
- Hillebrandt, F., 2015c. Was ist der Gegenstand einer Soziologie der Praxis?. In: F. Schäfer, A. Daniel, F. Hillebrandt, eds. *Methoden einer Soziologie der Praxis*, Bielefeld: Transcript, pp.15-36.
- Laclau, E. and Mouffe, C., 2000. *Hegemonie und radikale Demokratie. Zur Dekonstruktion des Marxismus*. Wien: Passagen Verlag.
- Latour, B., 1991. *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes: Essai d'anthropologie symétrique*. Paris: Editions la Découverte.
- Latour, B., 1996. *Der Berliner Schlüssel. Erkundungen eines Liebhabers der Wissenschaft*. Berlin: Akademie Verlag.
- Latour, B., 2000. *Die Hoffnung der Pandora. Untersuchungen zur Wirklichkeit der Wissenschaft*. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp.
- Latour, B., 2001. *Das Parlament der Dinge. Für eine politische Ökologie*. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp.
- Latour, B., 2005. *Reassembling the Social. An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford: University Press.
- Mauss, M., 1978. Techniken des Körpers. In: ders: *Soziologie und Anthropologie*, Band II, Gabentausch, Todesvorstellung, Körpertechniken, Frankfurt/M. et al.: Ullstein, pp.199-220.
- Merleau-Ponty, M., 1966. *Phänomenologie der Wahrnehmung*. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Plessner, H., 1982. Vom Lachen und Weinen. In: Helmut Plessner. *Gesammelte Schriften VII*. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, pp.201-387.
- Reckwitz, A., 2003. Grundelemente einer Theorie sozialer Praktiken. Eine sozialtheoretische Perspektive. In: *Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, 32, pp.282-301.
- Schatzki, T.R., 1996. *Social Practices. A Wittgensteinian Approach to Human Activity and the Social*. Cambridge (Ma.) University Press.
- Schmidt, R., 2012. *Soziologie der Praktiken. Konzeptionelle Studien und empirische Analysen*. Berlin: Suhrkamp.
- Vielmetter, G., 1998. *Die Unbestimmtheit des Sozialen. Zur Philosophie der Sozialwissenschaften*. Frankfurt/M. and New York: Campus.
- Wittgenstein, L., 1984. *Tractatus logico-philosophicus, Tagebücher 1914–1916, Philosophische Untersuchungen*, Werkausgabe Bd. 1. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp.