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Individuals in practice, practices in individuals: The return of embodied agents

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INDIVIDUALS IN PRACTICES, PRACTICES IN INDIVIDUALS

Anders Rhiger Hansen

*Aalborg University
ESA RN5 Sociology of Consumption:
Bonding beyond boundaries
2023 Mini Midterm Meetings in Helsingborg
August 28, 2023*



AALBORG
UNIVERSITY

Individuals in practice (theory)

Reckwitz, 2002: practitioners...

- “...are body/minds who ‘carry’ and ‘carry out’ social practices”
- “...’consist in’ the performance of practices [as body/minds]”
- are “[..]the unique crossing point of practices”

Warde, 2005: agents...

- ... have **personal trajectories** within practices (practice careers)
- ...in different situations do the same activity differently, and thereby practices become “[...] internally differentiated”
- ... “[c]ontrasting understandings, levels of practical competence, and degrees of involvement generate behavioural variation”
- ... “[...]recruitment to a practice becomes a principal explanatory issue”

Shove et al., 2012: individuals...

- “[...] are constantly taking up and dropping out of different practices as their lives unfold” , therefore transferable skills: mastered in one setting and carried over and reproduced in others



The fellowship of the 'ring' (*Ring = practices*)

- ▶ Action is routinized
- ▶ Materiality shaping practices
- ▶ Distributed agency (objects and human bodies)
- ▶ Decentering individuals
- ▶ Social practices as study objects
- ▶ Etc.



The two 'towers'

Embodied in humans

(Bourdieu legacy)

→ emphasizing practices as embodied in human (bodies), also know as habits/habitus and dispositions

(Warde 2005; Lizardo 2021a+b; Wilhite & Wallenborn 2013; Lahire 2011)

Embedded in materiality

(Latour legacy)

→ emphasizing practices as embedded in things, technology and infrastructure

(e.g. Shove et al, 2012; Shove et al., 2015).

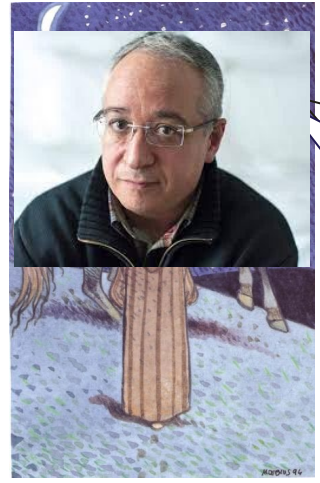
EMBODIED
UNDERSTANDING

EMBEDDED
UNDERSTANDING

(Jacobsen & Hansen, 2019; Reckwitz, 2002a; Sahakian & Wilhite, 2014)

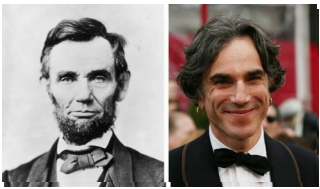


EMPHAZISING THE EMBODIED (E)



"Action (practice, behaviour, etc.) is [...] the meeting point of individual **past experiences**, of habits, of manners, and of a present **social situation**" (p. 66).

LEE STRASBERG
→ FULLY INHABITING THE ROLE OF THE CHARACTER



STANISLAVSKI
→ EXPERIENCING THE ROLE



MEISNER
→ ROOTED IN REPETITION AND CONCENTRATING ON IMMEDIATE ENVIRONMENT

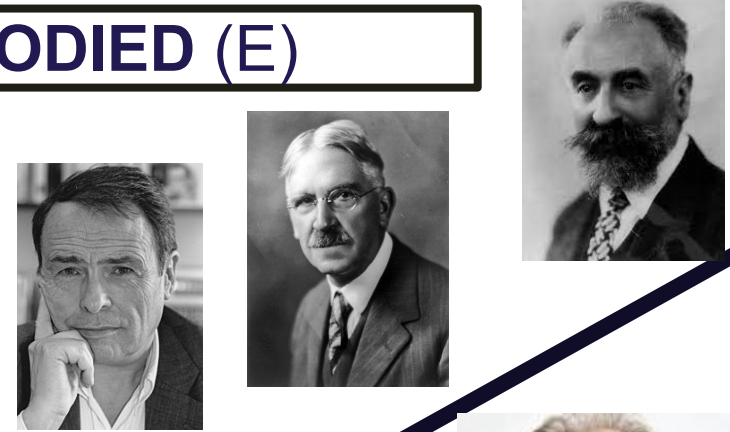


EMPHAZISING PRACTICES (P)

EMBODIED PRACTICES (EP)

- INDIVIDUAL AGENTS
- EMBODIED EXPERIENCES
- EMBODIED LEARNING
- INTERNALISATION
- HABITUS

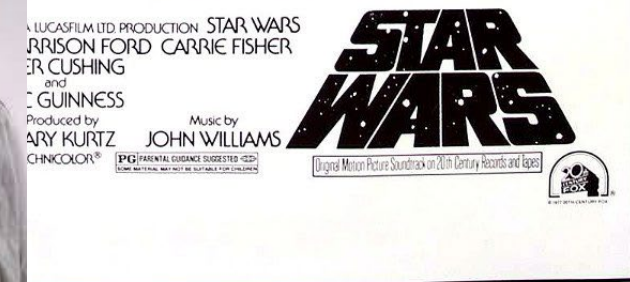
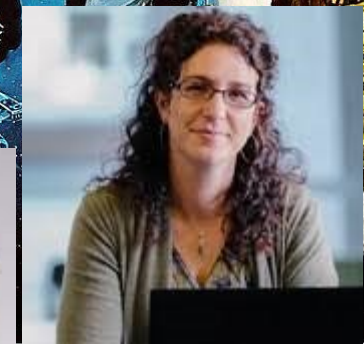
- SOCIAL PRACTICES
- PRACTICE TRANSFORMATION
- PRACTICE INTELLIGIBILITY
- PRACTICAL UNDERSTANDING



"There is no such thing as learning [...] the only thing see is the transformation in practices" (Practice Theory Podcast #3)

Star Wars: A New Hope

- ▶ **HABITUS:** Acquired (and accumulated) system of dispositions (Bourdieu, 1990; Lizardo, 2004, Lahire, 2020, 2011)
- ▶ **EMBODIED UNDERSTANDING(S)** (or knowledge) (Hansen & Jacobsen, 2020; Jacobsen & Hansen, 2019; Wallenborn & Wilhite, 2014; Wilhite, 2016; Warde, 2005)
- ▶ **MEANINGS** and **COMPETENCE** (Shove et al., 2012 + others)
- ▶ **EMBODIED PRACTICE(S)** (Hansen, 2018; Macnaghten, 2003; Niewöhner and Beck, 2017).
- ▶ **PRACTICE MEMORIES** (Maller and Strengers, 2018, 2013)
- ▶ **EPIGENETIC MEMORY** (Maller, 2016), see also ‘bodies as more-than-human assemblages’ (Maller, 2019)



So...

- “The return of the embodied agent”, but ‘**return**’ is too much and not the right word
- New title: **Revisiting embodied learning**

(Lahire 2003:340)



➔ Unconscious imitations of the actions of others can result in **sharing the same bodily automatisms** and practical skills as well as shared practices

(Lizardo, 2009, 2004, with reference to e.g. Bourdieu, 1990, and Piaget 1970).

➔ “[...] mirror neurons appear to **encode practical information about objects in the world** (i.e. not what objects “are” [...] but instead “**what they are for**” [...] in a practical embodied sense”

➔ “In [...] each ‘new’ situation that presents itself, the actor will act by ‘mobilizing’ **embodied schemes** that the **situation** calls forth” (p. 66)

➔ “it seems that the new situation induces them (occupants) to feel that their habits have become strange to them”



Lizardo



But there's more...



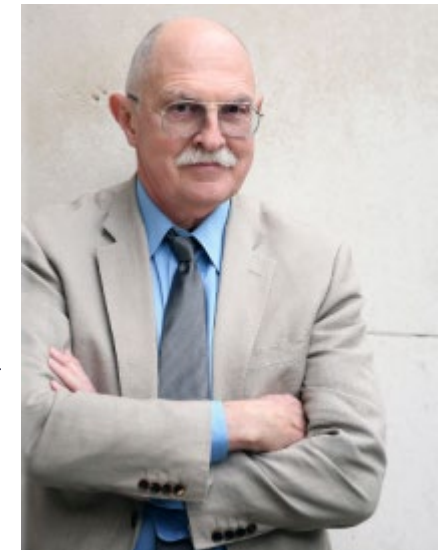
"There are indications that mirror mechanisms do not just happen when you observe other people, but also when **you experience art and architecture**. Scientists call these processes inside our brains and bodies '**embodied simulation**'"

Certain processes in the brain are identical whether **you** reach for a peanut or **observe** visually someone else doing it (Rosa, 2019 with reference to Rizzolatti & Sinigaglia (2008) and Bauer (2006):

- Acts (such as grasping, holding, crushing etc.) are not inherent, but **learned** or **acquired**.
- Processes of resonance apply not only to **movements**, but also **feelings** (e.g. disgust, fear, pain etc.), actions and their **underlying intentions**.

"Humans are hard-wired to get caught in a **mutual focus** of **intersubjective attention**, and to **resonate emotions** from one body to another in **common rhythms**"

"We have evolved to be hyper-attuned to each other emotionally, and hence to be especially **susceptible** to the **dynamics** of **interactional** situations"



Randall Collins (2009)

How do practices reproduce?

	A) Human “interactions”	B) Object “relations”
(Likely) mental processes	1) Reflexive <i>(conscious interaction)</i>	
	2) Non-reflexive <i>(unconscious/ ‘mirror’ neuron mechanisms)</i>	

How do practices reproduce?

	A) Human “interactions”	B) Object “relations”
(Likely) mental processes	<p>A1) Social interaction (interpersonal)</p> <p><i>E.g., processes of learning, education and nurture</i></p>	<p>B1) Interacting with objects</p> <p><i>E.g., <u>handling</u> or using technology, infrastructure, and things in practices</i></p>
	<p>2) Non-reflexive (unconscious/ ‘mirror’ neuron mechanisms)</p>	

How do practices reproduce?

	A) Human “interactions”	B) Object “relations”
(Likely) mental processes	<p>1) Reflexive <i>(conscious interaction)</i></p> <p>A1) Social interaction (interpersonal)</p> <p><i>E.g., processes of learning, education and nurture</i></p>	<p>B1) Interacting with objects</p> <p><i>E.g., <u>handling</u> or using technology, infrastructure, and things in practices</i></p>
	<p>2) Non-reflexive <i>(unconscious/ ‘mirror’ neuron mechanisms)</i></p> <p>A2) Embodied imitation (Motor representations)</p> <p><i>E.g., observing parents or peers perform practices in a certain way</i></p>	

How do practices reproduce?

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	<p>A2) Embodied imitation (Motor representations)</p> <p><i>E.g., observing parents or peers perform practices in a certain way</i></p>	<p>B2) Embodied simulation</p> <p><i>E.g., performing practices in particular architecture, infrastructure or buildings</i></p>

Almost final slide

- ▶ Energy research tends to ...
 - ... overlook “unconscious learning”
 - ... overstate the importance of “individual learning”

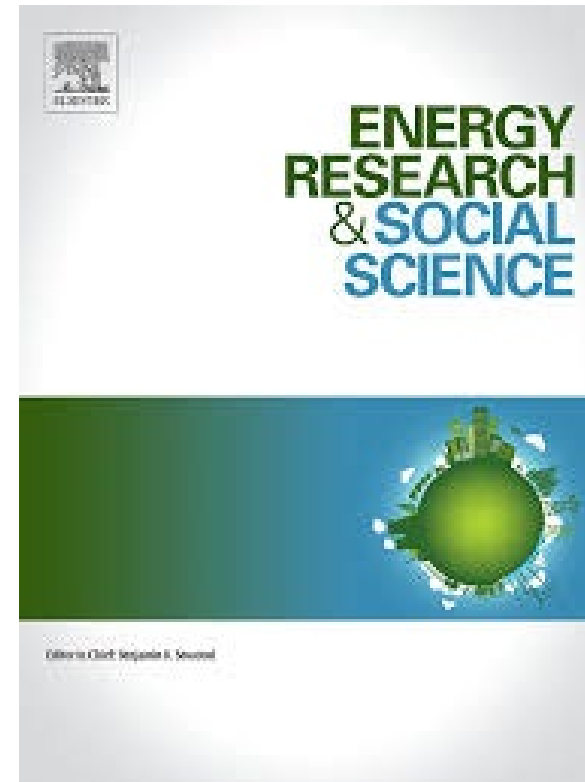
- ... how do we investigate the importance of processes of ‘mirroring’ (embedded and embodied) in reproducing energy practices?
- ... how do we convince policy makers etc. about the importance of unconscious processes of “learning” (or practice transformation)?

(answer = through solid empirical studies, preferable experimental designs, longitudinal designs or lifecourse analysis)

Beyond crisis/Beyond normal

A social science and humanities conference on sustainability
Organized by NTNU Energy Team Society

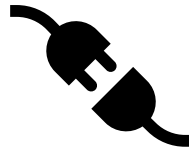
📅 27 and 28 September 2023 | 📍 [Digs - Mesh Community](#), Trondheim | 👤+ Registration deadline: 15 August



ADULTHOOD (TODAY) → 2019 – 2021

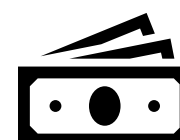
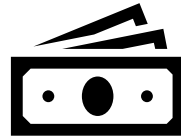
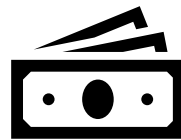
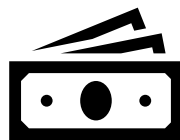
(49 – 56 ÅR)

QUAL: RELATIONS
TO ENVIRONMENT
(KENNEDY, 2022)



EARLY ADULTHOOD → 1990 – 1995

(20 – 30 ÅR)



TRANSITION
PHASE

CHILDHOOD → BORN 1965 – 1970



SIBLINGS



Thanks for listening

