

# Chapter 14

## Roads Not Travelled, Roads Ahead: How the Theory of Practice Architectures Is Travelling

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**Abstract** This chapter asks how the theory of practice architectures is travelling, in terms of the way it has been used, primarily in this volume. The chapter (1) clarifies some key terms in the theory including (a) the relationship between practices and practice architectures, (b) the ideas of ‘enabling’ and ‘constraining’, and (c) the relationship between the theory of practice architectures and the theory of ecologies of practices. The chapter also addresses (2) the ubiquity of contestation and variation in the formation, conduct, reproduction, and transformation of practices and practice architectures to dispel the perception of ‘seamless’ harmony between practices and the practice architectures that sustain them. It examines (3) the question of agency and how it is evident in the formation and conduct of practices. Finally, the chapter addresses (4) the centrality to the theory of the notion of intersubjective spaces. The chapter concludes with some remarks encouraging critical use of the theory.

The authors of this chapter, Stephen Kemmis, Jane Wilkinson, and Christine Edwards-Groves, are among the six authors of *Changing Practices, Changing Education* (Kemmis et al. 2014), which is the most authoritative statement of the theory of practice architectures since its initial formulation in the chapter ‘Situating praxis in practice: Practice architectures and the cultural, material and social conditions for practice’ (Kemmis and Grootenboer 2008). We are, of course, delighted by the present volume, which extends the theory both by exploring its utility in new

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sites and settings, and also by providing more extended treatment of some of the ideas in the theory. Chapter 1 (this volume; Mahon et al. 2017) introduces the theory in a fresh new way. Chapter 13 (this volume; Kemmis and Mahon 2017) presents some of the genealogy of the theory, as seen through the eyes of Stephen Kemmis, in conversation with Kathleen Mahon.

Table 1.1 in Chapter 1 of this volume lists some of the chapters in which key terms of the theory of practice architectures are used and, in some cases, problematised. The table is a useful resource for readers who want to see how these key terms express their meanings in use in this volume. In this chapter, we will not present a comprehensive analysis of how, in our view, all these key terms in the theory are travelling. Instead, we will comment on a number of theoretical issues that arose in the course of preparing this book, sometimes because of questions or difficulties contributors faced in using some of the key terms, and sometimes because we want further to elaborate our thinking about these key ideas.

In the chapter, we have used examples drawn from the field of education as a domain of professional practice, mostly because we have drawn on actual examples from fieldwork in our own research. We nevertheless believe that our comments apply to practices in general.

## Some Clarifications

In discussions with contributing authors, and in reading, reviewing, and editing contributions to this volume, we became conscious that we ought to clarify some things that we regard as central to the theory of practice architectures – things that some seem to have found ambiguous or confusing. The particular topics we want to mention here are (a) the relationship between practices and practice architectures, (b) the ideas of ‘enabling’ and ‘constraining’, and (c) the relationship between the theory of practice architectures and the theory of ecologies of practices.

### *The Relationship Between Practices and Practice Architectures in the Theory*

We have used the theory of practice architectures extensively in the last 8 years or so, and tend to take it for granted that practices are made possible, and held in place, by the conditions we have described as ‘practice architectures’. These are the cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political arrangements, or conditions, to be found in the site where a practice happens. These arrangements give practices their substance:

- arrangements of language and specialist discourses used in a site provide the substance for, and make possible, the sayings of the practice in the site;

- arrangements of objects in physical space-time in a site provide the substance for, and make possible, the activities and work that can be done in the practice (the doings of the practice in the site); and
- arrangements in the form of webs of relationships of power and solidarity (belonging) in a site provide the substance for, and make possible, the relations of the practice.

Part of the purpose of the theory of practice architectures is to invite social and educational researchers to find whether and how such arrangements enable and constrain practices. To do this is to undertake the kind of archaeological task that Michel Foucault advocated in books like *The Order of Things* (1970), *The Birth of the Clinic* (1973), *Discipline and Punish* (1977), and his two volumes of *The History of Sexuality* (1978, 1985).

In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972), Foucault wrote that

...history, in its traditional form, undertook to 'memorize' the *monuments* of the past, transform them into *documents*, and lend speech to those traces which, in themselves, are often not verbal, or which say in silence something other than what they actually say; in our time, history is that which transforms *documents* into *monuments*. In that area where, in the past, history deciphered the traces left by men, it now deploys a mass of elements that have to be grouped, made relevant, placed in relation to one another to form totalities. There was a time when archaeology, as a discipline devoted to silent monuments, inert traces, objects without context, and things left by the past, aspired to the condition of history, and attained meaning only through the restitution of a historical discourse; it might be said, to play on words a little, that in our time history aspires to the condition of archaeology, to the intrinsic description of the monument. (1972, p. 7)

Looked at from one side, the aim of the theory of practice architectures, analogously, is to find, in practices, traces of their conditions of possibility. Conversely, looked at from the other side, one might also say that the aim is to find, in practice architectures, traces of the practices that have shaped them. Most straightforwardly, we would say that our usual aim is to see where the words uttered in practices came from, how the activities of practices were and are channelled by objects that were configured in particular ways at particular moments in physical space-time, and how the ways people relate to one another and the world in practices were and are made possible by relations of power and solidarity that always already pertain in the sites where the practices happen. We acknowledge, however, that finding the traces of these three kinds of conditions of possibility does not lead to neat, closed 'answers' or interpretations of the conditions that brought a practice into being, or the conditions that currently make it possible.

When we begin to find and follow those traces, we may fear being led out into an indeterminately large set of possibilities that reach far beyond the one who practises, deep into their history, far into their networks of association with others and with other objects in the world, and on through the immediate sites of practice to the social worlds beyond. But this fear is not well-founded. The theory of practice architectures imposes limits on these apparently limitless webs of possibility. *All* is not possible. The way a practice *actually* happens is finite; large though it may be, the site in which it happens is also finite. Practices may be indeterminately shaped

by the apparent vastness of practitioners' histories, but they are also *limited* by those histories, as well as by the histories of the sites in which they occur. This remains so even if it is nevertheless the case that people take ideas and activities and ways of relating to each other and the world from place to place, in the way that travellers of the nineteenth century took guidebooks, equipment, and letters of introduction with them as they moved from country to country and continent to continent. The theory of practice architectures invites researchers to explore, *in practice* and *in particular sites of practice*, the nature and provenance of the words, acts, and relationships that practitioners exhibit in their practice, to find how and where they 'erupted' into that person's practice, and to find how this or that particular site furnishes or furnished the conditions for this practice to be possible. To say '*in practice*' and '*in particular sites of practice*' is to emphasise the ontological perspective of the theory of practice architectures; it is to counter-pose the *concrete, what actually happened, and where did it happen*, with the abstract *what happens in general or universally*.

In short, the aim of the theory of practice architectures is to discover how practices – visible and performed – come to be, and what kinds of conditions make them possible. The point of this investigation is not just to be able to say what kinds of arrangements support a practice, but also why the practice takes the shape it does, thus leading us to consider whether it might be transformed, or conducted otherwise, under other conditions of possibility. The point of the theory is that it makes possible a certain specific kind of *critique*. It encourages us to consider how practices might be constructed otherwise under other conditions, and also asks how other conditions can be created through our practices and the practices of others. This kind of critique asks

- in what ways the language we use in our practices (made possible in observable cultural-discursive arrangements that populate the semantic space of the practice) might be unsustainable because false or unreasonable or misleading or based on misunderstandings of the world or one another;
- how the activities and work that populate our practices (made possible in observable material-economic arrangements that compose the physical space-time of the practice) might be unsustainable in terms of the ways they deploy or consume or destroy or waste energy and resources; and
- how the ways we relate to one another and the world in our practices (made possible in observable social-political arrangements that populate the social space of the practice) might be unsustainable because they cause suffering (usually unequally distributed) or injustice.

Conducting a critique of this kind is, inevitably, a historical task: it is a task of discovering or recovering histories of the use of words in languages and specialist discourses; discovering or recovering how things happened (when? where? how? why?); and discovering or recovering the historical consequences of our practices for the relationships between people and with the world. And so the research must be approached

- *empirically or descriptively* in relation to such observable ‘facts’ as we can discover about practices and the sites where they happen, for example, through ethnographic observation or through the analysis of transcripts of audio or video records of practices as they unfold;
- *interpretively* in relation to how the people involved understood what they were doing, and how we understand them, across the horizons of experience and history and culture that may separate us, usually through interviews with people involved and affected by particular practices, as well as various kinds of document analysis; and
- *critically* in relation to the sustainability of the practices, judged against criteria concerning the coherence of ideas, the ways resources are used, and the moral and political orders that may (or may not) justify what is done.

The point of the theory of practice architectures, then, is not to say merely *that* practices are shaped by practice architectures, or, merely *that* practice architectures are frequently shaped by practices, but rather to reach through these reciprocal relationships to arrive at *critical insights* about how our practices, and the practice architectures that make them possible, make worlds that are increasingly sustainable, or unsustainable, for the people who inhabit them, for others, and for the other species and the other things with whom and with which we share the planet.

### *The Ideas of ‘Enabling’ and ‘Constraining’*

In ordinary usage, the notion of something being ‘enabled’ or ‘enabling’ seems positive, a good to be pursued; and the notion of something being ‘constrained’ or ‘constraining’ seems negative, a thing to be avoided. Understood thus, being enabled is like being ‘empowered’, as if being enabled were an unalloyed good, and being constrained is like being cheated or deprived of something, as if being constrained were an unalloyed bad. This is not our view. In our view, both enablement and constraint have positive and negative faces: Fagin enables Oliver Twist’s pick-pocketing; Oliver’s expertise rests in certain pick-pocketing techniques that constrain how he moves in relation to his ‘mark’; using solar power enables us to use less fossil fuels; if we constrain our energy use to renewable resources the world will be a better place.

Enablement and constraint are obverse sides of the same coin. Together, they direct and limit what is said, what is done, and how people relate to one another and the world. Enablement and constraint are both aspects of what are sometimes described as ‘affordances’ (Gibson 1977). We think of enablement and constraint as what channels, or canalises, the talk, the action, and the relationships that fuel practices. Languages and specialist discourses enable (make possible) the saying of some things; using those particular languages and discourses, however, also inevitably constrains what we can think and say. Similarly, objects in physical space-time both enable and constrain our action; and, similarly, particular arrangements of

power and solidarity in social space both enable and constrain how we can relate to others and the world. We do not come to the world as an open field in which anything is possible; we come to a world always and already populated with conditions that make some things more possible than others – though sometimes we can also alter those conditions of possibility.

In the theory of practice architectures, we use the language and specialist discourse of enablement and constraint to help us identify what directs and permits practices, on the one hand, and also what limits and holds them together in what Schatzki (2010) calls *activity time-space*, which he defines thus: “the timespace of human activity consists in acting towards ends departing from what motivates at arrays of places and paths anchored at entities” (2010, p. 38).

As the notion of activity timespace suggests, the disposition of arrangements in the world (“arrays of places and paths anchored at entities”) both opens and encloses the space for practice. In terms of our view of intersubjective space, these arrangements, together forming practice architectures, both open and enclose the semantic space, the physical space-time, and the social space occupied by a practice. Ethnographic observation and interviews are ways to discover the boundaries of practices, and the ways they are anchored to the cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political arrangements found in a site.

### ***The Relationship Between the Theory of Practice Architectures and the Theory of Ecologies of Practices***

People sometimes ask whether the theory of ecologies of practices (outlined in Chapter 1) is part of the theory of practice architectures, or a separate theory. We sometimes say words to the effect that ‘the theory of practice architectures is a theory about what practices are composed of; the theory of ecologies of practices is a theory about how *some* practices *sometimes* relate to one another’. (We emphasise the ‘some practices’ and ‘sometimes’ because, in our view, it is an empirical question – to be decided by observing practices as they happen – whether one practice is dependent on another, or whether the two are interdependent, either of which could be the basis for concluding that two practices are ecologically related.) Nevertheless, in our view, the theory of ecologies of practices is part of the theory of practice architectures understood more generally: it is a subsidiary theory to the theory of practice architectures.

## Contestation and Variation

A criticism we have encountered in our attempts to apprehend how practices are enabled and constrained within particular conditions in a site is that our kinds of analyses appear to some readers to suggest that practices unfold seamlessly in sites because of the prefigurative power of the relevant arrangements. This reading gives the false impression that the performance of practices, and the securing of practice architectures, occurs in ways devoid of contestation and struggle. We think that, on the contrary, while social reality is often reasonably harmonious, practices and practice architectures are usually formed in ways that are messy, contested, and conflicted. Practices are analogous to living things. They unfold in the ‘happeningness’ of actual sites, occupied by human beings performing their daily routines and actions (Schatzki 2006), and, to a greater or lesser degree, pursuing their own interests. Practices do not spring forth fully formed or predetermined from the practice architectures that sustain them; rather, they must be struggled over and constantly reasserted as part of the micropolitics at play in social arenas. Practice and practice architectures may be replaced if more robust alternatives come along, ready to compete for their own survival.

One of the reasons for this appearance of seamless harmony may be that the term ‘architectures’ can imply or be read as suggesting a view of practices as emerging from already fixed or stabilised structures which hold them in place. To read practice architectures in this way is to mistake the particular arrangements that compose practice architectures for generalised social structures that predetermine, rather than prefigure practices. Schatzki (2002, pp. 210–233) discusses prefiguration at length, but defines it pithily in these words: “... the prefiguration of action is a delimitation of fields of possibility (via constraint and enablement)” (2002, p. 219).

The distinction between predetermination and prefiguration is critical. A key tenet of the theory of practice architectures is its insistence on the primacy of the site as containing the necessary but not sufficient conditions of possibility for practices to emerge in one form rather than another. Schatzki’s notion of site ontologies (2003, 2005) is crucial here, because practice architectures are the particular *nexus*es of arrangements that make particular practices possible in specific sites. Equally importantly, they render other practices as less possible and less likely to emerge in particular sites at particular times (i.e., less sayable, less doable, and less likely for people to relate in certain ways to other people and the world).

To illustrate, the discourse of school principals as managers emerged in the 1990s in Australia as part of a series of policy borrowings from England and the USA, underpinned by neoliberal notions of education as analogous to a business enterprise with a principal as its Chief Executive Officer. This discourse was taken up with particular enthusiasm in the state of Victoria, seeming to sweep away previous discourses of equity and equal opportunity. Those earlier discourses, a crucial part of the previous government’s long-term agenda, began to jostle uneasily with new policy edicts and resource arrangements that presumed a demarcation between principals and teachers. The arrival of this new managerialist discourse, like a new species invading an already settled territory, prompts us to investigate the conditions

of possibility – especially the social-political conditions of possibility – that led to the state of Victoria being particularly receptive to such policies while other Australian states remained less receptive, and perhaps more resistant, to them in the same era.

Furthermore, even when the new policies were ushered in, principals in some school sites resisted and contested the new practice architectures that supported these radically different sayings, doings, and relating of leadership. The new policies did not preclude individual principals strategically continuing to lead in ways that maintained their former focus on social justice and equity imperatives, albeit under these changed conditions of possibility. In some sites, principals adopted the *habitus* of manager/entrepreneur with alacrity. In such sites, the new arrangements ushered in by the government, and the subsequent changes to the conditions for possibility in these sites, led to the emergence of more managerialist sayings, doings, and relating, sometimes transforming the sites. These changes were not uncontested, however. Their meanings were struggled over, challenged, and fought for in the day-to-day dynamics of educators' individual and collective practices. The subsequent actions and relations prefigured by these new arrangements varied depending on the actual site (primary, secondary, rural, regional, urban, school size, nature of the community, and individual and collective *habitus*es of the principal and teachers) in which they took place and in the conditions for possibility in the site. We thus conclude that the new neoliberal management practices envisaged by government did not always find a congenial niche in the territories to which they had been imported. Indeed, in some sites, they encountered existing species of leading and educational practices with which they had to compete for legitimacy and survival. In some sites, the new practices succeeded in becoming established; in others, they achieved neither legitimacy nor survival.

The infinity sign on our figure of the theory of practice architectures (Chapter 1, Fig. 1.3) draws attention to this ever-fluid and dynamic process of contestation and variation. The infinite tracing of the sign invites exploration of how and why particular kinds of leadership practice secured a *management* *habitus* evident in one leader's practice in one site but did not secure such a *habitus* and did not become evident in another leader's practice in another site. The contrast compels us to investigate not only what made neoliberal management practice more congenial in the *habitus* of one leader and not another, but also what particular kinds of conditions in each site made neoliberal management practice more or less possible (perhaps more hierarchical relationships between principals and other staff in one case, and more collegial relationships in the other, for example). Far from being a seamless process of determination, we see the formation and transformation of practices as achieved – ordinarily – through contestation, which is both an inevitable and ubiquitous part of the restless, dynamic, and dialectical process by which some practices unfold in specific sites but not in others, prefigured by the historical and contemporary conditions of possibility and affordances that pertain at one particular site but not at another.

Another reason why there may be a tendency to smooth over the inevitable dynamic of contestation is that the theory of practice architectures, like Schatzki's



(e.g., 2002) practice theory, says that practices are enabled and constrained by ‘arrangements’. To some readers, ‘arrangements’ may seem rather abstract and general, rather than (as we intend) concrete and specifically present in particular sites. The theory of practice architectures focuses particularly on three kinds of arrangements: cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political. It might *sound*, to some readers, as if these arrangements are more or less rigid or fixed, enduring, or orderly. But the authors of the theory neither intend nor imply such rigidity, longevity, or orderliness: rather, we presume that practice architectures will shift and change over time (even though some endure in evolving forms for prolonged periods), and they can be disorderly as well as orderly. While some practice architectures appear to be institutionalised, stable, and enduring, over time, they frequently turn out to be contested, unstable, and transient. Moreover, sometimes practice architectures like the weather are highly variable: if the day is sunny, we can play cricket, if it is rainy, we can’t. From the perspective of the theory of practice architectures, the arrangements to be found in a site are generally (in the long view) matters of happenstance: they were once produced by particular things that happened (including past practices), and they will change as different things happen. A principal aim of the theory of practice architectures is to tease out how and when these particular arrangements came to be, and how securely (or not) they prefigure the way practices unfold.

This leads us to the notion of *variation*, which we regard as essential to practices and practising. Most of the time, we humans are adaptable: we vary the performance of our practices (our sayings, doings, and relating) to bypass obstacles, to avoid untoward or inappropriate outcomes, to rise to challenges, or to seize opportunities. We act within the constraints of the practice architectures around us, but we are also aware that we can alter the flow of our practice as circumstances change, like the flow of a stream around a new boulder that has fallen into its course. Yet, as participants in practices, we are equally aware that the banks of the stream themselves change over time in response to the strength and direction of the stream’s flow. The stream and its banks both adapt to one another dialectically. In the same way, practices and practice architectures adapt to one another.

This is to say that practices, once ‘laid down’ in the repertoire of acting agents, may have a tendency to be *reproduced* on future occasions, but they also have the capacity to *vary* and to *adapt* in response to changing circumstances. Because they vary and adapt, practices also have the power to be *transformed* under appropriate circumstances. Instead of being (re-) produced in the form in which they unfolded on previous occasions, they may now unfold in different – sometimes dramatically different – forms on new occasions. Thus, for example, where in the past, a teacher we observed once saw student misbehaviour in a classroom as ‘challenging’ the social order of the classroom, she now sees it as ‘interrupting others’ learning’; where, in the past, she responded to challenging student behaviours negatively or punitively, she now responds positively by ‘inviting the student back to your learning’. She now sees situations of this kind in a new light: her understanding of the situation, and what she says, has been transformed, along with what she does, her action, and how she relates to the misbehaving/distracted student. In fact, of course,

these three elements of her practice are inextricably interwoven: as her practice happens, they all appear and unfold together, within a transformed *project* of her practice: to treat classroom management not as a threat to the social order of the classroom, but rather as a student's momentary distraction from the practice of learning, which is, and remains, the central project of the student's practices, despite occasional lapses.

The dialectic of reproduction and transformation of practices is driven by the power of *adaptation* (realised in our capacity of adaptability): reproducing former practices to meet the usual circumstances, or varying them to meet the demands of new circumstances. Like the dialectic of reproduction and variation in biology, which permits the evolution of new species from former species, sometimes alongside the persistence of earlier forms, the power of adaptation also permits new forms of practice to evolve. The power of adaptation also allows the reproduction and transformation of any *practice architectures* that are constructed or produced by the practices of human beings – for example, the design of classrooms, or curricula, or the qualifications of teachers. Thus, practice architectures can be *institutionalised*, and be relatively stable over time, and they can also become objects of *contestation*, and destabilised. Once contested and destabilised, practice architectures that are the products of human agency can then be rescued, destroyed, or transformed (or maybe more than one of these alternatives). And if they are transformed, they may then become, in their turn, institutionalised, and then, as they confront the exigencies of human action in history, they may also become, once again, objects of contestation. Seen in the light of history, contestation and institutionalisation are not polar opposites but different sides of the same coin.

Drawing on Aristotelian (Bartlett and Collins 2011) and neo-Aristotelian traditions,<sup>1</sup> and also on critical traditions that emerged in the last century (e.g., Habermas 1972, 1974), the authors of the theory of practice architectures see practices and practice architectures as mutable and malleable, as made and re-made through people's action in history. Not all practices and practice architectures are easy to change, however: some have deep roots that make them strongly resistant to change. The practice architectures of the capitalist economy, revealed by Marx, are one example. In our time, the practice architectures of neoliberal management are another. Both are malleable, however. Capitalism in the twenty-first century is different from what capitalism was in the nineteenth century; neoliberal management in the public sector today is different from the consultative forms of management that characterised decision making in the progressive welfare states of 40 years ago. In the latter, experts advised and authorities deliberated about what to do, taking multiple possible kinds of outcomes into account: cultural-discursive, material-economic (including, by the end of the twentieth century, the environmental), and social-political. In the mid-twentieth century, civil servants were perhaps more conscious, in advising policy-makers, about how their decisions would affect whole populations (not just individuals) culturally, materially, and socially.

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<sup>1</sup>For example, Toulmin's (1972) theory of the 'coupled evolution' of concepts.

## Agency

Some readers think that the theory of practice architectures does not have a place for the notion of (human) agency. The theory's insistence upon the primacy of practices as the key site for human sociality and its critique of the sovereign individual as the primary locus for transformation might perhaps be read as implying a non-agentic and more deterministic view of the world and of social life. Our position, however, is that the opposite is true.

The theory of practice architectures is first and foremost a theory about practices – their production, their persistence through reproduction, their transformation, and their dissolution. Practices are the motor of human co-existence, but this statement does not imply that humans do not practise agency. On the contrary, practices are performed by human beings, and are enmeshed with and held in place by specific practice architectures which give sites their distinctiveness and material form. Human activity (individually and collectively) can and does alter these arrangements, bringing some kinds of arrangements into being and dissolving others. Particular arrangements set up the conditions of possibility for some practices rather than others, but whether a practice will be performed remains a matter of human agency – although sometimes conditions are so oppressive that they leave people little choice about what they can do. More usually, however, circumstances allow participants to innovate or experiment in what they do and how they do it – leaving room for creativity, and for participants to demonstrate forms of agency that are more radical or emphatic.

Practices come into being, are conducted, reproduced, and transformed by the individuals who inhabit them, who come to embody and realise them in their day to day actions. We make our worlds by acting within them, but we do so in ways that are constrained. As Marx (1852) colourfully put it in the second paragraph of *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*,

[People] make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living.

Our agency lies in coming to understand the constraints within which we operate but also that, when appropriate or needed, we can open up opportunities to imagine and enact alternative conditions that make new practices possible.

The *disposition* or *habitus* which practitioners bring to a site is crucial. Practices make history (Kemmis et al. 2014, p. 25), and histories make practitioners. Human beings inhabit practices – bringing their individual and professional histories and dispositions to the work of perceiving, interpreting, and differentially enacting and realising or challenging or resisting the projects of different practices. For instance, how Australian teachers individually or collectively make sense of and enact the project of a practice like compulsory national literacy and numeracy testing tells us a great deal about their feel for the education 'game' and the possibilities for differing testing practices afforded by the specific site in which they are teaching (cf. Parr

and Bulfin 2015). Depending on the knowledge and understandings they bring to the site, and the conditions of possibility which the school site affords them, they may work with the tests in ways that are more or less educative.

The concept of *praxis* is one of the things that distinguishes the theory of practice architectures from some other practice theories. In insisting on the primacy of the ‘human and humanistic’ in the enactment and realisation of practices, and that practice is a “human and social activity with indissoluble moral, political and historical dimensions” (Kemmis et al. 2014, p. 25), the theory foregrounds the transformative potential of practices and of the practitioners who enact them. In this view, practitioners are not solely operatives of a system in which they churn out the fully administered child or higher test scores to satisfy national and international rankings. The concept of *praxis* presupposes agency – opening up for possibility a view of education practice and practitioners (students, teachers, leaders) as makers and transformers of history, through individual and collective action. The critical purpose of the theory of practice architectures is to provide theoretical, analytical, and transformational resources that enable a particular kind of critique with a moral purpose – to discern untoward consequences of our practices and, individually and collectively, to discover whether other conditions of possibility for different kinds of practice can be created through our collective and individual actions.

This view of practice also recognises that agency is not only an individual matter but is also realised via interactions between the human and non-human world, for example, through particular kinds of material resources that shape human practices (allocation of budgets, national testing, the kinds of physical and virtual spaces in which schooling takes place). It recognises that practices are interactionally secured, that they are embodied both in the systems we inhabit and in the lifeworlds in which we encounter one another as human beings. The phrase ‘interactionally secured’ is crucial here, for the word ‘secured’ in English stresses that this is an agentic action and ongoing process, and not an inevitable result. Nor is it realised only in the actions of individual human beings; it is also produced collectively through the dialectical interplay between agents as they participate in a practice. To say that practices are interactionally secured is also to say that they are *politically* secured. They are secured through collective action. To explore *where* practices are secured, we now turn to the notions of intersubjectivity and intersubjective space.

## **Intersubjectivity and the Three-Dimensional Composition of Intersubjective Space**

The theory of practice architectures is a resource for exploring the intricacies of practical action in social life and how action is shaped as it happens in passages of real, historical time. The idea of human sociality is central to the theory of practice architectures, as it is to Schatzki’s practice theory (e.g., 2002). This sociality comes to life as we encounter one another – frequently, as we interact in practices. Yet

these encounters also position us as individuals, and as *subjective* beings; they help form our habitus and our identities, for others and for ourselves. In large part, then, our subjectivity is formed *intersubjectively*.

For some social theorists, the notion of intersubjectivity is central for theorising the social world. Husserl, for example, defines “intersubjectivity as ‘shared’ or ‘mutual’ understanding” (cited in Duranti 2010, p. 12). Habermas (2003) fleshes out a slightly different view of intersubjectivity, rooted in the *logos* of language, i.e., the possible meanings a language ‘holds’ in the usage of the linguistic community of its speakers. He sees the power of the intersubjective in the languages we share, and what they allow us to understand and say, even about ourselves, so that who we are, to ourselves, is only made possible in the *logos* of the language we use to express ourselves:

As historical and social beings we find ourselves always already in a linguistically structured lifeworld. In the forms of communication through which we reach an understanding with one another about something in the world and about ourselves, we encounter a transcending power. Language is not a kind of private property. No one possesses exclusive rights over the common medium of the communicative practices we must intersubjectively share. No single participant can control the structure, or even the course, of processes of reaching understanding and self-understanding. How speakers and hearers make use of their communicative freedom to take yes- or no-positions is not a matter of their subjective discretion. For they are free only in virtue of the binding force of the justifiable claims they raise towards one another. The *logos* of language embodies the power of the intersubjective, which precedes and grounds the subjectivity of speakers.

.... The *logos* of language escapes our control, and yet we are the ones, the subjects capable of speech and action, who reach an understanding with one another in this medium. It remains ‘our’ language. ... From this perspective, what makes our being-ourselves possible appears more as a transsubjective power than an absolute one. (pp. 10–11)

Certain kinds of practice theory, the theory of practice architectures among them, understand practices *ontologically*; i.e., they take the view that practices can be understood in terms of *what happens* in practice as it unfolds in the everyday life of individuals. The theory of practice architectures thus acknowledges, and carefully attends to, the ways in which people encounter one another in interaction *as it happens* – in particular, they encounter one another as interlocutors in language, and as co-participants in activities, and in reciprocal relationships of various kinds. According to the theory, as people co-exist in human activity, they create and open up intersubjective spaces in which they act in the present, in a space shaped by the remembered past (as traces from history), and anticipating possible future actions and outcomes (Duranti 2010; Kemmis et al. 2014). As noted earlier, Schatzki (2010) describes this kind of space as *the timespace of human activity*: “acting towards ends departing from what motivates at arrays of places and paths anchored at entities” (p. 38).

Ontologically, then, the social accomplishment of practices is achieved, in practice, in the enactment of sayings, doings, and relating, held together in the project of a practice. These sayings, doings, and relating, in turn, are made possible by the existence (or not) of certain arrangements in a site. Accomplishing practices involves entering the social world within which

characteristic arrangements of actions and activities (doings) are comprehensible in terms of arrangements of relevant ideas in characteristic discourses (sayings), and when the people and objects involved are distributed in characteristic arrangements of relationships (relatings)... that ‘hang together’ in a distinctive project. (Kemmis et al. 2014, p. 31)

Particular cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political arrangements combine to form practice architectures that enable and constrain the ways in which people can interact in a particular practice, and thus give a specific, ‘three-dimensional’ shape to the intersubjective space in which the practice unfolds. To explain what we mean by the three-dimensionality of intersubjective space, we will say a little more about what we mean by the ‘cultural-discursive’, the ‘material-economic’ and the ‘social-political’ in the theory of practice architectures.

First: the cultural-discursive. Unlike some other theorists of culture, we see ‘culture’ strictly through the lens of the *semantic*, although we also include the syntax by which propositions in language allow meaning to be shared. As described by Habermas (2003) above, we see the cultural-discursive as embodying the *logos* of language: what can be thought and said in that language (or dialect or specialist discourse) among the members of the language communities using the language. As a rough approximation, one might say that ‘culture’ is like the *lexicon* of the language; more precisely, we take the Wittgensteinian (1958) view that this lexicon comes to bear possible meanings (and revisions of meaning) through being used in language games. We thus take a rather different view of the ‘cultural’ than some anthropologists or sociologists or cross-cultural theorists like Hofstede et al. (2010), for example, who see culture as a fluid and dynamic process “consist[ing] of the unwritten rules” of a “social game” that is “learned”, not “innate” (p. 6). On their view, the cultural gives shape and texture to the tacit rules around what is sayable, doable, and relatable, which participants in a practice invariably encounter when they enter a new site. In our view, by contrast, the ‘cultural-discursive’, is to be understood only in terms of things that occupy *semantic space*, even though, *empirically*, ‘the cultural’ always manifests itself together with material-economic, and social-political arrangements. We reject the definition of Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov because it conflates these realms *analytically*, i.e., in the very definition of the ‘cultural’.

Similarly, a Foucauldian interpretation of discourses sees them as “ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and relations between them” (Weedon 1987, p. 108). This view of discourses draws attention to the ways in which the cultural aspect of cultural-discursive arrangements is also imbricated in the social-political relations of ruling within specific sites. Of course we agree that this imbrication occurs, and it is important to see that it occurs – indeed, that it reaches far into what we say and think and how we relate to others in everything we think and say. Here again (as with the Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov definition), we assert that ‘knowledges’ and ‘power relations’ are *analytically distinct*, even though they never (or almost never) appear *empirically* in the absence of each other – or in the absence of the material-economic. In social life as it is lived, we

assert, these three different dimensions always appear together in intersubjective space.

We believe that a particular strength of the theory of practice architectures is that it disentangles these three realms *analytically*, inviting us to consider, in research, how they are entwined in specific ways when they appear (together) *empirically*. This provides the detailed material necessary to fuel the *critical* aspiration of the theory: to consider how the sayings, doings, and relatings of practices are entwined together in specific combinations in different practices, with specific consequences, which may be untoward. If the consequences are untoward, the theory then invites us to consider how the conduct and consequences of our current practices might be transformed, including by changing the locally site specific practice architectures that make them possible.

In short, our view is that ‘the cultural-discursive’ registers in our minds, in language; ‘the material-economic’ is what we encounter as bodies, moving around in the world; and ‘the social-political’ is what we feel or what we can reveal when we inhabit social spaces along with others (in relationships of power and solidarity). *Analytically speaking* (but not in *empirical* reality), this is to assert that

1. ‘the cultural-discursive’ encompasses only what appears in *semantic space* – in the linguistic world in which we encounter one another in language, enabling and constraining what we can think and say, and what we can mean;
2. ‘the material-economic’ encompasses only what appears in *physical space-time* – in the materiality of things in the physical world in which we encounter one another, enabling and constraining how we can move about in the world; and
3. ‘the social-political’ encompasses only what appears in *social space* – in how we will form (or not) bonds of belonging and solidarity with one another (which, by the way, is not always an unconditional good), or be in relations of power with or over or under one another (or be socially integrated with one another, or in conflict or harmony with others, or resistant to or complying with others).

When we see these three ‘dimensions’ of intersubjective space as *analytically distinct but (always) empirically intertwined*, we can raise the critical *historical* question of when and how they came to appear in these combinations, and the *political* question of whether and how they might be disentangled, or differently entangled, or entangled with other things in other ways.

These spaces are never neutral; they are always mediated and contested (by past and present practices, and by particular cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political arrangements) as persons and practices enable and constrain what is possible. Our subjectivity as unique individuals is thus always grounded, formed, and transformed through our co-participation in intersubjective spaces. People become practitioners of practices by co-inhabiting (acting in and on) intersubjective spaces in-the-moment, in physical space-time, and over historical time. In our interactions, in intersubjective space, we constantly revise and renew our practices, the practice architectures that enable and constrain us, and our *selves* – our subjectivities, our identities, our dispositions, and our agency.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, we have aimed to clarify some key terms in the theory of practice architectures that have sometimes confused readers or users of the theory. We have also responded to some criticisms of the theory (for example, that it apparently overlooks the question of agency). In concluding the chapter, we want, once again, to emphasise that the theory was devised with a critical intention. We concede that it is sometimes helpful simply to be able to *describe* practices and the ways they are enabled and constrained by the practice architectures that make them possible and hold them in place, or to describe how particular practices are interdependent with other practices in ecologies of practices. We also think it is helpful to be able to *interpret* how people experience practices – their own and others’ – as part of a broader hermeneutical task of understanding others and ourselves in the social world. But the theory was devised to help us explore practices *critically*: to see when and how they were formed, reproduced, and transformed; what social conditions (practice architectures) make them possible and hold them in place; and how both practices and practice architectures might need to be changed if they turn out to have untoward consequences: if they are incoherent or unreasonable; wasteful, destructive, or unsustainable; or the cause of suffering or injustice.

*The critical task* is to see practices in relation to the social conditions that make them possible, and to understand how practices sometimes produce untoward consequences – even consequences contrary to the intentions of those who participate in the practice (untoward consequences like ill-health in the case of health practitioners, or mis-education in the case of educational practitioners). This critical task requires what Nicolini (2013, Chapter 9) calls ‘zooming out’ (as well as the ‘zooming in’ of close analysis): widening our frame of analysis to see the everyday actions and interactions that form, reproduce, and transform practices (and practice architectures) as they unfold in particular sites and societies, at particular moments in longer histories. The critical task also involves taking a stand: it aims to discover, explore, and explain when and where and how and why practices have untoward consequences, if and when they do. And this, in turn, means naming such things as the incoherence or contradictoriness of the rationales or intentions that guide practices; naming when and why practices are sometimes wasteful, destructive, or unsustainable; or naming the suffering or the injustices they may cause; or naming the solidarities (whether of the elite, or of colleagues, or of community members) they strengthen or threaten; or revealing the capillary operations of power whose results are compliance or oppression. One might say it is sufficient for a critical theory just to name such things, but, in our view, simply naming untoward consequences is insufficient. In our view, the task of a critical theory also includes identifying ways in which such untoward outcomes can be avoided or overcome. It is to have some practical answer to the question “What is to be done?”

And so we might ask, about this chapter, what untoward consequences has it named, and what has it said about what is to be done about dealing with these untoward consequences? Our task has been a modest one. As co-participants in the



process of preparing this volume, and as interlocutors with many people exploring the power and limitations of the theory of practice architectures, we have sometimes observed how the theory has seemed incoherent or ambiguous or confusing; how people have struggled to make analyses of practices as they unfold in sites; or how they have sometimes found themselves in disagreements with others about their analyses and their implications. In this chapter, we have therefore tried to clarify a few of the key terms of the theory in an attempt to dispel some ambiguities or confusions, to make analyses more effective and more trenchant, and to encourage users of the theory to do so not only descriptively and interpretively, but also critically.

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