

Disturbance, Dialogue and Metaphor: the Study of Practices and Perspectives through Design Enquiry

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Abstract

Practice theory (Reckwitz, 2002) provides an alternative to three approaches that currently dominate the study of culture: culturalist mentalism, textualism, intersubjectivism. Practice theory looks to background practices as the basis of our shared understanding of the world. Practices are routine forms of behaviour consisting of interconnected forms of bodily activities, mental activities, 'things' in use, and background understanding in the form of know-how, moods, feelings and motivations.

There is significant potential within practice theory to account for phenomena that design practitioners and researchers have long recognised as being central to understanding of design activity. These phenomena include tacit knowledge, insight and the emergence of new artefacts and practices. Practice theory embraces diverse range of theorists including Heidegger (1962), Wittgenstein (1968) and Schatzki (1996). Much of the published work in this area is oriented toward the articulation of the ontological position of the researcher or the applied investigations of social phenomena. The research practices appropriate to modes of qualitative enquiry consistent with this ontology are yet to be adequately recognised and articulated.

The discussion in this paper is guided by the following questions: What are the research practices appropriate to praxeological enquiry? How do these apply to research by design?

I do not propose to offer a comprehensive response to these questions – practice theory is as yet an emerging paradigm. I will, however, discuss three constructs that I consider to be helpful in sensitising the researcher to the structure of practices and perspectives – disturbance, dialog and metaphor. I discuss the relevance of these constructs to design enquiry, with particular reference to issues confronted by the design practitioner-researcher.

Keywords

Practice theory; phenomenology; practice led research; Heidegger, Gadamer

Reckwitz (2002) distinguishes between four approaches to the study of culture: culturalist mentalism, textualism, intersubjectivism, and practice theory. Culturalist mentalism locates the basis of our social and cultural life in mental representations. Textualism focuses on discourse, and intersubjectivism on interpersonal interactions. Practice theory offers an alternative to these three more established approaches. Practice theory looks to background practices as the basis of our shared understanding of the world.

Practices are routine forms of behaviour consisting of interconnected forms of bodily activities, mental activities, 'things' in use, and background understanding in the form of know-how, moods, feelings and motivations¹. In practice theory, the principal focus of study is our embodied engaged dealings with the world. Practices are to a large extent performed, and are thus potentially open to observation.

Practices incorporate particular ways of understanding the world (Reckwitz, 2002, p.253). We are always already oriented in the world. The world shows up for us in the light of our concerns. The ontological position that most comfortably aligns with practice theory might be described as 'perspectival realism' (Wachterhauser, 1994).

In this paper I am guided by the following questions: What are the research practices appropriate to modes of inquiry that are consistent with practice theory? How do these apply in the context of design enquiry (research by design)? I will discuss three constructs that are helpful in sensitising the researcher to practices and perspectives.

The first construct is the phenomenon of 'disturbance' (Heidegger, 1962). It describes various ways in which our unobtrusive engagement with the world might be interrupted. While practices are potentially open to observation, a difficulty arises from the fact that we are always already thrown into the world. We are deeply embedded in shared cultural practices. These practices form the most basic understanding that we have of ourselves and of our world. They tend to recede into the background. One of the challenges for research is that practices are, for the most part, taken over unawares. Practices are rarely the focus of conscious thought. In order to study practices, and the perspectives that open up through our engagement with those practices, we must interrupt our ongoing dealings with the world. We must develop strategies for noticing the structure and style of our practices.

The second construct is 'dialogue'. Dialogue might be seen as a specific instance of the operation of 'disturbance.' When we genuinely engage in dialogue we are interested in understanding what the other has to say. We are attentive to the difference being expressed by a dialogical partner. Gadamer (1989) characterises the process of dialogue as a 'fusion of horizons' where each dialogical partners initially comes to a topic from different perspectives. If the dialogical partners are attentive to the differences in those perspectives, then the perspectives of each partner will undergo some change. In being attentive to difference we create an opportunity to shed light, not only on the perspective of the other, but also on our own perspective on the situation.

Gadamer's phenomenological description of dialogue can be used to draw attention to the fact that any act of interpretation involves orienting and reorienting oneself in the light

¹ This description of practices is a development of the description given by Reckwitz (2002, p.249). Reckwitz describes practices as 'routinized behaviour consisting of interconnected forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, 'things' in their use, and background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge.' I have shifted some of the terms of this description to draw out the Heideggerian insight that much of our background understanding is pre-conceptual, that is, prior to any mental representation. Terms such as 'states of emotion' and 'motivational knowledge' may suggest that emotion and motivations are mental representations. Heidegger provides a critique of this position in his discussion of 'attunement' in *Being and Time* (Heidegger, 1962, p.173) (King, 2001, p.56).

of the contingencies of the situation. Being attentive to these changes in orientation can provide a valuable pathway into conceptualising one's own background awareness. Holding onto these moments of 'insight' should allow the researcher to be able to draw on resources in their culture to articulate that background awareness in ways that are accessible (recognisable) to other participants in that culture.

The third construct is 'metaphor.' In practice theory all understanding is perspectival. This understanding resides primarily at the level of background awareness. Metaphor, provides a construct for drawing attention to the 'as' structure of our background understanding.

(Reckwitz, 2002, p.250) draws attention to work of Heidegger (1962) and Wittgenstein (1968) as the 'philosophical background of practice theory.' Reckwitz goes on to suggest that 'everything that is original in practice theory is already in the work of these authors.' The discussion in this paper is motivated in part by a belief that we should look to Heidegger, not just for the background philosophy of practice theory, but also for practical guidance as to how to engage in praxeological enquiry.

'Disturbance' is a concept explicitly thematised by Heidegger in *Being and Time*. It is a concept that is gaining recognition in design literature, however, the radical implications of this concept are not always recognised. I will discuss the notion of disturbance with particular reference to recent work by Klaus Krippendorff (2006) and the work of the IDEO (Kelley & Littman, 2001).

'Dialogue' is a concept explored by Gadamer (1989). Gadamer, a former student of Heidegger's, developed his phenomenological description of dialogue to elaborate a Heideggerian perspective on interpretation. I draw on this description to recover an over subjective dimension to the phenomenon of 'insight.'

In the section on 'metaphor' I take some liberties with the position of both Heidegger and Gadamer. For Heidegger, there is no need to maintain a distinction between the literal and the metaphoric, and therefore no need to maintain a category called 'metaphor.' All language is metaphor, in the sense that all language operates by drawing our attention to the similar in the distinct. In this paper I retain the use of the term 'metaphor' as it provides a useful point of reference when discussing the way in which language might be used to bring our background awareness into view.

Disturbance: the challenge of noticing the structure in our practices

Central to Heidegger's *Being and Time* is the recovery of background understanding, the mode of understanding that makes it possible to make our way around in the world. At the heart of Heidegger's exploration of background understanding are careful descriptions of the way that objects normally show up for us. In *Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (1982, p.163) he discusses the experience of entering a lecture theatre. He points out that we don't first notice 'walls,' 'doors,' 'seats' and 'stairs' and their properties. We don't first perceive individual entities and then somehow establish coherent interconnections between them. We simply go about the business of attending the lecture. We are always already oriented towards the lecture theatre. Walls, doors, seats and stairs are always already integrated into a referential whole that relates to our concerns. Similarly in *Being and Time* Heidegger demonstrates that the most basic

understanding that we can have of a hammer is in its transparent use (Heidegger 1962, p.98).

It is only in situations of the disturbance of the transparent functioning of a piece of equipment that we start to notice it as 'a thing' – if it is unavailable, broken, not performing as we expect it to perform, if we wish to improve it (design), or if we wish to theorise about. Theoretical accounts of the world have traditionally overlooked the necessarily perspectival nature of our access to the world. While the world is as it is, there are many ways in which we can access (or fail to access) the world as it is. What shows up for us in the world necessarily depends on the orientations that we bring to our encounter with the world and those orientations are inherently linked to our engagement with the world – an engagement shaped by shared practices.

Understanding things 'as things' is a derivative mode of understanding. The more basic form of understanding is 'know how,' the transparent background awareness that we have of the world when things are in use. Tom Kelley, general manager of IDEO, provides a simple example of the way in which we tend to carry our understandings of the world primarily through deeply embedded actions rather than conscious thought. In the context of redesigning toothpaste packaging, in a project undertaken in the 1990's designers and researchers at IDEO found that people found it very hard to adapt to a toothpaste cap that departed from the traditional screw top. The problem with the screw top was that over time toothpaste caught in the grooves making it difficult to reapply the cap. In trials of an alternative pop-off cap Kelley (Kelley & Littman, 2001, p.45) reports:

People kept trying to screw off our pop-off cap, even after they realized it had no screws. Decades of screwing caps on and off—thousands of times for most people—had created an ingrained perception and habit. The cap on a toothpaste tube must screw on and off.

The habitual coupling of self and world was such that the toothpaste cap solicited ingrained responses from people even though they had a conceptual understanding that contradicted the likelihood that those responses would be successful. The response of the IDEO designers was to develop a cap that was a compromise between the screw top mechanism that accorded with habitual expectations and the new pop-off cap, no doubt smoothing the way for the pop-off toothpaste caps that are now quite common.

Practice theory repositions our tacit, background awareness in such a way that it becomes the condition of possibility of any other form of understanding. In order to draw out the radical implications of this move, I will compare Heidegger's position with the mentalist-textualist position articulated by Klaus Krippendorff in *The Semantic Turn*.

Krippendorff's stated aim is to shift design from a focus on functionalism (Krippendorff, 2006, p.5) towards a focus on sense, meaning and social significance (Krippendorff, 2006, p.xvii). Krippendorff explores the meaning of artefacts from four different perspectives: the meaning of artefacts in use, the meaning of artefacts in language, meaning in the lives of artefacts; and meaning in an ecology of artefacts.

It might be expected that an exploration of the 'meaning of artefacts in use' would have much in common with the way in which artefacts are conceptualised within practice theory. In practice theory artefacts are things to be handled, they are constitutive elements of the patterns of activity that are our practices (Reckwitz, 2002, p.253). Krippendorff does in fact draw on a number of Heidegger's ideas – these include the

phenomenon of 'disturbance'² and the distinction between the 'ready to hand' (the background awareness of equipment in use) and the 'present at hand' (the conceptual understanding of items of equipment as things). He also appeals to Gibson's affordances (Krippendorff, 2006, p.111) a phenomenon entirely compatible with a Heideggerian ontology.

While Krippendorff acknowledges that 'the understanding of artefacts...is *demonstrable* by interfacing with them' (Krippendorff, 2006, p.292) (my italics) he appears to hold that any understanding that we might have of artefacts is necessarily conceptual. Passing over practices, and the attendant focus on the interpretative structure of background awareness, amounts to a failure to recognise that these background interpretations are a potential opening onto new ideas and new ways of being in the world. This has significant implications for design practice and research. Almost all the strategies listed by Krippendorff in his account of 'methods for creating spaces of possible futures' (Krippendorff, 2006, pp.213-221) operate at the level of conceptual understanding. Similarly in the section on 'methods for inquiring into stakeholders' concepts and motivations' (Krippendorff, 2006, pp.221-230) the exploration of methods which focus on 'unconscious habits' and 'nonverbalizable routines' is mentioned but is of only marginal concern. Compare this to the priority that practitioners such as the IDEO group (Kelley & Littman, 2001) and David Stess (2002) give to user studies where anomalies and disruptions to the observed experience of others, or to the experience of the designer themselves, provide insight into the structure of the situation and open up avenues for design responses.

Kelley describes a number of strategies that have emerged from the experience of the IDEO group, specifically oriented towards the elicitation of anomalies. These include: learning to notice aspects of one's own experience where the organization of the experience is lacking in some respect, in the context of meetings, travelling or visiting another company for example (Kelley & Littman, 2001, pp. 42-43); learning to notice actions that seem clumsy or difficult (ibid, pp.44-49); observing users different to oneself, kids, for example (ibid, p.33); and observing users who break the rules, who improvise rather than using products and systems as they have been designed to be used (ibid, pp.39-40).

Practice theory anticipates the importance of 'disruption' as a way into noticing the taken for granted aspects of our background awareness. The priority given to 'disruption' within practice theory accords with the research approaches developed in practice by user centred design practitioners such as the IDEO group. It is important to note that Kelley is critical of focus groups and marketing research methods more generally. David Gilmore, also a member of the IDEO group argues that there is a significant difference between research undertaken to 'inspire design' and research conducted to 'validate' design – 'one is about idiosyncracies and little details and the other is about averages and generalities' (Gilmore, 2002, p.32). The richly textured qualitative investigations advocated by Kelley and Gilmore would seem to have much in common with the phenomenological approaches of practice theory, the aim of which is to bring into conscious awareness that which we already in a sense know, that which resides in our background understanding (Glendinning, 2007, p.16).

² Following Dreyfus (1991) Krippendorff uses the term 'breakdown' to refer to Heidegger's concept of 'disturbance.'

The phenomenon of 'disruption' provides a powerful entry point into understanding the structure of our background awareness. It can be used to access a myriad of routinized interactions between agents, bodies, artefacts, environments, discourse, concepts and identities. Holding onto anomalies sensed, but deeply embedded, can be an important catalyst for cultural change (Spinoza, Flores, & Dreyfus, 1997). Practice theory suggests that there is considerable scope, in both design and in social research more generally, for developing research practices that are attentive to our pre-conceptual ways of understanding the world.

Dialogue: the interplay of emergent and preceding horizons

In a review of the approaches used in his own auto-ethnographic study of cultural politics of the paralympic movement P. David Howe draws attention to an issue that lies at the heart of any research endeavour that draws on the researcher's own practices as a primary source of data (Howe, 2008, p.156):

The danger of this phenomenological position is that the truths discerned by self-examination may be too closely bound to the experience of the researcher and the categories of their culture.

This concern is just as pressing for the design practitioner-researcher engaged in projects that draw upon their own practice as a significant source of data as it is for any other form of auto-ethnography.

From a practice theory perspective, existing experience in the form of practices of perceiving, noticing, categorising, articulating, making and otherwise acting in the world are intrinsically linked to the way in which the world shows up for us. Our practices operate at basic levels of perception governing what we notice. Heidegger (1962), Merleau-Ponty (2002) and Wittgenstein (1968) have all developed phenomenological descriptions that draw our attention to the fact that there is no such thing as pure sense perception. Heidegger (1962, p.207):

What we 'first' hear is never noises or complexes of sounds, but the creaking of a wagon, the motor-cycle. We hear the column on the march, the north wind, the woodpecker tapping, the fire crackling...It requires a very artificial and complicated frame of mind to 'hear' a 'pure noise.'

Even at the level of perception we are interpreting the world. Gibson's affordances (Gibson, 1979) might be seen as an elaboration of this position. A surface, for example, will not be perceived as pure sense data but as 'climb-on-able', 'fall-off-able' or 'bump-into-able' relative to the perceiver's actions and concerns (Cazeaux, 2007, p.64). Our practices enable our encounters with the world by allowing us to project into a situation.

If we accept that we can only ever have an understanding of a situation by coming to that situation from a particular perspective, then this raises the issue of how it is possible to move beyond that perspective. Hans Georg Gadamer, a philosopher, phenomenologist, and former student of Heidegger's, has developed a rich body of work aimed at developing our understanding of the practice of interpretation.

Gadamer (1989, pp. 367-368) develops detailed descriptions of the way in which our understanding is transformed through engaging in open dialogue with an 'other.' When we enter into a conversation, each participant brings a particular perspective to the matter at hand. Through the course of the conversation similarities and differences

emerge. If we are attentive to the differences, if we genuinely try to project into the situation to see how the other's claims might make sense, then our own initial projection into the situation is inevitably changed. At the very least we have a broader perspective on the way in which the situation at hand might be interpreted. At a more fundamental level, key aspects of our initial projection may no longer seem tenable. Gadamer employs the term 'fusion of horizons' (Gadamer, 1989, p. 306) to describe the development of perspectives (horizons) that occurs through open dialog. Through dialog, the initial perspective may shift in ways that align more effectively with the perspective of the other, but this is always a development of that initial perspective. Our changed perspective will never be identical to the perspective of the other. The initial projection into the situation is always productive of any future understanding of the situation that we might attain.

It is possible to draw on Gadamer's concept of fusion of horizons to account for the development of new ideas – not just in the context of conversation – but in the context of design and research activity more generally. Coyne and Snodgrass suggest that Schon's protocol studies reveal that the process of designing is dialogical, the talk back of the situation in the architectural context consisting of reflection on 'the construction of the problem, the strategies of action, or the model of the phenomena' (Snodgrass & Coyne, 1997, p.22). Gadamer's account of dialogue allows us to see how practice theory might offer a viable account of the phenomenon of 'insight.' Insight might be characterised as the recognition or resonance that occurs when the orientation that a designer/researcher has been projecting into a situation shifts in such a way that they glimpse the situation from another perspective, and that perspective seems, at least for a time, to make sense.

Practice theory posits an account of understanding as an orientation. It also offers a distinctive and compelling account of how it is that we develop new ideas. As we work through the process of trying to establish an effective coupling between self and world we orient and reorient ourselves in relation to the world. Any particular orientation will bring forth the world in a particular way. As we orient and reorient ourselves towards the world, the world will show up in different ways. Contrast this with a cultural mentalist account of change where understanding is conceived entirely in terms of mental representations. Change is construed as a combinatorial process where new ideas (representations) are generated by combining existing representations. In design contexts such a process is implied by the term 'synthesis.' The design methods movement was notable for the difficulties encountered in trying to account for the generation of design ideas in this way.

In a discussion of the new thinking required to drive entrepreneurial activity, Spinoza, Flores and Dreyfus (1997, p.53) observe that it is important for the entrepreneur to maintain a sense of both the 'sensibleness' and the strangeness of their new way of thinking. Their rationale is as follows. First, it is typically difficult for people to recognise the potential of the new way of thinking. The danger here is that people tend to make sense of the world in terms of existing categories and perspectives. It is all too easy for people to respond to the new thinking by subsuming that which is strange or difficult under existing categories, casting it as a manifestation of existing ideas in an attempt to master or reject it. The entrepreneur must find a way of articulating the relevance, the 'sensibleness', of the new thinking, showing how it relates to our tacit understanding of the world, and building an understanding of how this new way of thinking addresses particular issues or needs in a new way. Second, if the entrepreneur is successful in articulating the soundness of the new thinking there is a risk that it will seem obvious.

The danger here is that people will assume that if something is self evidently true then it must already be known and that the implications of the ideas have already been explored. The entrepreneur must preserve a sense of the difference between the new way of thinking and existing norms.

What of the auto-ethnographic practitioner-researcher? What of the situation where the researcher is in dialogue with his or her own views, with his or her own perspectives?

My claim here is that there are significant parallels between Spinosa et al.'s entrepreneur and the practitioner and/or researcher working with ideas (anomalies, insights) that they consider to be potentially significant. The onus is on the auto-ethnographic researcher to be attentive to 'shifts' in their projections as they work through projects. Gadamer's description of dialogue suggests that interpretation is primarily a matter of allowing one's initial projection into a situation to be opened up and modified by the contingencies of that situation. As the practitioner researcher presses into the possibilities of the situation, they need to be attentive to both the limitations of conventional ways of thinking about a situation and to those moments when they develop a sense of possible alternatives.

Rissanen (2007, 2008) discusses a PhD project explicitly structured around the articulation of emerging and existing perspectives on designing and pattern making in the context of fashion design. The aim of the project was to develop approaches to design and pattern making that eliminate fabric waste. The project began by documenting existing approaches to designing fashion, approaches which encompass a range of relationships between pattern making and designing. The next stage of the project involved a series of design experiments organised in terms of distinct design approaches which seemed to have potential in terms of designing to eliminate fabric waste – including draping, interlocking pattern pieces, and backward engineering existing pattern pieces to eliminate gaps when laid out on a given fabric width. The design experiments evolved into the design of a zero waste menswear collection. The outcomes of the project will be reported in terms of the changes to existing industry practices that would be required to facilitate design for zero fabric waste.

Practice theory holds that practices and perspectives are inherently over subjective (Reckwitz, 2002). It is recognition of the solidarity that arises from our being inducted into shared practices that free us from the spectre of relativism (Bernstein, 1983). If the outcomes of auto-ethnographic research are to be recognised as being of value to others, then the practitioner-researcher must be able to contextualise those outcomes in the light of perspectives that are familiar to others working in similar areas. The practitioner-researcher should be able to contextualise new, speculative projections so that they shed light on our more familiar perspectives whilst in the process articulating the merits of the new alternative.

Metaphor and entailments

Heidegger makes extensive use of the 'as' structure of our understanding in his phenomenology whilst, at the same time, making no explicit mention of metaphor. Apart from a reference to the fact that language is fundamentally metaphorical (Gadamer, 1989, p.429), Gadamer too is largely silent on the subject. It would seem that neither Heidegger nor Gadamer see the need to maintain a category called 'metaphor' as their ontological position is such that there is no distinction to be made between literal and metaphorical language. All language use involves 'seeing as.' All language is metaphorical. One simply needs to speak of 'language.' That it is the nature of language to allow us to perceive the similar in the distinct is implied (Vedder, 2002, p.197). Ricoeur

(2003), provides a compelling example of this position by drawing attention to the fact that to use a common category such as 'dog' or 'cat' to refer to any animal in particular is necessarily in itself an instance of 'seeing as.' We live within a culture that has lost sight of this fundamentally metaphoric character of language.

In this section I explore the value of the language construct "... as ..." in bringing to the fore aspects of our perspectives – perspectives that normally reside at the level of background awareness, a level that is necessarily prior to concepts. I retain use of the term 'metaphor' in the context of this discussion as it helps to illuminate the provocative nature of the praxeological account of language and its relationship to understanding.

Concepts of metaphor are tied to concepts of language. If we conceive of language as primarily a matter of 'naming' then metaphor is a decorative, ornament of language, a figure of speech that can always be replaced with literal language (Ricoeur, 2003, pp.51-52). If we conceive of language as isomorphic with mental representations that are constitutive of our understanding of the world, then metaphor shapes our understanding in the most fundamental of ways (consider here the culturalist mentalism of Lakoff and Johnson (1999)). If however we conceive of language as equipment for drawing attention to aspects of our understanding of the world (Heidegger, 1962, p. 108), then metaphor can be seen as equipment for drawing attention to aspects of the 'as' structure of our understanding,³ understanding that typically resides at the level of background awareness. In practice theory metaphor does not capture our perspectives (as in culturalist mentalism), it is merely language that can be used to draw attention to aspects of those perspectives.

As we have already seen, any encounter that we can have with the world is always already an interpretation. A fundamental assumption of practice theory is that most of our understanding resides at the level of background awareness. Understanding is conceived primarily as a matter of 'orientation' rather than of conscious thought. In those situations where we do become conscious of our background awareness, moments of insight for example, the experience can be fleeting. New perspectives might be momentarily glimpsed, preceding perspectives discarded in an instant.

Once glimpsed the researcher informed by practice theory requires a construct that will allow him to background perspectives into view. While Heidegger and Gadamer would no doubt assign this function to our use of language as a whole, the construct "... as ..." provides a concise and explicit way of drawing attention to the perspectives that constitute our understanding. 'Metaphor' in the form of the construct "... as ..." allows us to draw attention to particular ways of seeing the world so that the entailments (implications) of those perspectives can be explored.

Much of the research on the metaphor and entailments explores entailments that are worked out in the context of language itself. George Lakoff's (1996) analysis of different conceptions of family – the 'strict father family' and the nurturant parent family' – is a case in point. Starting from an initial observation that much political rhetoric is based on metaphors of the family, Lakoff has analysed the way in which the two models of family have been used to frame the rhetoric of conservative and liberal politics in America. While Lakoff is clearly interested in the practical implications of the use of these metaphors his analysis is entirely at the level of discourse.

³ It should be noted that I am drawing here on Heidegger's characterisation of language when it is being used to make assertions about the world. Heidegger's concept of language is in fact broader than this but a focus on assertions is sufficient for my purpose here.

Practice theory would, of course, suggest a very different approach to the working out of entailments. It is interesting that Krippendorff (2006, pp.106-107) in his discussion of UCMs (User Conceptual Maps) comes to a position that closely approximates the practice theory approach. Krippendorff discusses an example of a study where users were found to be using two different models of home heat control: 'as a valve' and 'as a feedback system.' Krippendorff reports that these models were derived from extensive interviews where users explained how they handled thermostats and that this was correlated with recorded room temperature fluctuations. Krippendorff also comments on the fact that the engineer's design of the thermostat accommodated both models of use 'probably without intention or awareness of the difference.' Here we see the operations of two different models at play in both the design and the use of an artefact. The fact that the models were derived from extensive interviews suggests that the models weren't operating primarily at the level of conscious thought, but that they formed part of the background awareness of both user and designers. This movement from use and design, to discourse (the UCMs), and presumably back to use and design, is entirely consistent with a praxeological approach to design enquiry.

Given that the ontological assumptions behind the study were obviously in some ways at odds with practice theory – the terminology of 'User Conceptual Map' gives this much away – does it really matter whether or not the design researcher is aware of the possibility that much of our understanding could be embedded in the structure of our background understanding?

On one level design research is generally applied research. It is a practice and, as a practice coupled with the world in very real ways. It is thus likely to gravitate towards activities that work in spite of the epistemological and ontological assumptions of the researcher. On another level however I think it does matter. The background perspectives of researchers can have very real implications for the priorities that they give to particular research practices and the aspects of a situation that come to their attention.

Conclusion

Practice theory is an emergent approach to the study of the social that offers many ideas that should be of value to design research: the repositioning of background awareness (know how) as the pre-condition of any other form of understanding; the recovery of artefacts as a central focus for investigating the social; the recognition that understanding can never be fully captured or formalised but that we may draw attention to aspects of the structure of that understanding. Furthermore practice theory has the potential to provide a compelling account of the phenomenon of 'insight' and the way in which new understandings emerge.

I have explored three constructs that I consider to be helpful in sensitising the design practitioner-researcher to the possibilities and implications of practice theory: disturbance, dialogue and metaphor.

'Disturbance' is a concept explicitly thematised by Heidegger. It is a concept that has already been taken up to some extent in the context of design research. Reckwitz (2002, p.250) has observed that there is a danger in trivializing practice theory. It is not a full blown grand theory, and there is every possibility that it might be reduced to concepts of agents and behaviours and become subsumed within existing approaches to the study of culture. The work of Klaus Krippendorff has been discussed in this paper to provide

an example of how this is happening in the design literature. Krippendorff draws on ideas from Heidegger, including his concept of disturbance and his distinction between the ready-to-hand and the present-at-hand. Krippendorff also draws on Gibson's concept of affordances. He subsumes these phenomena within an ontology that does not recognise practices as *the* site of the social. In the light of practice theory 'disturbance' can be seen as a starting point, a way into noticing the way in which specific practices are structured. This potential is passed over when practices are conceived of as mere patterns of behaviour, rather than being constitutive of our perception, our discourse, our understanding and use of artefacts, our identities, and our motivations as well as our actions.

'Dialogue' is a construct developed by Gadamer to elaborate a Heideggerian perspective on the dynamics of interpretation. Gadamer's phenomenological description of dialog draws our attention to both the possibility and the potential of allowing ourselves to be sufficiently open to the contingencies of a situation that we are able to adapt our initial projections, whilst at the same time recognising that those initial projections the condition of the possibility of our having any understanding of the situation. We can conceive of the shift in understanding that occurs as we orient and reorient ourselves towards a situation as a form of 'disturbance.' I have suggested that this form of disturbance accords with the phenomenon often referred to in design literature as 'insight.' As with other forms of disturbance – it should be regarded as a potential point to access into the structure of our background awareness.

A difficulty arises from that the fact that the bringing into conscious of an awareness of aspects of our background understanding can be fleeting. A third construct 'metaphor' has been discussed with a view to demonstrating the value of this language form, both in drawing attention to the 'as structure' of our background awareness, and in holding particular perspectives in view so that the implications of those perspectives can be explicitly interrogated.

I close with the observation that a focus on practices as the site of the social may result in collapsing or minimising some of the existing distinctions between modes of research. An ethnography consistent with practice theory would develop a clear focus on practices. Auto-ethnography would be undertaken by practitioner-researchers oriented towards bringing aspects of the background awareness that is cultivated by their own practices to the fore. Under these circumstances the auto-ethnographer would seem to have much in common with the design practitioner-researcher engaging in design projects with a view to drawing on aspects of their understanding of their own design practice.

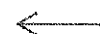
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EKSIG 2009: experiential knowledge, method & methodology

Editorial

Kristina Niedderer & Linden Reilly

This CD contains the papers accepted through the double blind review process to be given at the EKSIG2009: Experiential Knowledge, Method and Methodology held on 19th June 2009. The papers presented by the keynote speakers will be available on the conference website.

The conference was organised to provide a forum for debate about methods of research and other forms of practice in design, art, and related subject areas. Over the past two decades, new impetus has been given to debate about design research in the UK subsequent to the formal transformation of polytechnics and some schools of art and design into universities in the 1990's (Durling, Friedman, and Gutherson, 2002), which meant that design has increasingly been conceived and framed in academic terms. Before then, most research relating to art and design had to be conducted in a recognised research discipline such as history, philosophy, education, or engineering (Niedderer 2009). This transformation of the context of much design education has

brought two disparate sets of practices and beliefs into close proximity: on the one hand practices and cultures of research, characterised by debate about questions, methods and what counts as knowledge, and by requirements of communicable as well as generalisable and transferable

results. On the other hand practices of creating, designing, inventing, and making, in which the experiences of the body are traditionally conceived as playing an important role. (Niedderer and Reilly 2007)

Negotiation between these two disparate sets of practices has generated new models of research to accommodate the particularities of design and related subject areas.

Several recent studies have been concerned with the development and use of art and design methods within and for art and design research. Publications by Cross (1984, 2001, 2003) have been seminal the field, and a number of PhD studies have set precedents for research in art and design by using the creative potential of drawing or designing to generate insights and/or new solutions (Whiteley 2000; Rust and Whiteley 1998, Wood 2004, Pedgley 2007, Niedderer 2007).

There is increasing interest in the development of methods and approaches that are designed for art and design research and that are developed to utilise and integrate experiential knowledge. This year's conference is held in recognition and support of these developments, and to provide a forum that might stimulate research and debate in this area.