Practice 'in Talk' and Talk 'as Practice': Dish Washing and the Reach of Language

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to open up debate about the methodological implications of adopting practice theory in social research. Practice theory has become a much used analytical framework for researchers working on the question 'what we do' in relation to a diverse set of contemporary concerns, but discussion on the epistemological implications has thus far been limited. By looking at interview talk on dish washing through a practice-theoretical lens grounded in Schatzki's (1996, 2002) ontology of practices, I set out to examine how language and talk form a resource and an obstruction when we want to think about mundane practices in scholarly ways. My concern is located within the broader questioning of qualitative interviews in debate in the social sciences. Acknowledging that interviews are 'distinctive forms of social action' (Atkinson & Coffey 2003), I move on to consider how talk about washing up in interviews conveys the interaction between two practices; those of talking as the salient embodied practice wielded by human beings in interaction with each other, and dish washing as an integrated cleaning practice common in domestic kitchens. The analysis suggests that our qualitative interviews stimulated talk on the teleo-affective qualities of dish-washing. Rules and principles also appeared in the talk in specific ways. However, the talk was not so good for gaining understanding of the activity of dish washing. In conclusion, I argue that the standard qualitative interview brings out the human-to-human interactional concerns of practices, but that different research contexts need to be developed and employed for gaining greater understanding of the performance (or activity) of the practice of dish washing.

Introduction

1.1 As a fusion of common threads found in contemporary cultural theories (Reckwitz 2002), practice theory has captured the attention of researchers working in different disciplinary areas, often stimulated by the challenges encountered in investigations aimed at addressing complex contemporary concerns. Examples include the debate on sustainability, the environment, and changes in habits (e.g. Bartiaux 2007; Gram-Hanssen 2010; Nye & Hargreaves 2010; Røpke 2009; Shove 2010); on health and food routines (e.g. Halkier 2000), and on skill, competence and knowledge acquisition in organisations and domestic life (e.g. Antonacopoulou 2008; Truninger 2011). We find common reference in this work to the ontology of practices, developed by Theodor Schatzki (1996, 2002) and the summary typology of social practices put forward by Andreas Reckwitz (2002a). Both theorists are explicit in their view that a focus on practices requires attention to epistemology and methodology.[1] Thus, in the conclusion to his second commentary on social practices, Schatzki argues:

> "Although I have occasionally noted or commented on epistemological issues that immediately attend or bear on the proffered ontological theses, I have assiduously avoided engaging these issues in any detail. Social ontologies, however, hold considerable consequences for the character of social investigation." (2002: 266)

1.2 Reckwitz sketches practice theory as an invitation to:

> "...revise the hyperrational and intellectualised picture of human agency and the social

offered by classical and high-modern social theories. Practice theory 'decentres' mind, texts and conversation. Simultaneously, it shifts bodily movements, things, practical knowledge and routine to the centre of its vocabulary." (2002: 259)

1.3 To date, this call for methodological attention has yet to be addressed coherently. Halkier (2011) and Halkier & Jensen (2011) offer what may be regarded as the first explicit reflections on the methodological implications of adopting a practice theoretical framework in research on food and eating. And whilst recent studies have included ethnography (Hargreaves 2011), photographic materials (Watson and Shove 2008), and also video (Truninger 2011), the prominence of the qualitative interview draws attention to the reliance in much contemporary 'practice research' on modes of research engagement that are grounded in discursive interaction between researchers and research participants.

1.4 The aim of this paper is to open up debate about the central place of language in scholarly practices of investigation, understanding and representation, and to examine the implications of this for researching common everyday practices. It is not my intention to develop a simple critique of language-based research endeavours. To the contrary, my discussion below illustrates how central language is in our 'efforts to understand', whether 'common' or 'scholarly', raising the question how it is 'practically' possible, in 'research practice' on common practices, to shift 'bodily movements, things, practical knowledge and routine' to the centre of our focus, whilst simultaneously decentring 'mind, texts and conversation' (Reckwitz 2002: 259). But I believe we should be more aware of the ways in which language and talk form a *resource* and an *obstruction* when we want to think about mundane practices in scholarly ways. I develop this concern in two ways. In this paper, I think through how the practice of talking in qualitative interviews on kitchen life relates to the *social organisation* of the practice of dish washing, and what this reveals about the functionality of a 'standard' qualitative interview for developing insight into the *practical-performance* dimension of dish washing. Elsewhere, I consider how the *social organisation* of dish washing comes into play in efforts to understand the performance of dish washing through the process of viewing 24/7 CCTV footage of domestic kitchen practices (Martens in development).

1.5 I start by locating the concerns addressed in this paper within a broader historical and interdisciplinary debate about the role and place of language in knowledge, culture and research. I point to the apparent contradiction between the assertions that 'actions ... are understandable because they can be talked about' (Atkinson & Coffey 2003: 416) and that much of what 'we do' is not 'linguistically explicit' or even language-like (Bloch 1991: 186). Schatzki's (1996, 2002) argument that practices are normatively organised around teleo-affectivities, rules and principles, and understanding is then used to reflect on how talk about dish washing in interviews conveys the interaction between two practices; those of talking as the salient embodied practice wielded by human beings in interaction with each other, and dish-washing as an integrated cleaning practice common in domestic kitchens. The empirical focus for my discussion is research on domestic kitchen practices, in which the relationship between the ontology and epistemology of practices was a primary focus.[2]

Language, Discursive Interaction and Understanding

2.1 Conversation is the definitive embodied medium for interpersonal interaction and communication amongst human beings. As such, language and conversation have enjoyed substantial theoretical and methodological interest amongst a diversity of scholars, with clusters finding in the study of these phenomena their *raison d'etre*. Given the centrality of conversation and language in the conduct of human interaction and meaning-making, it is hardly surprising that scholarly practice has itself come to rely so heavily on specific forms of discursive interaction. In the social sciences, the development of survey questionnaires and various forms of interviewing are examples of conversational techniques scholars have initiated and used profusely. Sociologists have been keen developers of these methods, and their centrality in the project of British sociology in the post-war years has recently been assessed (Savage 2008). Equally, despite some important and interesting experimentation in scholarly authorship (e.g. Büscher 2005; Pink 2007), the written and spoken word continues to hold sway in the conversations scholars have with one another.

2.2 Having said so, it would be hard to deny the disillusionment which has started to envelop linguistically-grounded research methods. This is the case in policy-related research, where the question 'what people do' in their everyday lives is high on the agenda, but where confidence in the chief methods used for developing understanding is low. In sociology, Hammersley traces the increasingly sceptical stance towards interviewing in critical methodological reflection (2003: 120). And Maurice Bloch represents an anthropological questioning of the power of language in expositions of 'what we do'. He argues:

> When our informants honestly say 'this is why we do such things', or 'this is what this means', or 'this is how we do such things', instead of being pleased we should be suspicious and ask what kind of *peculiar* knowledge is this which can take such an explicit, linguistic form? Indeed, we should treat all explicit knowledge as problematic, as a type of knowledge probably remote from that employed in practical activities under normal circumstances. (Bloch 1991: 193-4)

2.3 This questioning of the powers of verbal expression found in communicative interaction holds sway with some crucial linchpins in the argument on the relationship between interviewing and observation, developed by Atkinson & Coffey (2003) and Atkinson, Coffey and Delamont (2003).[3] The authors usefully challenge some methodological conventions, which have crept into sociological parlance and practice through a set of early reflections on the affordances and qualities of the methods of observation and interviewing. Crucial is their criticism of 'simple' modes of triangulation, found in earlier

methodological reflections in sociology, which render observation the 'gold standard' with which researchers may verify 'problematic' statements made during interviews. Arguing against the idea that observation has primacy over interviewing, Atkinson & Coffey state:

> ... the research methods we use imply or depend on particular kinds of transactions and engagements with the world. ... participant observation and interviewing are themselves distinctive forms of social action, generating distinctive kinds of accounts and giving rise to particular versions of social analysis. (2003a: 421/2)

2.4 Despite their effort to bring qualitative research into the 21st Century, interest in the contrast between 'what people do and what they say they do' (2003a: 422) is still very much on the agenda today, and this is not limited to the sociological community.[4] Research engagements must therefore be scrutinised for what they are and what 'they do', or, putting it into practice theory language: they must be interrogated for the kind of practices they are. Atkinson and Coffey start to give us some insight into the kind of practices 'standard' qualitative interviews are by describing them as '...occasions in which are enacted particular kinds of narratives and in which "informants" construct themselves and others as particular kinds of moral agents' (2003: 421). In a similar vein, I have argued that researchers' practices of looking in observational research contexts are inherently linked into their community of practice, and thus looking is always a political practice guided by specific purposes (Martens 2012).

2.5 Whilst Atkinson and colleagues offer useful insights that may form the basis on which to build further methodological reflection, their argument also kindles potential confusion. Let us consider a series of assertions with which they start their critique:

> ... field researchers must not assume that what is done should enjoy primacy over what it said, and that therefore observation and interviewing stand in opposition to one another. Actions, we argue, are understandable because they can be talked about. Equally, accounts - including those derived from interviewing - are actions. (Atkinson & Coffey, 2003: 416)

2.6 I agree that there is much of truth in this statement. Yet, I wish to dwell a little on the second assertion that 'actions ... are understandable because they can be talked about'. It seems to me that this statement says more about the purposes of talk than it does about the nature of action itself. It potentially hides the fact that actions are *rendered* understandable through talk, pointing to the salience of discursive communication in human-to-human interaction and to the *active* constitution of understanding in social life. This suggests that not *all* we could possibly know about actions is translatable into words and conveyed relatively effectively through talk: actions should not be confused with talk, even when talk is acknowledged as action. By doing so we run the risk of promoting an understanding of culture that is overly linguistic; something which arguably happens in the research example Atkinson *et al.* (2003) use to support their argument that as enactments, observation and interviewing are not dissimilar. Thus:

> Culture is not something "out there" that one invokes as an explanation for action. Culture is what is enacted. Student culture is what students talk about - what they treat as memorable, remarkable, tellable (amongst many other things). So students also render their own "experiences" in terms of what can be narrated to other students. (2003: 103)

2.7 The idea that not *all* we could possibly know about action is translatable into words is not new. As illustrated in the quote above, one of the strongest proponents in favour of this view is Maurice Bloch (1991). Referring to predecessors, like Mauss, Bloch argues that common knowledge, like 'how to cook', has long been recognised as 'fundamentally non-linguistic' (1991: 186). In sociology, Majorie DeVault (1990, 1991) engages with the problematic of the limitations of the language women have at their disposal for talking about mundane 'action' in the kitchen. Drawing on Dorothy Smith, she sketches language as shaped by (gender) culture; something importantly connected with what elements of our culture we render as socially important. Atkinson *et al.* acknowledge these points when they characterise the talk of medical students as 'any encounter with a clinical teacher is *potentially* tellable in accordance with the shared understandings of what constitutes an experience. Being dealt with rationally, reasonably, and undemonstratively by a clinical teacher does not count as a tellable experience - except when used as a contrastive device to highlight the unreasonable behaviour of someone else, or to highlight how extreme this particular event was.' (2003: 104) Thus, if talk is an avenue for presenting that which is 'tellable', this simultaneously suggests that silences must exist around elements of culture which are rendered 'socially insignificant'. Different reasons for such reticence *about* and *in* action are implied. Bloch (1991) considers the 'biological' challenges of translating that which 'we do' into words, suggesting that action or practical expertise is too complex and not sufficiently language like to make for easy translation into words. Atkinson *et al.* and DeVault point to social reasons for silence, connected on the one hand to the fact that rules guide discursive interaction, and on the other, to the historical shaping of language itself by cultural forces. Oral performance of culture, we may conclude, is therefore only one element of culture.

2.8 This problematic, of the limitations of language, is also addressed by Schatzki (1996), who points to the historical debate about whether 'the limits of language are the limits of intelligibility' (1996: 126). Arguing that 'language plays a critical role in the articulation of intelligibility', he nevertheless agrees with the above discussants, when stating that 'the limits of intelligibility are charted out in behaviour beyond the limits of what can be said.' (1996: 126) Schatzki also points to the difficulty scholars face for comprehending and examining this, because 'language is the medium in which analysis is conducted' (1996: 128). For the purpose of examining the ways in which 'the qualitative interview' operates as a *resource*, and vice versa, an *obstruction* for thinking through the practice of dish washing, I will use elements of Schatzki's ontology of practices as an analytical guide. First, I will say a little about the research on which it draws.

Researching Domestic Kitchens Practices

3.1 In the project *Domestic Kitchen Practices*, we developed ethnographic research on the kitchen lives and practices of 12 families, diverse in terms of their location in the life course. We drew attention at the proposal stage to the limitations of our common language as a resource sufficiently revealing to serve as the sole method for advancing scholarly knowledge on routine practices in mundane domestic life. Therefore, from the outset, one of our priorities was to explore the potential of video. Using different technologies and techniques for recording, we actively examined the potential of video for understanding practices. This included the 24/7 recording of everyday life in the kitchens of four of the families, using a CCTV camera and assorted equipment.[5] The temporal order of research engagement with these families was as follows. After recruitment, we conducted a qualitative interview, talking about different elements of kitchen practices, focussing especially on practices of cleaning and ordering, and on the materiality of the kitchen. This was followed by the CCTV recording of four to five 24-hour days of kitchen life, including week and week-end days. After initial analysis of first interviews and the CCTV recordings, the researchers returned for a second interview. The purpose here was to pick up on issues which were not clear from the first interview and, whilst watching some of the footage with participants, to reflect further on their kitchen practices and on the experience of having the CCTV equipment in the kitchen.

3.2 An overall analysis of interview extracts coded under the practice category for dish washing was conducted. My discussion below is limited to a more detailed exploration of the talk on dish washing which ensued with two of our participants; Sarah Allison and Josie Stevens. Sarah lived with her husband; a retired farmer, and his uncle in a farm house in a rural location. This was an older couple, who had married relatively late in life and who had no children. Josie had a young family which included her partner, her 7-year old son and a crawling baby. The Stevens had recently moved into their own home; a semi-detached house in a town, and Josie and Martin were soon due to marry. The stresses of moving house, associated here with the disruption caused to previously established routines of dish washing, were evident in this family. Both families collaborated with us in the CCTV element of the research, which means that we have talk on dish washing from before and after the CCTV recording. This makes it possible to examine our evolving understanding of the kitchen practices of these families over the course of different research encounters. It also attunes us to the fact that each interview was a different 'event'. Because the interviews took place in people's homes, a number were conducted in the presence of other family members. Sarah's husband Robert was present during the first interview, but absent during the second interview. Josie's partner Martin was absent on both occasions, but during the second interview Josie's two children were around. In both cases, the CCTV recording was conducted soon after the first interview, though the timing of the second interview varied. The two interviews with Sarah were 6 months apart; in Josie's case the second interview followed 2 months from the first one. The combined transcript of discussion with these women in which dish washing featured exceeds 2800 words, with more exchange occurring during the first interviews.

Talk about Washing Up in Qualitative Interviews

4.1 Dish washing is unambiguously 'a practice' in the sense of 'a 'bundle of activities, that is to say, an organized nexus of actions. Any practice, consequently, embraces two overall dimensions: activity and organization.' (Schatzki 2002: 71) It could be regarded as a fairly dispersed integrated practice in the sense that the need to clean cooking and eating utensils is ubiquitous in human life. Washing up is also a practice which is 'materially dense' in the sense that one of its main purposes is the 'renewal' of tools for cooking and eating across and between eating and cooking events. Dish washing in family life is mostly confined to the space of the contemporary domestic kitchen, in which it has a distinct material infrastructure that includes a sink and surrounding area for collecting and storing dirty and clean dishes. In increasing numbers of households, this is accompanied by a dishwasher appliance. Our interviews suggest that dish washing holds potential sociological 'practice' interest, for instance, in relation to temporal changes in it, which frequently appeared in our talk through a focus on intergenerational variations and memories from past experience and practice. Given the insulated character of the performance of washing up in domestic life, the 'uniformity' of themes that came into our discussion is highly interesting.

4.2 This section taps into how dish washing as a practice 'exists' and 'lives' in the talk that evolved during our interviews. By focusing on the way the different dimensions of the organisation of this practice appear in the talk, my analysis also offers an illustration of how Schatzki's ontology of practices may be operationalised. It may be useful to repeat that for Schatzki a practice is 'an organized nexus of actions' in the sense that the actions

> "...are linked *(or organised)* in certain ways. Three major avenues of linkages are involved:
> (1) through understandings, for example, of what to say and do; (2) through explicit rules,
> principles, precepts, and instructions; and (3) through what I will call "teleoaffective"
> structures embracing ends, projects, tasks, purposes, beliefs, emotions, and moods."
> (Schatzki 1996: 89, *Italics my emphasis*)

4.3 The argument I develop is in essence that our talk is good for getting at these *organisational* dimensions of dish washing, but not so good for getting at *activity*. My starting point is to consider how the organising principles of understanding (conceptual/practical), teleology (ends and purposes) and affectivity (beliefs, emotions and moods), and rules, principles and instructions are embedded in the talk. Such a focus is useful partly for providing insight into how these dimensions come into talk. My attention then turns to how talk conveys *activity*, or the practical, performance-related aspects of dish-washing. Whilst my scholarly interest is in the practice of dish washing, because the qualitative interview is a

distinct form of action (or practice) in its own right, in the ensuing analysis my focus is two-fold. On the one hand, I consider how knowledge (or intelligibility) of dish washing is articulated. On the other hand, I pay attention to how talk as practice comes into focus and how it interacts, guides and shapes articulation of the practice of washing up.

Accomplishing talk on dish washing

4.4 Interviews typically rehearse a range of topics, and it is interesting to think about how we are able to recognise the shift between topics and/or practices. Following Schatzki, those who participate in a practice (also known as practice-carriers) have access to a propositional and practice-based conceptual understanding. When looking through our interview transcripts, it is apparent that this conceptual understanding 'surrounds' the other organizational dimensions of dish washing, by essentially forming the language with which to talk. As practice carriers and as readers we are also able to recognise a shift to the topic of dish washing (and to identify continuity of the topic and a shift away from it) through the occurrence of what I call practice-implying 'do' concepts and concepts for practice-implying 'materialities'. Do concepts point to 'doing' related elements of the practice, and include verbs, which are sometimes turned into nouns, as happens for instance with 'the washing up'. Concepts for unambiguous practice-implying materialities include 'dishwasher', 'tea towel' and 'washing up liquid'. Of interest is that some of these concepts are combinations of 'doings' and 'materialities'. 'Dry the dishes', 'washing up liquid' and 'dishwasher' are examples. Use of such unambiguous practice-related concepts was instrumental for turning the conversation to the practice of washing up, though their use did not necessitate such a turn. In extract 1 below, Josie assertively moves the discussion to dish washing by using the unambiguous practice-implying materiality concept of 'dishwasher' after the researcher explains that one of our interests is in cleanliness. In the following two extracts, I have highlighted the unambiguous do concepts and materiality concepts in bold and italic.

4.5 In line with Schatzki (2002: 70), who explains that the difference between 'doings' and 'acts' is one of context, meaning that an action is unambiguously associated with one rather than another practice, whilst a doing may point to different practices until its association with a particular practice is clarified, I am here making a distinction between unambiguous and ambiguous do and materiality concepts. As such, talk about dish washing ensues through the combination of concepts used for materials together with do concepts, and where ambiguous concepts derive their practice-associated clarity through their proximity with unambiguous concepts in the flow of the discussion. I have highlighted such ambiguous concepts in bold and underlined them.

> Extract 1:
>
> Researcher - the focus of the research is. It's kind of about kitchens generally, but with a bit of a focus on cleanliness.
> Josie - Right. I did have ***a dishwasher*** in [name of street]. We brought it with us, but I didn't like it.
> Researcher - Why's that?
> Josie - It did, it didn't, my…it was a slimline ***dishwasher*** and you know you have your **pans** and everything. Everyone thinks that you should just **put everything** in ***the dishwasher*** and **it'll come out** sparkling, nice and clean. If you **put a pan** in ***the dishwasher*** with mashed potato on, **everything comes out** covered with hard mashed potato. {Ay} **It** doesn't **rinse everything off** and I kept **filling it** up with the **salt**, **putting the detergent in**, **putting** *the* ***rinse aid*** in - doesn't matter. It still used, everything used to have that… When your ***dishwasher*** **comes** to the end, it gets really hot so **it dries it** so it and it just dried on - it were like cement! I didn't like it at all. Now I really, I do prefer to ***wash up*** so you know that **it's** nice and clean.

4.6 Briefly, the mention of 'salt', 'detergent' and 'filling it' in extract 1 could point to a variety of different practices. The context of the discussion nevertheless clarifies their association with dish washing and ensures that as practice carrying readers, we can agree the talk is (amongst other things) about washing up. In the exchange between the researcher, Sarah and Robert Allison in extract 2, 'putting in' becomes a dish washing associated do concept through its association with the 'dishwasher', which appears in the researcher's first question and is itself a follow-on of earlier discussion about the dishwasher in the Allison kitchen that was first stimulated through a researcher question that also coined this unambiguous materiality concept.

> Extract 2:
>
> Researcher - I'm doing this research and it's increasingly made me think that I must get a ***dishwasher***. {laughs}. Spend hours ***washing dishes***. Do you **put** everything **in** it or?
> Sarah - No. I don't **put pans in**. No, I put um… **mugs** um… **cutlery**, the majority of the **cutlery** except he always likes a **bone handled knife** so they don't **go in**. But, I've got stainless steel **cutlery**. **Plates**, **mugs** er…certain **dishes**, everyday **glasses** but I don't put **pans** in 'cos **they** take up too much room and **it's** not a full sized one, you know, it's um…
> Robert - Slimline…
> Researcher - Do you **put things** straight **in** it or do you **rinse them** first?
> Sarah - Em… I **put things** straight **in** it, but er…we're not people who leave a lot on our plates! Put it that way. I mean it's a, you know, obvious **bits** I'll **scrape** them **off** but em… but breakfast time I might **knock the crumbs off**, but anything that's **stuck on** I'll just…

4.7 The do concepts that appear in washing up talk range across different levels of 'generality'. In Sarah's

talk, for instance, 'washing up' and 'dry the dishes' were present as unambiguous do concepts, with the former commonly used as a quick short-hand for 'the whole' practice and the latter a common concept indicating 'a task' within the practice. 'Putting in' in extract 2 could also be acknowledged as a task of dish washing, though 'scraping off' and 'knocking off' are do concepts that point to more micro dimensions of activity. Tasks are an interesting feature of the social organisation of practices. In a brief exchange where Josie outlines what she regards as a fair organisation of domestic work with her partner Martin, the dish washing related tasks of washing and drying dishes, and putting these back into cupboards, are mentioned in quick succession: 'If I'm doing the cooking and the cleaning and ironing and everything else, it's his job to do the pots and he dries and puts away, yeah.' Tasks 'say something' about the sequencing and location of collections of actions 'in a practice' and, as done by Josie here, they allow us to talk about how the overall work is 'divided up'. As useful 'short-hands' in verbal explanation, they are thus part of the conceptual understanding of the practice as well as pointing to the teleological dimensions of it, as argued by Schatzki.

Teleo-affective priorities as tellable talk

4.8 During the discussion, both participants moved to offer insight into their priorities early on in dish washing-related talk, thus tapping into the teleo-affective dimensions of the organization of dish washing. Arguably, this is the case because these priorities connect with strong emotional experiences, and Sarah and Josie 'used' the interview to convey this.[6] Sarah's main priority was 'who was involved in the work' of dish washing. Further priorities were 'getting the dishes clean' and 'maintaining kitchen ware', which came out in relation to not machine washing bone-handled cutlery. In relation to 'getting the dishes clean' and through further discussion, it became apparent that Sarah was more concerned with visual cleanliness than with germ cleanliness. Though both were present, visual cleanliness was volunteered, whilst hygiene was negotiated with the researcher as a shared principle (thus offering Sarah a way of 'displaying' knowledge of its relevance to washing up). Most of the talk with Sarah centred on the dishwasher, which she described as 'wonderful', and which was the lynchpin tying her priorities together, whilst simultaneously functioning as an indicator that 'who was involved in the work' came 'up front' for her. With little help from the male members of the household in dish washing being forthcoming, the celebrated dishwasher was the answer to a job Sarah said she 'hated doing' and pointed to the internal conflict she experienced from the idea that she was seen as the one responsible for doing them. Arguably, the end/purpose of 'getting the dishes clean' was dwarfed by Sarah's emotional conflict with cleaning and inter-relational assumptions about her responsibility for this.

4.9 As was the case for Sarah, the discussion with Josie Stevens also illustrated interactional reasons for the ordering of teleo-affective priorities in her talk. She shared with Sarah an emotional pre-occupation with 'who is involved in the work' of dish washing. By the time the second interview took place, the lack of participation in dish washing Josie perceived in her partner had become a stumbling block in their relationship. From Josie's point of view, she had been led down by Martin, as he did not keep himself to the 'condition' she had placed before him when he moved in with her: 'all I asked him to do, when we agreed to move in together I said 'all I ask you to do is to do the pots after we have had the tea' that's all I asked.' Like Sarah, Josie's early discussion centred on the dishwasher, but she rejected it as an appliance brought into the household by Martin to get out of his obligation to wash pots after meals. As reflected in extract 1, Josie's emotional struggles around dish washing came out early on in her discussion in as assertive way - and initiated by her rather than the researcher - through the strong rhetorical narrative on how dishwashers fail to wash properly, in which pots and pans were used by way of 'telling' illustration.

4.10 The exchange continues with another of Josie's priorities: that of 'getting the dishes clean', with emphasis on the visual ('sparkling, nice and clean' here, and clutter elsewhere) and germ cleanliness. Josie was very vocal about hygiene, which she linked to having a baby in the house, and this fluency was couched within a discussion of anti-bacterial products and an illustration of her knowledge of the principles behind air drying dishes as hygienically better than towel drying. Finally, in her narrative on the failure of the dishwasher, we may read the priority of value-for-money associated with the amount of detergent needed without a satisfactory end product. These three priorities arguably feed into the meta-practice of mothering and exhibit Josie's concern with ideas about what constitutes 'good motherhood' (Molander 2011). Overall, it could be argued that whilst for Sarah it was important not to be seen as the 'domestic servant' in her household, for Josie there existed a contradiction between the need to share domestic work and her perception that Martin's participation compromised her standard of cleanliness, and thus her claim to good mothering.[7]

Principles, rules and instructions in talk

4.11 One of the most intriguing insights of examining talk on dish washing as done here is how the organisational facet of rules, principles and instructions came into view. In fact, there was little of noteworthiness about the way in which this dimension of organisation entered Sarah's talk, making me speculate about the relative secure location she adopted during the interview in relation to the researcher; a positioning which probably carried beyond the research context. As an older, mature and 'unfazed' woman, who knows her way around kitchens, Sarah did not express any insecurities. Josie's talk, on the other hand, was peppered with principles. Examples include: 'you leave it (Fairy[8] anti-bacterial washing up liquid) in your sponge and that...' - a principle which comes straight from the Fairy television advertisement showing on the television at the time, and which illustrated that sponges containing the anti-bacterial washing up liquid 'double up' by ridding kitchen surfaces of germs when wiped; 'more so when you've got kids' in relation to the use of anti-bacterial cleaning products in the kitchen; and 'I don't think that you were supposed to dry them, I thought you were supposed to let them dry by themselves...'

in relation to the use of tea towels in dish drying. I would argue that for Josie 'firing off' such principles was used as a discursive strategy to illustrate her knowledge, which was accompanied by a lack of clarity about 'what she actually does'. Her talk was not much populated by firm statements like 'I do' in preference for third person statements, such as, 'you do'. Josie's talk may thus be seen as evasive and confirmative, meaning that she would follow up unclear statements about 'what she does' with a principle, emphasising that she certainly knows what's right 'to do'. Unlike Sarah, then, in her discussion, Josie purveyed a more insecure subject positioning which may be related to the fact that she had a young child and was female and working-class.[9] The way rules, principles and instructions come into the talk of interviews must say much about the type of discursive interaction that is unfolding. We might for instance expect that in a more 'instructional setting', e.g. in the class room, this facet of practice would come to the fore more than was the case during our interviews, where the emphasis was on talking 'on an equal footing' with participants. Whether we fully succeeded in this may be questioned given our discussion with Josie suggests that her subject positioning clearly comes through, indicating the presence of class dynamics in our talk.

Articulating the activity of washing up

4.12 The above illustrates that when our interviewees were invited to talk about dish washing, their teleo-affective concerns came out loud and clearly. Interviewees were eager to convey 'what matters most' to them. I argue here that this type of interview does not stimulate discussion on 'the practical-performance' reality of dish washing. Arguably, our discussions were not 'about dish washing' as a practical activity, but about a set of interpersonal concerns that are implicated in dish washing (thus pointing to what makes practices interpersonally social). I present three examples to illustrate this point.

4.13 The exchange between the researcher, Sarah and Robert in extract 2 above is interesting for being a sequence that is 'performance rich' and where the engagement with materials in action gains priority over human-interactional pre-occupation. Here we gain some insight into Sarah's practical understanding and organisation of the task of loading the dishwasher. Following an earlier part in the discussion during which Sarah conveys her teleo-affective concerns, this exchange commences after the researcher asks a specific 'practical' question and finds Sarah 'ready' to respond. Our analysis suggests that in the discursive engagement of this type of interview, the interaction between humans and materials does not feature prominently in the discussion. However, as evidenced by the two extended extracts provided above, 'practical experience' comes into the talk by way of *illustration*, and it does so regularly. We are thus fortunate to *catch glimpses* of practical activity in talk.

4.14 Following observation of the CCTV footage, it became apparent that Sarah did not only use the dishwasher, but that she also hand-washed dishes other than those associated with meal times (as she had indicated in the first interview). During the second interview, the researcher followed this awareness up with some repeated questioning, to which Sarah finally responded with new information: that she 'washes as she goes along' when baking.

> Extract 3:
>
> Researcher: ... you tend to be washing quite a lot of things as you go along?
> Sarah: I do if I bake,.. well it might be that rather than get another bowl out, I will wash one and use it again. Erm.. certain things I know that, like if you do meringues, if you have any grease at all on the bowl the egg whites won't whip. There you are you see, you get to know these things! So if I was doing meringues or anything like that you would always see me washing the bowl again before I use it. Erm, but baking, unless I'm doing a batch of fruit loaves in which case I weigh out six different lots, mix up six different lots and put them in, so I will have six different containers left at the end, and just one bowl that I am mixing them in. But apart from that I'll tend to more often than not, wash up as I go along.

4.15 In terms of 'what goes on in Sarah's kitchen', here is thus the type of 'obvious inconsistency' between talk by Sarah of 'what she does' and researcher observation and interpretation of 'her performance' as illustrated on video footage, and that is one of the criticisms repeatedly levelled at the robustness of the qualitative interview. In this instance the 'discrepancy' would not have come to light if our only engagement with Sarah has been the first interview. In this sequence, equally puzzling is how, instead of providing a 'thorough rationale' for hand-washing in these instances, Sarah instead delivers a speech illustrating specific practical know-how in relation to baking and her use of dishes. Therefore, she provides no effective 'rationale' for hand washing as she goes along. To interpret instances like this as either lying or evasiveness is missing some important points. The reason why Sarah skimmed over what, from our point of view was a clear dimension of her dish-washing practices, was that it did not connect with her priorities. If anything, Sarah's fervent baking (and the associated utensil washing) was a 'hobby'; something which she enjoyed doing and which possibly helped her counterbalance the image of herself as 'merely' the household's 'cleaning lady'. In Sarah's eyes, then, washing utensils as she goes along is not washing up in the sense of the washing that needs to be done following meals. In essence, therefore, there is nothing much for her to talk about and she fills up the 'space' with practical, performance-related 'small talk'. In terms of our interest in the relationship between talk and practical accounting, it is clear that Sarah uses her agency to convey 'what matters to her', and this clearly has priority over practical accounting.

4.16 The final point about the manifestation of practical *activity* in our interviews relates to the presence of imprecise 'practical' concepts in talk. In their research on healthy cooking practices, Halkier & Jensen (2001) reflect on their 'frustrations' when talking with one of their participants about the amount of ghee used in cooking. In our discussion with Josie, such ambiguous 'practical talk' is also present. For

instance, when she talks about how often Martin loads the dishwasher, the response is: 'sometimes… sometimes… not all the time' and in relation to sponges for dish washing and surface cleaning, she says: 'we always have plenty of sponges, 'cos I don't like using them for long. Once they start get grubby, they go out.' These statements convey a level of precision and imprecision: we are, for instance, informed that Martin does not always load the dishwasher, but we can surmise that he does load it sometimes. What we do not know for sure is how often he does so, and this is a matter on which Josie could most likely not give a clear answer.[10] In the second passage, imprecision creeps in through the word-strings 'plenty', 'for long' and 'get grubby', which do not give us a solid handle on 'how many sponges' Josie has, 'how long sponges are used for' and what they might look like or how long they might have been used before they 'get grubby'. The utilisation of imprecise language like this illustrates two points about the capacity to express practical precision through talk. Firstly, as a form of human-to-human interaction, talk is both a social and a political practice. Whether we consider utterances as delivered by Halkier & Jensen's female Pakistani Danes regarding their use of ghee in cooking, or Josie's discussion on the use of sponges in cleaning, both link to standards in the practice and thus, to the principles inherent in them. As illustrated above, utterances may serve the purpose of illustrating knowledge of such standards, but also offer ways out of being precise about actual practices. As such, these could be seen as linguistic forms of resistance. The second point relates to Bloch's (1991) assertion that it is practically impossible to verbalise everything we do. Through the fact that it is impossible for Josie to be precise about how often Martin loads the dishwasher, we here have an example of the limitations of language for the expression of practical precision. In this respect, then, we must agree with Bloch that 'what we do' does not render itself to full linguistic expression.

Conclusion

5.1 The understanding resident in the practice of dish washing makes it possible to talk about the practice, and any talk about dish washing illustrates understanding (Schatzki 1996). Arguably, the language or propositional understanding of dish-washing is relatively simple, exhibiting a limited set of unambiguous practice-implying do and materiality concepts and a more ambiguous conceptual vocabulary, which is wielded flexibly to maintain the focus on dish washing. In the talk of our qualitative interviews, the speakers are engaged in a form of multi-tasking in the sense that the conversation is itself 'a practice', with rules and conventions, and where the conversation is the *activity* of communicative interaction. This conversational context had a clear impact on the type of dish washing talk that ensues. Thus, the invitation to talk freely; a common convention in qualitative interviewing concerned with the power balance between participants, was translated by interviewees as an invitation to talk about 'what is important to me', and engaged the teleo-affective dimensions of the organisation of dish washing. Sarah and Josie made their concerns 'tellable' through skilful narration that captures the attention of the listener, pulling them along in the emotional realities of their lives, much in the way the medical students in Atkinson's research accounted certain aspects of their experience in an 'interesting' way to the listener.

5.2 Sarah and Josie both endeavoured to be seen as knowledgeable about the rules and principles of dish washing. In some instances, this knowledge was expressed when the potential for ambiguity arose during an exchange, after which a consensus was negotiated on specific principles of dish washing. The interview context was therefore also an occasion during which the interviewee's occupation with 'how I present myself' was evident, and points to the practice of 'moral selving' Atkinson & Coffey have identified as common to the qualitative interview (2003: 421). In a similar vein, in the presence of her husband, Sarah was keen to confirm the positive qualities of the dishwasher, and only allowed herself to state that she 'hated' washing up in the second interview, when he was not there. Having said so, the insights Sarah volunteered to share were remarkably similar across the two interview events, which is interesting given they were 6 months apart. This type of talk thus served as a useful *resource* for highlighting these two dimensions of the *social organization* of washing up.

5.3 The same cannot be said for the *activity* of washing up. Brief examples of practical experience effectively entered narration, and found their way into elaborations of specific points and in 'fleshing out', as illustrated by Sarah in extract 3. But detailed elaborations of practical performance did not come into this type of talk. When confronted with questions about such mundane aspects of our lives as washing up, the initial discursive 'climate' is frequently one which assumes that there really is not 'much' to talk about, mirroring the arguments made by DeVault (1991). Another reason comes closer to the issues raised by Atkinson and colleagues in the sense that the practical interaction between humans and the materialities of the kitchen simply was not a priority in this particular conversational context. Talk was overwhelmingly guided by human-to-human interactional concerns, relating to both practices. Thus, in relation to the practice of dish washing, *who* participated in this work and for *whom* it was intended were primary concerns. In relation to the practice of talking, as we just saw, the presence of other people informed how interviewees conducted themselves. This interview context thus encouraged performance-related silences.

5.4 If we treat this analysis as generalizable to what 'typically' happens in a standard qualitative interview, this outcome must be interesting to those researchers for whom the interaction between humans and the material world is important. It has distinct implications for method and methodology. Given that we did get *glimpses* of practical *activity* in this type of verbal accounting, we may surmise that enhanced insight into the *activity* of dish washing may be gained verbally through research contexts which set out to stimulate such a focus. An example is Sarah Pink's research, in which domestic practitioners were video-recorded as they simultaneously illustrated and discussed how they washed dishes and clothes (Pink 2007, 2010). As explained by Molander (2011), combining observation and talk has the distinct advantage of conducting the research in the setting common to the investigated practices, and helps the researcher to question aspects of the unfolding practices which are normally taken for granted. The method of recording the 24/7 goings-on of life in kitchens in this project had the distinct benefit of side-stepping talk altogether, really demanding that the researcher watching the footage develop their

understanding of *activity* through the juxtaposition of what was observable with their practice-carrying understanding. Given this data is a visual archive of the mundane, as outlined by visual researchers (Heath et al. 2010), it offers opportunities for repeated viewing, zooming in, and the adoption of different looking strategies to unearth different dimensions of the *activity* of practices (Martens 2012).

5.5 In this analysis of talk on washing up, initial conceptual analysis was pushed further by thinking about how such talk groups around the three dimensions of the *social organisation* of practices Schatzki identifies. His ontology offers a practice analytical lens useful for thinking about how to push beyond the challenging 'barrier' between our linguistic and practical-performance worlds, and towards the intersections between 'bodily movements, things, practical knowledge and routine' in the practical accomplishment of everyday life (Reckwitz 2002: 259). Part of this struggle is about reaching consensus amongst scholars that different dimensions of the reality of practices are found in these parallel worlds, and that even though they clearly also connect with one another, there is a need to think more creatively about how to capture these realities in and through research engagement. There appears to be a need for this conversation to be held on a regular basis. This is clear from Bloch's account, published in 1991 (see also Jenkins 1994). It may be that researchers working through contemporary developments in science and technology studies, actor network theory and non-representational theory (see e.g. Anderson and Harrison 2010) will be able to move these concerns more solidly onto the methodological agenda. It would be good to see researchers engaging with practice theory move in the same direction.

Notes

[1]This salience is also picked up in Warde's (2005) location of consumption within practice theory.

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[3]The first paper appeared as chapter 20 (pp. 415 – 428) in JA Holstein and JF Gubrium (Eds.) (2003) Inside Interviewing: New Lenses, New Concerns (as well is in some other collections, appearing at the same time). It reappeared, with the latter half substantially rewritten, as Chapter 4: Participant Observation and Interviewing in P. Atkinson, A. Coffey and S. Delamont (2003) *Key Themes in Qualitative Research: Continuities and Change*. The page references used here refer to these two chapters.

[4]For another critical discussion, see Kindon (2003: 146). During a recent invitation by the Food Standards Agency to talk about the research discussed in this paper, I was encouraged to reflect on the relationship between 'actual behaviour' and 'reported behaviour' about 'what we do'.

[5]For an ethical/political positioning of our video research in relation to other video research practices, see Martens 2012.

[6]The use of research interviews as confessional devices during which individuals take the opportunity to 'air' their concerns has been subject to recent discussion in methodological debate (e.g. Atkinson et al. 2003 and Grenz 2005).

[7]In view of the fact that this was 'a discussion', achieved between interviewee and the researcher, it was equally possible to identify the researcher's priority in the discussion. When talking with Sarah, e.g. our 'environmental concerns' became clear through the specific questions which we asked about the practice of loading the dish washing.

[8]Fairy washing up liquid is a well-known brand of washing-up liquid in the UK; owned by Proctor & Gamble. At the time we did our interviews, it was advertised on the television.

[9]The fact that parents of young children are targets for 'governance' through the state-medical complex is widely discussed in the sociological literature. Martens & Scott (2004) address how this comes into the discussions we held about kitchen practices with people who had very young children.

[10]This issue has cropped up as a methodological discussion point in sociological research that explores the division of labour, and the challenges caused by questions in interviews that ask who in the family *most often* does specific tasks, such as cooking, shopping and cleaning (see e.g. Warde & Heatherington 1994 and Warde & Martens 2000).

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