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## Practice what you preach? Currents, connections and challenges in theorizing citizen media and practice

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### Abstract

This chapter explores the past, assesses the present and delineates the future of a media practice approach to citizen media. The first section provides an extensive overview of the different currents in research on media practices, identifying the antecedents of the media practice approach in several theoretical traditions and highlighting possible points of convergence between them. Hence, we ground the roots of the practice approach in Latin American communication and media studies, we scrutinize Couldry's conceptualization in connection to theories of practices within the social sciences, and we examine audience research, media anthropology, social movement studies, citizen and alternative media, and Communication for Development and Social Change. The second section takes stock of the current 'state of the art' of practice-focused research on citizen and activist media and develops a critical assessment of how the concept of media practices has been used in recent literature, identifying key strengths and shortcomings. In this section, we also discuss the integration of media practices with other concepts, such as mediation, mediatization, media ecologies, media archeology, media imaginaries, and the public sphere. The third section delineates future directions for research on citizen media and practice, reflecting on some of the challenges facing this growing interdisciplinary field. Here, we illustrate how the media practice approach provides a powerful framework for researching the pressing challenges posed by mediatization and datafication. Further, we highlight the need for deeper theoretical engagement, underline the necessity of dialogue between different traditions, and point out some unresolved issues and limitations. The chapter concludes with an outline of the contributions to this edited collection.

### Introduction

Prompted by the rise of digital communications technologies, the last decade has witnessed an explosion of interest in citizen and activist media within a variety of fields including social movement research, journalism studies, political communication, performance studies, and translation studies. Much commentary on citizen media has focused on how digital technologies enables non-institutionalized actors to disseminate media *content* that challenges dominant discourses or makes visible hidden realities, but there is also a growing interest in the social, material, and embodied aspects of citizen media. The concept of 'media practices' - and, more broadly, an understanding of *media as practice* (Couldry 2004, 2012) - has become increasingly popular as a means of developing socially grounded analyses of citizen and activist media. Especially among scholars of social movements and media, among whom

we count ourselves, ‘media practices’ has provided a productive conceptual hook for challenging the media centrism (i.e. the tendency to take media technologies and media content, rather than broader social practices and relationships, as a starting point for enquiry) of recent literature on digital media and protest.

In turning to ‘practice’ as a conceptual framework for studying the social movements-media nexus, scholars in this field have taken cue from a growing interest in practice within media and communication studies more generally, which in turn has been inspired by the recent resurgence of practice approaches in social theory (e.g. Schatzki, Knorr-Cetina & von Savigny 2001; Reckwitz 2002; Shove, Pantzar, & Watson 2012; Hui, Schatzki, & Shove 2016; Spaargaren, Weenink, & Lamers 2016). As we will show in this chapter, much work has already been done to refine our conceptualizations of media practices. This book seeks to continue such efforts to define, problematize and theorize media practices - with a specific focus on citizen and activist media. A key aim is to stimulate dialogue among scholars working in different fields and bridge previously separate traditions of theory and research. In doing so, we acknowledge the antecedents of the current turn to practice in areas such as audience studies, media anthropology, and alternative media, but we also want to give due recognition a different trajectory. While much of the recent work on social movements and media has taken Couldry’s (2004) call for a new practice paradigm as a starting point - and can be situated within a largely anglophone European and North American tradition of media and communications research and social theory - the notion of media practices also has a rich history within Latin American communication theory, as the contributors to the first section in this volume (Rodríguez, Rincón & Marroquín, Barranquero, Barbas) clearly illustrate. Although the interest in practices among Latin American communication scholars predates the current ‘turn’ to practice in European and North American media scholarship by at least a couple of decades, there has been little take-up of their ideas among English-speaking academics. One important aim of this book is therefore to begin to rectify this lack of dialogue by introducing anglophone scholars to the Latin American tradition.

At the same time, we also want to help deepen engagement with practice theory as developed in the anglophone tradition. While looking ‘back’ at the Latin American roots of the media practice concept, the book also contributes to very current debates by exploring the utility of the media practice approach for getting to grips with urgent questions about agency, power, and social change in the context of processes of datafication and mediatization. Contributions to the book employ the practice approach to examine the complex relationship between activists’ media practices and technological affordances (Cammaerts, Kaun); explore its relevance for understanding video activism as an increasingly important mode of contemporary media activism (Askanius, Mattoni & Pavan); and consider the implications of expanding the media practice concept to include practices that involve ‘acting on media’ (Kannengiesser, Stephansen). Contributions to the final section of the book - on ‘citizen data practices’ (Milan, Fotopoulou, Dencik) - make a strong case for studying people’s engagement with data and processes of datafication from a practice perspective.

This chapter has four parts. First, we provide an overview of different currents in research on media practices, identifying the antecedents of the media practice approach in different theoretical traditions and highlighting possible points of convergence between them. Second, we take stock of the current ‘state of the art’ of practice-focused research on citizen and activist media by providing an overview of how the concept of media practices has been used in recent literature and identifying key strengths and shortcomings. Third, we delineate future directions for research on citizen media and practice and reflect on some of the challenges facing this growing interdisciplinary field. Finally, we provide an outline of the contributions of the book.

### **Converging research paths around ‘practice’?**

The turn towards practice within media and communications scholarship is often attributed to Nick Couldry’s (2004) article ‘Theorising media as practice’. Couldry’s intervention was significant in that it engaged explicitly with sociological theories of practice, and proposed an understanding of media as practice as a new paradigm in media research. The aim of this paradigm shift, for Couldry, was ‘to decentre media research from the study of media texts or production structures (important though these are) and to redirect it onto the study of the open-ended range of practices focused directly or indirectly on media’ (2004, p. 117). Couldry defined media practices as the ‘open set of practices relating to, or oriented around, media’ (2004, p. 117), later further distinguishing between ‘acts aimed specifically at media, acts performed through media, and acts whose preconditions are media’ (2012, p. 57). Theorizing media as practice thus involves asking what people are ‘doing in relation to media across a whole range of situations and contexts’ (Couldry, 2012, p. 37).

In developing this framework, Couldry took inspiration from the growing prominence of theories of practice within the social sciences. Conceived as an attempt to transcend the ‘dualisms of structure and agency, determinism and voluntarism’ (Shove, Pantzar, & Watson 2012, p. 3), practice theory challenges prevalent ways of thinking about subjectivity and sociality by ‘shifting the research focus away from studying individuals, their motivations and background features primarily, towards a more in-depth investigation of “context” or the activities, the social practices, they engage in’ (Spargaaren et al., 2016, p. 4). With long roots in social theory stretching back as far as Wittgenstein and Heidegger, practice theory comprises a variety of approaches. Bourdieu’s (1977, 1990) theory of habitus and Giddens’ (1984) theory of structuration - which in different ways sought to reconcile the structure/agency dualism in social theory - are commonly thought of as ‘first-generation’ practice theories. The turn of the 21st century then saw the emergence of a ‘second generation’ of practice theorists, who have sought to systematize and extend practice theory by refining definitions of practice and elaborating on the relationship between practices, social order, and social change (Schatzki 1996; Schatzki, Knorr Cetina, & von Savigny 2001; Reckwitz, 2002; Shove et al., 2007; Shove, Pantzar, & Watson 2012; Hui, Schatzki, & Shove 2016; Spargaaren, Weenink, & Lamers 2016; Jonas, Littig and Wroblewski 2017).

While there is no single, universally agreed-upon definition of ‘practices’, most practice theorists agree that they comprise some combination of embodied activities, shared understanding, and material or cultural objects. Schatzki, in an attempt to synthesize common understandings, defines practices as ‘embodied, materially mediated arrays of human activity centrally organized around shared practical understanding’ (2001, p. 11). In a slightly more elaborate definition, Reckwitz describes a practice as

a routinized type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one another: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, ‘things’ and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge (2002, p. 249)

Along similar lines, Shove, Pantzar and Watson (2012, p. 12) develop an understanding of practices as consisting of three main elements: *materials* (objects, technologies, tangible physical entities), *competences* (skill, know-how and technique), and *meanings* (symbolic meanings, ideas and aspirations). A practice, thus, can be thought of as ‘a “block” whose existence necessarily depends on the existence and specific interconnectedness of these elements’ (Reckwitz, 2002, p. 249-250). These blocks, in turn, ‘link to form wider complexes and constellations - a nexus’ (Hui, Schatzki, & Shove 2016, p. 1) and this nexus, for practice theorists, is what makes up the social.

Placing materiality, embodiment, knowledgeability, and *process* at the centre of social analysis, practice theory thus offers a holistic framework for understanding the media’s social significance. By taking practices as a starting point for enquiry, it enables open questions to be asked about what people are doing in relation to media and how these media-related practices combine and intersect with other social practices - thus facilitating an analysis of the broader social processes of which media practices form part (Couldry, 2004; 2012).

While Couldry’s proposal, and most subsequent anglophone research on media practices, looked mainly to practice theory for inspiration, a shift towards practice had already taken place decades earlier in Latin American media and communication studies, and has since then profoundly defined the scholarly DNA of the discipline - as the contributors to the section on Latin American communication theory in this book make abundantly clear. The reasons why it was not properly acknowledged in the Global North until very recently can be attributed - as Clemencia Rodríguez points out in her passionate introduction to the section - to the disregard for academic production in Spanish by scholars of the Global North and also to the different conceptual labels that have been used. Indeed, media practice is not a term used by Latin American scholars who favour instead a plurality of terms that connects to the concept of ‘lo popular’ which means ‘of the people’, or link it to the notion of ‘mediation’ developed by Martín-Barbero in the mid-80s to counteract functionalist and media-centric approaches from North America. The shift towards the exploration and the understanding of the practices of the people in Latin America, and the interest in what media users do with the media in a variety of social contexts had an inherently political nature. In one of the most unequal region in the world, scholars like Paulo Freire and his ‘comunicación popular’ pointed to the

centrality of communication, dialogue, and interaction to give voice to the oppressed, the marginalised, and the exploited in their own terms.

In anglophone media research, meanwhile, the more recent ‘turn’ to practice has antecedents in diverse traditions. Because of its ability to account for the broad range of practices that involve media, the practice framework has been understood to offer a solution to a perceived crisis in the study of audiences (Couldry, 2012, citing Ang, 1996). A concern with practices arguably has a long history within the tradition of audience research: the question of what people do with media formed the starting point for the Uses and Gratifications approach that emerged in the 1940s (Couldry, 2012), and qualitative research on ‘active audiences’ became prominent following the cultural turn in the social sciences of the 1980s and 1990s. However, these framework remained focused on people’s interactions with specific media technologies or texts (Cammaerts & Couldry, 2016) - an approach which became increasingly untenable given the growing ubiquity and embeddedness of media in everyday life. Around the turn of the 21st century, scholarship on media audiences thus moved away from a focus on direct engagement with texts toward ‘a consideration of multiple articulations with media in everyday life’ (Bird, 2010, p. 85; see also Bird, 2003). Practice theory offers a propitious framework for studying these multiple articulations. In a media-saturated world, where media practices cannot be reduced to ‘individual usage of bounded objects called media’ (Cammaerts & Couldry 2016, p. 327), the openness of the practice approach seems better suited to capturing the diversity of everyday practices involving media (Couldry, 2012).

For similar reasons, practice theory has also been taken up within media anthropology - a field which has always taken people and their social relations (rather than texts or technology) as a starting point for analysing media as a social form (Ginsburg 1994, p. 13). The notion of media practices has been widely used by media anthropologists as a shorthand for people’s various everyday articulations with media; however, it tended until recently to be used in a mostly descriptive and unreflexive manner (Postill, 2010, 2017b). Sparked by Couldry’s (2004) intervention, the edited collection *Theorising Media and Practice* (Bräuchler & Postill, 2010) sought to remedy this by bringing media anthropology into explicit conversation with practice theory. Exploring the value of practice theory for understanding diverse ways of engaging with media, contributors to this volume explored a wide range of practices, from uses of information and communication technologies by Norwegian (Helle-Valle, 2010) and Danish (Christensen & Røpke, 2010) families to practices of newspaper readers (Peterson, 2010) and news journalists (Rao, 2010) in India, amateur audiovisual production (Ardévol et al., 2010), and free software activism (Kelty, 2010). The practice framework has also been employed by digital ethnographers as a methodological framework for studying interrelated digital practices across multiple sites and platforms (Gómez Cruz & Ardévol, 2013a, 2013b; Ardévol & Gómez Cruz, 2013). Here, practice theory has been characterized as providing ‘a bridge between theoretical conceptualization and empirical data, allowing us to extend our ethnographic account of mediation processes by including in our analysis a wider scope of relationships between uses, meanings, routines and technologies’ (Gómez Cruz & Ardévol, 2013, p. 33).

Most recently, the practice approach to media research has been taken up both enthusiastically and extensively in research on social movements and media activism, as a means of developing socially grounded analyses of activists' media practices. Much of this work has come as a response to a perceived 'media centrism' - i.e. a tendency to take media platforms, rather than broader social practices and relationships, as a starting point for enquiry - in recent literature on digital media and protest. Hence, the media practice approach has been seen to offer a means to develop non-media-centric analyses of activist and citizen media practices, and at the same time as a way to overcome the communicative reductionism - i.e. 'the belief that media technologies' role within social movement dynamics is either not relevant or merely instrumental' (Treré 2019, p. 1) - that plagues to different extents accounts on the relationships between media and protest movements. More specifically, it has been adopted to challenge technological determinism and instrumental visions of media as neutral communication channels (Barassi, 2015; Lim, 2018; Treré, 2019), and the one-medium fallacy, i.e. 'the tendency to focus on the use of single technologies without disentangling the whole media spectrum with which activists interact' (Treré, 2019, p. 9 - on the problematic implications of this fallacy see also Treré, 2012, Mattoni & Treré, 2014) in order to develop more nuanced analyses of the intersections between protest and media (see, for example, Barassi, 2015; Kaun, 2016; Kubitschko, 2015; Martínez, 2017; McCurdy, 2011). The endorsement of the practice approach in this subfield should also be understood as a reaction against the digital positivism (Fuchs, 2017) that largely defines many studies adopting big data/computational techniques to analyse collective action dynamics (Gerbaudo & Treré, 2015; Rodriguez et al. 2014; Treré 2019) that neglect the importance of social and political contexts (Fenton, 2016), and gloss over cultural nuances and specificities.

This recent surge of interest in media practices among students of social movements resonates with a longer tradition of scholarship on radical and alternative media that predates current preoccupations with digital technologies - even if this influence is not always explicitly recognized. Although scholars in this field have not drawn explicitly on practice theory, they have arguably always been interested in practices, insofar as social relations and organizational processes have been central to their conceptualizations. Downing's (2001) groundbreaking study of radical media emphasized the prefigurative character of media activism, showing how activists attempt to 'practice what they preach' by implementing radical democratic principles in their mode of organizing. Atton (2002), similarly, highlighted the range of practices that alternative media producers engage in with the aim of transforming the social and economic relations involved in media production, distribution, and consumption - such as non-hierarchical, collective forms of organization and anti-copyright publishing. Rodríguez (2001) - whose work has been important in bridging the anglophone and Latin American traditions of media and communication theory (and will be discussed in more detail below) - coined the term 'citizens' media' to refer to media through which citizenship is enacted or performed. Her pioneering study *Fissures in the Mediascape* focused on how communication practices can empower individuals and communities, strengthen social bonds, and thus act as a catalyst for social change.

A concern with processes and practices has also been central within Communication for Development and Social Change (CfDSC), a heterogeneous field of practice and research concerned with the relationship between media and communication, and development and social change. During the 1980s and 1990s, communication came to be seen within this field as more than a tool for persuasion and behaviour change, and ‘increasingly regarded as a process of democratization and empowerment and hence an end in itself’ (Hemer & Tufte, 2016, p. 15). Hemer and Tufte (2016) propose that an ‘ethnographic turn’ is under way within CfDSC, which entails a focus on grassroots appropriations of media and the ‘social practice which communication entails’ (Hemer & Tufte, 2016, p. 18). Although CfDSC and scholarship on the social movements-media nexus have developed as largely separate fields, with the former focusing predominantly on policy and institutional domains and the latter on extra-institutional forms of action (Tufte, 2017; Barbas & Postill, 2017), recent developments highlight the beginnings of a process of convergence between them. The global wave of digitally-enabled protest that followed in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis prompted several calls for CfDSC scholars to pay closer attention to social movements (Barbas & Postill, 2017; Tufte 2017). As Tufte (2017, pp. 80-105) shows, many of the concerns of social movements (e.g. with citizen engagement, organization, leadership, information dissemination, and the use of storytelling and performance) are very similar to those of more institutionalized communication for development actors, and the two fields face similar practical and conceptual challenges.

*Practice*, then, seems to constitute a potential point of convergence for a fruitful dialogue between the Latin American Communication tradition and different currents in anglophone media and communications scholarship. While a concern with media practices is clearly not new, practice theory appears to offer a new way of framing ‘old’ questions that is better able to respond to the challenges raised by the growing ubiquity and embeddedness of media in contemporary social life. Its holistic character and concern with processes enable a more systematic analysis of media practices and deeper theoretical reflection on their significance in relation to questions of agency, structure, and social change. At the same time, one of the key aims of this edited collection is to root the media practice approach firmly within the Latin American communication tradition. We believe that the diverse disciplines and subfields that we have reviewed here have not sufficiently recognized nor done justice to the primacy, richness, and conceptual power of this tradition. Furthermore, the political focus that has defined the shift to media practice in Latin America has not adequately infused reflections on media practice in the Global North. In many contemporary studies of digital activism, citizen media, and social movements, the engagement with practice theory sometimes appears apolitical and unrooted. We argue, therefore, that the shift to media practice needs to rediscover its roots, and at the same time recognize the political urgency of this grounding. In times dominated by the ideology of dataism (van Dijk, 2014) and the flourishing of uncritical big data positivism and data centrism (Fuchs, 2017; Dencik and Milan, this volume), shifting our gaze to the media practices of the marginalised and the oppressed is (again) a political act, and the Latin American communication tradition represents an essential ‘guide’ along this perilous path. At the same time, we contend that the strong contribution that the conceptualization of media practice in the Global North has

brought forward lies in its ability to contribute to practice theory in the broader sociological realm, having the ambition to reconfigure some of the key conceptual and methodological tenets of social science itself. This powerful conceptual ambition does not equally animate the diverse studies on citizen media and practice, but it is undoubtedly a defining trait of this tradition. Thus, we believe that a strong media practice approach is one that learns its Latin American roots and inherently political nature, while at the same time aims to contribute to a broader project of reconfiguration of social theory and methodology.

### **Understanding citizen media from a practice perspective**

Placing practices at the centre of our analysis has important implications for the study of citizen media. It enables us to expand our focus beyond media content and media technologies, to explore the broader range of socially situated practices that relate to citizen media (Stephansen, 2016). This broader concern with social relationships and processes was of course central to Rodríguez's (2001) original definition of citizens' media as media through which people *become* citizens. Questioning then-dominant framings of citizen media in terms of counter-information, Rodríguez (2001, p. 20) located the transformative effects of citizens' media in their capacity to 1) intervene in and transform the established mediascape, 2) 'contest social codes, legitimized identities, and institutionalized social relations' and 3) empower the community involved. Further developing these ideas, Rodríguez (2011) draws on theories of communication as performance to emphasize the constitutive power of citizens' media: 'Citizens' media are the media citizens' use to activate communication processes that shape their local communities' (2011, p. 25). It is through the broad range of practices oriented *towards* citizens' media that collective and individual transformation is possible.

This emphasis on social relationships and processes has sometimes been forgotten in the subsequent anglophone literature on citizen media, which has celebrated the rise of web 2.0 and the opportunities this offered for 'ordinary' citizens to have their voices heard and make visible hidden realities (e.g. Gillmor, 2006). Particularly in the literature on citizen journalism, the significance of citizen media has tended to be conceptualised primarily in terms of changing news flows and the visibility such media can give to ordinary people's perspectives and experiences - even when this visibility and the place of citizen journalism within complex media ecologies are discussed in critical terms (e.g. Allan & Thorsen, 2009; Meikle, 2016). Where 'practice' figures in this literature, it is usually in relation to the practice of journalism, and the extent to which citizen journalists adopt or challenge the values and practices of professional journalists (Forde, 2001; Lievrouw, 2011; Wall, 2012).

However, practices, materiality, and sociality seem to have made a comeback in recent scholarship on citizen media. In the edited collection *Citizen Media and Public Spaces*, Baker and Blaagaard (2016, p. 16) define citizen media as encompassing  
the physical artefacts, digital content, practices, performative interventions, and discursive formations of affective sociality produced by unaffiliated citizens as they

act in public space(s) to effect aesthetic or socio-political change or express personal desires and aspirations, without the involvement of a third party or benefactor.

Baker and Blaagaard's definition is important because it incorporates material objects, practices, and relationships - and the meanings invested in these. Recalling the definitions (outlined above) of practices as comprised of materials, competences, and meanings (Shove, Pantzar, & Watson, 2012), such an understanding of citizen media chimes closely with the practice approach - even if Baker and Blaagaard do not engage explicitly with practice theory.

Our own understanding of citizen media, which underpins our conceptualization of this volume, draws inspiration from Baker and Blaagaard's definition but is at once broader in some respects and more specific in others. First, with regards to the *subjects* involved in citizen media, our disciplinary background leads us to question their focus on 'unaffiliated' (by which we read 'individual') citizens: in our understanding, such media are also used by collective actors such as social movements. A more appropriate term which encompasses both individuals and collectives might therefore be 'non-institutionalized actors' - recognizing that the boundaries between loosely formed activist groups and more formally organized actors such as NGOs might occasionally be blurred. Moreover, an emphasis on the collective dimension helps us recognize that citizen media include collectively organized media outlets such as alternative newspapers and activist-managed online platforms. Second, with regards to the *objects* involved in citizen media, we confine our understanding to material objects, technologies, and infrastructures that are external to the human body (recognizing that technologies such as microchips and wearables contribute to a blurring of this boundary). This does not mean we want to exclude the body from analysis - indeed, practice theory insists on the embodied nature of media practices - but that we prefer a slightly more focused understanding of 'media'. While Baker and Blaagaard include the human body in their definition - which leads them to understand phenomena as diverse as parkour, protest marches, and theatrical performances as citizen media - we wish to retain some specificity to the term 'media' as involving (digital and non-digital) objects, technologies, and infrastructures through which meaning is conveyed. This slightly more restricted definition of media is important as it focuses attention on the interplay between human actors and technologies, and facilitates a critical evaluation of the appropriateness of practice theory for conceptualizing the relationship between structure and agency.

### **Current understandings of practice in the literature on citizen and activist media**

As John Postill (2017a) has suggested in a recent review of scholarship on the media practices of social movements, it is possible to distinguish two broad camps: 'authors who use the notion of media practices as a methodological conduit to reach one or more aspects of a given social movement' and authors 'who ask what we actually mean by "media practices" in the context of social movements research' and draw on the recent practice turn in media theory to find answers to this question (Postill, 2017a). For scholars studying media activism from the perspective of social movement research - which has always been concerned with questions of organization, collective identity, and mobilization - it makes almost intuitive

sense to take media practices as a starting point, and much important work has been done in this vein, even if practice theory is not explicitly invoked.

For example, activists' daily media practices form the central focus of Costanza-Chock's (2014) rich study of the US immigrant rights movement, which develops the concept of 'transmedia organizing' to account for how community organizers 'engage their movement's social base in participatory media-making practices' (2014, p. 47) across a range of different media platforms. Lee and Ting (2015), meanwhile, draw on a broadly Marxist understanding of 'praxis' as critical-practical activity to develop the concept 'media and information praxis of social movements', referring to 'the communicative strategies that the activists use in the movement to seek, evaluate, produce, and disseminate information, as well as to mobilize participation in collective action' (2015, p. 380). 'Digital and social media activist practices' are also central to Boler et al's (2014) study of women's performance of 'connective labour' within the Occupy movement, which focuses on the 'the often hidden labor of women in sustaining the networked and affective dimension of social movements' (2014, p. 438) and highlights the 'gendered, hybrid, embodied, and material nature' of this labour. While studies such as these do not explicitly invoke practice theory, they demonstrate the value of ethnographically-inclined research that takes media practices as its central focus.

Among scholars who fall into the second of Postill's two camps, much has been done to further our understanding of citizen and activist media as practice. Within the literature on social movements and media, the media practice approach has proved incredibly productive as a methodological framework for bringing into view aspects of the movement-media relationship that would not be accessible from a more media-centric perspective. One of the first and most comprehensive studies in the social movements literature to adopt the media practice approach was Mattoni's (2012) research on the media practices of the precarious workers' movement in Italy. Mattoni (2012, p. 159) defined 'activist media practices' as

(1) both routinised and creative social practices that; (2) include interactions with media objects (such as mobile phones, laptops, pieces of paper) and media subjects (such as journalists, public relations managers, other activists); (3) draw on how media objects and media subjects are perceived and how the media environment is understood and known.

Blending social movement studies, media studies, and the sociology of practice, Mattoni (2012) contrasts a media-centric approach that select a priori the types of media that will be investigated (for instance, citizen or mainstream), with a media-practice approach whose strength lies instead in exploring how activists map, understand, and then actively navigate the media environment with which they interact during their protest activities. Extending this analysis further, Mattoni (2012, 2013) also develops the concept of *repertoires of communication*, understood as the entire set of media practices that social movement actors may conceive as possible and use to reach social actors within and beyond the social movement milieu (2013: 50). Recognizing how activists' perception of the opportunities and constraints of the media environment informs their media choices, Mattoni's definition of

activist media practices incorporates not only social movements' use of citizen and alternative media but also their interactions and negotiations with more 'mainstream' media.

This wider emphasis and concern to situate media practices within broader social practices is shared by other scholars of media activism who draw on practice theory. For example, McCurdy (2011) uses a practice perspective to analyse activists' lay theories of media as part of a broader 'practice of activism'. Barassi (2015) - highlighting the interplay between media practices, political cultures, and imaginaries - explores how activist groups in the UK, Italy and Spain utilize a diverse range of media outlets and networks. Kubitschko (2015) applies the notion of 'media-related practices' to German hackers' articulation of expertise through various communication channels, ranging from alternative media (such as their own in-house publication) to corporate social media (such as Twitter) and mainstream media outlets. Martínez (2017), in a study of the Marea Granate network of Spanish migrant activists, develops four categories of media practices: networking, collaborative organisation and work, discursive practices, and participation in traditional media.

Focusing more specifically on *citizen* media, Stephansen (2016) draws on Couldry (2004, 2012) and Rodriguez (2001, 2011) to develop the notion of 'citizen media practices' as encompassing the broad range of practices related to citizen media beyond the production and circulation of media content. Through a case study of media activism in the World Social Forum, she identifies four types of citizen media practices - organizational practices, capacity-building practices, networking practices and movement-building practices) - and shows how such practices create the preconditions for distinct forms of agency to emerge: they generate a sense of individual and collective identity, offer lived experience of 'another communication', and help build solidarity that can provide a source of strength for activists operating in difficult contexts.

### **'Weak' definitions of practice**

As the discussion above shows, 'practice' has emerged as a productive framework for research on activist and citizen media, allowing scholars to develop holistic analyses of people's uses and understandings of media technologies, and the broader social contexts within which these are situated. The concept of media practices has been used to develop rich accounts of the incredibly diverse ways in which activists and citizens engage with media in order to express themselves and effect cultural, social, or political change. As is clear from our brief survey of the literature on citizen and social movement media, most scholars who engage with definitions of media practices take cue from Couldry's intervention and draw on the anglo-European tradition of practice theory to frame their understanding (though there are exceptions: Barassi (2015) for example, approaches activist media practices from a broader media anthropology perspective). Where scholars engage with the Latin American tradition of communication theory, this is largely confined to Rodríguez's work on citizen media. Among those who attempt to define media practices, these are mainly understood (following Couldry's definition) as what people do with, or in relation to, media, and empirical research has primarily been concerned to describe and categorize media practices and the various

actors involved in such practices. The concept of media practices has thus served mostly as a methodological framework for developing empirically rich and nuanced understandings of citizen and activist media.

Nicolini (2017) distinguishes between a ‘weak’ and ‘strong’ programme within the broader practice turn in the social sciences. The weak programme, according to Nicolini, arises from the recognition that it is important to bring human activity to the centre of social analysis, but remains confined to reporting ‘what people do’, i.e. ‘naming, describing, and listing practices’ (2017, p. 23). The strong programme differs from this in that it ‘strives to explain social matters, their emergence, change, disappearance and effects in terms of practices instead of simply registering what practices are performed’ (2017, p. 23). The strong programme, according to Nicolini, also challenges what he refers to as ‘localism’ - the tendency to focus narrowly on local ‘scenes of action’ without exploring how such practices link to other practices in space and time. A ‘strong’ programme of practice research, therefore, involves situating practices in their broader social and historical context (Nicolini, 2017).

Following Nicolini, we might say that there is a tendency in the current literature on citizen and activist media practices to operate with a ‘weak’ definition of practice. Couldry’s call for a turn to practice, and his ‘disarmingly simple’ proposal to treat media as ‘the open set of practices relating to, or oriented around, media’ (2004, p. 117) seems to have struck a chord because it spoke to an already widespread, almost intuitive, understanding that focusing on what people *do* with media offers an important corrective to the media centrism prevalent in studies of protest movements and media. However, the adoption of a practice perspective has not always been accompanied by rigorous theoretical work in relation to the concept of media practices.

### **Is practice enough? Integration of other concepts/approaches**

Where people have sought to develop the concept of media practices theoretically, it has tended to be in conversation with other concepts and approaches. Usually, this has emerged out of a perceived necessity to address certain deficiencies of the media practices perspective, or to strengthen a specific aspect of this approach that are considered particularly relevant.

Mattoni and Treré (2014) argue that the media practice approach is particularly insightful for studying social movements at the micro-level, but less appropriate for grasping meso- and macro-level processes (cf. Postill 2010). Hence, they propose a conceptual framework that integrates media practices with the concepts of *mediation* – ‘a social process in which media supports the flow of discourses, meanings, and interpretations in societies’ (Mattoni & Treré, 2014: 260, citing Couldry, 2008 and Silverstone 2002) – for studying the meso-level; and *mediatization* – ‘a concept used to analyze critically the interrelation between changes in media and communications on the one hand, and changes in culture and society on the other’ (Couldry & Hepp, 2013, p. 197) – for investigating macro-level dynamics.

Treré (2011, 2012, 2019), Mattoni (2017), and Barassi (2015) have sought to combine media practice with media/information ecology approaches that pay attention to the complex, hybrid, and multi-faceted nature of the media systems within which social movement actors operate. Treré (2011, 2012, 2019, p. 205) points out that these two conceptual lenses implicate - and reinforce - each other: on one hand, an analytical approach anchored in practice theory puts us in a position to ask holistic questions regarding the whole spectrum of media used by activists; on the other, a media ecology perspective sheds light on the complex interrelations among multiple types of media (old and new, corporate and alternative, online and offline, etc.). Mattoni (2017, p. 2) contends that, together, media practice and media ecology approaches are powerful because they recognize the wider range of technologies, actors, and contents that activists interact with, historicize social movements' use of technologies, and emphasize activists' agency vis-a-vis media technologies.

Kaun (2016, this volume), meanwhile, combines instead attention to media practices with insights from media archaeology (Ernst, 2011; Parikka, 2012) - an approach that 'considers the material properties that constitute media technologies as well as their temporal and spatial consequences' (Kaun, 2016, p. 30). Together, these two approaches, Kaun argues, allows for an analysis that takes seriously the 'temporal and spatial structuration' (2016, p. 31) of specific media technologies, while recognising how activists resist, adapt, and politicize such technologies through their practices. In her contribution to this book, she clarifies that 'while media archeologies lacks people, media practice research lacks an historically and material contextualization of what people are doing with the media'.

Several scholars have also sought to integrate the media practice approach with an attention to social and media imaginaries (Barassi, 2015; Fotopolou, 2017; Treré, 2018, 2019; Lim, 2018; Barassi & Treré, 2015; Treré et al., 2018) as well as technological myths and the digital sublime (Treré, 2018, 2019). While there is not a unified understanding of the ways through which practices and imaginaries can be combined in this line of work, these scholars point to the necessity of studying the discourses, meanings, beliefs, visions, understandings, and assumptions of activists in order to properly grasp what they do with media technologies. For these authors, investigating people's social imaginaries is thus an inherent component of the media practice approach. Some scholars have illustrated how the analysis of media imaginaries entails scrutinizing and critically deconstructing the rhetoric inherent in the the grand narratives of progress and emancipation promoted by governments and corporations that often encapsulate the deployment and application of media and communication technologies for social change (Barassi, 2015; Fotopoulou, 2017). At the same time, it has been pointed out that we need to shed light on the concrete social imaginaries that activists and citizen media producers and consumers mobilize in specific contexts to make sense of the affordances provided by media technologies (Barassi, 2015; Treré, 2018, 2019). This means placing particular attention on the creative and collective aspects of imagination, underlining its capacity to act as a template for action and recognizing its powerful role in shaping the directions of social transformation.

Another concept with which the media practice approach has been brought into dialogue is that of the public sphere, which remains a core analytical framework for research on the relationship between media and democracy. Much recent work on the emergence and appropriation of digital networked media technologies has challenged both the spatial assumptions and model of deliberative democracy that underpin the classic Habermasian definition of the public sphere, highlighting the shifting, fluid, and fragmented character of contemporary public communication (e.g. Poell & van Dijck, 2016; Poell, Rajagopalan, & Kavada, 2018; Volkmer, 2014). Taking these changes as a starting point, contributions to the recent edited volume *Media Practices, Social Movements, and Performativity* (Foellmer, Lünenborg, & Raetzsch, 2017) use the concept of media practice to explore the relationship between everyday use of networked digital media and social change. Lünenborg and Raetzsch use the concept of media practice to ‘capture and analyse quotidian routines of communication in their relevance for the emergence of publics’ (2017, p. 23). Combining insights from practice theory with Judith Butler’s concept of performativity, they develop the concept of ‘performative publics’ to propose an understanding of publics as brought into being through practices (rather than as pre-existing entities). Stephansen (2016) also deploys the media practice framework to develop an understanding of publics as constituted through media practices. Challenging a tendency within studies of citizen media to focus primarily on media content, Stephansen’s practice-based understanding of publics emphasizes their social and material foundations and draws attention to the range of organizational, capacity-building, and networking practices that form around citizen media.

The embodied and material aspects of media practices also figure centrally in Fotopoulou’s (2017) study of feminist activism and digital networks, which combines a media practice perspective with insights from feminist science and technology studies. Challenging the tendency in feminist media studies to understand politics primarily in terms of representation, Fotopoulou emphasises the need ‘to account for bodies and practices when thinking about feminist and queer politics, digital media and activism, not least because this is the site of immaterial or affective labour’ (2017, p. 8). Drawing on Mattoni (2012) and Stephansen (2016), Fotopoulou uses a media practice framework to highlight the social, pedagogical, and political significance of media practices - how such practices are integral to the formation of political subjectivities and to processes of social world-making. Her feminist perspective on the embodied nature of media practices develops the concept of ‘biodigital vulnerability’ to account for the embodied and experienced aspects of the digital, and how shared experiences of corporeal vulnerability can be empowering for feminist and queer activists.

What becomes clear from this overview is the incredibly productive nature of the encounters between media practice and other theoretical frameworks. While practice theory ‘purists’ might balk at this theoretical promiscuity, and others might take it as evidence of the weakness of the practice paradigm, we believe instead that these conceptual integrations attest to the malleable and dynamic nature of the practice perspective, as an approach that can be fortified and merged depending on the context and aims of the researcher - while preserving its strength as a framework for understanding the ways social reality and media are mutually shaped. Nonetheless, as we discuss in more detail below, we believe the media

practice approach can be further strengthened through more in-depth debate about its theoretical underpinnings and more explicit engagement with practice theory.

### **Future directions and unresolved issues in media practice research**

Where next, then, for practice-focused research on citizen and activist media? In this final section, we offer some reflections on future directions and unresolved challenges for efforts to theorize citizen media from a practice perspective.

#### **Responding to urgent questions of our time**

As this book aims to demonstrate, the media practice approach provides a highly appropriate and propitious framework for investigating the pressing challenges posed by processes of mediatization and datafication. If, as Couldry and Hepp suggest, we are now living in an age of deep mediatization when ‘the very *elements and building blocks* from which a sense of the social is constructed become *themselves* based in technologically based processes of mediation’ (2017, p. 7, emphasis in original), an understanding of media practices becomes fundamental to understanding the social world more generally. A media practice perspective not only enables an analysis of the ways in which mediatization processes play out at the level of everyday life; it can also capture the practices of social actors who - becoming increasingly aware of the importance of media in today’s world - ‘take an active part in the moulding of media organisations, infrastructures and technologies’ (Kannengießer & Kubitschko, 2017, p. 1). The term ‘acting on media’ (Kubitschko, 2018; Kannengießer & Kubitschko, 2017) has been proposed as a way to broaden the focus of media practice research to include not only practices that involve doing things *with* media but also practices that make media objects of struggle. As Hepp (this volume) notes, deep mediatization entails the growing prominence of ‘collectivities for media change’ (Couldry & Hepp, 2017, p. 180) which see ‘media as fundamental to contemporary societal formations’ and seek to effect social transformation through media change. While the concept of ‘acting on media’ is relatively new, the practices it denotes have a much longer history, as Hepp (this volume) points out. The ‘acting on media’ lens thus resonates with longer traditions of scholarship on ‘emancipatory communication practices’ (Milan, 2013) and media democracy movements (Hackett & Carroll, 2006; Stein, Kidd, & Rodríguez, 2009) - and these traditions could fruitfully be brought into conversation with the media practice approach to deepen our understanding of such activism. The novelty of the ‘acting on media’ perspective is that it draws attention to the political dimension of media practices and raises questions about the nature of agency in an age of deep mediatization.

Datafication is the process of transformation of social action into quantifiable and analyzable data. In the last years, due to a blend of crucial social transformations connected with rapid technological advancements, we have witnessed a strong intensification of this process, together with the emergence of the big data phenomenon and the concomitant diffusion of reflections on the social, cultural, political, and economic implications inherent in the use and the analysis of massive quantities of data. Similarly to the media centrism that has defined the literature on digital media and protest, various accounts on the role of data within

contemporary societies have tended to adopt a techno-centric view of data, paying excessive attention to technical aspects to the detriment of practices and the human agency around and behind data. Recent literature, however, has urged scholars to relocate agency at the center of the debate around the implications of datafication (Couldry & Powell 2014; Treré 2019; Milan & Treré 2019) and pay attention to the specific material contexts, times, and places in which datafication plays out (Kennedy & Bates, 2017). This book follows and extends the path of these critical scholars. It makes clear that a critical practice approach to (big) data constitutes a powerful lens to overcome the prominent data centrism in studies of big data and algorithms, restoring the political dimension of datafication. It also illustrates how a practice approach to data can contribute to placing the study of data within broader sociological, ontological, and epistemological discussions on action, agency, and knowledge. Further, it demonstrates how investigating citizen data practices promotes a dialogue and builds conceptual bridges with other disciplines such as the sociology of social movements, the emerging field of critical data studies, feminist STS thinking, and Latin American media and cultural studies.

### **Need for deeper theoretical engagement**

As already suggested above, we believe there is a need for deeper debate about the theoretical underpinnings of ‘media practice’ in the specific context of citizen and activist media. Here, the growing field of research on citizen and activist media practices would benefit from a deeper engagement with practice theory. While we do not necessarily agree with Nicolini’s (2017) assessment of the ‘weak’ programme of practice research as shallow and naïve - much can be, and has been, gained from studies that produce detailed, ‘thick’ descriptions of citizen and social movement media practices -, we believe an important next step for scholars of citizen media practices would be to align themselves more closely with the ‘strong’ programme of practice research, which seeks to explain social phenomena and processes of social change in terms of practices (Nicolini, 2017, p. 23). This would entail engaging more explicitly with two core questions in social theory: the question of how to conceptualise the relationship between structure and agency, and the question of how to understand and explain processes of social change.

Thus far in the literature on citizen and activist media, the practice approach has been used primarily to account for citizens’ and activists’ *agency* vis-a-vis technological infrastructures and social institutions - and this is also an approach that is adopted by some of the contributors to this volume. Focusing on practices (what people ‘do’ with media) helps uncover the creativity with which activists adapt different media technologies to serve their needs and how they navigate complex media ecologies to pursue their aims. Intuitively, a focus on practices seems to entail a concern with ‘micro’ aspects of social reality - the situated, everyday practices of social actors as they interact with each other and wider social structures - and indeed, a common criticism of practice theory has been that while it is useful for studying the micro-level of social interaction, it cannot adequately account for large-scale political processes (Postill, 2010; Mattoni & Treré, 2014). This criticism, however, has been challenged by recent efforts to theorise large phenomena and power through a focus on

interconnections between practices (Hui, Schatzki, & Shove, 2016; Nicolini, 2016; Shove, 2016; Watson, 2016). The privileging of agency and the micro-level by scholars of activist and citizen media is also complicated by Schatzki's (2016) conceptualisation of practice theory as 'flat ontology': the idea that all social phenomena are constituted by practices, and that there is only one 'level' to social reality (2016, p. 31). This contrasts with conventional understandings of social reality as comprised of a micro level made up of individuals and their actions and a macro level consisting of social systems, structures, and institutions. From Schatzki's perspective, a key premise of practice theory is that it offers a way to move beyond the structure-agency dualism in social theory by collapsing both structure and agency, macro and micro phenomena, into practices. Explaining social change (and reproduction) is therefore not a matter of understanding how agents succeed (or not) in changing social structures - it is rather a case of understanding how practices change (or persist) over time and how changes in some practices may lead to changes in others (or not).

The question of how to conceptualize social change is particularly pertinent in the context of research on citizen and activist media practices, as such practices often aim, as per Baker and Blaagaard's definition, to 'effect aesthetic or socio-political change' (2016, p. 16) - although their potential to do so is not given. A crucial question for citizen media research thus concerns the potential - as well as limitations - of citizen media to contribute to processes of social change. To address this question, a better understanding of the conditions under which, and the processes through which, citizen media practices might contribute to social change is essential. Though practice theory has been criticized for being better at accounting for social reproduction than it is at explaining social change - because it tends to conceptualize practices as 'enduring entities reproduced through recurrent performances' (Shove et al., 2012, p. 8) - efforts have been made by practice theorists to develop more convincing accounts of social change. Shove, Pantzar and Watson, who understand practices as made up of materials, meanings and competences, argue that 'practices emerge, persist, shift and disappear when *connections* between [these] elements [...] are made, sustained or broken' (2012, pp. 14-15). Offering further purchase on the question of social change, Shove et al (2012) employ a useful distinction between 'practices-as-entities' and 'practices-as-performances'. As entities, practices exist as a recognizable conjunction of elements that can be spoken about and drawn upon by actors enacting that practice. At the same time, practices exist as performances: 'it is through performance, through the immediacy of doing, that the 'pattern' provided by the practice-as-an-entity is filled out and reproduced' (2012, p. 7). It is in this 'gap' between practice-as-entity and practice-as-performance that innovation and change become possible. Enabling an understanding of changes in citizen media practices as resulting from a complex interplay between technological developments, user adaptations, and the meanings that people attach to what they do, Shove et al's framework is potentially fruitful for analysing the processes through which particular citizen media practices emerge, change, and disappear.

The question of how to conceptualize social change in relation to activist and citizen media needs to also take into account the role of knowledge and pedagogic practices. Education and pedagogy can play a fundamental role within social movements (Couldry, this volume), and

as contributions to the first section of this book show, a focus on the pedagogic dimension of media practice has been central in Latin American communication theory. Building on the pioneering work of Paulo Freire, whose ‘liberation pedagogy’ was based on a dialogic and participatory model of education, the Latin American tradition has conceptualised communication practices as pedagogical processes that enable people to come to consciousness about - and develop strategies for changing - their realities (Rodríguez; Rincón & Marroquín; Barranquero; Barbas - all this volume). Within social movement studies, meanwhile, there is a growing body of literature that conceptualises social movements as sites for knowledge production, and understands their significance in terms of their capacity to contribute new knowledge and ideas to wider society (for an overview see contributions by Stephansen and Barbas in this volume). Taken together, these perspectives point towards an understanding of critical pedagogy and knowledge production as central role to processes of social change, and of media practices as central to such processes of knowledge production. To better understand the role of citizen media in processes of social change, we need to pay attention both to the pedagogic dimension of media practices (Barbas & Postill, 2017; Barbas, this volume) and the knowledge that activists mobilize as part of their media practices (Mattoni, 2012; Stephansen, this volume).

A further important question - arising from practice theory’s understanding of social reality as a *nexus* of practices (Hui, Schatzki, & Shove, 2016) - regards how citizen media practices might intersect with other social practices. This question, which was raised by Couldry (2004) but has not been taken up fully within the literature on citizen and social movement media, relates to the *ordering* of practices and the extent to which media practices might ‘anchor’ other practices by enacting new patterns of action that in turn prompt changes in other practices (Swidler, 2001). A better understanding of such connections seems crucial to understanding how citizen media practices might be implicated in broader processes of social change.

Wholesale adoption of Schatzki’s flat ontology - and the idea that there is nothing ‘outside’ of practice - may be a step too far for citizen media scholars who wish to retain a critical analysis of agency and power relations. The popularity of approaches that combine media practice with other theoretical frameworks, as outlined above, suggests that most scholars in the field tend to see the practice approach as a powerful new conceptual and methodological lens, to be used pragmatically alongside other perspectives - rather than an overarching, general theory. There seems to be a sense that, on its own, the practice approach cannot fully account for the processes and phenomena we wish to study. For example, as Kidd (this volume) and others have suggested there is an urgent need for citizen media research to engage more thoroughly with questions of political economy, and it is unclear whether practice theory equips us fully to do so. We agree with this pragmatic and theoretically pluralist position. As scholars interested in the emancipatory potential of citizen and activist media, our primary concern is not to build theory for theory’s sake, but rather to find the most appropriate tools for the job at hand. As long as it is well grounded in existing literature and operates with clear definitions, the integration of other conceptual frameworks enriches rather than dilutes the practice approach. However, we believe practice theory offers a rich set of

conceptual tools for exploring how citizen and activist media might be implicated in broader processes of social change, and that media practice research would benefit from a closer engagement with these tools and with Nicolini's (2017) strong programme of practice research in mind.

### **The necessity of dialogue**

From our review of the currents, connection, and challenges of theorising media practice and citizen media, one issue has emerged with clarity: this approach flourishes only in a context characterized by dialogue, debate and dynamism. Our book is an attempt to strengthen the conversation between the Latin American communication tradition where the roots of media practices are situated, and the plethora of mostly anglophone approaches that have experimented with this approach. We have seen that the strengths of the Latin American tradition and the anglophone visions can be fruitfully combined, retaining both the richness and the distinctly political focus of the former, and at the same time the ambitious programme of reconfiguration of social theory of the latter. We need both of these traditions in their richness and complexity to do justice to contemporary citizen media practices. At the same time, the book shows that the strength of the media practice approach lies precisely in its plasticity and suitability to be integrated, combined, and permeated by other fields of enquiry, including social movement studies, media archeology, media ecologies, critical data studies, science and technology studies, and other conceptual lenses such as social imaginaries, mediation, mediatization, performativity, and the public sphere. We believe that given the complexity of the current social and political context and the challenges we are facing in our increasingly datafied society, only a theoretically pragmatic and 'pluralist' approach to practice will be up to the task and therefore both *inter-* and cross-disciplinary dialogue are essential. Our book represents a step in this direction, but there is still a lot to do, especially considering the many insights in integrating a practice perspective coming from fields - just to name a few - as different as organizational studies (Nicolini), international studies (Bueger & Gadinger, 2014), and political economy that are only tangentially touched in this edited collection. Openness and pluralism are pivotal if we are to grasp the complexity of today's media-saturated society and media worlds, including a much needed intensification of dialogue and knowledge exchange between the Global South and the Global North in order not to fall prey to the same mistakes of the past (and of the present...).

### **Unresolved issues**

While this book moves the debate around citizen media and practice forward in several ways, there are unresolved issues and areas that require further development. One such issue, as highlighted above, relates to the relationship between the practice approach and political economy. In line with Couldry's (2012, p. 57) point that 'a practice-based approach to media must stay close to political economy', various accounts of citizen media practices have reiterated the need to situate an understanding of media practice firmly within a political economy framework (Costanza-Chock, 2014; Gomez & Treré 2014; Kidd this volume; Rodriguez et al., 2014). However, such accounts remain rather underdeveloped, and it is still not entirely clear exactly how these two approaches can be integrated. More theoretical work

is needed here that engages explicitly with the debate in practice theory about how to conceptualise the relationship between structure and agency. Such work is particularly urgent given the intensification of processes of datafication and rise of the ‘platform’ society (van Dijck, Poell, & de Waal, 2018) dominated by a small number of tech giants.

Another pressing question for media practice research is the extent to which this conceptual framework is useful or feasible to investigate the media practices of authoritarian and far-right activist collectives and protest movements. Thus far, this approach has mainly been applied to the study of progressive and radical left groups (and this is also the case for the contributions to this volume), but what can it tell us with regards to populism and activist groups that use media technologies to spread propaganda and manipulation on a large scale? What kind of changes and adjustments have to be made in order to adopt the conceptual lens provided by the practice framework to study these kinds of movements? Considering the increasing relevance of right-wing populist and authoritarian communication (Fuchs, 2018), these are important questions. We believe the media practice approach has potential to increase our understanding of such movements, but it raises methodological and ethical issues that are not easily resolved and that would require further research and conceptual development beyond the scope of this edited collection.

Linked to this last point, there are unresolved questions about the methodological orientation adopted by media practice researchers. There seems to be an elective affinity between the exploration of media practices and ethnographic research (Ardevol & Gómez-Cruz, 2012; Pink et al., 2016; Sartoretto, 2016). The openness and non-media-centrism of ethnography make it particularly suited to explore media practices - and some insist that only ethnographically thick understandings of activist cultures will do if we want to understand the complexities of activists’ negotiations with digital technologies (Barassi, 2015, pp. 19-20). However, given the proliferation of other types of digital methodologies and big data analytics, we are faced with the problem of evaluating how and under which circumstances we can integrate and complement different methodologies for studying media practices. Can practices only be studied by directly observing ‘scenes of action’ (Nicolini, 2017) - which would imply quite a narrow range of methodological choices - or can other approaches, such as computational methods, be used either on their own or in combination with ethnographic approaches, as Mattoni and Pavan, and Milan, suggest in their contributions to this volume?

Last - but by no means least - research on citizen and activist media practices needs to incorporate a critical analysis of inequalities that form around various axes of oppression including gender, sexuality, ‘race’, class, and (dis)ability (Kennedy, this volume; Fotopoulou, this volume). With regards to the gender dimension, the media practice approach shares with feminist theory a concern with embodiment and materiality, but as Fotopoulou (2017, p. 7) points out, ‘gender and sexuality as embodied practices, have been invisible in both research about communication systems and studies of collective action, despite their centrality’. Though there is a literature on feminist and LGBT movements, the tradition of social movement studies rarely analyses movement dynamics through a feminist lens. This is a serious oversight, which is also replicated in media and communications theory including the

Latin American communication tradition (the scholarship of Martín-Barbero has been criticised for the lack of attention to gender as a key component of a better understanding of communication processes in Latin America [Lagos Lira, 2018]). A media practice approach that aims to seriously do justice to the technological appropriations of citizen media producers and consumers also needs to develop an intersectional analysis that recognises all axes of oppression and reflects deeply on their epistemological and ontological foundations. Engaging with second generation Latin American scholars who - as Rodríguez points out in contribution to this volume - are reflecting on the ways through which the shift to practice can evolve into an epistemology of/from/for the South is thus pivotal, as recent vivid discussions in both the Global North and South around datafication, design, and social justice testify (Escobar, 2017; Milan & Treré, 2019; Costanza-Chock, 2018).

### **Outline of the book**

The topics, case studies, and perspectives explored in this edited collection provide a comprehensive introduction to the concerns and applications of the media practice approach across a diverse range of contexts and experiences related to activist and citizen media. Inevitably, given the size and diversity of this field, we had to make choices in terms of what topics and perspectives to include, which has left at the margins of the conversation some types of media activism and citizen media. For instance, the book does not say much about practices such as citizen journalism, community radio, DIY/hacker cultures, culture jamming, and activism in general. Since these are covered extensively in other publications, and taking into account the impossibility of condensing the extreme richness of citizen media types in one single volume (but see on this the forthcoming *Routledge Encyclopedia of Citizen Media*), we decided to shed light on a wide spectrum of different theoretical perspectives including more established topics (activist agency, social movement media, technological affordances, video activism), neglected explorations in the anglophone literature (Latin American communication theory and the connection to critical pedagogy), as well as original conceptual perspectives (mediatization and acting on media, citizen data practices). Partly due to our own disciplinary location as scholars of social movements and media, there is undoubtedly a 'bias' towards organized and explicitly political forms of media activism (over more individualized and 'accidental' forms of citizen media, such as citizen witnessing), but we believe this is justifiable given that it is in studies of these kinds of media activism that the media practice approach has received most attention. Another limitation of the book is that the empirical examples referred to by the contributors to this book are all broadly left-leaning, radical or progressive in terms of their political orientation. Again, this was a conscious choice on our part. As discussed above, the prospect of applying the media practice approach to the study of right-wing media activism raises complex methodological and ethical issues, which deserve more detailed and specific attention than would be possible in this volume. Given the growing prominence of right-wing populism and post-truth politics, this is certainly an area in urgent need of further research, but we also believe it is important in this context to develop a better understanding of the emancipatory potential of progressive forms of citizen and activist media. We believe the media practice approach, as applied and developed in the chapters that follow, provides excellent tools for this task.

Section I, Latin American communication theory, represents a powerful opener for the book. Its location at the very beginning of this collection signals the relevance of Latin American thought in media and communication for laying the roots of the media practice approach. Clemencia Rodríguez's passionate introduction starts with a strong statement: 'Latin America did not have to wait until the 2004 publication of Couldry's article, "Theorising media as practice" to begin thinking about a shift to practice. In Latin America, the shift happened 40 years earlier'. Rodríguez clearly explains why this shift was not recognized by a Global North that rarely takes scholarship emerging from the South seriously. She illustrates the differences in the labels and definitions of practice between the South and the North, and shows that the media practice approach has always been a constitutive part of the Latin American scholarly DNA as evidenced in the works of authors as diverse as Jesús Martín-Barbero, Paulo Freire and Rosa María Alfaro among others.

The Latin American shift to practice in media studies is carefully disentangled by the three contributions to this opening section. Omar Rincón and Amparo Marroquín's chapter represents a much-needed introduction to Latin American communication scholarship. The chapter explains the theoretical rupture, or how Latin American academics moved away from research questions centered on media to exploring people's experiences with media and how those experiences are permeated by power – as domination but also as resistance. In order to illustrate the complexity of this rupture, the chapter articulates the main contributions of six key Latin American authors to 'the shift to practice': Paulo Freire, Jesús Martín-Barbero, Carlos Monsiváis, Néstor García-Canclini, Rossana Reguillo, and Bolívar Echeverría. Relying on their profound understanding and meticulous exploration of this rich body of knowledge, Rincón and Marroquín draw a vivid, nuanced portrayal of the Latin American contributions to the understanding of media as practice.

In the next chapter, Alejandro Barranquero explores the historical development of the Latin American concept of praxis. The Spanish scholar documents how praxis emerged at the intersection of different fields, including culture and communication studies, liberation theology, and social movements. The chapter illustrates the influence of praxis on areas of inquiry in the field of communication research, such as community/citizens' media, education, and cultural studies centered on the notion of mediation(s). Barranquero follows the historical evolution of practice all the way to the contemporary line of inquiry around 'buen vivir', an epistemology from the South that emerges from indigenous worldviews centred on cooperative relations among living entities. Barranquero's chapter denounces the lack of interest among communication and media scholars in the Global North towards Latin America's media practice legacy, and invites media scholars and practitioners to learn from and dialogue with the Latin American scholarly legacy.

In the final contribution to this section, Ángel Barbas explores an area of research little known outside of Latin America: Educommunication. He illustrates the evolution of Educommunication in Latin America as a field that understands media and communication as educational praxis. Based on this framework, the Spanish scholar examines contemporary

social movements and their use of media as educational practice. Barbas documents this Latin American tradition of Educommunication that has functioned, since the early 1950s, as an incubator for hundreds of community media initiatives, and concludes proposing an ‘Educommunicative diagnosis’, a toolbox that includes Kaplún’s ‘feed-forward’ methodology and Fals Borda’s participatory action research in order to examine activist media practices. Educommunication, concludes Barbas, ‘allows us to build a bridge between media practices and media learning processes’.

The contributions to Section II of the book make clear that the media practice approach provides a powerful lens through which we can examine and evaluate the complex interplay between activist agency and the technological affordances of media technologies. In her introduction to the section, Donatella della Porta illustrates how approaches to practices can help us to go beyond traditional approaches to mass media as brokers for protest messages but also to citizen media. A media practice approach, she argues, has the potential to bridge the focus on structure that defines the literature on mass media selectivity with the attention to agency that is key in research on citizen media. However, she concludes, in order to properly build theory, attention to media practice should be complemented by a focus on other elements of the communicative process such as technological affordances, norms, and content, as well as the knowledge that movements produce.

In Chapter 5, Bart Cammaerts develops a historical account of the various ways in which activists across time and space have appropriated traditional media as well as telecommunication and digital media to develop resistance practices. He shows how countercultures and activists have been able to shape communication technologies into tools of resistance to suit their particular needs across history. Cammaerts draws a conceptual connection between the self-mediation practices of activists, the communicative affordances of the media, and what he calls the mediation opportunity structure. He then identifies the affordances that enable activist mediation practices situating them at the level of the three dimensions of temporality, spatiality, and resistance. Cammaerts convincingly disentangles the articulation between activist practices, technological affordances and the constraints and opportunities of the political opportunity structure. ‘The Empire always strikes back’, he concludes, but ‘new technologies will be developed, new affordances discovered, and new creative workarounds imagined, rejuvenating old practices as well as constituting new ones’.

In Chapter 6, Anne Kaun studies the media practices of social movements from a media archaeological perspective. Kaun combines media archeology and media practice theory, merging a materialist perspective with an experiential approach in order to foreground the material properties that constitute media technologies as well as their temporal and spatial consequences. Based on extensive archival research in combination with interviews with activists, she develops a diachronic, comparative study of the media practices of three protest movements emerged in the context of large-scale economic crises: the unemployed workers’ movement in the 1930s, the tenants’ movement in the 1970s and Occupy Wall Street in 2011. Kaun argues for a shift in media regimes that activists are navigating from mechanical speed to perpetual flow towards digital immediacy, and from a space to a hyper-space bias. Her

combined approach is able to shed light on the increasing desynchronization between media technologies and political practices that activists are facing in the present scenario.

The third section of the book tackles the richness, along with the benefits and the challenges, of practice approaches to video activism. In her introduction to the section, Dorothy Kidd digs into the early roots of video activism and video practices, showing how the use of multiple digital video circuits has become a primary practice for most social and political movements in the last years, as the examples of the Indignados in Spain and the Occupy movement clearly testify. Inspired by Downing, Kidd urges to combine analyses of social movement practice and political economy to reveal dynamics of exploitation, censorship, and surveillance perpetrated by corporate platforms such as YouTube and Facebook. Further, she suggests that practice theory would benefit by a brighter focus on the investigative protocols and the knowledge which social movement activists themselves adopt and generate. This, Kidd shows, also implies drawing much more deeply from the activist knowledges of the Global South and excavate the power dynamics of gender, race, class, and immigration status.

In Chapter 7, Tina Askanius synthesizes scholarship on historic and contemporary forms of video activism, identifying three distinct *foci* within the literature (video as technology, text, or testimony). Askanius demonstrates how the holistic, flexible, and open-ended nature of a practice-based approach allows us to appreciate this form of citizen media as being characterized by all three components. Hence, Askanius illustrates, a practice approach is able to travel beyond recurring conceptual dichotomies (online/offline, digital/analogue, old/new, etc.) addressing instead the ‘rich ways in which these categories impinge and encroach on each other’. Relying on Mattoni (2012) and Stephansen’s (2016) theoretical conceptualizations, Askanius develops an understanding of video activism as ‘the things activists do, think and say in relation to video for social and political change’. She concludes exemplifying how this renewed perspective and this novel definition offer a ‘productive and holistic approach with which we might begin to fully understand all of the intertwined social and political practices involved in video activism and citizen media more generally’.

In their chapter, Alice Mattoni and Elena Pavan adopt a somewhat different perspective and demonstrate the utility of the media practice approach for studying the circulation of alternative media content through a single social media platform. Through a case study of the use of YouTube by the Italian feminist movement *Se Non Ora, Quando?* [If not now, when?] and its supporters, the authors make a strong case for the use of computational methods in the study of media practices. Through the analysis of metadata and the digital traces that movement actors and supporters leave behind when sharing YouTube videos, Mattoni and Pavan show that the ‘mainstreaming’ of alternative media content through this platform gave rise to hybrid forms of media practices that rested not only on the efforts of a core of organized collective actors but also on the contributions of non-affiliated individuals. Demonstrating the utility of their platform-centred approach for capturing the dispersed nature of contemporary protest movements - and, specifically, the media practices of individual sympathizers beyond the core movement organizers - Mattoni and Pavan suggest

that computational methods can thus fruitfully be combined with ethnographic approaches to develop more comprehensive accounts of contemporary activist media practices.

Contributions to section four examine, from different perspectives, the implications of expanding the media practice approach to include practices that involve thematizing and politicizing media and communication. Although, as Couldry himself points out in his foreword to this volume, such practices were implicit in his reference to practices that ‘relate’ to media, this dimension of media practice is made explicit by the notion of ‘acting on media’ (Kubitschko, 2018), which has been used to refer to ‘the efforts of a wide range of actors to take an active part in the molding of media organizations, infrastructures and technologies that are part of the fabric of everyday life’ (Kannengießer & Kubitschko, 2017, p. 1). In his introduction to the section, Andreas Hepp situates such ‘collectivities for media change’ within the broader context of *deep mediatization* - ‘an advanced stage of mediatization in which through digitalization all elements of our social world are intricately related to digital media and their overarching infrastructures’ - arguing that efforts to ‘act on media’ emerge as a response to these developments, but also that they must be seen as contributing to the making of deep mediatization. ‘Acting on media’, as an extension of the concept of media practices, involve broader practices of *doing* in relation to media beyond the *use* of media to communicate ideas, ranging from *practice of creation* (of alternative media technologies), *practice to improve and restore* existing technologies, and *practices of public discourse* that problematize issues of media regulation.

The two chapters that follow highlight the variety of practices that involve ‘acting on media’, showing how the concept can be applied to practices as diverse as repairing media devices and campaigning for media policy reform. In her chapter ‘Acting on media for sustainability’, Sigrid Kannengießer develops the concept of ‘consumption-critical media practices’ to account both for media practices that use media to critique unsustainable consumption, and practices that involve ‘acting on media’ for sustainability, such as repairing media technologies or producing sustainable media devices. Individuals and collectivities involved in such practices thus ‘act on media’ by ‘adapting, modifying and politicizing media technologies themselves [...] as part of a broader practice of striving for sustainability’. An important insight here is that by acting on media in this way, people seek to transform not just the media technologies themselves, but also wider society. Consumption-critical media practices have a strong normative dimension as people reflect on the materiality of media technologies and media consumption, and seek to develop ‘better’, more sustainable alternatives.

Hilde Stephansen, meanwhile, is concerned in her chapter with further drawing out the implications of the conceptual move to ‘acting on media’ by problematizing the role of knowledge in media practices. While all social practices involve cognitive processes, she argues that knowledge is brought to the fore by practices that entail acting on media because these involve not just the tacit know-how required to *use* media, but also analytical knowledge and imaginaries informed by broader visions of social change. Through critical engagement with the status of knowledge in practice theory, Stephansen proposes that we

should understand knowledge practices as central to media practices, and that such knowledge practices can be studied empirically as social practices in their own right. Drawing on literature on knowledge production in social movements (Eyerman & Jamison, 1991; della Porta & Pavan, 2017), she develops a typology of activist knowledge practices, and demonstrates the utility of this typology for the study of media-related practices through a case study of the World Forum of Free Media, a global forum for NGOs and activist collectives that mobilize around media.

The fifth and final section of the book explores the value of the practice framework for understanding processes of datafication and their consequences. The relevance of the media practice approach for this field of enquiry should be obvious, given that ‘data practices are intrinsically communicative (Fotopoulou, this volume) and that ‘today, media are data and media practices are data practices’ (Kennedy, this volume). However, as Helen Kennedy notes in her introduction to this section (see also the contributions by Fotopoulou and Dencik), the field of (critical) data studies has thus far been dominated by structural critique, with limited attention paid to people’s *experiences* of datafication. This is a shortcoming, as our understanding of the role played by data in society ‘needs to be grounded in specific material contexts, times and places’ (Kennedy, this volume, citing Kennedy & Bates, 2017). The media practice framework, Kennedy suggests, offers a fruitful approach to understanding such contexts, as it brings together concerns with the emotional, the everyday, and agency through its focus on what people are ‘doing in relation to *data* across a wide range of situations and contexts’ (Kennedy, this volume, paraphrasing Couldry, 2012, p. 37). Beyond this, she argues - raising questions about the ability of the media practice approach to imagine new and different data practices - there is also an urgent need to consider how data arrangements can be improved to avoid ‘data harms’ and instead contribute to wellbeing and justice.

Citizens’ efforts to impact processes of datafication for emancipatory purposes are the topic of Stefania Milan’s chapter in this section, which adapts the ‘acting on media’ framework to the study of activism that places the politics of data and data infrastructures at its centre. Such ‘data activism’, she argues, can take proactive and reactive forms, involving both affirmative engagement with data for advocacy purposes and efforts to resist surveillance and data extraction by state and commercial actors. What the diverse practices designated by ‘acting on data(fication)’ have in common is 1) that they see information as a constitutive force in society and question dominant politics of representation, and 2) that they are typically ‘enabled (and constrained) by software (or lack thereof)’. This has implications for the media practice paradigm: according to Milan, we need to broaden our understanding of ‘media practice’ by placing software and the ontologies of information at the centre of our analysis. She suggests that the notion of ‘data assemblages’ may fruitfully be integrated with the media practice approach to help ‘tease out the growing *complexity* of the landscape which citizen media practitioners inhabit today, and the dynamic relations between its different parts’, thus helping us to give adequate consideration to the materiality of information and infrastructure.

Materiality is also a key issue in Aristeia Fotopoulou's chapter, though her concern is not just with information and infrastructure but also with 'labouring bodies, invisible human practices, and social relations and activities'. Exploring the relevance of practice theory for understanding citizens' data practices from a feminist perspective, Fotopoulou argues for an understanding of 'data practices' as encompassing a broader range of practices than those designated by the term 'data activism', including practices that are not explicitly political. This broader orientation, she argues, allows to draw out the political dimension and power relations inherent in seemingly mundane everyday practices. Developing an understanding of data practices as communicative, material, and embodied, Fotopoulou draws on insights from feminist science and technology studies to argue that such practices should be understood through the lens of a feminist ethics of *care*. This involves 'accounting for the often invisible and devalued ordinary human labour involved in producing data in everyday contexts or analysing data within organizations', and asking critical questions about whose knowledge, experiences, and labour 'count'. It also entails the 'production of standpoints', i.e. actively seeking 'to incite readers to care for a more just world'.

In the final chapter of the book, Lina Dencik demonstrates the value of the practice framework not just for analysing the practices of 'ordinary' citizens but also for 'researching up'. Through a case study of the use of social media intelligence ('socmint') in predictive policing in the UK that highlights the relevance of organizational context and human agency, she argues for the need to overcome data centrism by situating data practices in relation to other social practices. We need, Dencik suggests, to situate datafication in the specific contexts it is being played out and focus on the *uses* to which data are put. While police use of 'socmint' is on the one hand shaped by dominant logics of datafication it also interacts in complex ways with values of professionalism, hesitation towards technological innovation, and continued prevalence of other forms of knowledge. Dencik's examination demonstrates the value of the practice framework for developing 'a more nuanced understanding of how citizens are governed through data systems', with implications for how we understand the potential for citizen intervention and resistance 'from below'. A practice approach to datafication, Dencik argues, 'shifts the focus away from data as the entry point for citizen intervention and resistance' towards an understanding of the relationship between data practices and other social practices within institutional contexts as itself a site of struggle and intervention.

Together, the contributions to this book provide an introduction to the broad range of debates and concerns that animate practice-oriented research on citizen and activist media today. By critically reflecting on and demonstrating the relevance of approaches that place *media practices* at the centre of analysis, they make an important theoretical contribution to the development of the media practice framework, and open up new avenues for research by pointing to its relevance for understanding and responding to some of the key issues of our time. It is our hope that, by bringing together contributions from scholars in diverse areas - and particularly by reuniting the Latin American and anglophone traditions of media practice research - this book will stimulate inter- and intra-disciplinary dialogue paving the way for further theoretical work and empirical research on citizen media practices. With its emphasis

on sociality, materiality, experience, and meanings, the media practice framework has the potential to illuminate not only the complex ways in which contemporary processes of mediatization and datafication play out in specific contexts, but also the myriad ways in which ordinary citizens and activists respond to, engage with, and resist such processes. A better understanding of such citizen media practices, in all their complexity and diversity, is essential to the conceptualization and development of media infrastructures and institutions that place justice, equality and wellbeing over profit and financial benefits.

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