

Interactive comment on ““Doing with space”: towards a pragmatics of space” by M. Lussault and M. Stock

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We gratefully acknowledge the comments of the referee Marc Redepenning and editor Wolf-Dietrich Sahr that will allow for an improvement of our paper; we also are happy that the two comments value our contribution as innovative. One of the aims of the article was to present a series of new concepts and not a state of the art of the practice approach in geography. Those concepts have been developed during the last ten years within French geography and entered the broader academic debate with the publication of the Dictionary of geography of 2003 (Lévy & Lussault, dir.). It is therefore a contribution rooted within the French style of geography although we make the effort to embed our reflexion also within the different German and English-speaking productions on geographical approaches of practice. This cultural embedding of the scientific

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production is important and gives a clue to the kind of text submitted. It is different from what British, German, Italian or US-American geographers would have written.

Our aim was to give an *explorative* paper on the conditions of possibility of a pragmatics of space. This pragmatics of space is thought as a conceptual tool to grasp certain aspects of the ways individuals act in situations. The specific spatial dimensions of practice are highlighted. This implies *a*) a certain critical stance towards existing work, and *b*) the proposition of new conceptual tools in order to understand more precisely the spatial conditions of society. Indeed, fundamentally we tried to propose a different voice in the now accepted geographies of practice, where two specific aspects, situation and “*épreuve*” are strengthened. Therefore, our article is an *exploration*, not a review of progress of practice theory; as a consequence, and the reviewers noticed it, the arguments and the process are sometimes chaotic and not as precise as we would have wished. For the final paper, we will aim at a more fluid argumentation and a better conclusion.

We tried to achieve several objectives in this paper:

1. The introduction sets the context where we recall that several approaches of practice and action are possible, that there are various theoretical programmes. We define our specific approach by defining the concept of situation and ways spatial arrangements are co-constituted during the engagement of practice. As noticed by Wolf-Dietrich Sahr, there is a need for restructuring of the introduction.

2. Then, a first important demonstration has been tried: to indicate the necessity to move from approaches focussed on “being in space” towards approaches moving towards “doing with space”. There we tried to propose a vision of practice where the spatial dimensions are integrated, not conceptualised as “spatial practice” or practice *in space*¹. Therefore, we thought we could not elude a brief discussion of the concept

¹ We agree with Marc Redepenning that GIS approaches can also be subsumed under the “being in space” paradigm.

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of space. We did so and proposed something innovative, but could not discuss it in detail. When Wolf-Dietrich Sahr judges this review "still remains open-ended without any conclusion", this was not intended. We *mobilise* the four "traditions" in order to propose something new, which acknowledges the efforts of the discussed authors. Indeed, those authors can be related towards a reading of the concept of space as a conceptual synthesis that *subsumes* other concepts - location, territory, distance, spatial organisation, arrangement, place etc.

In the same section, Wolf-Dietrich Sahr mentions the development of de Certeau, Schütz, Foucault is "not much oriented towards pragmatism" and therefore fails to make a point and "enumerates excessively positions of authors". In fact, we try to *mobilise* those contributions in order to construct our perspective of practice: "ways of doing thing" (Certeau), the Foucauldian "*ensemble pratique*", the phenomenological-informed approach of the multiple relationships of the human (Schütz²) exactly permits to avoid the shortcomings of the *performance studies*. It allows for a deeper description/explications of situations. Maybe this has to be stated more explicitly.

We endorse a certain "syncretism" of our theoretical references. This is not in order to be "post-modern" or "relativistic" for fashion's sake, but because we try to fabricate an adequate "conceptual tool box"; we are not in search of a "school" or a "chapel" within which to find our place in geography. Our search for adequate concepts implies in fact an association of traditionally separated theoretical universes. In our sense, they are often separated and opposed more by a *rhetoric* stance than on the grounds of adequacy. We find it necessary to search for tools for the intelligibility of phenomena: if we can *articulate* the arguments of Plato, Derrida, Foucault, Heidegger, Dewey, Latour, Werlen, Thevenot to a *coherent* and adequate toolbox on the spatial dimensions of

² We know Schütz and also Goffman are not French ! Wolf-Dietrich Sahr's interpretation of our unhappy contextualisation about the "national traditions" is misread. We intended to express the fact contemporary French sociology *heavily* built upon these two contributors in order to present the approaches on "regimes of engagement", "situation" and "épreuve".

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practice, it is much more gained than by a narrow understanding of "pragmatism".

3. In a second section, in order to relate and delimit our engagement with the space/practice issue, we rapidly do a screening over the major contributions. We present especially three approaches: Werlen's (1993; 1995-1997), the performative theory informed and the ethnomethodologically informed. This gives us the opportunity - contrary to Wolf-Dietrich Sahr's perception - to point at the *limits* of the performative approach. For us, this is only one element of practice, which is not at all "non-representational", but informed by reflexivity and formally and informally learned competences. If we expand this section, we could give a more detailed critique of the different approaches. As a consequence, our text is *not* strictly affiliated to the paradigm of performativity or even to a narrow form of pragmatism. The aim is not to think the spatial dimension of practice for itself and through its "techniques", but to understand its part in the constitution of the spatial dimensions of society and the different spatial problems raised. Therefore, the political dimension of such a reflexion - "from class struggles to place struggles" (Lussault, 2009) - gets important. We haven't expressed this clearly and will be more explicit about this point.

4. In a third section, we probe deeper in the proposition of "doing with space", with the help of the notion "*à l'épreuve*" we translated by "in proof". For us, the concept "situation" is one of the key tools of our approach and we try therefore to give a few precisions as an answer to our critics. The concept of situation points at a convergence of actors where they have to actualise their spatialities, which we have named "épreuve". This "épreuve" means every act can be grasped as a task, a "work", which our text has to better indicate. Every situation has to be contextualised by the observer (i.e. researcher). The context is not the determining frame for the practice, but an *ensemble* of the conditions of possibility that are resources and/or constraints for the actants. The situated spatial practices are expressed by arrangements of materiality and ideas, which contribute to the permanent movement of the spatial construction of reality. Therefore, we take seriously the idea of the openness of practice and spatiality,

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as noted by Marc Redepenning, who also noticed some shortcomings of this idea. We try to be more explicit in the final paper.

5. In a forth section we try to put forward several limitations to the pragmatics of space. But we have no problem with "double hermeneutics" - as stated by Wolf-Dietrich Sahr - since "practice" is a concept that *refers* to, yet is *not identical*, with the processes people are involved when encountering the world. The critics bemoan that some references are superficial, redundant and dispensable, and others lacking. For example, Marc Redepenning asks for more references in order to sustain the openness and fluidity of space, Wolf-Dietrich Sahr for a smaller number references, because the text already is "overloaded". We cannot resolve this dilemma, because the aim has been to give a theoretical context of our presentation. Therefore the authors are mobilised as *resource*, but also we wanted to show by the display of references how our text is *different* from other approaches. For example, we intended to demarcate our approach from the purely ethnomethodological, phenomenological, existential and humanistic approaches of spatial action. Indeed, our focus is on the understanding of the spatiality (i.e. the spatial dimensions) of practice as processed by social operators. The implicit premise: society is permanently constituted and reconstituted, at all levels of scale, by the interplay of different (spatial) practices of individual and collective operators. To this respect, our work seems closer to the positions of Bruno Latour than of the performative, non-representational approaches of practice as can be found in British geography. This position permits also to acknowledge Wolf-Dietrich Sahr's critique, who points to the absence of the concept of "actant" in our paper. We will include it in the final version of the paper.

Wolf-Dietrich Sahr expresses the need of a thorough revision of the text, indicating with precision the dispensable and amendable paragraphs. We will do our possible to fulfill his dreams, but couldn't do it all the line down; otherwise, we would not be Michel Lussault and Mathis Stock, but Wolf-Dietrich Sahr!

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References:

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