ABSTRACT. The scope of International Relations theory has become increasingly diverse. The reflexive, constructivist, and linguistic turns have served to loosen the grip of rationalism and positivist methodology on the study of world politics. The more recent ‘critical’ turns – such as those toward practice, performativity, and emotion – have been understood as an even greater shift beyond traditional orthodoxies in International Relations scholarship. This paper investigates how recent developments in IR theory have looked toward older traditions of social thought as well as to extra-disciplinary concepts and the impact this may have had on the field. It argues that engagement with other disciplinary traditions can indeed be a fruitful endeavour and holds the potential to make International Relations a more inclusive discipline. Yet the tendency of scholars to both find and found their own niche through ever more ‘theoretical turns’, with an increasing pace of moving from one to the next, may make IR lightheaded and invite claims of disciplinary fracture beyond repair. The paper is based on the UK’s Economic and Social Research Council grant ES/K008684.
Introduction

**Global IR and Regional Worlds: A New Agenda for International Studies** – this was the headline of the International Studies Association’s 2015 Annual Convention, the largest gathering International Relations (IR) scholars from around the world. The convenors diagnosed a lack of correspondence, theoretically, methodologically, and empirically, between the disciplinary mainstream and the increasingly global pool of those engaged in the study of world politics. With the 2015 motto, they made the call for boarding of horizons of all aspects to make discipline more inclusive and self-conscious about its diverse intellectual heritage and constituency to transcend the ‘West versus the Rest’-divide (ISA 2014-15).

The verdict that IR is not (yet) a global discipline is certainly not new. Nearly two decades ago, Ole Wæver, for example, noted in his contribution to the 50th anniversary special issue of the flagship journal *International Organization* that American hegemony in International Relations continues to be key marker of the discipline. Despite expectations and signs of a move toward more balanced and pluralistic state of affairs in the disciplinary mainstream he acknowledged that IR continues to be a distinctly American social science, just as Stanley Hoffmann had observed twenty years earlier (Wæver 1998: 688).

Nevertheless, the scope of International Relations theory has since become increasingly diverse. The reflexive, constructivist, and linguistic turns of the 1980s and 1990s have served to loosen the grip of rationalism and positivist methodology on the study of world politics. The more recent ‘critical’ turns have been understood as an even greater shift beyond traditional orthodoxies in International Relations scholarship. This paper explores the potential that this recent post-positives effort to perforate the mainstream has to foster the progression of IR into a more inclusive discipline. The specific focus of the paper lies on the turns in IR theory toward practice, performativity, and emotion of the past decade. Like their predecessor, these have looked toward older traditions of social thought as well as to extra-disciplinary concepts, thus continuing the importing exercise marking previous shifts in mainstream and critical IR theory development. The paper argues this engagement with other disciplinary traditions can indeed be a fruitful endeavour and holds the potential to make International Relations a more inclusive discipline. At the same time, the tendency of scholars to both find and found their own niche through ever more ‘theoretical turns’, with an increasing pace of moving from
one to the next, may make IR lightheaded and invite claims of disciplinary fracture beyond repair.

**The Increasing Appeal of the ‘Deviant Community’**

Karl Popper once suggested that theories are ‘nets cast to catch what we call “the world”’ (Popper 1959: 59). They help to make sense of, and structure, our worlds by defining both the object under investigation (ontology) and what we can know about it (epistemology), and they are advocates of specific ways of how we best go about to do so (methodology). As other disciplinary fields in the social sciences and humanities, a divide between opposing viewpoints of what world is out there for us to see and how to best catch it has long characterized theorizing about international relations: first, mainstream ‘positivist’ scholarship engaged in problem-solving and neutral scientific explanation of a material and visible world, and, second, post-positivist ‘critical’ approaches focusing on understanding and unpacking an (inter)subjectively constructed world, in the widest sense, of which the observers are an integral part.

Post-positive approaches began to penetrate International Relations during the early 1980s, initiating a fourth (or third!) ‘great debate’ of the discipline between rationalism and reflectivism. Although critical and constitutive approaches posed a significant challenge to the positivist orthodoxy in the study of world politics at the ontological, epistemological, methodological, and axiological level, the disciplinary core in the US remained sceptical about ‘critical’ contributions to the development of IR theory. Robert Keohane (1989: 173), for example, maintained in his 1988 ISA Presidential Address that scholarship located in the reflectivist camp would dwell ‘on the margins of the field’ if it did not embrace the ‘rationalistic premises’ of the disciplinary mainstream. This suggests a reluctance to cast a wider net to ‘catch the world’ by engaging in a ‘systematic reconstruction’ of the IR discipline (Lapid 1989: 236; Giddens 1979: 238).

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1 This has also been labelled as the Third Debate when IR scholars do not count the inter-paradigm (or neo-neo) debate as one of the great debates of the discipline. The utility of the ‘great debates’ framework to characterize the development of International Relations has been controversial (e.g. Vangeswaran and Quirk 2004; Ashworth 2002).
Much has since happened in world politics and the study of international relations. After the end of the Cold War, which especially (neo)realist IR had failed to predict (see e.g. Gaddis 1992; Lebow 1994) the study of international relations began to move beyond the predominance of statism, national security concerns, and narrowly defined foreign policy, and it gradually opened up to include an ever-increasing number of referent objects and issue areas. The shift towards broadening and deepening the disciplinary capture – perhaps most visible in the field of international security – has also fostered the proliferation and diversification of theories and the rise of ‘analytical eclecticism’ (Sil and Katzenstein 2010). It has also paved the way for post-positivist scholarship to move out of the shadows. While continuing to linger at the side-lines of American IR, it is no longer merely a ‘deviant community’ of ‘relativists’ (Milliken 1999: 227; Adler 1997: 323) with little broader appeal.

The recent turns within the study of international relations toward practice, performativity, and emotion are to some extent as a reaction against determinism – social, structural, or otherwise – and have followed similar ‘turns’ in other disciplines. They are marked by approaches which all emphasize that meanings are not fixed but unstable and contested, and which exert an overt scepticism toward broad-brush generalizations, grand theories and meta-theorizing. Such ‘critical’ scholarship, as it is often labelled, stresses that IR theorists, just like other scientists, are never merely observers of international dynamics. Rather, scientific knowledge is understood as always contextual, situated, entangled, and political (see e.g. Adler-Nieesen and Kropp 2015: 161-66).

The multiplicity of approaches that are broadly aligned with the critical turns of the past decade have also begun to reconceptualise agency, and in a sense they offer a possibility to side-step, if not disentangle, the problem between social agency and social structure. At a basic level, they share the notion that agents have the capacity to behave and choose differently – and have the tendency to do so – depending on the specific domain, field, scenario, or situation they face. As Geertz (1973: 120) earlier observed, they can shift ‘more or less easily and very frequently between radically contrasting ways of looking at the world’. Consequently, such scholarship has moved away from a focus on ‘static’ traits, elements, and identities toward unpacking processes and relational assemblages. At the same time, as the following sections underscore, approaches within the ‘practice turn’, the ‘performative turn’, and the ‘emotive
turn’ are primarily interlinked through an interest in actions that do not involve conscious representational knowledge, and which used to be considered as trivial, mundane, and irrelevant for IR, including habit, rituals, emotional states, symbolic structures, and popular culture.

**Practice: The Importance of the Everyday**

The move toward a practice-oriented theory of social action in International Relations theory is the most visible of the three recent challenges to the disciplinary mainstream discussed here – and arguably the only one that has emerged as a distinctly labelled ‘turn’. IR scholarship situated within the practice theoretical spectrum, broadly conceived, has a rich intellectual heritage and draws from a diverse range of thinkers, such as Roland Barthes, Emile Durkheim, Michel Foucault, Antonio Gramsci, Bruno Latour, Ann Swindler, Johnathan Turner, Max Weber, and Ludwig Wittgenstein, to name a few. The French sociologist and cultural theorist Pierre Bourdieu tends to occupy the prime-spot in the limelight of the ‘practice turn’ situated closer to the IR disciplinary centre (Leander 2011; Bigo 2011; Williams 2007).

Many of the initial practice-theoretical interventions into IR theory development came from mid-level non-US constructivist scholars in International Relations who may have, as Ted Hopf noted (2002: xi: 11-12), maintained a positivist ‘epistemological anchor’ despite a commitment to ‘deeply interpretivist recovery of empirical evidence’. Hopf’s *Social Construction of International Politics* is an early example of integrating the role of ‘routine, repetitive, habitual, customary, and everyday’ practices (2002: 3). Alexander Wendt, the figurehead of the ‘constructivist turn’ in IR in the early 1990s who drew on works such as Berger and Luckmann’s (1966) *The Social Construction of Reality*, had already made the case that even the most basic, taken-for-granted common-sense knowledge of how we navigate our everyday lives is both derived from and sustained by social interactions. Hopf (2002), however, explicitly placed the emphasis on the importance of the ‘logic of habit’, and discursive practices for understanding the role of identity in world politics. Jennifer Mitzen (2006) likewise focused on ‘unthinking’ action and ‘routinizing relationships’ to explore and conceptualize the drive toward ontological security.
Emanuel Adler has a different take on the role of practices in his work on the expansion of security communities as he understands practices as distinct from habits. Although he also situates them in the realm of background knowledge, for Adler (2008: 198) practices are ‘knowledge-constituted, meaningful patterns of socially recognized activity embedded in communities, routines and organizations’. He stresses in particular that practices are ‘not outside or apart from discourses’ and understands them as ‘simultaneously “objectified” meanings and discourse that congeal in physical matter, and activity, as in a state of permanent becoming; stability within change’ (Adler 2008: 198; see also Neumann (2002).

Vincent Pouliot (2008) explored the contribution that the ‘logic of practicality’ could make to IR theory by building explicitly on Bourdieu. Like Hopf and Adler he diagnosed mainstream approaches to social action in International Relations with a major deficit as they privilege conscious representational knowledge while failing to tell us anything about what agents ‘think from’. Poilót proposes that in contrast to the premises of the three prominent IR ‘logics’ of social action – of consequences, of appropriateness, and of arguing – practices should be understood as ‘the result of inarticulate, practical knowledge that makes what is to be done appear “self-evident” or commonsensical’ (2008: 258). In cooperation with Immanuel Adler, he has refined this notion of practices in the sense that they should be understood to ‘embody, act out, and possibly reify background knowledge and discourse in and on the material world’ (Adler and Pouliot 2012: 6).

Taking these works together, a focus on practice offers to move IR theory beyond either reducing social action to subjective drivers – rational or otherwise – or to its structural external constraints. Rather, to translate Bourdieu’s take on practice into IR theory, the international system in whatever particular incarnation is seen as shaping and predisposing agents through processes of socialization and internalization; but it can only continue to exist through the on-going actions of the individual actors, and these are not predetermined. Structure thus both impacts upon and is dependent on the behaviour of its acting composite parts (Bourdieu 1990: 53). This extends to the construction of identity, at the level of individual and the collective, and the division of (inter)national society into opposing spheres that have long occupied scholars
in the IR theory mainstream and borderlands. Here, the focus on social practice helps to show how ‘objective limits become a sense of limits, a practical anticipation of objective limits acquired by experience of objective limits, a “sense of one’s place” which leads one to exclude oneself from the goods, persons, places and so forth from which one is excluded’ (Bourdieu 1984: 471).

As Hajer and Wagenaar (2003: 20) put it, a focus practice in theorizing about world politics offers a pathway to understand the international arena as ‘one ‘activity system’, in which social, individual and material aspects are interdependent’.

Turning toward the study of practice(s) offers to cast a wider net to catch world politics without imposing a theoretical straightjacket. Indeed much of the scholarship associated with the ‘practice turn’ is not primarily theory-driven (and also theory-unaligned), and this is partly where its attractiveness lays. Adler and Pouliot (2011a: 3; 28) see in practice-oriented research an opportunity to enable much-needed ‘interparadigmatic conversations’ in the discipline of International Relations. If taken seriously, they (ibid) argue it opens up the space for dialogue rather than seeking to foster synthesis (Adler and Pouliot 2011a: 3; 28; cf. Brown 2012: 440-1). At the same time, over the past five years an increasing number of IR scholars, in particular those at the earlier stages of their academic careers, have begun to latch on to the ‘critical’ practice-oriented research in international politics. And they have also begun to establish a specific International Practice Theory that seeks to combine elements of both, the pragmatist and critical strands of practice-oriented research in the study of world politics (Büger and Gadinger 2014a; 2014b).

Overall, however, for many IR scholars, as for those in related disciplinary contexts, a focus on practice, the everyday, and the commonsensical, has enabled a focus on the ‘nexus of doings and sayings’ (Schatzki 2012: 2) on the level of analytical strategy. Iver B. Neumann and Didier Bigo, for instance, have proposed to turn International Relations toward the study of social action through the lens of practice, at least in part, to refocus IR scholarship away from the ‘armchair analysis’ that has marked much of the American mainstream as well as discourse-centred approaches after the ‘linguistic turn’ (Neumann 2002: 2).

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2 This entails, for example, research on the contextualisation of the practice of enemy construction through a focus on political culture (Katzenstein 1996; Hogan 1998; Widmaier 2007; Bigo and Tsoukala 2008); the constitutive effects of enemy construction on identity (Campbell 1998; Neumann 1999; Hopf 2002; Hansen 2006); and on the language of difference in enemy construction (Butler 1995; Chilton 1996; Weldes 1999; Huysmans 2006).
628: Bigo 2011: 227). Neumann (2002: 628) argued, that he had developed an impatience with purely ‘text-based analyses … that are not complemented by different kinds of contextual data from the field, data that may illuminate how foreign policy and global politics are experienced as lived practices.’

Here, the combination of discourse analytical approaches, network analysis, and ethnographic research techniques, for example, which is also increasingly supported by the use of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), has not been without criticism from the positivist and post-positivist camps. Yet at least to an extent, turning toward practice has enabled IR scholars to bridge post-positivist ontology between and positive epistemology and engage in mixed-methods research that combines analytical strategies that tend to be associated with either the rationalist or the reflexivist strands of IR scholarship.

**Performativity and the Politics of Representation**

Much of practice-oriented IR scholarship has been concerned with the ways in which non-conscious representational knowledge – the everyday, the background – has impacted upon international dynamics. Both the focus on ‘doing’ in and on the world (Adler and Pouliot 2011: 2) and the commitment to what John Searle (1995: 129) referred to as the ‘background…the set of nonintentional or pre-intentional capacities that enable intentional states to function’ overlaps with and partially subsumes approaches in International Relations that focus more specifically on performativity. But, as the following suggests, the latter can make very distinct contributions to the study of world politics.

Approaches situated within the ‘performative turn’, while they are to some degree part of the turn toward practice, take a step further away from the IR mainstream into the critical corner of the discipline. Rather than exploring primarily what the ‘background’, or the ‘everyday’ does, questions of how this type of knowledge emerges and is reproduced take centre stage. In short, through a focus on the processes of how mundane and trivial practices, discursive and otherwise, are negotiated, legitimised, and actualised, and what the broader socio-political scope conditions are for this, scholarship on performativity asks what is political about non-conscious representational
knowledge. As Bourdieu (1990: 4) put it, ‘the relation of what is possible is a relation of power’.

(.../...)

[to be inserted:

• focus on how structures of signification (re)create and actualize social realities (how ‘subjects authorized’ speak is performative; it constitutes the objects of their speech ((Milliken 1999: 229)

• Context of performative turn across disciplines: ‘liquid modernity’ (Zygmunt Baumann) and an increased emphasis of scholarly work and in everyday life on ‘doing’ —— the logic of practicality is “ontologically prior” to “any and all conscious and reflexive action” (Pouliot 2008: 277). Performativity is different...

• Focus on communicative processes of social interaction
  a) Performative power of language & Symbolic action/communication
  b) Dramaturgies, Rituals, and the World as a Stages

• Turn toward emotion (and affect) as another critique of orthodox rationalist methods within IR specifically and Political Science generally.

• Violence as performance
  a) Michel Foucault: executions as a ‘theatre of terror’ (Foucault 1975);
     a) Kristeva on the Power of Horror
     Linked to performance through ‘emotional repertoire’ ‘emotional scripts’, emotional scenarios (Austin and anthropologists) ]

Conclusion: Critical Turns and the IR Balance Sheet

The intellectual world, which believes itself so profoundly liberated from conformity and convention, has always seemed to me as inhabited by conformities, that acted upon me as repulsive forces’

(Bourdieu 2004, quoted in Reed-Danahay 2004: 1).
The recent trends in International Relations theory have tended to follow similar ‘turns’ in other disciplines. As Peter Burke puts it in a recent essay on the performative turn in history, ‘as often happens in the history of knowledge, scholars who have been pioneering in one field are often unaware of parallel innovations elsewhere.’ (p. 36)

**Benefits:**

- Increased range of actors
- ‘prioritization of process over substance, relation over separateness, and activity over passivity” (Guillaume 2007:742)
- move beyond subjective drivers of social action (rational or not) and its structural constraints (structured & structuring)
- less theory driven, offering analytical framework for studying concrete practices
- contributed to dissolving traditional boundaries
- both raised awareness of and redrawn the scholarly line between what is ‘international’ and what is not.
- but: while some more traditional methods (numbers, expert interviews, surveys) are often regarded with scepticism by the ‘critical camp’, ethnographic approaches, archival sources, etc., have their own problems (Jabri). They also are ‘snapshots’ (Burke 2005: 46)

**Pluralism: good or bad?**

- longstanding debate in International Relations
- In his 1985 work, The Dividing Discipline: Hegemony and Pluralism in International Theory, Kal Holsti observed that International Relations had become a fragmented discipline.
- Walt (1998) makes the case for a ‘limited pluralism’ that includes liberalism and constructivism within IR theory, in addition to realism.
- Dunne et al (2013: 416) draw attention to the dangers of a ‘disengaged pluralism’, in which ‘[n]o claim or viewpoint would seem to be invalid and theorists are free to pursue their own agenda with little or no contact with alternative views.’

**Insularity:**
• IR as a whole has always been an insular, ‘importing discipline’ using insights from older traditions of social thought and the natural sciences as well as arts, with little ability to leave a trace in the disciplines it borrows from. (Recent examples: Wheeler and neuroscience; study of resilience and systems biology).
• But: Balance of trade problem that Waever observed in 1998 in relation to the placement of publications, citation rates, and (meta)theoretical orientation still exists.

Gatekeeping
• larger academic markets outside the US for those proficient in English, yet with multiple centres of gravity for specific scholarly orientations rather than truly integrative/pluralist/dialogue, in particular in Europe
• But: reproduction of old hierarchies in discipline, difficult to swim against the current of the mainstream if not part of a larger, group of scholars that does so.
• interdisciplinary or openly eclectic work has difficulty entering broader scholarly debates: gate-keeping, networks, etc. which extend to publishing in academic journals & book series. Identification with a particular group remains as a key requirement for individual academic success.
• Publication outlets: rationalist & quantitative, large N etc IR scholarship at in the high impact journals (IO, IS, JPR, JoCR, etc). post-positivist/reflexivist/ critical: IPS, EJIR, Sec Dialogue, RIS
• But: Increasing wedge between American IR and the rest, rather than the West and the rest, with much of European scholarship more diverse/eclectic, and more exportable to other regions…
• key problem of ‘critical’ IR theories as much as for those in the quantitative-oriented mainstream is their reliance on ‘esoteric terminology and arcane techniques’ (Mearsheimer and Walt, 2013) that intentionally create insularity and pose a challenge to engagement with their works by more mainstream scholars

Flying geese models:
• nothing wrong with these as long as they do not become insular – make call for pluralism & open discipline (small number of theoretical schools probably makes for a healthier discipline than a
large number of theoretical schools that are closed (gang culture vs. intellectual culture)

- competition between theories, competition between IR scholars (latter increasing with higher rates of PhD completion and fewer tenured, even tenure track positions) – How to stand out from the crowd, trend-setting, what is fashionable, how to create a brand, how to become a leader in flying geese model (reference to THE article on decline in good citizenship and increase in careerist activities).
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