

# Practice matter(s)

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Exploring practice theories of the body for body history

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‘We remain poised between the body as that extraordinary fragile, feeling, and transient mass of flesh with which we are all familiar – too familiar – and the body that is so hopelessly bound to its cultural meanings as to elude unmediated access.’

(T. Laqueur, *Making sex. Body and gender from the Greeks to Freud*, 12)

‘It is clear that western thought has been profoundly influenced by the dichotomies: body/soul and nature/culture.’

(B. S. Turner, ‘Recent developments in the theory of the body,’ 18)

‘There exists knowledge of the body, stronger than any logic.’

(G. Mak, *Doubling sex*, 216)

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## **Introduction. A journey through theories of the body**

'I want to consider how theoretical insights generated outside the discipline of history can offer a useful way into body history. A focus on the body, I argue, can allow historians to ask new questions of their sources and subjects; or, put another way, bodies can offer new ways into seemingly old problems.'

(Lisa Helps, 'Body, power and desire: mapping Canadian body history, 127)

From around the 1990s, cultural historians have started to analyse the body in the past by using post-structuralist theories. Departing from Foucaultian theories and gender perspectives, amongst others, the historical body became the site of reference and representation. Yet soon, historians from inside and outside the subfield body history started to critique these post-structuralist approaches to history. For body history, the most heard complaint has been that the post-structuralist method erased the materiality and the agency of the body. However, it has been difficult to find a solution for this problem, and it seems that up to date, no large steps have been taken within the historiography of the body.

In the above quotation, historian Lisa Helps more or less summarizes the aim of this thesis, which is to explore the fruitfulness of theories of the body from other disciplines for body history. This exercise departs from my dissatisfaction with current histories of the body, which in my opinion have focused too much on elitist, scientific source material and have treated the body as a non-agentic slave to larger discursive structures. Consequently, other knowledges of the body and the material body itself have been erased from the historiography. I argue that we should use praxiography for body history: when we zoom in on practices in which the body is enacted, performed, experienced, observed, classified, examined and touched, all different sorts of aspects surface, and complexity and multiplicity become evident. Most importantly, different knowledges of the body emerge: by zooming in on the body in practice, new source material needs to be called upon besides medical literature, and as such different knowledges of the body, like lay knowledge, become important in practice. Furthermore, an analysis of the body in practice elucidates that the body *does* multiple things and is an agent in its environment instead of merely being an empty shell that awaits discursive inscription. I therefore wanted to analyse several theories of the body in practice and pinpoint which issues and innovations emerge when they are approached from a historical perspective. As such, this master's thesis can be considered as a theoretical-methodological dissertation.

This thesis reflects my journey as a student of body history. Besides my fascination for the body in the past, for the different way, shapes and forms that it has been used, understood, experienced, and materialized, I have been very interested in a theoretical approach to history, to 'test' different theories on a historical practice. The theoretical aspect of body history is one of the reasons why the field caught my attention years ago, as being one of the few fields that appreciated a theoretical approach. However, I have noticed that most body historians have been reluctant to try out new methods and theories and therefore have not been able to overcome the issues of the field and supply it with other methods besides discourse analysis. While poststructuralist theories and methods of discourse analysis marked my undergraduate studies, during my master's program I became more and more interested in theoretical-methodological innovation and wanted to explore new theoretical paths. The new path that I found myself following was that of Science and Technology Studies, and for the past two years I have been fascinated by the works of philosopher Annemarie Mol and sociologist Bruno Latour, and the inspiring application of those theories by scholars such as historian Geertje Mak and anthropologist Amade M'Charek. This thesis gave me the possibility to go back to those theories, see where thorough analysis would take me and set out my own path for theoretical-methodological innovation within my discipline. I am greatly indebted to my advisor Willemijn Ruberg for her guidance, inspiration and knowledge which has been fundamental for reaching this goal.

This path of exploration has been set out in the five chapters below, which try to answer the question *to what extent do practice theories of the body, especially praxiography, innovate body history and overcome its problems, namely a lack of materiality and agency?*

Chapter one introduces body history and its problems. It tries to answer the question which theoretical and methodological issues are present in body history as a subfield of cultural history. It first discusses the rise of cultural history and the linguistic turn, and the issues that have resulted from this approach to history. Then it turns to the history of the body, which became popular with the new cultural history, and argues that the larger field and the subfield share similar issues. The key terms are materiality and agency. As the post-structuralist theories draw attention to a political, non-essentialist, discursive body, it is argued that the *material* or *physical* body gets erased from the historical accounts. Moreover, this discursive approach to the body leads to a notion of the body that is culturally determined, and therefore lacking any form of *agency*. This results in two perspectives on the body: either the material body becomes an empty

shell that is subjected to inscription, or the body is merely understood as a site of reference and representation. In both cases, an acting, material body is omitted which, for a field that has the body as its main topic, is untenable.

In chapters two and three I weave through several theories of the body in practice and analyse what they bring to the fore in relation to materiality and agency. I am not looking for ways to specifically define what materiality and agency of the body is or what it should be. As I stated above, I outline which issues and innovations emerge from analysing theories from a historical perspective. I have tried to examine how materiality and agency in relation to the body are enacted in different theories when they are approached from a historical perspective by asking what it consists of.

In chapter two the search for a solution to the problems of materiality and agency starts by looking at two theories that zoom in on practice and performance as a way to understand how living bodies engage with cultural systems. This chapter asks to what extent feminist embodiment theory and practice theory can refashion materiality and agency for body history. Feminist theory of embodiment argues for the joining of the discursive body with the experienced, lived body, of biology and psychology. However, in this way the material body remains passive by its inscription by exterior forces, thus lacking agency. The individual body that does have agency is one of a psychological manner, one that is imagined. The second theory under discussion is social practice theory. With its focus on embodied dispositions in practice, 'the social' is located in practices instead of discourses. Nonetheless, this living material body also ends up lacking agency because of the stress on habitual action and its power to (re)produce social structures in an unconscious manner. Both theories stress a living body that is culturally or socially determined. This understanding of agency and materiality guided in the direction of bodies that can effect change in their environment, and as such the refashioning of both theories by Katherine Hayles and Chris Shilling became of interest.

Yet bodies effecting change became even more prominent in the theories rubricated under Science and Technology Studies, which are discussed in chapter three. Again the central question is to what extent the theories that come to light in this chapter, actor-network theory and praxiography, can rethink materiality and agency for the history of the body. These theories stress the capacity to interfere and change the environment of all actors involved in practice, both human and non-human. Actor-network theory provides tools for analysing how realities are made in practice by different actors, without using determining structures for explanation of the enactment of realities in practice. With praxiography, actor-network theory becomes a theory of the body. Praxiography argues that each practice generates its own reality and its own object,

thereby making objects ontologically multiple. Yet it also provides insights in how this multiplicity is managed in practice. With ANT and praxiography's focus on agency of all actors involved and its appreciation of materiality through empirical reconstruction, ontology, materials, sites and techniques these STS approaches have become the point of departure for exploring its potential as a solution for body history.

Chapter four explores the potential of the STS approaches by zooming in on a subfield of body history: the history of the production of body knowledge. Because STS is a field that centres on the sociology of knowledge, this zoom makes the application of STS to body history more accessible. In answering the question how praxiography works for body history, the chapter takes a close look at two case studies that have examined the application of praxiography to this subfield of history. It demonstrates the multiplicity and complexity of the body in historical practice and the ordering logics to render that complex reality understandable. Yet it also demonstrates that practices in which knowledge of the body is produced are also power practices in which human power relations are enacted. Thus, agency of the body in these case studies is not only the wide understanding of that what acts in practice, it specifically becomes the autonomy of individuals over their bodies. The chapter then tries to answer the question to what extent STS can address this type of agency of the body. It argues that the approaches might take the decentring of the human too far, by stressing the importance of objects, unconsciousness, and complexity. Most importantly, it seems to keep a dichotomy between human and body intact, which for knowledge producing practices in the past becomes problematic. The specific enactment of agency and materiality that has become clear from the analysis of these case studies demonstrates that something else needs to be added to praxiography. The case study of Geertje Mak on hermaphrodites in the nineteenth century shows that the combination of praxiography and discourse analysis might be helpful for addressing human power relations. The chapter will close with the argument that historical studies seem to need some sort of structural approach to explain power relations and historical development, although ANT seems to argue against this.

After we have been able to see what materiality and agency might consist of in the application of praxiography to the production of body knowledge in past practices, the last chapter zooms out slightly from this subfield. The answer chapter 5 is looking for is what praxiography does in a set of practices in which knowledge of the body is not only produced but also questioned, rejected, and sent back and forth. As a result, different questions come to the fore. By empirically reconstructing the centring of body knowledge in the legal arena, a different sort of materiality of the body surfaced. With praxiography, this chapter analyses the way body objects and its knowledge travel between sites and transforms in that process. In this analysis, the



agency of the body became less relevant. Still, this chapter takes a close look at agency in the case study. Here, agency here is not about autonomy of the body but about authorship of the body. Two things are demonstrated: first, that a combination of praxiography with a more discursive analysis of power relations is again fruitful, and second that a praxiographic analysis as such can intervene in a historiographical discussion.

In the conclusion I will reflect on the use of praxiography and STS specifically and practice approaches at large for body history. Since this path to innovation was a journey of observing which issues and solutions emerge, the conclusion will reflect on the strong points and weaknesses of the explored theories and list suggestions for further research. It will demonstrate that indeed new questions and new ways of seeing old problems have arisen.

### **Relevance**

Before we turn to the discussion of the issues of body history and the different theoretical approaches, I want to briefly argue for the relevance of this research project. As already has been pointed out above, historians in general seem to be wary of introducing theoretical approaches to their work. The linguistic turn has indeed brought about a new perspective on historical analysis, but this change in attitude towards theory seems to remain within the field of cultural history. Moreover, the number of cultural historians who are trying out new theoretical approaches seems to be limited.

With this thesis I want to further argue for theoretical-methodological innovation, and demonstrate its importance by showing the fruitfulness of an approach that has hardly been used within the discipline of history, namely praxiography. Moreover, this thesis shows that historians should start paying attention to STS, as it holds so much potential for historical research. In pushing the boundaries of historical research I hope to not only inspire body historians and cultural historians to shift their focus to STS and praxiography, but also encourage historians in general to test and adopt new theoretical approaches, to dare to be interdisciplinary, and to see how we can write exciting, new histories.

## Chapter one. Cultural history and body history

In order to discuss the rise of body history and its problems, we need to analyse where this type of history came from. Because body history is part of cultural history, this chapter will begin with the development of cultural history. In this way, body history can be positioned within the larger historiographical framework of history as an academic discipline. More importantly, this introduction to cultural history will also demonstrate its main issues, and, as we will see later on in the chapter, the problems that arise in body history are similar to those of cultural history.

### §1.1 Background to body history: the rise of cultural history

#### *Social history*

‘Traditional’ historiography had, for a long time, focused on writing the histories of ‘big men,’ the important political or military figures in history. In the 1960s and 1970s, this approach received more and more critique, especially from ‘the New Social History’, which argued that this type of analysis left out the marginal, lower class and non-conforming groups in history. The New Social History sought ways to insert these excluded groups into historical writing, to provide a more complex picture of the past, by using the same ‘objective’ methodology that the traditionalists had used. In this way, they were able to show the limited and ideological character of the traditional historiography and could thus argue that the traditionalists wrote partial and political histories.<sup>1</sup>

However, the new socio-historical analysis soon became problematic itself as anomalies accumulated. Firstly, it became difficult to align individual or class social and cultural behaviours with the objective social structures that in theory produced those behaviours.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, social historians discovered that the categories they used varied temporally and geographically, making both the social categories and the quantitative methods that depended on them questionable. Thus, ‘the social’ lost its explanatory power.<sup>3</sup> The new social history was critiqued for its lack of attention to individual agency, the problem of class as a homogeneous concept, and the inadequate means of dealing with important concepts such as ideology, consciousness and subjectivity.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the mechanistic causal model and the positivist methods were questioned on their objectivity or impartiality, and thus the social historiography that came out of these

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<sup>1</sup> J. Appleby, L. Hunt & M. Jacob, *Telling the truth about history* (New York 1994), 198-200.

<sup>2</sup> G. Spiegel (ed.), *Practicing history. New directions in historical writing after the linguistic turn* (New York etc. 2005) 7.

<sup>3</sup> V.E. Bonnell, & L. Hunt (ed.), *Beyond the cultural turn: new directions in the study of society and culture* (Berkeley etc. 1999) 8.

<sup>4</sup> See G. Eley, *A crooked line. From cultural history to the history of society* (Ann Arbor 2008).

methods was questioned. As the New Social History had exposed the traditional historiography to be partial and political, the social historians found themselves accused on the same accounts.<sup>5</sup>

For a while, social historians were trying to find solutions for the growing problems within their own thinking, yet the impasse and the discontent was growing and it became necessary to transcend social history.<sup>6</sup> Solutions to the problems in social history were found in the concept of 'culture', drawing attention to the new cultural history, inspired by the linguistic turn in the humanities.

### *The linguistic turn*

The term 'linguistic' or 'cultural turn' has been used to describe an important change in thinking within the humanities, 'turning' scholars all over the world toward a new understanding of cultural analysis. Based on structuralism and post-structuralism, the linguistic turn in the humanities has mostly been understood as 'a recalcitrant body of thought'<sup>7</sup> criticizing the concept of modernity in the sciences, and its inherent trust in positivism, grand narratives, and the objectivity and progress of knowledge. Supporters of the linguistic turn, inspired by the theories of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, Clifford Geertz and others, radically stated that no truth existed outside of ideology and that knowledge therefore always was invested with power.<sup>8</sup> To overcome the problems of modernity and include the new approaches to truth and knowledge, new modes of analysis were created that addressed the notion that reality was always mediated and perceived through the subject's perception of it, and primarily focused on the linguistic, the interpretative, and the subjective.<sup>9</sup> A new understanding of language, the concept 'discourse', understood the linguistic and the discursive not only to be the ways in which culture is expressed but also the ways in which culture is formed. Consequently, culture was understood to be linguistically constructed through discursive practices and techniques. New cultural theories directed the attention of social scientists toward culture, as a 'self-enclosed, non-referential mechanism of social construction that precedes the world and renders it intelligible by

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<sup>5</sup> J. Appleby, L. Hunt & M. Jacob, *Telling the truth about history*, 200.

<sup>6</sup> G. Eley, *A crooked line*, 196.

<sup>7</sup> S. Gunn, *History and cultural theory* (Harlow 2006), 183. We do have to realize that 'the linguistic turn' is a 'catch-all term'. Kathleen Canning explains: "the linguistic turn" (like the term *postmodernism*) has become a catch-all phrase for divergent critiques of established historical paradigms, narratives, and chronologies, encompassing not only poststructuralist literary criticism, linguistic theory, and philosophy but also cultural and symbolic anthropology, new historicism, and gender history.' K. Canning, 'Feminist history after the linguistic turn: historicizing discourse and experience,' *Signs* 19:2 (1994) 369.

<sup>8</sup> J. Appleby, L. Hunt & M. Jacob, *Telling the truth about history*, 200-207.

<sup>9</sup> V.E. Bonnell, & L. Hunt (ed.), *Beyond the cultural turn*, 3-4.

constructing it according to its own rules of signification,<sup>10</sup> while at the same time raising important questions about the foundations of knowledge.<sup>11</sup>

### *Cultural history*

This type of analysis began to displace the new social history. Poststructuralist methods of language, culture, and discursive structures more and more replaced the causal models of social history and offered historians a way out of the impasse. “The self-confident “new social history” of the 1960s and 1970s was succeeded by an equally self-confident “new cultural history” in the 1980s.”<sup>12</sup> The new cultural historians, inspired by the linguistic turn and rejecting social history’s positivism, borrowed methods from anthropology and literary studies to study and interpret culture and language in the past. This focus on culture and language ‘tilted cultural history towards idealism, and an exclusive focus on the function of symbolic language and discourse in the codification of human consciousness. All these approaches to human subjectivity have emphasized the underlying collective psychological social or linguistic structures or patterns that determine human thought and behaviour.’<sup>13</sup>

The cultural context of people’s action became the main topic for historical research. As opposed to grand narratives, cultural history has shown preference for small-scale histories, explored for instance through the new approach of micro-history. Also, following from the critique on modernity and positivism, the new cultural historians acknowledged that there was not one way of interpreting history, but that many different histories could be written. Multiplicity in cultural history was further pursued through an expansion of the types of historical sources that could be used, the kind of topics that could be written about and the types of approaches that could be used for analysis. Finally, cultural historians took on the project of exposing the dualisms and unequal power relations within ‘modern’ Western knowledge, in order to move beyond those inequalities. This focus on power also changed the understanding of the archive, not as something that should be taken for granted but a place that is selective and partial.<sup>14</sup>

However, we should not overestimate the influence of the linguistic turn on history, as historian Simon Gunn argues, for the effects on history have been weak. ‘Of all the subjects in the humanities and social sciences, in fact, history is perhaps the discipline where cultural theory

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<sup>10</sup> G. Spiegel (ed.) *Practicing history*, 8.

<sup>11</sup> J. Appleby, L. Hunt & M. Jacob, *Telling the truth about history*, 226.

<sup>12</sup> W.H. Sewell Jr., ‘The concept(s) of culture,’ in: Spiegel, G. (ed.), *Practicing history. New directions in historical writing after the linguistic turn* (New York etc. 2005) 78.

<sup>13</sup> A. Green, *Cultural history* (Basingstoke etc. 2008) 117.

<sup>14</sup> See G. Eley, *A crooked line. From cultural history to the history of society* (Ann Arbor 2008).

has been most fiercely resisted and where its impress has consequently been most superficial.<sup>15</sup> Also, the historians who did direct their focus to discourse, culture, and power relations have met resistance from within the discipline.

### *Problems with cultural history*

Poststructuralism has been argued to be specifically problematic for history as a discipline. 'History has been shaken right down to its scientific and cultural foundations at the very time that those foundations themselves are being contested.'<sup>16</sup> The 'postmodern' attack on objectivity and value-free science created scepticism about the western philosophical foundations. 'The move toward the most radically sceptical and relativist postmodern position inevitably leads into a cul-de-sac (...) Postmodernism cannot provide models for the future when it claims to refuse the entire idea of offering models for the future. In the final analysis, then, there can be no postmodern history,<sup>17</sup> as historians Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt and Margaret Jacob state in *Telling the truth about history* (New York 1994). Also, it has been argued that the linguistic or cultural determinism, in which the social, cultural, and natural world is reduced to language and text, is highly problematic for history. More specifically, there are three main concerns with the linguistic orientation of cultural history: its understanding of culture, agency and foundations.

### *Culture*

One of the main critiques on the understanding of culture within cultural history is that it is too static and too coherent. As historian W.H. Sewell makes clear in his widely re-printed article 'The concept(s) of culture,' cultures are contradictory, loosely integrated, weakly bounded and subject to change and challenge. For him, the ethnographical understanding of culture as a consistent, consensual and bounded system is therefore untenable.<sup>18</sup> A similar argument has been made by historian Anna Green, in evaluating cultural history. She argues that cultural historians seem to ignore the complexity, ambiguousness and ambivalence of reality in favour of a static and cohesive understanding of culture.<sup>19</sup>

The second major point of critique argues that 'culture' has become an over-encompassing term: 'culture as a category ran the risk of encompassing everything and thus, in a

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<sup>15</sup> S. Gunn, *History and cultural theory*, 192.

<sup>16</sup> J. Appleby, L. Hunt & M. Jacob, *Telling the truth about history*, 1.

<sup>17</sup> J. Appleby, L. Hunt & M. Jacob, *Telling the truth about history*, 236-237.

<sup>18</sup> W.H. Sewell Jr., 'The concept(s) of culture,' in: Spiegel, G. (ed.), *Practicing history. New directions in historical writing after the linguistic turn* (New York etc. 2005) 76-95.

<sup>19</sup> A. Green, *Cultural history*, 117.

sense, explaining nothing.<sup>20</sup> ‘Not everything is culture and culture is not everything.’<sup>21</sup> ‘Culture’ itself easily acquires over-totalizing explanatory importance.<sup>22</sup> As a consequence, some scholars have argued that culture seems to serve as a ‘new nature’ or even a ‘new intellectual absolutism’, just as ‘the social,’ ‘the economic,’ or the trust in objectivity in more traditional forms of historiography. Thus, poststructuralist historiographies have failed to overcome one of their most important aims: to surpass grand structures in historical analysis. In the cultural history of the linguistic turn, ‘Culture’ seems to be the new structure.

### *Agency*

Another concern with the discursive focus on history and culture is that it leaves little room for human intentionality or ‘agency’. Historian William Reddy argues that “agency’ has arisen as a catchword for what is missing from recent linguistic theories.<sup>23</sup> For instance, this problem can be indicated in the theories of Michel Foucault, who has been of great influence within cultural history. Foucault argues that discourse not only produces meaning; it also produces the subject. In this way, the subject is not a self-conscious or self-determining agent but an effect of discourse. This potential ‘death of the subject’ excludes the possibility of intentional historical actors.<sup>24</sup> Consequently, it can be argued that actors in history cannot initiate or contribute to their own lives or cultural change.<sup>25</sup> But, as historian Gabrielle Spiegel contends, the fact that humans are culturally determined should not necessarily indicate that they have no agency. Some historians have insisted on the difference between discursive meaning and individual uses of them by actors situated in a certain time and place.<sup>26</sup> Yet, following the cultural theories that insist

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<sup>20</sup> J. Appleby, L. Hunt & M. Jacob, *Telling the truth about history*, 223.

<sup>21</sup> J. van Eijnatten, *Beschaving na de cultural turn: Over cultuur, communicatie en nuttige geschiedschrijving* (Utrecht 2011) 17. Translation mine.

<sup>22</sup> G. Eley, *A crooked line*, 194.

<sup>23</sup> W. Reddy, ‘The logic of action: indeterminacy, emotion and historical narrative.’ *History and theory* 40 (2001) 11.

<sup>24</sup> See for a full discussion of the problems with agency in the linguistic turn ‘Self, subjectivity, and agency’ in G. Spiegel (ed.), *Practicing history. New directions in historical writing after the linguistic turn* (New York etc. 2005). 11-18.

<sup>25</sup> The presence of agency in Foucaultian theory has been debated within feminism. On the one hand, it is argued that Foucault’s claim that the subject is an effect of power denies agency. This is problematic for feminism’s political aims because it becomes difficult to explain who resists power. On the other hand, some feminists have argued that Foucault develops an account of subjectivity and resistance to power in his later work, which may offer tools for feminism as an emancipatory social movement. In *Power/knowledge: selected interviews and other writings 1972-1977* (Brighton 1980), Foucault states ‘there are no relations of power without resistances; the latter are all the more real and effective because they are formed right at the point where relations of power are exercised.’ (*Power/knowledge*, 142) Resistance does not pre-exist power, but is inherent to power. Moreover, in ‘Politics, philosophy, culture: interviews and other writings (1977-1984) (London 1988), Foucault analyses ethical practices in Antiquity in which he indicates modes of self-constitution and ‘practices of freedom’. Here, the individual is still restrained by power relations, but can actively form himself by deploying models that are imposed upon the individual by society. Thus, in his later work, Foucault develops an understanding of a more active and agentic individual.

<sup>26</sup> G. Spiegel (ed.), *Practicing history*, 12. She quotes Judith Newton here, see J. Newton, ‘History as usual?: feminism and the ‘New Historicism’” *Cultural critique* 9 (1988) 87-121.

on discursive production and determination remains problematic for addressing an intentional, acting subject intervening in a changing world.

This call for agency within historical writing can be further stretched beyond human actors. Simon Gunn rightly argues that ‘it is important to accept that human agency is not the only form of historical agency – the natural and material worlds have agency too. The human, the natural and the material worlds are involved in complex interaction with each other and history is a product of this interaction, not only, or even mainly, of human will.’<sup>27</sup> Historians might have tried to expose dualisms in Western knowledge, but Gunn asks us to consider a broader understanding of historical agency, to overcome the opposition between human and nature, and include the material and the natural in our analyses.

### *Foundations*

A final set of problems can be rubricated under the term ‘foundations.’ Victoria Bonnell and Lynn Hunt explain: ‘the cultural turn threatened to efface all reference to social context or causes and offered no particular standard of judgment to replace the seemingly more rigorous and systematic approaches that had pre-dominated during the 1960s and 1970s. Detached from their previous assumptions, cultural methods no longer seemed to have any *foundation*.’<sup>28</sup> If historians assume that practices are culturally and linguistically inscribed, there is no place for causality. History in this sense could be argued to become a literary genre, far removed from the possibility of making any type of claim, such as truth claims, or any type of judgment.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, since the cultural turn focuses mostly on the cultural context in local practices, larger social ‘macro levels’, or ‘social contexts’, are ignored.<sup>30</sup>

Finally, it becomes difficult to write accounts of the past when reality is understood to be textual and ideological. Appleby, Hunt and Jacob correctly state that there is a historical reality to which the archive refers, and that language interacts with an objective world. Historians have to accept this ‘practical realism’: ‘the historian is someone who reconstructs a past pieced together from records left by the past, which should not be dismissed as a mere discourse on other discourses. (...) Historians find more than dust in the archives and libraries; the records there offer a glimpse of a world that has disappeared.’<sup>31</sup> Although cultural historians never abandoned

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<sup>27</sup> S. Gunn, *History and cultural theory*, 196-197.

<sup>28</sup> V.E. Bonnell, & L. Hunt (ed.), *Beyond the cultural turn*, 9-10. Italics mine.

<sup>29</sup> J. Appleby, L. Hunt & M. Jacob, *Telling the truth about history*, 245.

<sup>30</sup> See G. Eley, *A crooked line*, 198-201. Eley argues for history of society, which is a combination of the main insights of both social and cultural history.

<sup>31</sup> J. Appleby, L. Hunt & M. Jacob, *Telling the truth about history*, 250-251.

the belief in the objective reality of the social world,<sup>32</sup> it can be argued that their enthusiasm for interpretative approaches undermines the existence of this reality.

Thus, a linguistic approach to history problematizes the historiography in the sense that culture becomes an over-determining and over-encompassing concept, leaving out social, macro-level processes and problematizing the possibility of agency for historical actors. Finally it becomes very difficult to refer to some sort of objective 'reality' and make claims. Although the linguistic turn has brought the discipline a lot of interesting and important insights, such as the importance of everyday life in history and the expansion of the types of historical sources and approaches to history, which has led to very successful research, how do we move beyond the problems?

#### *Moving beyond the linguistic turn: Spiegel's practice theory*

A range of historians are making attempts to rethink the discipline of history *within the framework* of the linguistic turn: they are displeased with its basic beliefs, but try to alter and refashion those beliefs in order to address and solve the problems. Gabrielle Spiegel asserts that the different directions historians are taking can be grouped under the name 'practice theory.'<sup>33</sup> This is not one coherent body of thought, driven by a general consensus, but these historians are dealing with the same problems and are looking for similar solutions. These historians have, as an 'emerging school,'<sup>34</sup> recently picked up the theories of practice of sociologists and anthropologists such as Pierre Bourdieu and Michel de Certeau, to deal with a broader understanding of agency, re-examine the cultural in light of the social and place the subject back into a social world, where there is more place for cause and context.<sup>35</sup>

Most importantly, in relation to agency, Spiegel indicates a shift from a semiotic to a semantic approach to culture. While semiotic approaches understand individuals to be determined by impersonal discursive regimes, more and more historians are writing back intentional historical actors by looking at the way socially situated individuals relate to and *engage* with sign systems. In such a way, historiography is open again to historical actors, acting within a social reality, governed by what Spiegel dubs as 'social semantics'. She indicates that historical writing in this way tries to save the phenomenological, 'restoring the historical actor and his or

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<sup>32</sup> G. Spiegel (ed.), *Practicing history*, 8.

<sup>33</sup> Spiegel explains that this term has been proposed by Andreas Reckwitz in his article 'Toward a theory of social practices. A development in culturalist theorizing', to group new developments in cultural theory. Spiegel now uses this term to group historical writings that are inspired by the same theories. G. Spiegel (ed.), *Practicing history*, 22. Throughout this thesis I will refer to this new direction within historiography, inspired by social practice theory, as *Spiegel's Practice theory*.

<sup>34</sup> G. Spiegel (ed.), *Practicing history*, 23.

<sup>35</sup> G. Spiegel (ed.), *Practicing history*, 22-26.



her consciousness of the world, however thoroughly mediated by discourses of one sort or another.<sup>36</sup> A conception of historical actors actively engaging with the world directs focus to *practice* and *performance*, thus explaining the name ‘practice theory’. This new focus can lead to a different understanding of culture. For instance, W.H. Sewell calls for such a reconceptualization of culture, as both a system of symbols and a practice within social life, with a thin coherence between the two.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, Bonnell and Hunt claim that a focus on practice, narrative, and embodiment avoids a systematic understanding of culture while restoring a social embeddedness to cultural analysis.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, performativity, practice and embodiment lead cultural historians to a focus on embodiment, as a new perspective on the body, ‘no longer seen as an “instrument” used by an agent in order to act, but the place where mental, emotional, and behavioral routines are inscribed.’<sup>39</sup> Through embodiment, cultural historians can examine bodily dispositions and their relation to historical actors and cultural systems in social practices.

The ‘practice theory’ historians, interested in practice, performativity and embodiment, are turning to social theory for inspiration.<sup>40</sup> Also, historians such as Lynn Hunt, Victoria Bonnell and Geoff Eley argue that a new direction should be sought by either redefining or reconceptualising of ‘the social’,<sup>41</sup> or a new ‘history of society.’<sup>42</sup> Thus, historians of the ‘Practice Turn’ argue for a re-orientation on the social while incorporating the insights from the cultural turn.

As follows, the new directions in history, which Spiegel grouped together under ‘practice theory,’ seem to re-examine culture, in order to define it not as a dominating structure but as something that is in interplay with individual practices. This focus gives back agency, in the sense that humans are now examined as actors who engage with cultural structures. And the stress on practices brings back some sort of social reality, a space and time in which actors and their bodies act. In this manner, ‘practice theory’ provides new understandings of agency and culture, while giving new attention to a social reality. As such, it actively addresses the problems of cultural theory and reworks them by holding on to important insights. “practice theory’ asserts the continuing relevance of semiotic insights proffered by the linguistic turn, yet reinterprets them in favor of a rehabilitation of social history by placing structure and practice, language and body

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<sup>36</sup> G. Spiegel (ed.), *Practicing history*, 3-4.

<sup>37</sup> W.H. Sewell Jr., ‘The concept(s) of culture,’ in: Spiegel, G. (ed.), *Practicing history. New directions in historical writing after the linguistic turn* (New York etc. 2005) 76-95.

<sup>38</sup> V.E. Bonnell, & L. Hunt (ed.), *Beyond the cultural turn*, 26.

<sup>39</sup> G. Spiegel (ed.), *Practicing history*, 19.

<sup>40</sup> G. Spiegel (ed.), *Practicing history*, 4 and A. Green, *Cultural history* (Basingstoke etc. 2008) 121.

<sup>41</sup> V.E. Bonnell, & L. Hunt (ed.), *Beyond the cultural turn*, 11.

<sup>42</sup> G. Eley, *A crooked line. From cultural history to the history of society* (Ann Arbor 2008).

into dialectical relation in systems construed as “recursive”, “thinly coherent”, “weakly continuous,” and always “at risk.”<sup>43</sup>

Now that the characteristics and problems of cultural history have become clear, we can turn to the history of the body, which became popular with the rise of the linguistic turn and cultural history. After briefly discussing the rise and theoretical background of body history, I will demonstrate that this field of history has problems similar to cultural history, relating to agency, foundations, and, like the cultural in cultural history, ‘the body’ in body history.

## §1.2 The history of the body

Although historians have ‘long ago begun to write the history of the body’<sup>44</sup> within the traditional historiography, the body had been a neglected subject for a long time. One of the main reasons historians of the body have put forward for this indifference is the fact that Western traditional thinking has a dualistic vision of man, of body and mind, and has always hierarchically subordinated the body to the mind.<sup>45</sup> One of the most important historians in the development of body history, Roy Porter, explains: ‘since the dominant western intellectual tradition has thus depreciated the body, it is small wonder (...) that the *history* of the body has been neglected.’<sup>46</sup> All in all, the somatic has been disregarded by historians.

Where Roy Porter claimed in 1991 that the research done on the history of the body was at best spotty, by the time he wrote his reflection in 2001, the historiographical situation had completely changed. Body is history had become very popular, so much that historian Mark Jenner stated that ‘we are living in somatic times.’<sup>47</sup> This popularization has to be linked to the rise of the new cultural history, which, with its focus on poststructuralist cultural theory, opened up the field of body history, with the body as the main site of reference and representation.<sup>48</sup> Specifically Foucaultian theory made new ways of thinking about culture and the body in history possible. With his understanding of discourse and power/knowledge, Michel Foucault was able to reconceptualise the human body in relation to power, in an anti-essentialist and non-biological manner. He asserts that modern power regimes exercise power by inscribing it onto bodies. This

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<sup>43</sup> G. Spiegel (ed.), *Practicing history*, 22.

<sup>44</sup> M. Foucault, M., *Discipline and Punish. The birth of the prison* (New York 1975) 25.

<sup>45</sup> E. Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington 1994) 3. See her introduction in this publication for an overview of the history of thinking about the body in Western philosophy. She explains here how Western philosophy developed a strict division between body and mind.

<sup>46</sup> R. Porter, ‘The History of the Body Reconsidered’ in: Peter Burke (red.), *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (Oxford 2001) 235.

<sup>47</sup> M. Jenner, ‘Body, image, text in early modern Europe,’ *Social history of medicine* 12:1 (1999) 143.

<sup>48</sup> I. Crozier, ‘Introduction,’ 1.

happens through discursive practices, the processes and techniques of normalization. Modern states dominate the population through 'bio-power', regulatory and normalizing techniques mainly directed at the human body, treating it like a machine that needs to be disciplined and optimized.<sup>49</sup> Through internalization, bio-power is literally embodied.<sup>50</sup> Foucault has further described these disciplining techniques for creating 'docile bodies' in *Discipline and punish. The birth of the prison*, where he talks about institutions like hospitals, prisons and the army where bodies are normalized. Thus, Foucaultian theory understands individuals to internalise norms with their bodies, and in that manner control and monitor themselves. Departing from Foucault's theory of bodies in society and the method of discourse analysis to examine these power relations, historians of the body have analysed the body within cultural systems in history. This discursive approach to the body has led to a body of work that analyses the disciplining techniques in history and thus aim to contextualize and historicize the discursive body. And Foucault's theory is still widely used for body history. Historian Ivan Crozier states at the end of the introduction to *A cultural history of the human body, Vol. 6* (2010), 'bodies are mediated through a variety of discourses and arrangements of power (...) They are deeply imbedded in culture.' Furthermore, Crozier argues that the body is highly unstable, historically changing and fragmented into a 'myriad of discursive schemes.' Finally he maintains that bodies should not be understood outside techniques of control, modification and representation.<sup>51</sup> The fact that such clear references to Foucaultian theory of the body can be found in such a recent publication demonstrates the continuous importance of Foucault's theory in current body historiography.

Feminism and the discussion of the sex/gender distinction has been a second major influence on body history. Initially, 'gender' was the long sought term that feminists could deploy to argue against a biological difference between male and female. Through gender they could assert that the norms for masculinity and femininity were socially constructed in society and therefore not biological and essential.<sup>52</sup> Yet because of gender, it became difficult to theorize the sexed body, which now had become 'stigmatised with biologism and essentialism.'<sup>53</sup> In the past decades, some feminists have argued that the distinction between a cultural gender and a biological sex does not hold up. They argue that gender and sexuality are interwoven with each other and are both a product of culture. Especially feminist Judith Butler's theory has been

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<sup>49</sup> See 'Right of death and power over life,' in: M. Foucault, *The history of sexuality, vol. I: An introduction* (London etc. 1978).

<sup>50</sup> R. Cooter, 'The Turn of the Body: History and the Politics of the Corporeal', *Arbor Ciencia, Pensamiento y cultura*, 186 (2010) 395.

<sup>51</sup> I. Crozier, 'Introduction,' 21-22.

<sup>52</sup> L. Jordanova, *Sexual visions. Images of gender in science and medicine between the eighteenth and twentieth century* (Exeter 1989) 4.

<sup>53</sup> K. Canning, 'The body as method? Reflections on the place of the body in gender history,' *Gender and History* 11 (1999) 501.

influential in this discussion. In *Bodies that matter. On the discursive limits of "sex"* (New York etc. 1993), Butler redefines sexual difference as 'never simply a function of material differences which are not in some way both marked and formed by discursive practices.'<sup>54</sup> Following Foucaultian theory, she contends that 'sex' is a normative category for the regulation of bodies, materialised over time through 'forcible reiteration', namely the performativity of sex. Performativity on the one hand constitutes the materiality of a body's sex and thus the sexual difference, but on the other hand also prevents full materialization of the body and full obedience to the social norms of sex, hence the necessary reiteration. The body and its sex are thus understood as an effect of power, of discourse. "There will be no way to understand "gender" as a cultural construct which is imposed upon the surface of matter, understood either as "the body" or its given sex. Rather, once "sex" itself is understood in its normativity, the materiality of the body will not be thinkable apart from the materialization of that regulatory norm."<sup>55</sup> This leads to a theoretical reorientation towards the body and its sex. Besides the focus on the performances of gender and sex, it opens up ways to see sex as socially constructed. 'We can never take terms like 'sexual', 'masculine' or 'feminine' as either stable or self-evident. The job of the historian is precisely to recover the fragile and fleeting significances they take on.'<sup>56</sup>

Thus, Foucault and Butler have provided historians of the body with tools to argue that there is no ontological independence of the body outside of discursive regimes, that there is no 'natural' body but only discursive bodies that are open to meaning.<sup>57</sup> The best example of this discursive approach to the body within body historiography is Thomas Laqueur's *Making sex. Body and gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, MA. 1990), Laqueur provides the history of biological sex to demonstrate that 'sex' shifted meaning over time. By analysing Western medical and philosophical literature and images of the body, Laqueur demonstrates that around 1800, the understanding of sexual difference changed from a one-sex system to a two-sex system. Whereas the female body initially was understood as an underdeveloped, inverted version of the male body, around 1800 the male and female body were understood to be incommensurably different, due to changing politics and ideas about society. Thus, Laqueur demonstrates that 'sex' is socially constructed and related to historically contingent power and thought regimes.

Laqueur's study is only one example of the 'gains'<sup>58</sup> that the theoretical reorientation of sex, gender and the body have brought. A wide range of topics – infanticide, dress, masturbation,

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<sup>54</sup> J. Butler, *Bodies that matter: on the discursive limits of "sex"* (New York etc. 1993) 1.

<sup>55</sup> J. Butler, *Bodies that matter*, 2.

<sup>56</sup> L. Jordanova, *Sexual visions*, 4.

<sup>57</sup> S. Bordo, 'Anorexia nervosa: psychopathology as the crystallization of culture', I. Diamond & L. Quinby (eds.), *Feminism and Foucault. Reflections on resistance* (Boston 1988) 90.

<sup>58</sup> L. Roper, *Oedipus and the devil. Witchcraft, sexuality and religion in early modern Europe* (London & New York 2005) 16.

homosexuality, hermaphroditism, witchcraft, and even sports, to name some – demonstrates both the broadness of the field of body history but also the salience of the topics sex and gender within the field.<sup>59</sup>

### *Problems with body history*

Yet this discursive approach to the body has generated concern over the years. Broadly speaking we can indicate two types of critiques: about methodology and about materiality.

### *Methodological critiques: history of bodies*

Already in 1991 Roy Porter complained that the discursive approach to the body merely focused on bodily representations, accompanied with a ‘theorized repudiation of vulgar positivism’. According to Porter historians run the risk of ‘decontextualized extrapolations’ with this approach. Instead, he argues for a combination of hermeneutics, semiotics and an empirical analysis of a body of evidence. ‘Pursuing the history of the body is thus not merely a matter of crunching vital statistics about physiques, nor just a set of methods for decoding ‘representations’. Rather it is a call to make sense of the interplay of the two.’<sup>60</sup> Granted, there are interpretational issues when it comes to body history; evidence of ‘the body’ is hard to find and tricky to interpret, but ‘hints and suggestions must be scraped together and interpreted.’<sup>61</sup>

Moreover, it has been argued that discursive analyses focus too much on ‘elitist’ texts. The body is analysed by looking at normative discourses, which in many cases turn out to be scientific discourse. For instance, Laqueur analysed medical and philosophical texts, and it can be argued that these tend to be more prescriptive than descriptive.<sup>62</sup> Other sources that might demonstrate a different understanding of the body are thus excluded from these discursive accounts. In the introduction to her publication on witchcraft in early modern Europe, historian Lyndal Roper writes, ‘It is a far easier task to investigate literate discourse on sexual difference than it is to get at the way early modern people actually conceived of sexual difference.’<sup>63</sup> There certainly were other types of discourses or knowledges that were active in understanding the corporeal; think of lay knowledge and the importance of midwives in dealing with the female

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<sup>59</sup> C. Bynum, ‘Why all the Fuss about the body? A medievalist’s perspective,’ in: *Critical Inquiry* 22 (1995) 5.

<sup>60</sup> R. Porter, ‘The History of the Body’ in: Peter Burke (red.), *New Perspectives on Historical Writings* (Londen 1991) 211.

<sup>61</sup> I. Crozier, ‘Introduction,’ 3.

<sup>62</sup> See for critiques on Laqueurs elitist approach K. Harvey, ‘The Century of Sex? Gender, Bodies and Sexuality in the Long Eighteenth Century’, *The Historical Journal* 45 (2002) 913-14, and G. Mak, ‘Lichaamsgeschiedenis, sekse en zelf,’ in: *Gender en het historische lichaam. Jaarboek voor Vrouwengeschiedenis* 28 (2008) 36.

<sup>63</sup> L. Roper, *Oedipus and the devil*, 16.

body,<sup>64</sup> or how doctors dealt with patients in practice.<sup>65</sup> This calls for an expansion of the corpus of evidence when dealing with the history of the body, to include other types of texts and search for different or even competing knowledges. Historian Daniel Smail has even argued for using a whole different type of source material for researching the body; instead of textual documents, he proposes looking at the brain as a source that encodes information about the past.<sup>66</sup>

Thus, deconstructive, discursive approaches within body history have focused on a limited set of source materials to examine ‘bodily representations’. But as we can see by looking at the different critiques and suggestions – ranging from a focus on lay knowledge to the brain – there is not one clear methodology or approach that defines the historiography of the body. In fact, some historians have indicated this as one of the main issues of body history. Most importantly, Carolyn Bynum critically states in her article ‘Why all the fuss about the body?’ that ‘body talk’ across the disciplines has become ‘completely incommensurate – and often mutually incomprehensible,’ because ‘there is no clear set of structures, behaviors, events, objects, experiences, words, and moments to which *body* currently refers.’<sup>67</sup> More historians take issue with an unclear and generalized definition of the body. ‘The history of *the* body’ has been indicated as an ‘unqualified abstraction,’<sup>68</sup> or even ‘an irritatingly non-physical abstraction,’<sup>69</sup> and as such has been accused of reinventing traditional historical master narratives.<sup>70</sup>

Furthermore, the diversity in approaches enhances the incommensurability. Generally speaking, we can indicate two different approaches to body history. On the one hand we have discursive analyses of bodies, which are overly theorized, lacking empirical data to back up the claims and merely focus on scientific elitist discourse. On the other hand there are studies of the natural, physical body, referring to subjective embodiedness, with overly concrete, undertheorized or ‘naively biologicistic’ understandings of the body.<sup>71</sup> We can argue that the entire problem of incommensurability, obscurity about ‘the body’, and multiplicity in approaches probably is due to the fact that historians have written body histories using a wide range of different, multidisciplinary approaches. Inspired by different poststructuralist theories, different

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<sup>64</sup> See G. Mak, *Doubting sex: inscriptions, bodies and selves in nineteenth-century hermaphrodite case histories* (Manchester 2012), 97-100.

<sup>65</sup> Historian Wendy Churchill has tested Laqueur’s one-sex model by looking at vernacular medical treatises and illnesses that affected both men and women. She argued that, unlike the one-sex model predicts, that there was a sense of sexual difference based on the sex of the patient, which led to different treatments. She argues that the female body did have an ontological status separated from the male body. See W. Churchill, ‘The medical practice of the sexed body: women, men and disease in Britain, circa 1600-1740’, *Social History of Medicine* 18:1 (2005) 3-22.

<sup>66</sup> D. Smail, *On Deep History and the Brain* (Berkeley & Los Angeles 2007).

<sup>67</sup> C. Bynum, ‘Why all the Fuss about the body?’, 5.

<sup>68</sup> L. Jordanova, *Sexual visions*, 13.

<sup>69</sup> L. Roper, *Oedipus and the devil*, 17.

<sup>70</sup> M. Jenner, ‘Body, image, text in early modern Europe,’ 154.

<sup>71</sup> K. Canning, ‘The body as method?’, 502, R. Porter, ‘The History of the Body,’ 211, and M. Jenner, ‘Body, image, text in early modern Europe,’ 147.

discursive histories of bodies have been written. And Smail has even demonstrated the fruitfulness of turning to neuroscience.

In sum, there are different assumptions, approaches and definitions of the body within the historiography, which ‘raises questions about the intellectual coherence of any such putative historical specialism.’<sup>72</sup> Yet, while there is a diversity of approaches, there remains a singular understanding of ‘the body’ in history. This might be the source of the frustration over the methodological diversity; the singularity implies methodological coherence where there is none. A history of *bodies* might do more justice to the different bodies that can be found in history as well as the different approaches historians might have in analysing those bodies.

### *Materiality: ‘the body’*

Although some argue that studies of the *physical* body are undertheorized and biologicistic, the biggest critique on the *discursive* approach to body history is the fact that it lacks any kind of materiality. Foucault and Butler have drawn attention to a political, non-essentialist, discursive body, or a ‘historicized body’ more than ‘body history’.<sup>73</sup> According to Porter, the linguistic turn has tried to attack ‘the myth of the Cartesian *cogito* and all it entailed’,<sup>74</sup> but ended up still praising mind over matter by viewing the body as a signifier of cultural structures. Likewise, sociologist Stefan Hirschauer argues that semiotic approaches are an aversion from everyday knowledge and are hostile to the body. In discussing Laqueur and Butler, he asserts; ‘diese Autorinnen demonstrieren eine unabweisbare *Sozialität des Körpers* als immer schon sprachlich durchdrungenem Objekt, aber sie interessieren sich nicht für die *Körperlichkeit des Sozialen*.’<sup>75</sup> So body history demonstrates that cultural history was unable to move beyond modernism by holding on to a strong preference of mind over matter, even in discussing something material as the body.

Lyndal Roper discusses the problems with the discursive ‘denial of the body’ more extensively, stressing two main issues. Her first point aligns with the positions of Porter and Hirschauer, concerning the body as a signifier. ‘It is of course true that we experience the body through mediations of various kinds, and, because we want to emphasize the way notions of the body are constructed, the temptation is to write as if there were nothing *but* a historically

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<sup>72</sup> M. Jenner, ‘Body, image, text in early modern Europe,’ 144.

<sup>73</sup> R. Cooter, ‘The Turn of the Body: History and the Politics of the Corporeal’, *Arbor Ciencia, Pensamiento y cultura*, 186 (2010) 394.

<sup>74</sup> R. Porter, ‘The History of the Body Reconsidered,’ 234.

<sup>75</sup> S. Hirschauer, ‘Praktiken und ihre Körper. Über materielle Partizipanden des Tuns,’ K.H. Hörning & J. Reuter (ed.), *Doing culture. Neue Positionen zum Verhältnis von Kultur und sozialer Praxis* (Bielefeld 2004) 76.

constructed body.<sup>76</sup> Besides the problem of the symbolic and socially constructed body, Roper also argues that the contingent understanding of the corporeal in history is problematic. The fact that sexual difference looks different and varies from time to time does not mean that sexual difference itself is contingent. She calls for a history of the body that includes the physical, ‘a reality that is only in part a matter of words.’<sup>77</sup>

‘Bodies have materiality, and this too must have its place in history. The capacity of the body to suffer pain, illness, the process of giving birth, the effects on the body of certain kinds of exercise such as hunting or riding – all these are bodily experiences which belong to the history of the body and are more than discourse. (...) Bodies are not merely the creation of discourse. What we have is a history of discourses about the body; what we need is a history that can problematize the relation between the psychic and the physical.’<sup>78</sup>

Quite sharply she concludes, ‘how indeed can there be a history of sex which is purely about language and which omits bodies?’<sup>79</sup> Similarly we might question how there can be a history of the body that omits the actual bodies.

In sum, after periods of neglect, the body became a popular historical topic due to the linguistic turn and especially the body theories of Foucault and Butler. However, the discursive approach to the body has been criticized for being merely about (elite) *representations* of the body instead of actual physical bodies. Both agency and materiality of the body seem to be lacking, leading to an understanding of the body that is culturally determined. How can we discuss the body without retreating to either biological determinism or cultural determinism? But since the history of the body seems to be such a diverse academic field, there is not one approach or one solution on how to solve this problem.

But what might provide some clarity for the issues in body history is the fact that they seem to correspond to the issues of cultural history. Like ‘culture’ in cultural history, ‘the body’ has been problematized in body history, for being too coherent. We need a history of historically specific *bodies*, which provides an understanding of the body that is neither static nor coherent. Most importantly, there is a demand for writing histories about *real, living* bodies, instead of their representations as discursive bodies that are denied an ontological – or foundational – existence. Finally, these points on material and multiple bodies address an increase in *agency* for the body: if

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<sup>76</sup> L. Roper, *Oedipus and the devil*, 17.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibidem*, 16.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibidem*, 21.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibidem*, 17.



studies focus on the body and its real, living, and multiple existence, and no longer as that which is subjected to discourse, then the body can become something real again, something that is not passively subjected to power, but something that *acts*. We need an approach for body history that acknowledges the body as having both a cultural and biological reality, and that acknowledges its materiality and agency.

## Chapter two. New approaches for body history: Spiegel's practice theory

If Spiegel argues that practice theory is the solution for (cultural) history after the linguistic turn, perhaps this solution also works for the history of the body. Spiegel's practice theory aims to improve the insights from the linguistic turn by focusing on social practices in which actors have agency to interfere with cultural systems. The focus on performance and embodiment might provide a solution to the opposition between biological and cultural determinism. Therefore theories of embodiment and performance should be analysed on their use for body history. In this chapter, two theories will be analysed that focus on how actors and their bodies perform and engage with cultural systems. The first theory is feminist theory of embodiment, which I shall call feminist embodiment theory for present purposes. Feminists working with the concept embodiment have as their main objective to move beyond the Foucaultian passive, immaterial and generalized body, by examining the body in reality in a phenomenological way. Next, we will see what social practice theory has to offer body history. Practice theory has a more distinct focus on the performativity of bodies in practice, in order to understand how habits relate to cultural and social structures. Both theories analyse how living bodies engage with cultural systems by looking at the way humans act in practice and how knowledge of society becomes knowledge of the body. Below, both theories will be weighed to see to what extent they solve the problems of body history and cultural history.

This analysis must specifically address the issues of agency and materiality of the body, in order to examine whether the theories provide proper solutions for body history. Therefore we must analyse what the body *is* for these theories and how humans are understood in relation to their bodies and reality, to what extent they are determined by reality or not. Furthermore, it is important to see to what extent these theories resolve the problems of post-structuralism. And, as will be demonstrated, by focusing on the agency and materiality of the body, and its position in reality, it will become clear that both theories do not entirely resolve the problem of the immaterial body and its lack of agency.

## §2.1 Feminist embodiment theory

### *Problems with Foucault*

Feminist theory of embodiment has developed as a critique on the Foucaultian understanding of the body and its usage by feminists. Foucault's theory has long been deployed by feminists to discuss the female body in patriarchal society without reducing it to biologism, essentialism and ahistoricism. They could argue against the notion that female oppression was linked to their bodily structures by demonstrating that the female body was merely *represented* as inferior. Yet recently, feminists have critiqued the Foucaultian body. Firstly, these feminists of embodiment have problematized the understanding of the body as being passive and immaterial. Feminist Elizabeth Grosz complains in *Volatile bodies* that Foucault's body is without will and passive. 'The body functions almost as a 'black box' in this account: it is acted upon, inscribed, peered into; information is extracted from it, and disciplinary regimes are imposed on it.'<sup>80</sup> Due to the dominance of the Foucaultian body in contemporary theory, German scholar Leslie Adelson states that she feels 'trapped between the much-touted domination of discourse and the uneasy feeling that even in the age of postmodernism people and things do continue 'to matter'.<sup>81</sup> She maintains that the body cannot be understood as a discursive construction because something remains outside of it. A bodily reality, or the experiences of individual embodiment should be juxtaposed to discourses that inscribe on the bodies of individuals. Furthermore, by seeing the body as a passive black box, feminism participates in the same kind of Cartesian devaluing of the body as the types of traditional, male knowledge that it fights against.

The second problem concerns the generalized body in Foucaultian theory. The concept of the Panopticon creates a universalized body because it 'abstracts power out of the bodies of disciplinarians into a universal, disembodied gaze.'<sup>82</sup> This view is especially problematic for feminism; if feminists want to expose the ways in which women are oppressed in society and want to explain that experience, they have to depart from an understanding of sexual difference or sexual specificity.<sup>83</sup> Embodiment feminists therefore argue for a theory of a sexually specific body that is culturally inscribed. Through the concept embodiment, they demand recognition for sexual difference in lived experience.

If we take these two problems together, 'we need an understanding of sexual difference which will incorporate, not fight against, the corporeal,'<sup>84</sup> as historian Lyndal Roper argues. Thus,

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<sup>80</sup> E. Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 146.

<sup>81</sup> L. Adelson, *Making Bodies, Making History. Feminism & German Identity* (Lincoln 1993), 128.

<sup>82</sup> N.K. Hayles, 'The materiality of informatics', in: *Configurations* 1.1 (1993), 152-153.

<sup>83</sup> E. Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 19-20.

<sup>84</sup> L. Roper, *Oedipus and the devil*, 17.

embodiment theory directs its focus to bodily *experience*, on how sexual specificity is internally lived. For the concept of the 'lived body,' these feminists turn to the phenomenology from philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty and rework it.<sup>85</sup> Adelson further elaborates that 'historical processes and relationships are rooted in concrete, sentient experience.'<sup>86</sup> Embodiment theory mediates between sensory experience and internal states of being, the psyche. Some feminists deploy psycho-analysis to get a grip on this active relation, between outside sensory experience and internal psychological experience. In this way, embodiment theory unites the biological body with the psychological mind, and historian Kathleen Canning indicates that 'the notion of embodiment may be the most promising outcome'<sup>87</sup> of the debates on how to overcome the divide between discourse and materiality, between body and human.

*Embodiment theory: Leslie Adelson and Elizabeth Grosz*

These feminists have turned to specific concepts and approaches to define this relationship between outside/inside, body/human, discourse/materiality. Leslie Adelson for instance expounds on the concept of embodied positionality in *Making bodies, making history. Feminism and German identity* (Lincoln 1993). She states that bodies exist in discourse, as discourse and power function *through* bodies, but are not entirely contained in it because bodies are physical, material entities. Embodiment thus becomes the process of 'making and doing the work of bodies – of becoming a body in social space.'<sup>88</sup> But besides the tension between discourse and physicality, Adelson further elaborates on the tension between the interior and exterior of bodies. Subjectivity is both embodied as a body in social space but it is also multiple and conflicting due to interior and exterior bodily spaces. To address this type of subjectivity – multiple, conflicting, and embodied – Adelson turns to psychoanalysis. She specifically uses Teresa de Lauretis's concept of positionality, and argues that sensory experience constructs subjectivity. Thus, 'a refined concept of embodied positionality compels us to recognize some of the decisive ways in which human bodies, real as well as imagined, engage in material and discursive sociality.'<sup>89</sup>

The central focus of Elizabeth Grosz's theory of embodiment is inscription and sexual difference. In *Volatile bodies: toward a corporeal feminism* (Bloomington 1994), Grosz departs from

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<sup>85</sup> See M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London 1976). An interesting analysis of feminist embodiment in relation to Merleau-Ponty's work can be found in I.M. Young, 'Throwing like a girl. A phenomenology of feminine body comportment, motility, and spatiality,' in: I. M. Young, *Throwing like a girl and other essays in feminist philosophy and social theory* (Bloomington 1990) 141-159.

<sup>86</sup> L. Adelson, *Making Bodies, Making History*, 23.

<sup>87</sup> K. Canning, 'The body as method?,' 505.

<sup>88</sup> L. Adelson, *Making Bodies, Making History*, xiii.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibidem*, 125.

the understanding that there is a fundamental difference between male and female that comes with specific experiences of and inscriptions on the body. This understanding of the sexually specific body serves two aims: first, to demonstrate the ‘inscriptional etching of female bodies’ within patriarchal society, and second, to argue for the fact that knowledge is specific and perspectival. But, although the body is inscribed by power, Grosz makes very clear that this body is not passive, but ‘internally lived, experienced and acted upon by the subject and the social collectivity’;<sup>90</sup> the body interacts with culture. ‘The body must be regarded as a site of social, political, cultural, and geographical inscriptions, production or constitution.’<sup>91</sup>

Like Adelson, Grosz sees the body as having an undeniable psychological dimension, and as being fragmented instead of united. And, like Adelson, Grosz turns to psychoanalysis to analyse the embodied subjectivity, as an interaction between inside and outside the body, between the biological and the psychological. Specifically, she uses ‘body images’ to mediate between the body/mind polarization, since they require ‘the operations of both mind and body,’<sup>92</sup> and unify the senses into an image. Likewise, Roper has also used ‘body images’, the psychic imagination of the lived body, in the study of sexual identity in early modern Europe, in order to bring together the psychological and the corporeal. Roper claims that body images provide access to perceptions of the body.<sup>93</sup>

In sum, embodiment theory unites the discursive body with the experienced, lived body through the concept of embodiment. Thus, embodiment is not the same as ‘the body.’ Canning explains: ‘A far less fixed and idealised concept than body, embodiment encompasses moments of encounter and interpretation, agency and resistance.’<sup>94</sup> This theory analyses how bodies *interact* with culture and how they are a cultural product, instead of being opposed to culture.<sup>95</sup> It lays bare the complex relationship between the body and structures of power through notions of inscription and positionality. As follows, the body itself is ‘pliable flesh, unspecified raw material of social inscription that produces subjects as *subjects of a particular kind*.’<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> E. Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 65.

<sup>91</sup> E. Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 23.

<sup>92</sup> E. Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 62.

<sup>93</sup> See L. Roper, *Oedipus and the devil. Witchcraft, sexuality and religion in early modern Europe* (London & New York 2005).

<sup>94</sup> K. Canning, ‘The body as method?’, 505. N.K. Hayles also elaborates on this: ‘Embodiment differs from the concept of the body in that the body is always normative relative to some set of criteria. (...) In contrast to the body, embodiment is contextual, enwebbed within the specifics of place, time, physiology and culture that together comprise enactment. Embodiment never coincides exactly with “the body.” (...) Experiences of embodiment, far from existing apart from culture, are always already imbricated within it. Yet because embodiment is individually articulated, there is also at least an incipient tension between it and hegemonic cultural constructs.’ N.K. Hayles, ‘The materiality of informatics’, 154-155.

<sup>95</sup> E. Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 23.

<sup>96</sup> E. Grosz, ‘Bodies and Knowledges: Feminism and the Crisis of Reason’, in: Grosz, E., *Space, Time, and Perversion: essays on the politics of bodies*. (New York 1995) 32.

Besides the bodies, the humans inhabiting them are addressed too through the focus on the psychological dimension of sexually specific experience. Embodiment theory states that there is an undeniable psychological dimension to embodiment. In relation to that psychological state, Adelson asserts that humans have choices within discursive structures,<sup>97</sup> and Grosz states that inscriptions are not forced on the subject but are undertaken voluntarily.<sup>98</sup> To theorize the relationship between bodies that are inscribed and humans who choose inscriptions, embodiment theorists turn to notions of embodied subjectivity and methods of psychoanalysis, developed by French psychoanalysts such as Jacques Lacan and Julia Kristeva.

*Embodiment as the solution for body history?*

It becomes clear that the body itself in embodiment theory is nothing more than flesh that is susceptible to inscription of discursive structures. This makes sense if we consider the political aim of feminist embodiment theory: to expose the ways in which individual female bodies are formed by powerful discursive patriarchal structures, as has been convincingly demonstrated by Iris Marion Young in 'Throwing like a girl.'<sup>99</sup> And although embodiment feminists view individuals to have the ability to choose inscriptions, and describe human agency as determinism simultaneously *with* freedom instead of *versus* freedom,<sup>100</sup> we might question to what extent this theory is a move *beyond* the problems of post-structuralism. The material, fleshy body is still discursively – and thus passively – understood, and appears to have no agency: it is subordinate to cultural structures and its inscriptions. The body that has some sort of agency that embodiment theory talks about is not an actual material body but more a psychological understanding of the body: Roper analyses body *images* to get to the *perceptions* of bodies. Feminist Moira Gatens, who also uses embodiment theory, published a book under the title *Imaginary bodies*. It seems difficult to claim that this theory deals with material bodies *and* solves Foucault's problem of passive, discursively determined bodies. It seems that embodiment feminists want to move away from social constructivism, from the distinction between real biological bodies and bodies as objects of representation<sup>101</sup> but we are left behind with a dichotomy between imagined bodies and material bodies that do not act but passively get inscribed by exterior forces. In trying

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<sup>97</sup> L. Adelson, *Making Bodies, Making History*, 27.

<sup>98</sup> 'The various procedures for inscribing bodies, marking out different bodies, categories, types, norms, are not simply imposed on the individual from outside; they do not function coercively but are sought out. They are commonly undertaken voluntarily and usually require the active compliance of the subject.' E. Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 143.

<sup>99</sup> I.M. Young, 'Throwing like a girl. A phenomenology of feminine body comportment, motility, and spatiality,' in: I. M. Young, *Throwing like a girl and other essays in feminist philosophy and social theory* (Bloomington 1990) 141-159.

<sup>100</sup> L. Adelson, *Making Bodies, Making History*, 32.

<sup>101</sup> See E. Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 16-17.

to unite biology, psychology and some sort of cultural outside, the material body and its agency disappear.

The body in embodiment theory lacks agency because it is still too much discursively determined. Therefore, embodiment theory does not provide a solution to overcoming the problem of either biological or cultural determinism.

If the body in embodiment theory is still too passive and immaterial, we should perhaps direct our focus to a theory that stresses the performativity of the body in practice. The focus on performativity might guarantee that the body addressed will be a real, material body that might have agency in its performance. Social practice theory might provide the solution, with its main theme of bodily dispositions in practice, and how these individual enactments relate to larger structures.

## §2.2 Social practice theory

*Practice theory: Marcel Mauss, Pierre Bourdieu and Paul Connerton*

Practice theory focuses more specifically on active, material bodies that act in time and space. Theories of bodily dispositions have been developed by Marcel Mauss, Pierre Bourdieu and Paul Connerton – amongst others. Sociologist Marcel Mauss first brought attention to embodied dispositions, in his study ‘Techniques of the body’ (1936). Here, he analyses ‘the ways in which, from society to society, men know how to use their bodies.’<sup>102</sup> To examine the differences in body techniques between and in societies and their continuation or tradition, Mauss introduces the core understanding of *habitus*. Every society has ‘its own special habits’ relating to the body, such as child rearing techniques, or marching, swimming, running. These are actual bodies that act in reality. The notion of habitus has further been developed by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu in *Outline of a theory of practice* (Cambridge etc. 1977). Bourdieu also stresses some sort of ‘temporality’ of the body and its techniques, which should be analysed, what he calls ‘real, practical time.’ In such a way, the body movements and the fine subtleties of ‘playing the game’, of practical knowledge and habitus, can be studied.

Sociologist Paul Connerton has developed an understanding of ‘incorporating practices,’ which indicate a more active body, in relation to practices of inscription. In *How societies remember* (Cambridge 1989), he argues that since the linguistic turn, scholars have neglected incorporating practices in favour of the textual, inscribing practices. ‘Frequently what is being talked about is

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<sup>102</sup> M. Mauss, ‘Techniques of Body,’ in: J. Crary & S. Kwinter (eds.), *Incorporations* (New York 1992) 455.

the symbolism of the body or attitudes towards the body or discourses about the body; not so much how bodies are variously constituted and variously behave.<sup>103</sup> Connerton does not wish to provide an alternative to the linguistic model, but instead wishes to improve it by looking at body practices to see how meaning is *enacted*. Incorporating practices are about bodies that move and act in time and space, instead of passively being inscribed by society.

Thus, practice theory provides alternatives to a post-structuralist understanding of the body in society, by demonstrating that we cannot focus merely on abstractions or representations, but we have to replay ‘practical time’ and reconstruct the positions that the bodies in action go through:

‘Any bodily practice, swimming or typing or dancing, requires for its proper execution a whole chain of interconnected acts, and in the early performances of the action the conscious will has to choose each of the successive events that make up the action from a number of wrong alternatives.<sup>104</sup>

In this way, the material body becomes an active agent in reality, as something that moves and acts in that reality.

By stressing bodies in action, practice theory, locates ‘the social’, the bodily dispositions, in *practices* instead of discourses:

‘A “practice” (*Praktik*) is a routinized type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one other: 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. (...) A practice is thus a routinized way in which bodies are moved, objects are handled, subjects are treated, things are described and the world is understood.<sup>105</sup>

Analysing practices compels us to analyse bodies in their performance of habits, and more broadly, to adhere to the materiality of social practices, which includes objects besides humans and their bodies. But, as Reckwitz’s definition of a practice makes clear, practice theory understands these body techniques to be routinized, not consciously recorded by the brain. Above, Connerton argued that the body goes through different positions to execute an act, but he finishes this statement with saying that, ‘habit eventually brings it about that each event precipitates an appropriate successor without an alternative appearing to offer itself and without

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<sup>103</sup> P. Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, 104.

<sup>104</sup> P. Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, 101.

<sup>105</sup> A. Reckwitz, ‘Toward a theory of social practices’, 249-250.



reference to the conscious will.<sup>106</sup> Bourdieu has made the point of unconscious habitual action most clear: habitus is not about conscious body acts, but about a ‘conductorless orchestration,’ a practical logic that is learned and internalized through education and practical imitation. It is taken for granted by the actors of a group and becomes a non-conscious, self-evident or ‘doxic’ experience. ‘The principles embodied in this way are placed beyond the grasp of consciousness, and hence cannot be touched by voluntary, deliberate transformation, cannot even be made explicit.’<sup>107</sup> And, ‘in practice, it is the habitus, history turned into nature, i.e. denied as such.’<sup>108</sup> Habitual action is a historical forgetting. This focus on the unconscious can be explained by the fact that Bourdieu developed his understanding of practice theory as a reaction against Rational Choice or Rational Action Theory, which argues that human action is intrinsically rational and laden with intentional purpose.<sup>109</sup> Connerton makes a point similar to historical forgetting, which he calls ‘habitual memory;’ ‘in habitual memory the past is, as it were, sedimented in the body.’<sup>110</sup> Connerton too wants to stress the unconscious: as mentioned above, he claims that the linguistic turn has focused too much on texts and inscribing practices, which, according to him, are intentional and conscious. Instead he proposes to analyse the unconscious and the sensuous of incorporating practices. In this way, both Bourdieu and Connerton stress the importance of subconsciously incorporated practices.

*Practice theory as the solution for body history?*

So, practice theory seems to resolve the issue of immaterial passive *bodies*, but it seems that we end up with passive *humans*: if humans are unconscious about what their bodies do, then those bodies act on their own, and the human becomes a passive bystander. Granted, Bourdieu mentions that actors have the freedom to play with power relations, and it is clear that if someone does not have the habitus of a group, s/he is very conscious of her/his bodily disabilities, but generally speaking, the individual in practice theory has little agency in relation to his or her performing body. This becomes very clear when we look at the full definition of habitus. The body practices are related to cultural structures, and habitus is the bridge between the objective structures and the individual decision-making through embodied dispositions. The structures produce regulated improvisations for bodies, which, through performances, reproduce the objective structures. In Bourdieu’s words, it is about the ‘dialectic of the internalization of

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<sup>106</sup> P. Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, 101.

<sup>107</sup> P. Bourdieu, *Outline of a theory of practice* (Cambridge 1977) 94.

<sup>108</sup> P. Bourdieu, *Outline of a theory of practice*, 78.

<sup>109</sup> J. Jenkins, *Pierre Bourdieu. Key sociologists* (London etc. 1992) 44-45.

<sup>110</sup> P. Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge 1989) 72.

externality and the externalization of internality, or, more simply, the incorporation and objectification.’<sup>111</sup>

And, as both Mauss and Connerton make clear, the body techniques are socialized and become practical logic, a non-conscious routine through imitation and education. This ensures continuity and exercises social authority because habitual memory reproduces power and social relationships. For example, Connerton contends that incorporating practices refer to ‘social classification, proper behaviour and communal lexicon;’ it is about the *right* table manners and the *right* hand gestures within the *right* group of people.

As such, practice theory is about the ways in which bodies operate, produce and re-enact social and cultural structures. In the end, the perspective on the body in practice theory is that ‘the body produces culture at the same time that culture produces the body.’<sup>112</sup>

To what extent is that a resolution for the issues of post-structuralism? Indeed, practice theory introduces means to analyse an active and material body, but only in relation to unconscious actors and overpowering structures. Indeed, ‘physio-psycho-sociological assemblages,’<sup>113</sup> seem to overcome the dichotomy between body and mind, yet in terms of agency we cannot talk about the individual and his or her body as a united whole; the lack of consciousness curtails the agency of the human. Furthermore, the body is merely acting upon and in the end subordinate to vague structures and powers, which diminishes the agency of the body. So although the body becomes real and material in the performance, that same performance takes away agency by stressing its relation to structuring structures.

Although only Connerton mentions his theory of the body in relation to the linguistic turn, this version of practice theory does not seem all too helpful for body history – and at large, cultural history – to overcome the problem of cultural determination while addressing a real, living body.

### §2.3 Embodiment theory and practice theory as a solution for body history

We have discussed the problems with cultural history and saw that Gabrielle Spiegel proposed a new and emerging school of thought, ‘practice theory,’ to rework those problems for historical writing. By refashioning the linguistic turn, and ‘saving the phenomenological,’ practice theory focuses on the individual and her/his interaction with structures, as to move beyond the death of

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<sup>111</sup> P. Bourdieu, *Outline of a theory of practice* (Cambridge etc. 1977) 72.

<sup>112</sup> N. K. Hayles, ‘The materiality of informatics’, 157.

<sup>113</sup> M. Mauss, ‘Techniques of Body,’ 471.

the subject to a more intentional, if not wholly self-conscious agent. Thus, the focus shifted from culture as discourse to culture as practice and performance.

We saw that body history had problems similar to cultural history, also inspired by the linguistic turn and being part of 'the cultural approach' to history. Its main issue was that the body was too culturally determined, therefore lacking both agency and materiality. In order to overcome the problematic choice between either biological determinism or cultural determinism, it made sense to look at practice theory for a solution. Perhaps practice and performance could provide a middle position between biological and cultural determination. Perhaps embodiment theory and practice theory could function as a solution to the current problems in body history. With embodiment theory's focus on phenomenology, and practice theory's stress on bodies in practice, these two theories have demonstrated to provide new methods of analysing bodies in space and time. Embodiment theory placed stress on sensual experience, the phenomenological *lived* body, and its specificity. Practice theory turned towards bodies moving in space and time, with a specific focus on techniques.

Yet by specifically analysing the body in these theories, how it is understood, in itself and in relation to owner and the outside world, it has been demonstrated that these theories do not move beyond a post-structuralist perspective of the body and do not provide thorough solutions to the problems presented above. Embodiment theorists describe only one body: a *passive* body, susceptible to inscription and unable to prevent or change. And while practice theory provides a more active understanding of the body, that body's techniques are unconscious to the owner of that body, and the acts are the result of the workings of anonymous powers. In both cases, the body remains a puppet to the anonymous puppet master 'Structure.' Therefore these theories present no answer to the problem of biological or cultural determinism. It seems impossible to address a real, living body that is not culturally (or socially) determined.

Furthermore, both theories seem to wish to surpass a division between body-human/mind, embodiment theory through psychology and practice theory through an unconscious habitus, but both fail. In terms of agency, both theories end up separating the body from the individual: embodiment theory presents an agentless body and an individual that seems aware and is able to choose inscriptions, practice theory introduces an active body but passive humans lacking agency in their habitual acts. In conclusion, it seems that Spiegel's 'practice theory' is not the answer for body history. As long as individuals have a strong relation with cultural structures it becomes impossible to deal with a material body that has agency.

## §2.4 Defining agency. Refashioning embodiment theory and practice theory

So the body has no agency in its materiality when it is strongly related to cultural structures. What is agency of the body then? We could argue that it means that the body, in relation to cultural structures, has the capacity to act *on its own*, to actually *change* and *interfere* in reality. The bodies from embodiment theory and practice theory need capacities to change their environment.

Both theories have been refashioned in terms of giving the body agency to actively engage with its environment. Literary critic Katherine Hayles and sociologist Chris Shilling both present a new understanding of embodiment and practice theory, which addresses the issue of actively engaging bodies within cultural structures. In the next section, their work will be discussed. Also, the extent to which they refashion the understanding of agency within the school of thought will be analysed, so as to argue if they truly rework the problems of embodiment and practice theory.

### *Katherine Hayles and agency in embodiment theory*

First of all it needs to be said that it is difficult to find a definition or conceptualization of agency within most theories. Agency is a term that many scholars in the humanities use, but hardly ever define or explain.<sup>114</sup> Yet Kathleen Canning provides an understanding of agency in ‘Feminist history after the linguistic turn’ (1994). ‘A conception of agency as a site of mediation between discourses and experiences serves not only to dislodge the deterministic view in which discourse always seems to construct experience, but also to dispel the notion that discourses are (...) shaped by everything but the experiences of “the people the text claims to represent.”’<sup>115</sup> Agency is thus placed in experience, and the fact that experience shapes discourse. But bodily experience, as Grosz and Adelson have argued, was mostly directed by inscriptions, which people can choose between, but there will always be inscription.

In ‘The materiality of informatics’ (1993), Katherine Hayles looks for ‘a way of talking about the body that is responsive to its postmodern construction as discourse/information and yet is not trapped within it.’<sup>116</sup> She argues that the body, always normative relative to criteria, always refers to discourse and inscription, but that ‘instantiated’ experience refers to embodiment and incorporation. Thus she repeats the notion of embodiment theory that embodiment is not the same as the body – and proves the point made above that the actual body is discursively

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<sup>114</sup> E. Grosz, ‘Feminism, materialism, and freedom,’ in: D. Coole & S. Frost, *New Materialisms. Ontology, agency, and politics* (Durham & London 2010) 139.

<sup>115</sup> K. Canning, ‘Feminist history after the linguistic turn: historicizing discourse and experience,’ *Signs* 19:2 (1994) 378.

<sup>116</sup> N. K. Hayles, ‘The materiality of informatics’, 148.

understood – but tries to find a solution through Connerton’s understanding of incorporation. By exploring the relation between embodiment and the body through the relation between inscription and incorporation, Hayles aims to demonstrate how humans interact within discursive constructions and the material conditions within which they are placed. ‘Incorporating practices perform the bodily content; inscribing practices correct and modulate the performance.’<sup>117</sup> However, she agrees – to a certain extent<sup>118</sup> – that bodily practices are not conscious and achieve a stability that is resistant to modifications. What about the possibility of change? Her solution for change is to be found in technology. Hayles states that technological changes affect instantiated experience. And, in following philosopher Mark Johnson’s *Body in the mind*, instantiated experience produces linguistic metaphors. Thus, technological innovations create new ways of acting, which create new metaphors in language, which in turn affect technological developments.

Although Hayles offers a way to look at embodiment, the body, discourse and experience by linking practice theory to embodiment theory, in the end the actor that effects change remains vague. ‘Technological innovations’ is a vague term for something that changes human experience. We could argue that it is humans that are behind technological innovations and in such a way shape with their experience discursive structures. As such, Hayles offers an interesting understanding of change in relation to body and embodiment, but how and by whom remains unclear. The material body is still passive in relation to discursive structures and the individuals are not fully conscious of their bodily practices. Thus, it is difficult to argue if her theory provides a new understanding of agency for the body.

#### *Chris Shilling and agency in practice theory*

Gabrielle Spiegel also provides a definition of agency, in relation to ‘practice theory’ as her solution for historiography. ‘At its root, minimalist definition, agency refers to the individual’s capacity to act, to *do* something (intentionally or otherwise), implying at the very least an agent’s practical knowledge and mastery of the common elements or conventions of culture, a form of cultural competency founded “less upon discursive than practical consciousness.”<sup>119</sup> Agency thus is the capacity to do something with the body, as Practice Theory has demonstrated above. Yet the link with the practical knowledge further stresses the problem that acting happens without conscious awareness and seems culturally encoded through habitus and social structures. But

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<sup>117</sup> N. K. Hayles, ‘The materiality of informatics’, 157.

<sup>118</sup> Hayles states that ‘Bourdieu somewhat overstates the case.’ She refers here to Bourdieu’s understanding of consciousness, see footnote 106 above. N. K. Hayles, ‘The materiality of informatics’, 162.

<sup>119</sup> G. Spiegel, *Practicing history*, 15.

Spiegel mentions that this is ‘at the very least,’ so what more is there? Do individuals have the possibility to consciously change the state of affairs?

A conscious theory of habit has been formulated by Chris Shilling in *Changing bodies: habit, crisis and creativity* (Beverly Hills 2008). His main theme is the corporeal dimensions of social action, in order to demonstrate the ‘social consequentiality of our physical being.’<sup>120</sup> This assumption implies active agents that can cause change through bodily action. Shilling deploys the philosophical tradition of ‘pragmatism,’ because of its ‘insistence on the human potential to ‘make a difference,’ turns what sociologists have sometimes treated as exclusively socially determined organisms into phenomenologically aware, active body-subjects whose corporeal properties enable them to intervene creatively in the world.’<sup>121</sup>

First he argues that bodies are necessarily affected by their external environment, both the social and physical milieu. Since bodies have impulses, there is a ‘pre-reflective intentionality of the human body,’<sup>122</sup> which indicates that humans intentionally select stimuli through the use of their senses and thus affect the development of the body and the mind. Then Shilling argues how body practices are constructed in practice. Initially, all sorts of actions are habitually ‘seeped’ into the body, as routinized modes of behaviour that influence the body and the self. Because habits incorporate social structures, the body and the self, habits unify the body with the natural and social environment. Up to now it seems that Shilling’s theory could well argue that all this happens both consciously and subconsciously. However, and this is the point where Shilling departs from other theories of practice, sometimes there is a conflict between the social and physical environment, which make certain habits impossible or ineffective. He calls this a moment of crisis, which goes against Bourdieu’s understanding of the irreversibility of habitual action. Where Bourdieu argues that habitus is determined by different factors, pragmatism claims that there is an unstable relationship between the external and internal environment, especially when it comes to habits. When habits are no longer effective, humans are able to creatively come with solutions, by critically reflecting on their surroundings and effecting change for themselves. The individuals become the agents that interfere in a changing environment.

As Shilling demonstrates, it is possible to rethink agency of the body in a way that adheres to its materiality, its capacity to act and perform *and* its power to effect change on some sort of conscious level. Shilling thus provides agency to both the material body and the individual acting with it.

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<sup>120</sup> C. Shilling, *Changing bodies: habit, crisis and creativity* (London etc. 2008) 1-2.

<sup>121</sup> C. Shilling, *Changing bodies*, 4.

<sup>122</sup> C. Shilling, *Changing bodies*, 9.

However, he makes clear that this moment of agency only happens when individuals consciously experience body habits because they come into conflict with their surroundings. Is it possible to theorize agency for the body and a conscious actor before a moment of crisis, without referring to 'structuring structures' that create bodily habits? Is it possible to envision bodies interfering in their surroundings in any type of event?

### Chapter 3. New approaches for body history: science and technology studies

The previous chapter demonstrated that it seemed impossible to move beyond cultural or biological determinism as long as individuals were positioned in relation to overpowering cultural structures. Again, the material body was without agency. Furthermore, it became clear that the agency of the body meant a capacity to interfere and change the environment in which the individual lives, either with her/his body or her/his consciousness but preferably with both. Shilling proved through pragmatism that such interference in the environment is possible by humans with their bodies in moments of crisis. Yet, I asked if it was possible to imagine bodies interacting and changing their surroundings in any type of event, not just when habits become impossible.

In this chapter I will discuss some theories that have been rubricated under science and technology studies (STS), an interdisciplinary approach to understand the interconnected relation between science, politics and culture, or more specifically, how knowledge production is a social activity, influenced by and influencing social norms, policy, etc.<sup>123</sup> The first theory that I will highlight here is actor-network theory, a theory developed by sociologists such as John Law and Bruno Latour. ANT specifically tries to imagine reality without determining structures. This school of thought argues that reality is unpredictable and messy, and everything, humans and non-humans in past, present and future, act in the event. Secondly, I will turn to praxiography, as developed by Dutch philosopher Annemarie Mol. Departing from ANT and specifically focusing on the body, Mol developed an ANT approach for the body that highlights its multiple enactments in practice.

Below, these STS approaches will be examined for their fruitfulness for understanding the body as neither biologically nor culturally determined, as something that acts and interferes in its environment.

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<sup>123</sup> The emerging body of thought 'New Materialism' will not be discussed in this chapter. It might also be rubricated under STS as it focuses on the production of knowledge and the resilience and productivity of matter. Because of its focus on ontology, objects, matter and bodies, one might argue that it is important for body history. Yet in my opinion, New Materialism is more a philosophical tool to ask new questions for and about theory, than that it is a fruitful approach for historical research. It seems unclear how to apply New Materialism in practice, while other approaches, like ANT and praxiography, demonstrate its practical use more clearly. This might result from the fact that New Materialism is not *per se* a practice theory of the body. Furthermore, I argue that New Materialism takes the 'radical reprisal of matter' too far. As we will see in chapter 4, a focus on matter can maintain a problematic dichotomy between body and mind, nature and culture, and consciousness and unconsciousness. New Materialism pre-eminently sustains this differentiation.



### §3.1 Actor-network theory

#### *No different levels of analysis*

Actor-network theory provides an alternative way to analyse ‘the social’ without having to retreat to larger structures for explaining social phenomena. It argues that ‘realities,’ be it social or natural, are the effects of the webs of relations in which they are located. Thus, there is no reality outside of those networks, no larger social context to which phenomena relate. There is just one level for social analysis, that of the webs of relations.<sup>124</sup>

This approach to reality has been developed by sociologists Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar within the field of science studies. In *Laboratory Life. The social construction of scientific facts* (Beverly Hills 1979), the authors argued against the understanding of science studies that in scientific practices one could see a larger context at work. They stated that science not only discovered or described reality but also *produced* reality in scientific practice. Furthermore, Latour and Woolgar claim that not only scientists are involved in the production of reality, but the physical things in the lab as well. Specifically, the ‘inscription devices’ are fundamental to the scientific endeavour. These devices, which can be instruments or technologies, are used to turn all the different lab materials into scientific texts, holding solid statements. In the meantime, the means by which these texts were created – its so-called ‘subjectivity’ – are erased. In such a way, the facts become ‘objective,’ and scientists get credibility. The main point is thus that realities are made, or more specifically, that in science, humans and non-humans produce a stable singular reality through the deletion of subjectivity.<sup>125</sup>

#### *Humans, non-humans and singularity*

Thus, actor-network theory provides a way to analyse reality as itself, without it always being in relation to an overarching macro-level. Instead of unveiling hidden structures, ANT focuses on

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<sup>124</sup>J. Law, ‘Actor Network Theory and Material Semiotics,’ version of 25th April 2007, available at <http://www.heterogeneities.net/publications/Law2007ANTandMaterialSemiotics.pdf>, (downloaded February 2013), 2.

<sup>125</sup>B. Latour and S. Woolgar, *Laboratory Life: The Social Construction of Scientific Facts* (Beverly Hills 1979). In later work, Latour further develops his notion that the distinction between micro and macro levels is untenable and must be dissolved. In his article ‘Give me a laboratory and I will raise the world’ (1983), he argues that the sociology of science keeps focusing on those things that happen outside the laboratory to explain the creation of scientific facts; the macro-levels. Instead, Latour proposes to analyse both the micro- and macro-levels, to understand the ‘construction of the laboratory and its position in the societal milieu.’ Through analysing different types of actors and their relations, in combination with the understanding that lab work effects or produces reality, it becomes clear that the laboratory is the place where differences of scale are destabilized and made irrelevant. In fact, Latour argues that the lab can alter the composition of society through the reversal and dissolving of scales. As such, the lab generates new sources of power, secured through inscription devices. See B. Latour, ‘Give Me a Laboratory and I will Raise the World’, in: K. D. Knorr-Cetina and M. J. Mulkay (eds.) *Science Observed: Perspectives on the Social Study of Science* (Los Angeles 1983) 141-170.

how realities are created in practice.<sup>126</sup> To *analyse* the social, instead of using it as an *explanation*, ANT keeps ‘the landscape flat.’<sup>127</sup> ‘The toolkit can be understood as a powerful set of devices for levelling divisions usually taken to be foundational,’<sup>128</sup> such as micro and macro, but ANT also reshapes the distinction between human and non-human and their role in reality. This happens when reality-creating practices are analysed without making any ontological distinctions, as ANT does. To understand how a certain reality comes into being, the analysis needs to follow the actors and their relations. Thus, it becomes clear that different sorts of things act in the production of reality, both human and non-human. Above, Latour and Woolgar demonstrated the importance of inscription devices. Latour explains the acting of multiple entities most clearly in *Reassembling the social. An introduction to actor-network theory* (Oxford 2005). Here he asks an important question: ‘when we act, who else is acting?’<sup>129</sup> Instead of finding causes through contexts or structures, Latour asserts that we need to replace them by as many actors that make someone do something, by mediators. In action, different types of ‘forces’ are woven together, and thus ‘the social’ becomes a collective, an entanglement. This is why sociologist John Law has called reality ‘messy’.<sup>130</sup> Reality is complex, multiple and an entanglement of different mediators or actors that produce that reality. By viewing actors as those things that ‘do’, it is no longer necessary to consider actors only as humans; now non-humans can be included too. By viewing humans and non-humans as ontologically equal actors in the production of reality, without referring to the Social Context or the Natural Context, ANT seems to move beyond cultural determinism and technical determinism.

So, ANT argues that reality is messy, in which all sorts of things move around in relations and translations, and sometimes get fixed in some sort of stability.<sup>131</sup> Yet, this theory of or approach to social reality is not necessarily about bodies. The theories that have been analysed before specifically were about bodies, but created certain problems which seem to be solved by ANT

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<sup>126</sup> The three foundational texts for ANT are, with ‘Give me a laboratory’ from Latour; M. Callon, ‘Struggles and Negotiations to Define What is Problematic and What is Not: The Socio-logic of Translation’, in: K. D. Knorr et al (eds.) *The Social Process of Scientific Investigation* (Dordrecht & Boston 1981) 197-221, J. Law, ‘On the Methods of Long Distance Control: Vessels, Navigation and the Portuguese Route to India’, in J. Law (ed.) *Power, Action and Belief: a New Sociology of Knowledge*, (London 1986) 231-260.

<sup>127</sup> B. Latour, *Reassembling the Social. An introduction to actor-network theory* (Oxford 2005) 176.

<sup>128</sup> John Law, ‘Actor Network Theory and Material Semiotics,’ 8.

<sup>129</sup> B. Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 43.

<sup>130</sup> J. Law, and V. Singleton, ‘Object Lessons’, *Organization* 12:3 (2005) 334; J. Law, *After method: mess in social science research* (London 2004).

<sup>131</sup> Within ANT, there are several perspectives on the stability of objects in reality. Some argue, like Latour, that the singularity of objects is *constructed* in reality, while others, such as John Law, Vicky Singleton and Annemarie Mol, argue that the singularity is merely *enacted*, over and over again to keep its stability or even that objects shape and reshape in different practices. See M. de Laet, and A. Mol, ‘The Zimbabwe Bush Pump: Mechanics of a Fluid Technology’, *Social Studies of Science* 30.2 (2000), 225-263 and J. Law and V. Singleton, ‘Object Lessons’, *Organization* 12:3 (2005), 331-355.

with its rejection of determining structures and expansion of agentic entities. But can ANT be a theory of the body?

### §3.2 Praxiography

Annemarie Mol has demonstrated that this in fact is possible in *The body multiple. Ontology in medical practice* (Durham 2002): here we can see how ANT becomes a theory of the body.<sup>132</sup> In this study she departs from the ANT understanding that practices create realities and stability for objects. Yet she pushes this argument further by stating that each practice generates its own version of the objects. According to Mol, objects are ontologically multiple by the fact that they come into being in different practices. Through an empirical-philosophical study of atherosclerosis in a Dutch hospital, Mol shows that there is not one disease or object, but that it becomes multiplied in practice. This happens because, due to different sites, techniques, materials and actors, the disease is *enacted* differently in every practice. Furthermore, Mol analyses how this multiplicity works in practice. She argues that the multiplicity of an object means that different enacted objects do not align. Thus, the incompatibility between two places and their different objects is a practical matter; the object is done or enacted differently. However, this multiplicity does not lead to fragmentation or confusion. The different sites are no natural unity, but simply form a unity in contrast to each other. Therefore, the different enactments of the object and the different sites are related. In fact, the multiplicity usually does not lead to conflict; it is managed, and can be understood as a *virtual* common object. There is a commitment to ontological singularity.

This approach to the body, which Mol calls *praxiographic*, thus argues that there are different practices in which different sorts of bodies appear. These different practices do not refer to one 'true' body, but in fact produce *a body multiple*. Hence, praxiography is a theory that addresses the body in its multiplicity and complexity, and seems to give the body more agency by its refusal to make an ontological distinction between object and subject. In fact, Mol argues that she overcomes the subject-object divide twice. First, her notion of performativity is used to study subjects and objects of all kinds and as such argues against the idea that subjects are humans and objects are found in nature. Secondly, and most importantly, she demonstrates that the dichotomy between actively knowing subjects and passive objects-that-are-known does not hold up. Not only do the 'objects' of knowledge, the patients, in her study talk back, and their bodies

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<sup>132</sup> I argue that Annemarie Mol's approach praxiography is part of actor-network theory. This is not something that she specifically mentions herself in *The body multiple*, but because of the distinct similarities between her approach to practises and the approaches of, for instance, John Law and Bruno Latour, I would like to argue that praxiography in fact is part of ANT.

influence the enactment of the disease; she also demonstrates that materials and techniques are actively engaged in the enactment of reality and the production of knowledge. The fact that each practice generates its own version of the object is because of the fact that actors, sites, techniques and materials all act together in that practice.<sup>133</sup> But besides the agency of the body in practice, praxiography also seems to approach the body in its materiality, by specifically focusing on the real, living body in reality, and not on representations or different understandings of the body in practice.

### *ANT and praxiography as the solution for body history?*

In sum, the approaches above direct attention to the complexity and multiplicity of reality, the ways in which different sorts of singularities are performed in webs of relations, with the help of both humans and non-humans. With praxiography, ANT becomes a theory of the body. To determine whether body historians can use this body of thought, or approach,<sup>134</sup> we should first ask to what extent these STS approaches resolve the issues of the linguistic turn and the problems of the previously discussed theories of the body.

Most importantly, the approaches have a different approach to ‘power’, or at least that what makes actors act. According to ANT, we cannot argue that abstract discursive structures ‘exert’ power and assume that ‘discourse’ or ‘power’ is something that provides explanation. Latour explains; ‘it is just because we wish to *explain* those asymmetries that we don’t want to simply *repeat* them.’<sup>135</sup> If we assume that actors are directed by causal structures, they become intermediaries instead of mediators.<sup>136</sup> As such, we need to explain how inequalities are established in reality in all its complex ways. More specifically, both ANT and praxiography do not argue that there are multiple perspectives on one reality, and do not wish to state which one has the correct perspective or which true context is behind false perspectives. Instead, there are multiple realities that hang together in a certain way, and those need to be studied ‘up.’<sup>137</sup> It is

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<sup>133</sup> See the footnote section of chapter two for Mol’s full discussion of the subject-object division, in A. Mol, *The Body Multiple. Ontology in medical practice* (Durham 2002).

<sup>134</sup> In ‘Actor Network Theory and Material Semiotics,’ Law argues that ANT is not a theory, but an approach. Bruno Latour also makes this point in ‘On recalling ANT’, in: J. Law & J. Hassard, *Actor network theory and after*. (Malden, MA 1999) 15-25: he asserts that the approach should be called an ‘actant-rhizome ontology,’ because the metaphysics and ontology of the actors is central in ANT. So ANT does not say ‘what reality is really like,’ and can therefore not be called a theory of reality. As a method, it provides the proper tools to analyse reality in all its complexity. However, as Law complains in ‘After ANT: Complexity, naming, and topology,’ ANT has been so successful that its assumptions have been naturalized. ‘Complexity is lost in the process of labelling, of getting fixed as a theory. There should be no identity, no fixed point.’ See J. Law & J. Hassard, *Actor network theory and after* (Malden, MA 1999) for more discussions on the problems with ANT.

<sup>135</sup> B. Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 63.

<sup>136</sup> See ‘On the difficulty of being an ANT,’ especially 154-55, in B. Latour, *Reassembling the Social. An introduction to actor-network theory* (Oxford 2005).

<sup>137</sup> J. Law, ‘Actor Network Theory and Material Semiotics,’ 11.

about ontology in its multiplicity, how things are constantly performed or enacted, and not construction or deconstruction; when things seem to be fixed, it is only temporarily, for instance through certain inscription devices, and then gets reshuffled again. By providing detailed empirical case studies that describe multiple realities, STS deconstructs power and displays a different understanding of objectivity and empiricism.<sup>138</sup>

An understanding of reality that is messy, complex and multiple goes against Foucault's static understanding of discourse as something that solidly hangs together. If everything is able to 'mediate', 'perform' or 'act', then 'discourse' cannot simply and single-handedly exert power over those who are subjugated. 'Discourse' cannot be the force that makes someone do something. So who has the power to act and interfere? This remains somewhat vague in actor-network theory. Latour is most clear about this confusion; 'uncertainty should remain uncertain throughout because we don't want to rush into saying that actors may not know what they are doing, but that we, the social scientists, know that there exists a social force 'making them do' things unwittingly (...) Not because actors know what they are doing and social scientists don't, but because both have to remain puzzled by the identity of the participants in any course of action if they want to assemble them again.'<sup>139</sup> ANT states that action is dislocated, we do not always know what makes us act.

Yet both Latour and Law are clear about the agency that objects have: they are capable of fixing inequalities and asymmetries. Latour argues that social ties are kept in place through practical means, *things* and entities. Objects explain the over-arching powers of society and the asymmetries, not power itself.<sup>140</sup> Likewise, Law contends that we need to analyse the relational materiality, or the material durability through networks to understand how certain types of social stabilities are created. Both sociologists agree that objects do not determine the action, and do not inhere stability, 'but it does not mean that there might exist many metaphysical shades between full causality and sheer inexistence.'<sup>141</sup>

However, there are also some similarities between post-structuralism and the STS approaches. The notion that inequalities are kept in place through materials can also be found in Foucault's theory on disciplining techniques. In *Discipline and Punish. The birth of the prison* (New York 1985), Foucault describes how prisons, schools and barracks as institutions in their shape and form are fundamental for disciplining individuals in society.<sup>142</sup> So both STS and Foucault stress the erosion

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<sup>138</sup> See chapter 4 in B. Latour, *Reassembling the Social. An introduction to actor-network theory* (Oxford 2005).

<sup>139</sup> B. Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 47.

<sup>140</sup> See chapter 3 in B. Latour, *Reassembling the Social. An introduction to actor-network theory* (Oxford 2005).

<sup>141</sup> B. Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 72.

<sup>142</sup> M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish. The birth of the prison* (New York 1985),

of the distinction between human and non-human in the course of action and demonstrate that objects play an important role in keeping power relations in place.

Furthermore, although STS seems to find discourse too static and coherent, Law states that ‘actor-networks’ can be seen as scaled-down versions of Michel Foucault’s discourses or epistemes.<sup>143</sup> Both the discursive approach and the STS approaches explore the relational and productive character of either epistemes or actor-networks. Also, Law and Singleton state that, like post-structuralism, their version of ANT focuses on a ‘metaphysics of presence.’ By making certain things in certain realities present, other things are made absent and that thus, presence depends on absences. In relation to objects, Law and Singleton argue that objects have a pattern of presences and absences, which include the actors from the pasts, different presents and futures.<sup>144</sup> And finally, like post-structuralism, ANT is an anti-essentialist movement, ‘a semiotic machine for waging war on essential differences.’<sup>145</sup> Both approaches push for the belief that things could have been different.

Thus, it can be argued that STS is not radically different from post-structuralism, as Law suggests by saying that ANT is an empirical version of post-structuralism. Both ANT and praxiography seem to refashion the insights from the linguistic turn through a new perspective on reality, objectivity or ontology and empiricism. Is this enough to solve the problems of the history of the body?

The problem with embodiment theory and practice theory was that it referred to real bodies and bodily experience but always in relation to determining social or cultural structures. STS analysis moves beyond determinism, as we have seen, by focusing on webs of relations in which both humans and non-humans act. This wide understanding of agency, of agents that act, makes it possible to see every actor as an agent that can effect change, including the body. Furthermore, by bypassing all different sorts of dichotomies, such as micro-macro, inside-outside, agency-structure, nature-culture, STS is able to argue that there is just one scale of reality that needs to be analysed and in which bodies should be understood and placed.

Importantly, the problem between either essentialism on the one hand and constructivism on the other seems to be resolved by ANT and praxiography’s focus on ontology. In relation to the body it argues that there is not one essential body, neither several constructed bodies, but bodies that perform in a specific practice and achieve a specific reality there. Thus STS says that bodies can be real somewhere, but they do not become fixed forever. With STS, we can analyse

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<sup>143</sup> J. Law, ‘Actor Network Theory and Material Semiotics,’ 6.

<sup>144</sup> J. Law and V. Singleton, ‘Object Lessons’, *Organization* 12:3 (2005), 331-355.

<sup>145</sup> J. Law, ‘After ANT: Complexity, naming, and topology,’ 7. Latour makes the same point in ‘On recalling ANT’,

the body as something that is both very real and something that changes or effects change. The atherosclerosis that Mol analysed was very real and material in practice, but a different reality in different practices. Therefore, if we follow STS, the multiplicity is not due to different perspectives on the body, but different bodies that become multiple in enactment. STS's anti-essentialism is very important in relation to the body: it provides tools to overcome biological essentialism, or the idea that biological differences are fixed and determined. Rather, we can argue that they are enacted.<sup>146</sup> Thus, with this approach, body history can move on from representations of the body and the discursive body to *real, material bodies*. These bodies are ontologically multiple but their difference is not fixed. And because they are specific-in-practice we might argue that they can also be historically specific. This provides an understanding of the body that is neither static nor coherent, but *dynamic*.

In conclusion, the STS approaches discussed above shift our focus to four important notions:

- (I) The complexity and multiplicity of reality
- (II) The expansion of the understanding of actors, of that what acts in the encounter, to include both human and non-human actors. They are intertwined
- (III) Focus on enactment or performance of objects in practice
- (IV) The ordering logics and strategies to render complex reality understandable and manageable.

For the body this means three things. First, addressing the *materiality* of the body, as something that is real and living, can be done through praxiography's focus on the *ontology* of objects in practice, on their enactment which can empirically be reconstructed. Secondly, the *agency* of the body, the capacity to (en)act in practice, seems to be addressed through the wide understanding of what it means to be an *actor*. Finally, by not relying on overarching structures and empirically analysing how power is established in practice, for instance through fixing objects, STS seems to move away from cultural determinism. Thus, STS and specifically praxiography seem to be a solution to the issues of body history and cultural history at large.

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<sup>146</sup> J. Law, *After method*, 66. See for an analysis of the enactment of biological differences A. M'charek, 'Fragile differences, relational effects: stories about the materiality of race and sex,' in: *European journal of women's studies* 17 (2010) 307-322.

## Chapter 4. Praxiography as the solution for body history: two case studies

In the last chapter, we saw that praxiography seemed to be the solution for the issues of body history. The lack of materiality can be addressed through the focus on ontology of objects and by empirically reconstructing how they are enacted in practice. The lack of agency seems to be resolved by taking all sorts of different actors into account, which broadens our perspective of who and what acts in practice. By stressing the complexity and multiplicity of reality in practice, we seem to have moved away from biological determinism on the one hand and cultural determinism on the other.

How can we specifically test this approach for body history? As mentioned above, praxiography is part of an approach that focuses on the relation between knowledge production and society. Therefore it seems appropriate to specify body history to the history of the production of body knowledge. Within the broad field of body history, a large amount of studies have focused on how knowledge of the body was established in the past. By analysing for instance doctor-patient relationships, historians such as Roy Porter and Barbara Duden have been able to explain how body knowledge was produced in the encounter between the ‘subject’ of study – the doctor – and the ‘object’ of study, the patient.

With praxiography, it becomes possible to analyse this encounter between ‘object’ and ‘subject’ of study and examine how historical knowledge of the body is produced in practice. As such, we should reconstruct doctor-patient encounters, analyse how ‘the body’ is enacted in this complex reality, and through which ordering logics the body becomes a constructed whole. The specific period that becomes most relevant to study doctor-patient relationships is the nineteenth century, as the scientific basis for the current medical profession and other sciences that focus on the body was developed during this century. In developing itself as a scientific profession, medicine slowly obtained more and more authority over ‘the body’ by creating and defining expertise medical knowledge of the body. This expertise knowledge was demarcated by medical professionals from the more amateur, lay knowledge of the body, which was embodied, for instance, by lay-women. Thus, the basis of doctor-patient encounters in which professional medical knowledge of the body was produced is to be found in this century. With praxiography, it becomes possible to reflect on the development of the professional medical profession through these first encounters.

This chapter will discuss and demonstrate the usefulness of the STS approach for the history of body knowledge by discussing two studies that have applied the praxiographic approach to nineteenth century medical case studies. The first case study focuses on a ‘doctor-



patient' encounter between a physical anthropologist and the Papuans he examined for his research on race. In the second case study, historian Geertje Mak analyses the production of knowledge about hermaphroditism by analysing the examination practices of people with doubtful sex.

The two case studies will demonstrate two things in relation to praxiography and the agency of the body. First, the multiplicity of the enactment of the ontological body is able to overcome biological and social determinism. Second, a praxiographic approach can demonstrate that the knowledge of the body is produced by all the actors involved. Yet, both case studies also crucially make clear that there is a third type of agency of the body, which praxiography is unable to adhere to: the autonomy of the individual to make decisions about his or her own body. This becomes problematic since historical case studies of the body are often about unequal power relations that have to be analysed and addressed. The difficulty with praxiography is that it might lead to a story about techniques and materials, and not about humans who make decisions and exercise power over each other.

#### §4.1 Praxiography and Papuan race

In a case study on physical anthropology during a Dutch scientific expedition in 1903, I used Annemarie Mol's praxiography to analyse the case as several historical, situated encounters. The research examined one of the first scientific, exploratory expeditions to the largely unexamined area of Dutch New Guinea, and specifically focused on the physical anthropological work that was done by anthropologist G.A.J. Van der Sande. During the expedition, he measured and analysed the Papuans he met and published a comprehensive study about 'The Papuan' a few years later, *Nova Guinea III* (1907). The main focus of this case study was *Papuan race* in Van der Sande's research. However, I did not analyse how he represented the Papuans and their racial identity, and neither did I determine to what extent he was part of a racist scientific community. Instead, this study approached Papuan race in relation to the Papuan racial body and the knowledge about the Papuan racial body. In this way it was possible to historicize Papuan race in relation to the body, through asking *what is Papuan race?*

The main method and starting point of this research was *praxiography* from Annemarie Mol. As we have seen above, her praxiographic approach makes it possible to show that concepts such as Papuan race are ontologically multiple because they are enacted differently in every practice, because of the specific techniques, materials, actors and sites of the practices. With this approach, this study was able to historically examine the body, practice and knowledge and in

doing so appreciate the materiality, complexity and heterogeneity of the encounter. As such, this case study could analyse the *enactment* of biological differences, in this case, of the Papuan race instead of merely describing the *representation* of Papuan race by Van der Sande.

Thus, the aim of this study was to explore to what extent praxiography was useful for historical analysis, especially body history. Interestingly, recent developments in colonial history resonate very well with (post) actor-network theory and New Materialism. In the introduction of the 2012 volume *Engaging colonial knowledge. Reading European archives in world history*, historians R. Roque and K. Wagner call for reshaping the approach to colonial history. They criticize postcolonial scholarship for automatically understanding colonial knowledge as a mere reflection of European dominance, containing hardly anything else than European prejudices. ‘Colonial knowledge has been recast as an embodiment of Eurocentric discourse alone.’<sup>147</sup> ‘A straightforward correlation between knowledge and power cannot be taken for granted,’<sup>148</sup> Roque and Wagner rightfully state, because it leads to a misrepresentation of colonial knowledge. Furthermore, this straightforward understanding ignores the fact that colonial knowledge is derived from a more complex and *entwined* reality, in which natives were *involved* in the knowledge production. Roque and Wagner call for a critical approach that appreciates the complexity of colonialism and therefore focuses on empirical specification, a temporal reconstruction of *practices* in which the specific historical actions, entities and the materiality of colonial encounters are examined.

There are some very clear similarities between Roque and Wagner’s project and the STS approaches. In a similar fashion, Roque and Wagner stress the fact that natives are both object and subject of knowledge. Also, they argue against the overly dichotomous view of dominance and objectification of post-structuralism and postcolonial theory. Finally, both approaches stress the complexity of reality, in which different actors act, and in which the difference between sites and materials matter. Both approaches wish to make this complexity clear through empirical observations.

Taking this ‘practical turn’ in colonial history and Mol’s praxiography as a point of departure, I analysed Van der Sande’s anthropological work on Papuan race. In the first part of my analysis, I focused on the enactment of race by chronologically following the different practices undertaken by Van der Sande. As it turned out, Van der Sande’s practices of measuring Papuan bodies were mainly concerned with ever trying to fit measurements and groups into racial categories and decide what the Papuan race is and is not. I indicated three types of practice, and each type

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<sup>147</sup> R. Roque, and K. Wagner, *Engaging colonial knowledge. Reading European archives in world history* (Basingstoke 2012), 7.

<sup>148</sup> R. Roque, and K. Wagner, *Engaging colonial knowledge*, 9.

consisted of several practices that all enacted Papuan race to the same thing: in relation to the body, geography and ethnography. And as became clear, within each set of practices, the use of different techniques and materials on different body sites created different enactments of race; race multiplied. Yet, through modes of coherence, these differences were erased and became non-problematic, creating some sort of racial singularity.

In the first type of practices race is enacted in multiple ways in relation to the biological body. In using different materials and techniques to measure all sorts of body parts, Van der Sande gets all sorts of different results that relate to Papuan race. For instance, measuring the head from the chin to the crown generates different numbers – and thus supports different theories of race – than a measurement of the chin to the top of the skull. These results are, according to Van der Sande, incompatible. Furthermore, some body parts are measured with different techniques for different goals. Thus, certain body sites are divided into smaller sites because of the different measuring practices. So, with every body part and every technique, a new race is enacted. Yet the first step in bringing all these different results and enactments together – the first mode of coherence – is the fact that Van der Sande notes the different measurements on one single form or schedule per measured Papuan. Here, possible contradictions between measurements and enactments are erased.

The second types of practice enact race in different ways in relation to topographical locations. The next step for Van der Sande was to add up and weigh all the different measurements of different body parts from the different forms. Firstly, through many calculations, Van der Sande produced medians, maximum and minimums concerning the body measurements. Secondly, he attached these numbers to specific geographical clusters. In both steps, the possible contradictions between individual measurements are non-problematic; complexity gets erased.

The last type of practices enacts race differently in relation to certain populations which are compared to each other. This is the practice of writing the book, of combining all the bodily and geographical information. More specifically, in the chapter ‘Anthropology’ of his publication, Van der Sande focused on *comparing* the averages from geographical groups to each other, and therefore the geographical sites from the second type of practices only become significant in relation *to each other*. Within these comparing practices, a distinction is made between several geographical clusters on the basis of bodily averages, as Van der Sande displayed in the tables. Not only are there all different sorts of comparison between Papuan geographical clusters, which erase individual differences, there are also comparisons between ‘the Papuan’ and other larger geographical clusters, again erasing differences between different Papuan groups. Thus, Van der

Sande ‘zooms out’ throughout his practices, which make the different sites mutually inclusive. The people from Lake Sentani are part of the interior people, who are further part of the Papuans, who are part of the Oceanic Negroes. Finally, the Oceanic Negroes as a cluster only exists through the individual measuring practices. All the different practices depend on each other. The three logics of enacting race – in relation to biology, geography and populations – come together in the final practice of writing the book.

This final practice of writing the book becomes important to understand the relation between the different sites and enactments. In the book, Van der Sande switches between the three types of logic, sometimes even within one sentence. For instance, body sites and geographical sites are linked to ethnographical characteristics, and thus these sites start to refer to one another. By letting biological sites refer to other sites, Van der Sande is able to let the biological say something about the ethnographical. And this is the crucial point where his understanding of race becomes significant. It specifically shows what Van der Sande is trying *to do*: to find Papuan racial characteristics and essences. He wants to present a unity, a racial core. Accordingly, he erases differences, and combines the body, the geographical and the ethnographical and lets them refer to each other to present such a unity. The racial unity is however fictional: there are modes of difference in which the enactment of race multiplies. Furthermore, the modes of coherence erase differences. The unity is, to use Mol’s term, a ‘virtual common object.’

Through applying the praxiographic approach, it thus becomes possible to understand the logics behind the production of knowledge, in this case the knowledge of a unified Papuan race. But, as discussed, this unity is fake, there is a plurality that hangs together in all sorts of ways but fundamentally differs too. The unity is pragmatic and therefore fragile. With Mol’s praxiography, a new perspective on the production of colonial knowledge of the racial body can be presented. By analysing different techniques and materials, it becomes possible to demonstrate how biological differences are enacted, without relying on power structures. Furthermore, this case study addresses a dynamic and material body, the Papuan body that changes the understanding of race in every single practice, and that resists biological determination in its multiplicity and fluidity.

Where the first part of the case study broadened the agency of bodies, materials and techniques, the second part turns towards the Papuans themselves and their agentic capacities. This is what Roque and Wagner emphasize most strongly, that colonial knowledge was produced in encounters between different people, including natives. They argue that the colonial texts are

multivocal and demonstrate that natives participated in the production of colonial knowledge, or influenced the type of knowledge that was produced.<sup>149</sup> Similarly, both Mol and New Materialism claim that the object of study ‘talks back’ and has the agentic capacity to participate in the production of knowledge.

I therefore envisioned the encounter between the Dutch physical anthropologist and the Papuans as an entwined reality in which both Van der Sande and the Papuans acted. The study thus assumed that the natives co-produced the Western knowledge about the Papuan race. It showed to be possible to find the words, visions and agency of the Papuans. However scant, it was possible to paint a picture of the contact between the expedition members and the Papuans. First and foremost, the expedition members needed access to the indigeneous people; they needed to be let into the villages by the natives. Once they were accepted, whole villages could turn out, which encouraged a lively trade of several objects between the expedition members and the villagers. Thus, the relationship the Dutch scientists had with the Papuans was of crucial importance for the access to sources, people, and their bodies, which in effect was crucial for the production of colonial knowledge. The Papuans had the agency to set boundaries and control access. This case study therefore demonstrates that narratives of European dominance and native subjection are negligent of the complexity of the encounter and the natives’ agency to set and control boundaries.

Yet the next step would be to analyse the interaction between Van der Sande and the individual people he measured, to adhere to the interaction between subject and object of knowledge, both co-producing knowledge in the encounter. If we stick with the praxiographic approach and focus on materials and techniques, the agency of the Papuans to accept these measurements becomes part of reconstructing the encounter. The natives do not fully know what those materials do and mean, as they are unfamiliar with where they came from and what they are used for. There must be a form of agreement and agency on the part of the Papuan to allow this. We cannot overlook the fact that the indigenous must give permission for letting Van der Sande touch the body, that the native gives access to the body. If we no longer want to view the Papuan as a passive and non-interacting object of study, the point of controlling access to the body becomes pivotal too.

Thus by focusing on the human agents in practices in which knowledge of the body is produced, it becomes clear that the subjective power of the agents needs to be analysed. So, by applying praxiography to this type of body history, our attention has turned to power relations. Through addressing the agency of the body with praxiography it has become clear that we should

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<sup>149</sup> ‘Indigenous people and their worldviews cannot simply be denied a presence or participation in the construction of colonial knowledge.’ R. Roque, and K. Wagner, *Engaging colonial knowledge*, 24.

also address the agency of the individual acting *with* the body. But assuming the co-production of knowledge and stressing the Papuan power to control access to the villages is not enough. If we do not add the agentic capacities of the embodied individual to our analysis, we do not explain the power relations in the event that have empirically become apparent, but simply repeat them. Therefore I want to specifically direct attention to the self-determination of the Papuans to control access *to their bodies*. I argue that agency in this account means that Papuans as *humans* have agency to consciously determine *body* boundaries, to decide what their bodies will and will not do. This is the specific type of agency of interfering in the environment that follows from accounts in which knowledge about bodies is produced by different actors. And this is the type of agency that needs to be theorized and historicized for this type of body history: understanding agency to mean the capacity to self-determine the body is essential for understanding the production of knowledge of the body. It takes bodies to produce knowledge of the bodies. The act of providing access stands right in between the bodies and the production of knowledge, between the ontology and the epistemology.

In sum, applying praxiography to a historical case study has shown three things, or what we might call three ‘types’ of agency of the body. First, it becomes clear that praxiography is very helpful for unravelling the logic behind body knowledge, through its focus on techniques, materials and by its potential to expose how singularity is created. This body is neither culturally nor biologically determined, but simply acts and interferes in a complex reality. Secondly, the praxiographic method goes very well with the assumption – discussed in both ANT and praxiography – that different actors co-produce knowledge of the body. Thus, bodies are no longer simply objects of study but become participating agents in the production of knowledge. Finally, applying praxiography to case studies in which knowledge of the body is produced demonstrates that the extent to which human actors have the agency to determine their bodies is an important aspect of the event. If all humans involved participate in the production of knowledge, we have to analyse how they do so.

But is it possible to address this specific type of agency with the STS approaches? There seem to be two problems. First of all, ANT remains unclear what the agency of the body *means* and what the body exactly *is*. It argues for the understanding that objects of knowledge are also subjects and that objects in general have agency to interact and influence how events go. But is that type of agency the same as the ability to self-determine? It does not seem to be: having agentic capacities as an (non-fixed) object towards a reality is not the same thing as having agentic capacities towards itself, to fix and control boundaries. What the body is and how its agency

should be envisioned remains unclear. Only Mol's theory specifically addresses the body. In Mol's praxiography of atherosclerosis, we see that this disease is enacted differently in the body per practice, but this is not the result of the body that acts differently, in the end the materials and techniques determine the enactment of the body. And since the enactment is a way to approach what the disease or the body *is*, it seems that praxiography might argue for technical determination of the body. Similarly, it could be argued that the Papuan bodies were not enacting race differently *by themselves*, but through the actions of materials and techniques.

Thus, it seems that the agentic capacities of the body are either unclear or problematic. The body does not necessarily have the capacity to determine itself. This brings me to the second problem: it seems that ANT erases humans from their accounts, leading to the conclusion that humans cannot determine themselves either. This happens because these accounts focus so much on making matter matter, on including the non-human, that they specifically argue against human deliberation. Because reality is complex, Bruno Latour argues that ANT does not choose between free subjects and subjects living in subjection. Instead, he argues, 'things, quasi-objects, and attachments are the real centre of the social world, not the agent, person, member or participant – nor is it society or its avatars.'<sup>150</sup> Thus, in moving away from structures and context, Latour's ANT analysis also distances itself from face-to-face interaction as a level of understanding 'the social.' Latour states that interactions are not the correct level of analysis because 'each site becomes the result of the action at a distance of some other agency.'<sup>151</sup> Each action is interfered by other agencies, or '*structuring templates* circulating through channels most easily materialized by techniques.'<sup>152</sup> 'If you began to probe the origin of each of your idiosyncrasies, would you not be able to deploy, here again, the same star-like shape that would force you to visit many places, people, times, events that you had largely forgotten?'<sup>153</sup> John Law agrees: 'I argue that the kaleidoscope of impressions and textures I mention above reflects and refracts a world that in important ways cannot be fully understood as a specific set of determinate processes. (...) That is, events and processes are not simply complex in the sense that they are technically difficult to grasp (...) Rather, they are also complex because they *necessarily exceed our capacity to know them*.'<sup>154</sup>

So, the point that humans are not the centre of the world is connected to a specific understanding of the human as an actor: this actor is unaware of other agents, and as we have seen above, actors 'remain puzzled by the identity of the participants in any course of action if

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<sup>150</sup> B. Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 238.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibidem*, 219.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibidem*, 196.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibidem*, 209.

<sup>154</sup> J. Law, *After method*, 6.

they want to assemble them again.<sup>155</sup> For ANT, action is dislocated and actors do not know what makes them act. So, not only are human actors unaware and puzzled, once the human acts, s/he does so unconsciously. 'Action is not done under the full control of consciousness, action should rather be felt as a node, a knot, and a conglomerate of many surprising sets of agencies that have to be slowly disentangled.'<sup>156</sup> Latour calls these other agencies that influence or underlie human action 'plug-ins.' In *Reassembling the Social* (Oxford 2005), he interrelates his understanding of plug-ins with Mauss's *habitus*.<sup>157</sup> And thus, it seems that we are back to the problem of practice theory: agents are no longer driven by Bourdieu's 'structuring structures' but are *unconsciously* driven by other agents. And although Latour explains that these plug-ins have no determining power but simply make someone do something, this perspective on humans leaves no room for purpose or intentionality.

Why should there be an opposition between nature-unconsciousness on the one hand and human-awareness on the other? Furthermore, Law contends that 'agency is imagined as emotive and embodied, rather than as cognitive.'<sup>158</sup> Why should the cognitive and the emotive or embodied be oppositional too? Why is there such a persistent separation of the human and the body when it comes to agency? If we want to analyse humans and their bodies as agents with capacities for self-determination, this requires a conscious state of decision making, of not separating body-nature-unconsciousness from human-rationality-awareness. As long as humans remain unconscious or unaware in their actions, there is no room for agency as self-determination. In sum, we cannot take the aim of decentring the human too far.

How does Annemarie Mol envision this? She is the one who argues that patients talk back, who analyses both humans and their bodies in an agentic manner. In 'Embodied action, enacted bodies: the example of hypoglycaemia' (2004),<sup>159</sup> Mol and Law argue that in order to get people's self-awareness back into modern medicine, we need to pay attention to what a body is, how it is enacted and temporarily fixed as a unity. Having a body and being a body is doing a body: enactment should overcome the subject-object dichotomy. But although this approach lets the patients talk, we have seen that the body itself is not an active agent, because its multiplicity is determined not by itself but by other objects. The argument that the body is 'a complex configuration' does not provide tools for a human that self-determines her or his body.

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<sup>155</sup> B. Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 47.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibidem*, 44.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibidem*, 204-213.

<sup>158</sup> J. Law, *After method*, 3.

<sup>159</sup> A. Mol and J. Law, 'Embodied action, enacted bodies: the example of hypoglycaemia,' in: *Body and society* 10 (2004) 43-62.



Besides the problem of the separation between human and body, it thus becomes clear that there is a problem with the argument that actors are not self-enclosed, but complex and entangled with their surroundings. As we have seen with the case study on Papuans, there are things like body boundaries, events in which humans control access to their bodies and allow the body to be touched. There are events in which humans-with-bodies have the power to set boundaries and protect themselves from the outside. The idea that notions of movement and network overcome the agency-structure dichotomy<sup>160</sup> does not hold up when there are specific choices to be made in relation to agency and power in the event, practice or encounter. Complexity and unpredictability are very interesting and helpful tools to re-envision reality, but they should not be related to unconsciousness. I am sure that when Roque and Wagner proposed complexity for more indigenous involvement they were not arguing for including natives who are unaware of what is making them act. The STS approaches seem to argue against an understanding of a rational enlightened human being, against idealism,<sup>161</sup> but in that move erase human deliberation, consciousness, awareness and the agentic capacity to set boundaries and allow access.

Above, three types of agency of the body have been indicated, resulting from the application of praxiography to a historical case study. In search of the perspective of ANT and praxiography on human autonomy in relation to the body – the third type of agency – it has become clear that these approaches in fact do not overcome one crucial dichotomy, namely the separation between the body and the human. If we understand bodily agency to be self-determination, a separation of the body from the human is untenable. This also explains the first problem I indicated in this chapter. It is indefensible to view the body in its self-determining agency as ‘an object’ or as ‘matter,’ just like other matter because of its essential relation to some sort of thinking, feeling and judging self. Moreover, how should ‘the body’ as unthinking matter control access? That seems like a rather vague point of view. Indeed, for certain agentic capacities, the body and the human are inherently connected. The agency of the *human-with-body* is also the capacity to self-determine, control boundaries and provide access. This is something that comes from *within* the human-with-body. ANT and praxiography seem to fail in providing such an understanding of bodily agency because these approaches fail to overcome several oppositions that are crucial for the body, such as conscious-unconscious, cognitive-emotive and human-body. The humans

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<sup>160</sup> See Latour’s critique of the understanding of actor within actor-network theory in B. Latour, ‘On recalling ANT’, in: J. Law & J. Hassard, *Actor network theory and after*. (Malden, MA 1999) 15-25.

<sup>161</sup> K. Canning, ‘Feminist history after the linguistic turn: historicizing discourse and experience,’ *Signs* 19:2 (1994) 377 and J. Law, *After method*, 7-8.

involved are either unconscious or unaware of or confused by what is happening. I am not arguing that we should go back to analysing humans as rational and enlightened, but I do think that, for the history of body knowledge, it is important to see the subject-object of our studies as intentional humans-with-bodies. Only in this way can we understand how several agents acted in the event in which knowledge of the body was produced.

Thus, in analysing practices in which knowledge of the body is produced, there is a crucial human factor that needs to be adhered to. More specifically, by applying praxiography it has become clear that there are power inequalities between the different human agents acting in practice that require thorough analysis in relation to the production of body knowledge. In the history of body knowledge, it seems that practices of knowledge production are also practices of power. If we want to discuss the body and its agentic capacities in these types of practices, we also need to take human deliberation into account.

Let us analyse a second application of praxiography to the history of body knowledge, and see if similar types of agency of the body and similar problems with power relations appear.

#### §4.2 Praxiography and hermaphroditism

Dutch historian Geertje Mak has very successfully demonstrated how Mol's praxiography can be deployed for body history. In *Doubting sex. Inscriptions, bodies and selves in nineteenth-century hermaphrodite case histories* (Manchester 2012), Mak applied the praxiographic method to nineteenth-century medical cases concerning hermaphrodites. 'On the basis of this *praxeographic approach* to the body and its history, I developed the main analytic framework with which I could sort out the huge variety all my case histories constituted; by *historicizing* the different ways in which sex and doubting sex were enacted in medical practices.'<sup>162</sup> It provided a way to doubt the fixed category 'sex' and led to the question on what grounds the category of sex was exactly based. And through a praxiographic approach Mak was able to argue that hermaphroditism was not one thing, one object, but could better be understood as multiple ways in which sex was *doubted*. Mak argues that 'doubting sex' historically was enacted differently in different circumstances, with different kind of actors and different objects. Historicizing hermaphroditism by analysing cases of doubtful sex *in practice* led Mak to conclude that, when new medical techniques multiplied, the ways in which sex could be doubted multiplied dramatically.

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<sup>162</sup> G. Mak, *Doubting sex. Inscriptions, bodies and selves in nineteenth-century hermaphrodite case histories* (Manchester 2012) 7.

Despite the multiplicity of enacting doubtful sex, Mak indicates three underlying logics to understand how sex was assigned to a person or how someone's sex was doubted. Her main argument is that the logics, which refer to an underlying mentality, changed due to technical developments in medicine, eventually leading to an understanding of a sexed self, separate from the body. 'The rationale of sex as true representation of the body mainly changed because of medicine's increasing capacity to detach the person from the medical establishment of sex. (...) I do consider the emergence of medical techniques and routines isolating the body from its social context and its embodiment one of the essential conditions for the coming into being of a separate, autonomous, inner sexed self.'<sup>163</sup> Thus, Mak deploys the praxiographic focus on techniques to historicize the doubting of sex and to retrieve the different underlying mentalities regarding sex.

Initially, until 1860/1870, the role of the hermaphrodite *in society* determined the way that doubtful sex was dealt with. Someone's moral and social position in society was pivotal in dealing with a sexually ambiguous body. Mak argues that because of this moral and social order, and because people were inscribed in the social, moral, economic and legal fabric of the community based on their sex, publicly dealing with ambiguous sex could affect the entire community. Therefore, the initial reaction was secrecy, non-intervention and a policy of containment. For the hermaphrodite, his/her subjectivity was 'turned socially' and there was not a fixed sense of sexual self that one could adhere to. Instead, as a person within the community, there were a few social scripts the hermaphrodite could turn to in dealing with the ambiguous sex. His/her subjective power was further present in the fact that sex reassignment could never be forced.

After 1860/1870, a new medical paradigm emerged, with new techniques of examining or 'reading' the *body*. New techniques demanded the inside of the body to be examined in order to understand its 'truth', and therefore patients had to accept the touching and penetrating of the body by physicians. The fruitfulness of this new type of medical examination was not self-evident: courts, patients and other doctors had to be convinced. Yet resistance of the patient was overcome by better techniques, like anaesthesia and improving surgical skills, which provided more and more access to bodies by making the body a passive object of medical research. Whereas before, the body could hardly be detached from the person and his/her role in society, medicine now came with new techniques to 'cut the body loose' from the social context. Through these techniques, the body and its sex became detached from the moral and social context, and even from the person itself: through microscopic study, sex became laboratory sex. The body had its own medical truth, apart from the truth it could have in society and the truth it

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<sup>163</sup> G. Mak, *Doubting sex*, 3/5.

could have for the individual. Or actually the body had medical *truths*: in following praxiography, Mol argues that there were many clinical enactments of the sexed body.

Yet paradoxically, this dislodgement of the body from the person had the effect of creating a sex of the *self*, the third logic. With the sexed self, Mak refers to a modern Western understanding of innate, fixed individual qualities, located in the psyche, which can be treated as a separate object of study. Mak argues that when it became medically possible to examine the sex of the body, the sex of the hermaphrodite's self as an object of reflection was also created. Doubtful sex became increasingly visible through new technologies: when physical examination by doctors became more accepted, doubtful sex was more and more found during clinical encounters. Furthermore, as surgery and anaesthesia developed, ambiguous sexuality was also found during surgical procedures. Thus, by accidentally discovering more people to have an ambiguous sex and by having more options to surgically alter one's sex, the sex of the self emerged as a clinical concern, or as a logic, to which patient and doctor referred. Doctors started to question if gonadal, 'scientific' sex (the sex of the body) should be decisive in such cases. Instead of the relationship between the sex of the body and the social inscription, the relationship between sex of the body and the sex of the self became the main issue.

As we can see, Mak deploys praxiography and its primary focus on techniques in specific practices to understand the different enactments of an object and the different logics of knowledge of that object. In addition, she specifically deals with the agentic capacities of the individuals whose bodies are measured and examined. The case studies that Mak deals with are also practices of power and therefore require an analysis of this 'subjective power' of individuals and the power relations between the different human actors in the encounter. First, Mak deals with the fact that knowledge of hermaphroditism is produced in the encounter between the patient and the doctor. In order for the doctor to gain access to the body to examine hermaphroditism, the patient has to disclose his/her body. Mak argued that this became more and more normal after 1860, because of the trust in doctors, and more possible, because of new techniques. Secondly, she argues that with the first logic, the hermaphrodites have subjective power in relation to certain social scripts that are available. With the second logic, Mak argues that the third logic appears, the sex of the self, which could not be denied by doctors. In fact, Mak demonstrates that the sex of the self becomes, as an object of study, a deciding factor in sex-assignment. Furthermore, she makes clear that it was never possible to force a hermaphrodite to live according to his gonadal sex, to force him/her to undergo surgery or a sex reassignment.

Through the three logics, Mak seems to be able to historicize human autonomy in relation to the body.<sup>164</sup>

Thus, like my case study about Papuan race, Mak demonstrates that praxiography is very helpful to examine the ontology and knowledge of certain objects. Yet Mak's analysis of hermaphroditism also shows that, in encounters in which body knowledge is produced, the power relations between the human actors need to be analysed, we need to understand the subjective power of the individuals whose bodies are measured. Without an analysis of this human factor, praxiography as a method might lead to narratives of technical determination of the body, since it argues that through different techniques, materials, sites and unspecified 'actors', the body is differently enacted in its ontology. Thus praxiography offers a great solution to cultural and biological determinism of the body, but in order to refrain from technical determinism it needs a specific focus on the agentic capacities of the human-with-body in the encounter.

Let us take a closer look at how Mak deals with the human power relations in the practices of knowledge production. As mentioned above, the agentic capacities indicated by Mak are the social scripts and the self. We can argue that, in this way, Mak historicizes the autonomy of hermaphrodites in relation to their bodies. In arguing that the new technologies enabled new subject positions, Mak's introduction of the hermaphrodite autonomous self is way to 'resist a criticism in which the self of the hermaphrodite is presumably "suppressed" by an authoritarian medical discourse.'<sup>165</sup> The sex of the self is introduced as a logic in relation to the logic of the sex of the body. This sex of the body could be examined better due to improving technical developments in medicine, as Mak contends. For instance, she mentions that the main objective of anaesthesia was often to silence the patient. But the sex of the body was brought in relation with the sex of the self and patients could never be forced to undergo sex reassignment. Thus it seems that the sex of the self might provide some sort of agency in relation to the sex of the body and medicine's increasing access to the body.

Yet, Mak argues that the sex of the self is an effect of disciplinary power. The self is not a subject position from which the hermaphrodite could choose between several options, the self *itself* became an object of study: its sex became something that doctors could examine and define. Moreover, 'the creation of a scientific search for the relationship between physical sex and

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<sup>164</sup> Mak explains her point, 'The *concept* of subjectivity is not historicized here, for the fact that people act, speak, desire and think does not change. But, as subjectivity is always effected through existing discourses and practices, its *content* is historically in flux.' She argues that subjectivity or the self switched from a position to talk *from* to a position to talk *about*. G. Mak, *Doubting sex*, 44-45.

<sup>165</sup> G. Mak, *Doubting sex*, 159.

psychological sex was another new medical technique of control and discipline. In the future, it would increasingly define which psychological characteristics and sexual inclinations should be considered “natural” or “normal” or at least statistically predominant for women and men. Naturalizing and normalizing sex therefore began to replace legal and moral prescriptions.<sup>166</sup> Thus, in the end, the sex of the self is a way to resist the idea that hermaphrodites are suppressed by the new medical discourse, but also becomes an object of control and discipline. It thus seems that Mak deals with human power relations in practices in which knowledge of hermaphroditism is produced by turning to a discursive approach. Mak argues that the body is matter without meaning outside of discourse, but cannot be reduced to discourse because it is read by techniques and materials. She thus seems to combine the praxiographic method with discursive analysis in order to address the power relations.

Thus, Mak’s analysis of hermaphroditism also demonstrates the importance of analysing power relations between intentional humans-with-bodies in practice. Although ANT demands us to stay away from ‘context’ or ‘structures’, it seems difficult to analyse doctor-patient relations without in the end referring to some sort of larger framework.<sup>167</sup> Similarly, I argued that my praxiographic analysis of Papuan race demonstrated that the goal of finding racial essences probably facilitated colonialist, hegemonic goals and scientific racism. Such claims can become problematic in relation to cultural determinism (see chapter 1), but it is impossible to not adhere to power relations in practice. In order to understand history, and, for instance, medical development, we have to analyse what the different practices *mean*, instead of merely staying at a descriptive level. But trying to explore what practices mean in terms of historical context does not necessarily have to mean that we reduce practices to ‘social forces’.<sup>168</sup>

These issues hint at the difficult relationship between discourse, actor-network theory and praxiography at large. In chapter 3, I explained how ANT and discourse analysis resemble each other in the understanding that both networks and discourses are understood to be productive; networks are the scaled-down versions of discourses. But what does this exactly mean? If discourses are able to determine or form society, how are networks able to do so? And what does this say in relation to human agency or autonomy? ANT and specifically Latour argue that reverting to larger power structures to explain power inequalities is not the way to explain the

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<sup>166</sup> G. Mak, *Doubting sex*, 204.

<sup>167</sup> Methodologically speaking, we can argue that Mak uses praxiography as part of a larger methodological pallet. Her focus is on techniques and materials to understand logics of doubting sex, but she also uses discourse-analysis to understand sex in relation to power and turns to older social history approaches, to describe possibilities in daily life and marital patterns. As such, Mak combines practice with context through these different approaches.

<sup>168</sup> B. Latour, *Reassembling the social*, 7/22.

lack of or distribution of power. Is it therefore problematic to combine praxiography with discourse analysis?

Even larger, these questions refer to a field of tension between on the one hand the relativist aim to stay away from deterministic views, and on the other hand the wish to make claims and properly analyse historical development and describe power inequalities. In applying praxiography to body history, is it possible to refrain from structures by focusing on practices, like ANT argues, and still make claims about transformation and human power relations, which become visible in the case studies?

Historian Ed Jonker has argued that historians of science nowadays aim to leave grand narratives behind and therefore mostly write particularistic, small histories on local knowledge, 'as a practical, local activity that is strictly limited to its cultural context. No claims to truth, validity, let alone progress or even development were allowed.'<sup>169</sup> Yet recently this relativist approach, which has its roots in anthropology and postmodernism, has proven to be disappointing and insufficient, and there is a new need for judgement and interpretation. This means for history of science that analyses should not just focus on local practices and on demonstrating how locally and temporally knowledge is bound. Jonker states that there is a new tendency towards demonstrating and claiming scientific development over a longer period. Likewise, Mak has demonstrated a development in techniques and logics of 'knowing' hermaphroditism.

Although Jonker does not necessarily discuss how power relations, discursive analysis and deconstruction can be reconceptualised, my above arguments in relation to praxiography, agency and the production of body knowledge in the past seem to resonate with this new tendency within history of science. Describing local practices seems to become most meaningful in relation to arguments on historical development and meaning. As such we need to find ways to combine practice analysis with generalizing strategies to show development and meaning. Sociologists Martha Feldman and Wanda Orlikowski have made a similar statement:

"The theoretical generalizations produced through the use of practice theory are not predictions in the conventional sense but may be better understood as principles that can explain and guide action. They articulate particular relationships or enactments that offer insights for understanding other situations while being historically and contextually grounded."<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> E. Jonker, 'Van relativisme naar oordeelsvorming. Recente tendensen in de wetenschaps-geschiedschrijving', *Studium* 1 (2011) 15.

<sup>170</sup> M. Feldman and W. Orlikowski, 'Theorizing practice and practicing theory,' *Organization science* 22:5 (2011) 1249.

In this way, practice analysis and praxiography become tools for providing strong foundations for theoretical generalizations.

### §4.3 Praxiography for body history

In this chapter we have seen that the praxiographic approach to body history is very successful in overcoming social and biological determination by addressing the body in its material-ontological multiplicity. The focus on materials, techniques, sites and enactment seems to add some sort of materiality to the historical accounts. The non-discriminating attitude towards what defines an actor also makes it possible to demonstrate that all humans involved in the encounter produce the knowledge of the body, both ‘object’ of knowledge and ‘subject’ of knowledge. As such, the agency of the body seems to be the agency of a material body to act and interfere in events, and the agency of multiple human actors to participate in the production of knowledge of the body.

Yet there are some problems with praxiography that undermine another understanding of the agency of the body. Its focus on techniques for the ontological enactment of the body creates the possibility of technical determinism: the body *is* made differently because of different techniques.

Moreover, the STS approaches are not clear on what defines an actor and how this works in practice. If we look at ANT and praxiography at large, it even seems that human deliberation is consciously erased from these accounts and is assisted by a false dichotomy between body-nature-unconsciousness and human-rationality-consciousness. This becomes problematic in relation to practices in which knowledge of the body is produced because power relations are also evident in these practices. Body history is not just about the body but also about how people dealt with the body. Therefore, human relations are essential for body history. It becomes difficult to address these power relations, especially in relation to intentional humans-with-bodies that have agentic capacities over that body. Thus, the idea of a wide understanding of actors in practice seems to be more of a metaphysical concept than a practical tool. As such, I argue that we need to remain aware of this aspect of agentic capacities in the practice of knowledge production and *add* it to the praxiographic method for historical research.

Secondly and in relation to this issue of describing power relations, the STS approaches depart from an understanding that ‘structure’ or ‘context’ are not the way to understand practices. Yet, as we have seen, merely staying at a local, descriptive level is not preferable; history becomes interesting when we are able to explain or demonstrate development and historical meaning. Mak demonstrated a possible solution to both problems in her case study by historicizing human



agency in relation to the body. In order to do so, she turned to discourse analysis and thus showed that although praxiography sheds new light on historical case studies, it is not enough to meaningfully explain historical development in relation to the examined object, in this case doubtful sex, and in relation to human action.

Thus, the extent to which praxiography can be used for the history of the production of body knowledge has been discussed. It needs *something else* to fully analyse and explain these practices, an additional focus on human actors and their relation with the body in terms of agentic capacities to not revert to technical determinism. This focus is further needed to fully understand *how* different human actors participate in the production of knowledge and also to address the power inequalities that are often present in the historical case studies examined.

In these chapters, we have zoomed in from cultural history to body history, and now to the history of the production of body knowledge. Within this last subfield, I elucidated to what extent praxiography can be used to analyse practices in which knowledge of the body is produced between an object of knowledge – the patient – and the subject of knowledge – the physician or scientist. Now let us zoom out and analyse how praxiography as a practice of analysing the history of the body presents itself in a case study where there are several events in which the body becomes relevant, and where the knowledge produced in the encounter between doctor and patient is questioned in other encounters.

## Chapter 5. Praxiography and traveling knowledge. A final case study

In the previous chapter we have seen that praxiography is a great tool to analyse the production of knowledge about the body in past practices because it addresses both materiality and agency of the body in history. First of all, it addresses an active, living body in reality through ontology, enactment and multiplicity instead of just analysing representations, images, understandings and perceptions of the body. Secondly, because of its wide understanding of what is an actor in practice, praxiography leaves room for agency of the different (human) actors in the encounter, but, as we have seen, how one should address this agency remains unclear.

Because we have already explored the boundaries of praxiography in practices that focus on encounters between doctors and patients, I now want to zoom out from this specific encounter to a more difficult series of events in which knowledge of the body plays a crucial role. By doing so I want to explore what praxiography does in a slightly different type of body history. The legal arena serves as a good starting point for the type of next level 'history of body knowledge' that I want to address. It is in certain criminal cases that knowledge of the body is needed, produced, discussed, and rejected. Forensic medical experts create doctor-patient encounters, but the knowledge of the body that is produced in these encounters is subsequently transported to other events, such as court hearings and asylum observations. This makes a praxiographic analysis of the production of knowledge of the body slightly more difficult and therefore interesting. But such a case study also shows links with the previous analyses: again, the doctor-patient encounter is part of the case study and it is again within a nineteenth-century setting of medical professionalization, in this case forensic medicine.

But because we saw in the last chapter that agency of the body and power relations in practice become relevant in a praxiographic analysis of knowledge producing practices of the body, and especially its relation to discourse analysis, we need a topic that refers both to court, forensic medicine, power relations and has a historiography that has already discursively analysed the topic. The historiography of menstruation ties in well with these demands. First of all, as we will see below, the historiography has been inspired by the linguistic turn and has analysed power relations between physicians and patients through discursive means. Secondly, a praxiographic analysis of court cases in which menstruation plays an important role can shed new light on the historiography of menstruation and on the application of praxiography to body history.

As such, I would like to revisit the problems and potential solutions outlined in the previous chapters through a case study in which knowledge about menstruation is produced, discussed, questioned, and transported to different events. As we will see, the historiography of

menstruation shows the same problems as body history at large as I have indicated in chapter 1. The solution provided to solve the problems is similar to the answers provided in chapter 2. My solution to this topic in history has been described in chapter 3, and like chapter 4, this case study will demonstrate a praxiographic approach.

However, something interesting has happened during this analysis, in relation to materiality and agency. First of all, the previous chapters have argued that the materiality of the body can be addressed with praxiography through its empirical reconstruction of the real living body and its focus on ontology and enactment. But by zooming out just slightly from doctor-patient encounters to a more difficult series of events in a legal setting, the focus shifted towards the concept of *travelling knowledge*.

The notion of how knowledge and ideas move among different locations and transform in that travel has become more and more influential in the humanities. Introduced by Edward Said in his influential essay ‘Traveling theory,’ he states that theories are not static because they move between locations and change in the process.<sup>171</sup> In this travel, Said stresses the spatiality and temporality. The idea of travelling knowledge has been further developed by cultural theorist Mieke Bal, who discusses how concepts travel and change between disciplines.<sup>172</sup> This understanding of travelling knowledge is very much in line with STS approaches: it shows how knowledge is produced in practice. As such, it is not surprising that ANT has also picked up on this theme.<sup>173</sup>

The idea of travelling knowledge, theories and objects has recently crossed over to history too. Stephen Greenblatt’s manifesto for mobility studies in cultural history<sup>174</sup> seems to have been picked up by some historians. An amazing demonstration of travel in history has been undertaken by Ricardo Roque in his study on Timorese skulls in a Portuguese museum, which traces ‘the social and material webs formed by skulls, texts, and people.’<sup>175</sup> Likewise, Willemijn Ruberg argues in ‘Infanticide, body and min in the Netherlands 1811-1911,’ for applying the ideas on cultural mobility to medical history and trace how knowledge of the body travelled to the courtroom. The analysis below can be read in a similar fashion and has drawn inspiration from these new developments in the humanities.

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<sup>171</sup> E. Said, *The world, the text and the critic* (Cambridge MA 1983)

<sup>172</sup> M. Bal, *Travelling concepts in the humanities* (Toronto 2002)

<sup>173</sup> Mol and De Laet’s Zimbabwe Bush Pump shows how an object is transformed from site to site, thereby stressing the fluidness of the object and the impact of travel. See M. de Laet, and A. Mol, ‘The Zimbabwe Bush Pump: Mechanics of a Fluid Technology’, *Social Studies of Science* 30.2 (2000), 225-263.

<sup>174</sup> S. Greenblatt, *Cultural mobility. A manifesto* (Cambridge MA 2010).

<sup>175</sup> R. Roque, *Headhunting and colonialism. Anthropology and the circulation of human skulls in the Portuguese empire 1870-1930* (Basingstoke 2010) 11.

Secondly, we have seen that the praxiographic method raised questions about the agency of the humans involved in the encounter. In chapter 4 I argued that something needs to be added to praxiography in order to address the power relations in practice properly. Yet interestingly, this praxiographic practice mostly stressed the importance of travelling knowledge, and consequently overlooked the issue of agency more than in the other analyses. I will demonstrate that still, some interesting things are to be said about the agency of the ‘object’ of study, certainly in relation to the existing historiography of menstruation, and it even shows that combining discourse analysis with praxiography has surprising effects. Yet no crucial issues or answers concerning body boundaries or autonomy over the body – as the case studies in chapter 4 showed – followed from this exploration. As such, this praxiographic analysis has elucidated new important aspects for the history of the body but also shows that some issues that are crucial for certain case studies become less important for others.

### §5.1 The historiography of menstruation

Influenced by the linguistic turn in the humanities, gender historians since the 1970s and 1980s have focused on the role of gender in history, through notions of social-constructivism, language, agency and identity. Assuming the role of discourse on the production of reality and using deconstruction to expose the hidden meanings and blind spots in the archival material, these historians have been interested in examining how gender roles were perceived and constructed in history.

As such, some historians have specifically turned their attention to the history of menstruation. A topic that deals with the female body, these scholars have analysed how menstruation has been depicted in history and how this knowledge about the female body related to understandings of ‘women’ in general. As Dutch historian Willemijn Ruberg states in her article ‘The tactics of menstruation in Dutch cases of sexual assault and infanticide, 1750-1920,’<sup>176</sup> ‘historians studying menstruation have mostly concentrated on its representation, description, and explanation in medical textbooks or other prescriptive literature, as well as in doctor-patient correspondence.’<sup>177</sup> She goes on to argue that broadly speaking, the analysis of representation of menstruation has centred on three issues: which models of understanding menstruation were prevalent, whether menstruation has always been understood to be typically female, and finally the power of medical discourse and the multiplicity of knowledges about menstruation.

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<sup>176</sup> W. Ruberg, ‘The tactics of menstruation in Dutch cases of sexual assault and infanticide, 1750-1920,’ *Journal of women’s history* 25:3 (2013) 14-37.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibidem*, 17.

An important example of a gendered analysis of menstruation in history is British historian Julie Marie Strange's study 'Menstrual fictions: languages of medicine and menstruation, c. 1850-1930.'<sup>178</sup> By looking at medical textbooks on menstruation and case studies of the admittance of women in lunatic asylums, Strange argues that the medical profession started pathologising menstruation as a distasteful disease and a negative feature of femininity. As a growing discipline that was attracting more power to itself through claiming more and more expertise of the body, (male) medical discourse had the power to provide objective truths of the body. Yet importantly, Strange argues that the pathologising of menstruation was not based on objective or 'true' research, but reflected social and cultural understandings of women at large. Medical narratives of menstruation demonstrate 'what femininity was and ought to be.' Medicine could naturalize social conventions about gender through science, and as such *other* women. Specifically the link that was being made between physiology and psychology had othering powers. Physicians argued that menstruation caused psychological issues, such as emotional unbalance, hysteria and nervousness. They argued that menstruation took up too much energy of the body, leading crucial energy away from the brain. Especially in lunatic asylums, doctors claimed that 'the womb would reveal the cause of mental derangement.'<sup>179</sup>

From this, Strange concludes that the power imbalance between the male physician and the female patient and the pathologising of menstruation created a discourse that could exclude women from equality in society, by only highlighting their role as mothers and the issues of menstruation. Through analysing menstruation in history, Strange thus analyses gender roles and identity, while demonstrating the power of medical discourse.

Yet in 'The tactics of menstruation,' Ruberg indicates problems with approaches to the history of menstruation like Strange's. First of all, a focus on medical textbooks, which show 'dominant' or 'elitist' understandings of the body, excludes other types of knowledge, such as lay and local knowledge. Following from this approach, Strange concludes that 'female narratives of menstruation in such texts are obscured, fragmented and/or silenced,<sup>180</sup> since doctors were not interested in their stories. Broadly speaking then, there is a 'lack of female authorship within gynaecological stories about the body.'<sup>181</sup> Furthermore, this indicates a 'power imbalance between the patient and physician, one which held ramifications for the interpretation of femininity.'<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> J.M. Strange, 'Menstrual fictions: languages of medicine and menstruation, c. 1850-1930,' *Women's history review* 9:3 (2000) 607-628.

<sup>179</sup> J.M. Strange, 'Menstrual fiction,' 617.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibidem*, 609.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibidem*, 610.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibidem*, 610.

In clear contrast with Strange's approach, Ruberg aims to contribute to the historiography of menstruation by specifically analysing *non-dominant* ways of understanding menstruation. She 'shifts the spotlight' away from medical discourse and the medical setting to lower class girls and women, and the way they understood or presented their understanding of menstruation in court-cases concerning infanticide, rape or incest. 'Rather than outlining mainstream medical opinion on menstruation, as other scholars have done, or looking for a "genuine bodily experience" of lower class women, implying historians have an unmediated access to past corporeal understandings, I regard the Dutch legal records as evidencing the multiple stories women could choose from in relating their bodily experiences, within a frame of medical and local discourse.'<sup>183</sup>

To address this interaction with dominant discourse, Ruberg uses the concept of embodiment to analyse menstruation in Dutch legal cases, because of embodiment's stress on the appropriation of corporeal discourses *and* the accompanying agency and resistance. Embodiment thus becomes the 'interaction between cultural modes of menstruation and their interpretation by contextualized and sometimes resisting bodies of women acting in court cases.'<sup>184</sup> Furthermore, to attend to the individual autonomy of the women concerned, Ruberg makes use of Michel de Certeau's understanding of tactics, 'the inventiveness of ordinary men and women dealing with everyday practices in the face of overpowering "strategies"'.<sup>185</sup> In this understanding, discourse or power is both restraining and enabling. Discourses do not simply discipline the body, humans-with-bodies have tactics, to 'find their own ways' and even overthrow dominant understandings of the body. Ruberg's argument is that the ambiguity between different models of menstruation in Dutch law permitted women to opt between different narratives of menstruation in order to pick the one most favourable to their situation. Thus, female bodies were not just subjected to or silenced by dominant medical discourse: there were multiple interpretations about menstruation, creating a space which 'women eagerly used.' 'The play with knowledge and ignorance of their own bodies might be seen as a vital component of these women's tactics.'<sup>186</sup>

Thus, by focusing on other types of knowledges and 'tactics,' Ruberg is able to argue against Strange's notion that women's stories about their bodies hardly stood a chance against dominant medical discourse. Women were not simply 'docile bodies' subjected to discourse. So, it is demonstrated that looking at other types of source material can create different understandings of the history of menstruation, or, at large, the body. By looking for different

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<sup>183</sup> W. Ruberg, 'The tactics of menstruation,' 15.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibidem*, 14.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibidem*, 16.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibidem*, 28.

understandings of the body in *practice* – like judicial practice as Ruberg has done – we can come in contact with non-dominant views.

Yet, Ruberg hints at a second issue with the history of the body/menstruation. The article starts with a discussion of the neglect of the materiality of the body through a persistent discursive approach within body history. Her remark that the history of menstruation has mostly focused on representation and description of medical textbooks thus shows two problems: besides the focus on medical discourse instead of other types of knowledge, historians have mostly concentrated on *representations*, not materiality. For instance, Strange addresses *narratives* of menstruation, and willingly makes the biological textual because only the act of communicating the experience exists outside the individual.<sup>187</sup> Thus, her analysis denies the body its materiality. Yet we might argue that ‘The tactics of menstruation’ also lacks materiality. Ruberg introduces embodiment to the history of the body because of its focus on the interaction between dominant medical discourse and individual or understandings and agencies of the body ‘rather than its focus on material practices,’<sup>188</sup> as she makes explicit. It is still about the *representation* of the menstruating body, on dominant and non-dominant *ideas* about and *discourses* of menstruation instead of the female menstruating body itself.

Can we address both problems within one analysis? In a case study, I tried to tackle both problems within the history of menstruation by deploying the praxiographic approach. I tested its fruitfulness through a case study that specifically focuses on *practices of menstruation*: practices in which knowledge of the menstruating body was produced by different (non)human actors. The specific case study that I have chosen to explore is a legal case in which a girl is acquitted of a charge with arson through the use of the insanity plea. The argument that freed the girl from the death penalty was that her menstruation caused partial insanity, called *monomania*, which made her commit arson. Therefore she was not responsible for what she was doing.

Thus, I chose a source that in secondary literature has been described as a case study about menstruation and doctor-patient practices in a legal setting. I hoped to find a clear practice in which knowledge of menstruation was produced, and other distinct events to which this knowledge was transported and in which it was discussed or altered. But during the analysis it became clear that the source did not reveal that much information about menstruation. It made me therefore question to what extent menstruation was important in the different series of events. Things seemed to become more complex due to the legal arena. Therefore, following praxiography, I wanted to reconstruct the different series of events and the way menstruation

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<sup>187</sup> J.M. Strange, ‘Menstrual fictions,’ 608.

<sup>188</sup> W. Ruberg, ‘The tactics of menstruation,’ 15.

was enacted in those events. I wanted to analyse what menstruation exactly *was* in this entire case. To do so, I needed to examine how the knowledge of the body travelled and transformed between different sites. As such, most of the analysis is about the main object in different sites, and the way menstruation surfaces and disappears in those sites. I have also tried to examine what the politics of this (dis) appearance is. Praxiography was the perfect method to examine the travel and (dis)appearance, because of its focus on materials or objects, techniques, sites, and actors. By examining the object, techniques and travel of knowledge in and between different sites, I argue that this analysis of different enactments of menstruation in practice adds some sort of materiality of the body to the historiography of menstruation, as opposed to demonstrating different understandings of the female body as a result of different subject positions. It differs from the case studies that have been discussed before, but seems to show a materiality nonetheless, since it does not discuss representations but enactments of a real and living body and follows the travel of a body object through material documents.

Secondly, departing from my knowledge of the application of praxiography to the case studies discussed in the previous chapter, I wanted to analyse how the knowledge about menstruation-pyromania was co-produced in practice by all the actors involved. This focus proceeded from my assumption that the patient contributed in some way to the production of knowledge and that the actions and voice of the patient can be found in the medical records. Although the amount of material on her perspective was very scant, it did reveal some interesting points that could be related to the historiography of menstruation. I wanted to know how it related to assumptions of overpowering medical dominance and silencing of the patients. Specifically, I wanted to see how this story related to Julie Strange's claim that the girls had no authority over their menstrual stories. Was her story heard, did she have anything to say over her body, did she have any agency?

## **§5.2 A praxiographic analysis of the case of Marretje Moonen**

On the 24th of July 1839, nineteen-year old Marretje Moonen, a maid from Ouder-Amstel, set fire to a haystack on the farm of her employer Jan van der Neut, near Mijdrecht. Jan had fired her the evening before and Marretje had responded by saying that he would regret that decision. The next day, she went to the summer cottage nearby, took a piece of coal from the fire and put it in a haystack on the farm. Later she was arrested and some acquaintances and witnesses were asked questions about the event and, especially, about Marretje's character. Marretje was also taken in for questioning and she admitted that she had committed arson but also claimed she had not



done so willingly. While staring at the fire in the summer cottage, she stated that she had gotten 'bad thoughts' and had set fire to the haystack without thinking about it. Her defence attorney used her confession to plead insanity defence and eventually two physicians, J.L.C. Schroeder van der Kolk, professor of medicine at Utrecht University, and physician N.P. Visscher were ordered to examine her mental health. They stated in their *visum repertum* that the act was a deed of pyromania, caused by Marretje's irregular menstruation, which led to a lack of blood supply to the brain, causing insanity. Yet this statement was overthrown in court and Marretje was found guilty and sentenced to death on October 5<sup>th</sup>, 1839.

Yet a week later she was brought over to the asylum in Utrecht. During her stay in the house of arrest she started showing signs of insanity. On October 15<sup>th</sup> she was legally found insane, and therefore the criminal proceedings were suspended until after her recovery. She stayed in the asylum until July 28<sup>th</sup> 1840. In those months her condition worsened at first, to the point that the physicians doubted if she would ever recover. After a few months, her condition improved and she was found fit to appear in court. Her entire stay in the asylum was documented afterwards by her lawyer, mr. P.H.B. van Goltstein, based on what Schroeder van der Kolk had told him. On July 28<sup>th</sup>, Marretje appeared for the court and was ordered to be freed, based on the fact that it was proven entirely that she had committed arson due to insanity and was therefore held unaccountable for the crime.

In that same year, Marretje's lawyer published a book on the entire case, *Marretje Moonen, van brandstichting beschuldigd en wegens brandstichtingszucht vrijgesproken. Eene bijdrage tot de lijfstraffelijke regtspleging in ons vaderland* (Utrecht 1840). It included the accusation of the public prosecutor, the defence plea, his entire argument for Marretje's innocence, and the legal and medical documents. This book served the goal of demonstrating the importance of forensic medicine, since this case showed that, after thorough examination, someone was deemed unaccountable due to insanity. 'Door deze inrigting van het tegenwoordig geschrift, vleide ik mij duidelijk te kunnen doen zien, hoe moeilijk het dikwijls is, den schijn van den waarheid te onderscheiden, en hoezeer de geregtelijke geneeskunde medewerken kan, om de waarheid, bij een onderzoek naar schuld en onschuld, te doen zegevieren'<sup>189</sup>

Because of this publication, knowledge about this case remained available and as such the story of Marretje Moonen has popped up in several books on forensic medicine and psychiatry in the Netherlands.

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<sup>189</sup> P.H.B. van Goltstein, *Marretje Moonen, van brandstichting beschuldigd en wegens brandstichtingszucht vrijgesproken* (Utrecht 1840), 2.

### §5.2.1 Pleading pyromania in court

Before we turn to the praxiographic analysis of Marretje Moonen's case, it is important to first get a clear overview of the legal regulations on arson at the time, the state of forensic medicine, and the medical knowledge of pyromania.

From 1811 the French Code Pénal was applied to the Netherlands, until 1886. This criminal code was based on the principle that criminals should be punished proportionally to the crime, and the personality of the criminal should not be taken into account.<sup>190</sup> As such, the penalty for arson was very strict. Article 434 stated that:

‘Whoever shall wilfully set fire to any buildings, ships, boats, warehouses, dock or timber yards; woods, underwoods, or crops, either standing or cut down; and whether the wood be in heaps or cords, and the crops in heaps or stacks; or to combustible materials, so placed as to communicate the fire to such objects, or any of them; shall be punished with death.’<sup>191</sup>

The defence could opt for an insanity plea to argue against the ‘wilful’ part of the article, but the law was not clear about what defined mental insanity.<sup>192</sup> Furthermore, the responsibilities of the psychiatrists in court were also not clearly specified. Likewise, it did not describe how and to what extent the judge should take into account the specialist advice.<sup>193</sup> This lack of clarity did not benefit the fate of the perpetrator. Besides the fact that the law did not instruct the judge on getting medical help in determining insanity, the judge was not allowed to determine grades of insanity. As a consequence, perpetrators with any apparent form of mental insanity received the full punishment of the law.<sup>194</sup>

What also needs to be taken into account is the fact that the professionalization of forensic medicine happened later in the Netherlands than in other countries. For most of the nineteenth century, the consultation of doctors in court in cases of potential mental illness was

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<sup>190</sup> W. Ruberg, ‘Travelling knowledge and forensic medicine: infanticide, body and mind in the Netherlands, 1811-1911, *Medical history* 57:3 (2013) 364.

<sup>191</sup> T. Holmberg, ‘France: Penal Code of 1810’ (version July 4th, 2013) [http://www.napoleon-series.org/research/government/france/penalcode/c\\_penalcode3b.html](http://www.napoleon-series.org/research/government/france/penalcode/c_penalcode3b.html) (april 2007).

<sup>192</sup> This lack of juridical specificity is discussed in A.J. van Deinse, *De algemeene beginselen van strafregt, ontwikkeld en in verband beschouwd met de algemeene bepalingen der Nederlandsche strafwetgeving* (Middelburg 1860) 110 and 124; H.F. Thijssen, ‘Ligchamelijke oorzaken welke de toerekening van daden wegnemen of verminderen: brandstichtingszucht; wat behoort over dit geheele onderwerp in een Wetboek van Strafrecht bepaald te worden?’ in: C.A. den Tex and J. van Hall, *Bijdragen voor rechtsgeleerdheid en wetgeving* (Amsterdam 1828) 492-494.

<sup>193</sup> D.T.D. de Ridder, ‘Voorlichting van de psychiater aan de strafrechter rond de eeuwwisseling: diagnose of vonnis?’ in: F. Koenraadt (red.) *Ziek of schuldig? Twee eeuwen forensische psychiatrie en psychologie* (Gouda 1991) 35.

<sup>194</sup> S. van Ruller, *Genade voor recht. Gratieverlening aan ter dood veroordeelden in Nederland 1806-1870* (Amsterdam 1987), 165.

limited to only a few cases.<sup>195</sup> D.T.D. de Ridder tells us that initially, criminal lawyers were enthusiastic about the possibilities of psychiatrists to detect mental illness in criminal cases, but soon became more sceptical. Consequently, the influence of the psychiatry was restricted.<sup>196</sup>

From the 1850s this restriction was openly problematized in Dutch publications on forensic medicine<sup>197</sup> and around 1890 physicians started to play a bigger role in legal decision-making. This is both reflected and probably stimulated by the creation of forensic medicine as a specialization in 1893. Furthermore, there was a new attitude towards insane criminals at the end of the century, which stressed safety, prevention and controlling insanity rather than blame and punishment. As such, psychiatrists were increasingly considered as important experts in recognizing insanity by the turn of the century.<sup>198</sup>

Many young girls committed arson for unexplainable reasons and as we have seen, harsh punishment followed. The phenomenon of young female arsonists was generally discussed in medical textbooks. During the nineteenth century, one of the explanations for this behaviour was monomania.

‘Monomania’ was coined around 1810 by the French physician of insanity J.E.D. Esquirol, student of the famous physician P. Pinel. The core concept of the disease was partial insanity: the patient diagnosed with monomania had one pathological preoccupation in a generally healthy and normal working mind, causing audacity and excitement in the patient. Thus, monomania was a disease posed in direct contrast to the traditional notion of insanity, which indicated that the patient’s mind was completely insane.

The disease became trendy within popular and medical settings. Esquirol’s student, E.J. Georget, further tried to extend its influence by claiming that monomania could and should be used in court for the insanity plea. In court, insanity was understood traditionally as total insanity, clearly visible for all, and thus the court relied on the evaluation of laymen for the diagnosis and the consequential acquittal. But Georget stated that some insanity was hidden from the incompetent eye, such as monomania, and could only be identified by trained psychiatrists or

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<sup>195</sup> S. van Ruller, ‘De territoriumstrijd tussen juristen en psychiaters in de negentiende eeuw,’ in: F. Koenraadt (red.) *Ziek of schuldig? Twee eeuwen forensische psychiatrie en psychologie* (Gouda 1991) 26. Van Ruller decides this based on his own empirical research. However, Ruberg argues that the lack of professionalization of Dutch forensic medicine did not mean that doctors were not consulted in lawsuits. Ruberg makes this argument in relation to physical examinations of rape, not mental illness. Thus, it is possible to argue that physical examination by doctors in lawsuits happened earlier than mental examinations. See W. Ruberg, ‘Mother knows best.’ The transmission of knowledge of the female body and venereal diseases in nineteenth-century Dutch rape cases’ in: M. Dinges and R. Jütte, *The transmission of health practices* (c. 1500 to 2000) (Stuttgart 2011) 35.

<sup>196</sup> D.T.D. de Ridder, ‘Voorlichting van de psychiater aan de strafrechter rond de eeuwwisseling,’ 35.

<sup>197</sup> J.C. van den Broecke and Ph. Van den Broecke, *De uitoefening der geregelijke geneeskunde in Nederland. Hare gebreken, middelen tot herstel derzelve* (Utrecht 1845), 113-118.

<sup>198</sup> D.T.D. de Ridder, ‘Voorlichting van de psychiater aan de strafrechter rond de eeuwwisseling,’ 36-37.

alienists. Thus he claimed that medical experts should, besides autopsies, regularly be asked for advice in cases of possible mental illness.<sup>199</sup>

Different subcategories of monomania were created in the 1830s, mostly by the French physician C.C. Marc. Along with dipsomania (alcohol abuse), and kleptomania (urge to steal), ‘pyromania’ became a subcategory and was described as the instinctive urge to burn. One of the claimed reasons for pyromania among adolescent girls and women was menstruation, which was discussed by several lawyers and doctors in handbooks from the 1820s onwards. Some doctors claimed that when energy was needed in one part of the body, for instance the uterus, it could be taken away from other parts of the body, like the brain. As such it could cause insanity. Yet another reasoning argued that when menstruation failed to occur, blood could accumulate in the body, leading to mental disorders and incendiary urges. Dutch lawyer A.J. Van Deinse argued for this logic in his 1860 publication on criminal law. He claimed that because of the interrelation of body and mind, blood congestions could negatively affect brain functioning. This could cause lethargy or anger, leading to kleptomania, *monomanie homicide* and pyromania. Besides becoming evident in pregnant women, Van Deinse claimed that this also happens with young children who are still developing their sexual organs.<sup>200</sup> A more specific explanation of the relationship between arson and sexual development can be found in the essays *Abhandlungen aus dem Gebiete der gerichtlichen Medicin* from German physician Adolphe Henke, who according to fellow physician Johann Baptist Friedreich was the first who made the connection between fire setting and sexual development.<sup>201</sup> Friedreich also thoroughly described the influence of sexual development on the brain, causing arson in his *Systematische handbuch der gerichtlichen Psychologie für Medicinalbeamte, Richter und Vertheidiger* (Leipzig 1835). He argues that the period of sexual development had a major influence on the body and mind of humans, causing specific urges such as pyromania. He lists many examples of young arsonists, and mentions of many the influence of menstruation on the behavior of the children.<sup>202</sup>

Yet one of the earliest and clearest explanations of menstruation and arson can be found in the work of Dutch physician H.F. Thijssen. In his article on the urge to arson and its relation

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<sup>199</sup> See for a full history of French monomania J. Goldstein, *Console and classify. The French psychiatric profession in the nineteenth century* (Cambridge 1987).

<sup>200</sup> A.J. van Deinse, *De algemeene beginselen van strafrecht*, 120.

<sup>201</sup> Friedreich mentions that ‘Henke hat das Verdienst, zuerst ausführlich auf diese Neigung zur Brandstiftung, als auf einer Störung in der Pubertätsentwicklung beruhend, aufmerksam gemacht zu haben.’ This can be found in *Abhandlungen aus dem Gebiete der gerichtlichen Medicin, als Erläuterungen zu dem Lehrbuche der gerichtlichen Medicin* – B III and II, page 226, according to Friedreich. See J.P. Friedreich, *Systematische handbuch der gerichtlichen Psychologie für Medicinalbeamte, Richter und Vertheidiger* (Leipzig 1835) 394.

<sup>202</sup> See for his entire discussion of arson and sexual development J.P. Friedreich, *Systematische handbuch*, 388-421. For more contemporary literature on this topic see A. Henke *Sur la monomanie* in *Annales d’hygiène publique et de médecine légale* (1833 I); C. Marc, *De la folie* (Paris 1840) and J.C. Clarus, *Beyträge zur Erkenntniß und Beurtheilung zweifelhafter Seelenzustände* (Leipzig 1828).

to sexual development, he argues that this developmental phase can cause mental disorders such as an urge to arson. Although he does not call it pyromania, the train of thought is similar: it is an irresistible urge and therefore the actor is not responsible for the crime. He further argues that this urge especially manifests itself during menstruation, when different organs start functioning that have been latent before, thus affecting the physical and mental condition of the women in question. For a thorough explanation of this mechanism, he quotes the German physician F.B. Osiander. According to Osiander, the blood vessels become dilated in some places and become more blocked in others during (irregular) menstruation, especially around the eyes and the brain. Also, the blood is unable to flow back from the brain. Because of this congestion of blood around the eyes and the brain, the vision of light is very pleasant, thus effecting an urge to set fire.<sup>203</sup>

One important element of this explanation of arson is the relationship between body and mind, in the sense of a mutuality, which most authors seem to stress. Another interesting aspect of this model is that it demonstrates elements of the classic humour theory, with its stress on flow or congestion of bodily fluids, affecting the whole body.<sup>204</sup>

With monomania as partial insanity and psychiatrists' advocacy for the consequential unaccountability for crimes, historian J. Goldstein argues that monomania as a disease was constructed for claiming and expanding authority of the psychiatric discipline. With it, alienists could argue that they were able to analyse something that lawyers, judges and laypeople could not.<sup>205</sup>

Yet the argument of monomania was not uncritically accepted in court. First of all, it had to be proven. This was especially difficult when the perpetrator was claimed to have had temporary or partial insanity, e.g. monomania. Secondly, the plaintiff and the judge could question the honesty of insanity and suspect simulation. This problem was also helped by the fact that the insanity plea was mostly initiated by the defence. Thirdly, as mentioned above, there was a lack of faith in the new forensic psychiatry and, according to historian S. van Ruller, some people openly expressed their distrust of the science. The fact that the role of the psychiatrist in court was hardly defined might have reflected these feelings. Lastly, internal debates within the new science did not help its cause. These factors have led Van Ruller to conclude that psychiatrists were hardly consulted in criminal cases for the most part of the nineteenth

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<sup>203</sup> H.F. Thijssen, 'Brandstichtingszucht, in verband met de geslachtsontwikkeling,' in *Bijdragen tot rechtsgeleerdheid en wetgeving* I (1826) 358-367.

<sup>204</sup> S. van Ruller, 'De territoriumstrijd tussen juristen en psychiaters in de negentiende eeuw,' 26-27.

<sup>205</sup> J. Goldstein, *Console and classify*, 189-196.

century.<sup>206</sup> Consequently, there were hardly any indictments based on article 64, which argued for the unaccountability of the crime in case of insanity.<sup>207</sup> And, while some psychiatrists attempted to have children acquitted for the capital punishment with which arson was penalized,<sup>208</sup> this did not always succeed.

Finally, the popularity of monomania was only temporary: it disappeared a few decades later, around 1850. Criticism of monomania started to mount within psychiatric circles, attacking the disease on clinical grounds: other psychiatrists started to argue that madness was not confined to a single subject. Later on, both supporters and opponents agreed that, in the fight for more authority, psychiatrists had failed to clearly develop the concept and critically test it. The disease went out of fashion.<sup>209</sup>

### §5.2.2 A praxiographic analysis of the case

Let us turn back to Marretje Moonen and the practice analysis of her case. How does menstruation present itself in these series of events and how does it become significant? To understand the production of knowledge of Marretje Moonen's body and mind and the relation between arson and menstruation, we have to reconstruct the different events and practices in which this knowledge was produced. Because of the – lack of – source material, this analysis will start 'in medias res'<sup>210</sup> or, to be more precise, near the end of the case. We have one very illuminating source, namely a publication by Marretje's lawyer, mr. P.H.B. Van Goltstein. He published the entire story, including his adjusted defence plea, the *visum repertum*, the different legal documents, such as the accusation and the acquittal. By analysing this source in a praxiographic manner, we can first understand how menstruation is enacted in the practice of writing the book, and also follow Van Goltstein's logic and see where it takes us: which other events does he invoke or refer to in the story? And how does menstruation become significant in those events? In this way we can reconstruct the entire series of events and get a clear understanding of what menstruation in relation to arson exactly *is* in the case of Marretje Moonen. Then we will also be able to connect this to the historiography of Marretje Moonen in particular and the historiography of menstruation at large and see how these events illuminate the discussion of menstruation in history.

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<sup>206</sup> S. van Ruller, *Genade voor recht*, 165/181-2.

<sup>207</sup> S. van Ruller, 'De territoriumstrijd tussen juristen en psychiaters in de negentiende eeuw,' 26.

<sup>208</sup> S. van Ruller, *Genade voor recht*, 170.

<sup>209</sup> J. Goldstein, *Console and classify*, 155.

<sup>210</sup> Bruno Latour explains: 'where should we start? As always, it is best to begin in the middle of things, *in medias res*. (...) Relating to one group or another is an on-going process made up of uncertain, fragile, controversial, and ever-shifting ties.' B. Latour, *Reassembling the social*, 27-28.

## Part 1: Following Van Goltstein

The practice analysis will start with the practice of writing the book by Marretje's lawyer Van Goltstein. The writing of the book is a practice in itself, which happened more or less at the end of the series of events of this case. Thus the book displays a logic of ordering the complexity of those events. With a praxiographic analysis, this ordering logic and its main object(s) could be revealed. The full title of this book is *Marretje Moonen, van brandstichting beschuldigd en wegens brandstichtingszucht vrijgesproken. Eene bijdrage tot de lijfstraffelijke regtspleging in ons vaderland*. Thus, the main object of this book, and quite possibly the entire series of events, seemed to be *brandstichtingszucht*, that is, pyromania. What is menstruation then and where does it become important in relation to pyromania or arson? Two questions are thus of importance in analysing the logic of the book:

1. In the logic of this book, what is the main object, and how does menstruation relate to the main object?
2. To what other events does this book refer, and what is the main object of those events?

Below the logic of the book will be explained, with a special focus on where menstruation surfaces, where it disappears and how it relates to the main objects of the events.

### *Writing the book: enacting innocence*

In contrast to what the title of the book suggests, the main object, I suggest, is innocence, not pyromania. The practice of writing the book was all about *doing innocence*: the knowledge that the author was trying to produce was Marretje's innocence of the crime. He did so by accumulating information and setting it out like an argument in his book. This doing of innocence is ordered in relation to three different sites: innocence in relation to her confession, in relation to her mental health, and to her physical health.

#### 1. Confession

Van Goltstein begins with expounding Marretje's confession and argues that it is twofold. One part deals with the *materiality* of the crime, which establishes the fact that the accused committed the crime. The second part is about the *morality* of the crime, which means that the accused

committed the crime with a free will; he or she needs to be aware of their choice to commit the crime.

This is then discussed in relation to Marretje's actions and character. Marretje confessed to committing the crime but she also stated that she 'got angry thoughts' when she saw the fire and committed arson without thinking clearly. According to Van Goltstein, she thus confessed to the materiality of the crime, but not the morality, because Marretje said that she had committed arson without free will. He argues that Marretje is 'an honest farmer's girl,' who wears her heart on her sleeve. Therefore she would not lie about the morality of the crime.

Doing innocence here is thus committing a crime without being aware of that choice, but also being honest and not lying about what happened. Van Goltstein states that one cannot 'split' the confession into two elements but has to consider it as a whole. Thus there is a fundamental issue: the lack of free will.

Now he goes on to discuss the doing of innocence by lack of free will, in relation to the mind and the body. Thus the main object changes form from *doing innocence* and becomes (*doing innocence by*) *lacking free will*.

## 2. Mental health

Doing innocence is now enacted by lacking free will. The first site where Van Goltstein tries to elucidate this is the mind, Marretje's intellectual capacity. He returns to a fact, which he has already introduced in his first site of reasoning, namely that Marretje was a simple farmer's girl. But here this does not show that she is therefore very likely to speak the truth. Now Marretje's simplicity is turned into simple-mindedness, based on the testimonies of some people who have known Marretje longer. They apparently 'noticed something weird,' or thought she was not completely sane. The physicians also stated that Marretje had limited intellectual capacity.

Additionally, limited intellectual capacity becomes insanity when Van Goltstein introduces the fact that Marretje had been admitted to the asylum where her insanity 'revealed itself more and more'. Although she behaved like 'eene volslagen woedende' and the experts doubted recovery, she eventually calmed down and was deemed fit to appear before the court.

Thus doing innocence now is enacted through limited intellectual capacity and developing insanity. But there is a third logic to understand Marretje's innocence as a lack of free will, in relation to her body.



### 3. Physical health

This final section starts out with a fuzzy argument that justifies the expertise of physicians in this case. Van Goltstein states that in cases of questionable mental health the accused should be examined by doctors, and then discusses the works of Johannes B. Friedreich<sup>211</sup> and Johann C.A. Clarus<sup>212</sup> to demonstrate that these leading doctors have also advocated the importance of forensic psychiatry. He then turns to the fact that Marretje was clearly insane during her stay in the asylum and concludes that arson was therefore part of the insanity. After this clarification of her insanity and the justification of expert forensic knowledge, Van Goltstein begins a long discussion of pyromania in relation to age.

He starts out with discussing the forensic-medical literature and then shows how it resembles Marretje's case. First he mentions Friedreich, who argues that the developmental phase, the '*Entwicklungsjahre*' of women can be very intense. Here menstruation is first mentioned, but only in relation to what Friedreich indicates as 'religious melancholy,' which is not further explained.<sup>213</sup> Although there is no mentioning of pyromania in this citation of Friedrich, Van Goltstein then concludes that Marretje was also in her developmental years, and one of the possible conditions of this phase is pyromania, 'brandstichtingszucht'.

He then moves back to Friedreich and Marc, and this is the second time that menstruation surfaces. Van Goltstein claims that the cases of Friedreich and Marc showed that girls between 12-20 years of age all had irregular menstruation, with a consequential blockage of blood supply to the brain, causing headaches, dullness and lethargy. Yet although the report of the physicians argues exactly the same point, to which we will turn later, it is not at all mentioned here. Indeed, Van Goltstein argues that Marretje resembles Friedreich and Marc's cases because of age and limited mental capacity and then concludes that 'Friedrich heeft als het ware haar voor oogen gehad, toen hij die religieuse melancholie in een dusdanig meisje voorstelde.'<sup>214</sup> So it is quite unclear why the menstruation argument is thrown in here, without referring to the *visum repertum*. This is especially interesting because Van Goltstein started this argument by demonstrating the importance of the medical observation of perpetrators. Also this explicit

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<sup>211</sup> J.P. Friedreich, *Systematische handbuch der gerechlichen Psychologie für Medicinalbeamte, Richter und Vertheidiger* (Leipzig 1835). Van Goltstein refers to him as 'Friedrich'.

<sup>212</sup> J.C. Clarus, *Beyträge zur Erkenntniß und Beurtheilung zweifelhafter Seelenzustände* (Leipzig 1828).

<sup>213</sup> The point where Van Goltstein cites Friedreich, Friedreich actually quotes the German physician Oslander: 'eine ganz eigenthümliche und bei der weiblichen Evolution nicht selten auftretende Erscheinung, ist die mysteriöse oder religiöse Melancholie, welche gewöhnlich mit einer verliebten Melancholie verbunden ist. Oslander sagt: „nie ist ein Mädchen zärtlicher und stiller, nie geistiger und schwärmerischer und doch zugleich zum sinnlichen geneigter, verführerischer und brünstiger als im Anfange der Entwicklungsjahre, gemeinlich ehe noch die monatliche Periode ihren Anfang genommen, oder ihre rechte Ordnung erhalten hat.“ See J.P. Friedreich, *Systematische handbuch*, 221 and P.H.B. van Goltstein, *Marretje Moonen*, 22.

<sup>214</sup> P.H.B. van Goltstein, *Marretje Moonen*, 24.

mentioning of religious melancholy does not come back at any other point in the book and remains unexplained.

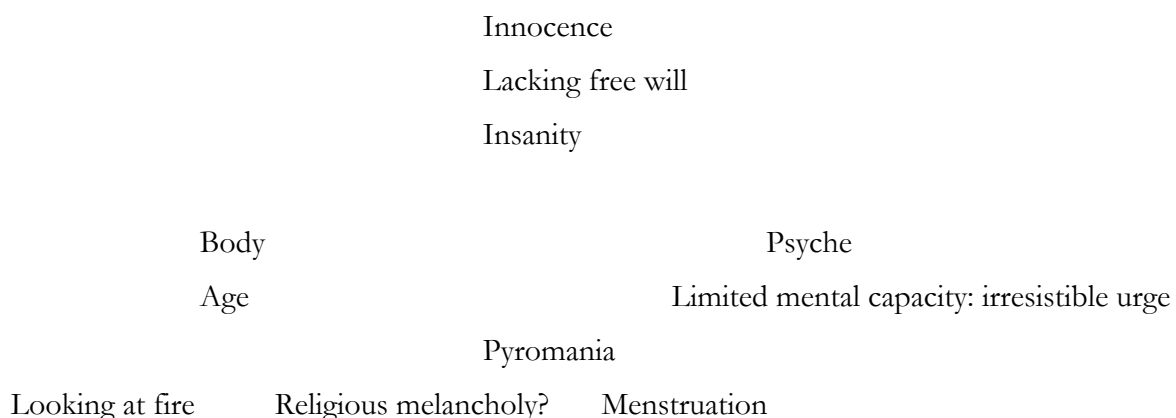
Van Goltstein then concludes: ‘ziedaar nu, M.M.H.H.! hare voorgeschiktheid tot de pyromanie voorgesteld, zoowel hare verstandontwikkeling als hare jaren vereenigden zich daartoe.’<sup>215</sup> Thus, doing innocence by lack of free will has become doing pyromania because of age and mental capacity.

But this is not the entire argument about pyromania. Van Goltstein further digs into the medical literature and finds different references in Friedreich, Masius and Thijssen about the fact that looking at fire can lead to pyromania at a young age. Like in constructing the argument of pyromania as a result of age and mental capacity, this argument is also constructed by demonstrating the resemblance between the cases discussed in the medical literature and Marretje’s confession. She also stated that she looked into the fire and got ‘bad ideas’ which she could not resist.

This irresistible urge is the final remark on Marretje’s situation. Van Goltstein concludes that the public prosecutor made a mistake to argue that Marretje committed arson by conscious deliberation while there was none, as the experts demonstrated. Van Goltstein concludes by saying that Marretje Moonen was innocent because of this irresistible urge.<sup>216</sup>

*The enactment of innocence and menstruation*

Pinpointing what doing innocence exactly is in relation to the body seems difficult. Is it limited intellectual capacity, age, menstruation, an irresistible urge? We might outline the entire logic as following:



<sup>215</sup> P.H.B. van Goltstein, *Marretje Moonen*, 24.

<sup>216</sup> P.H.B. van Goltstein, *Marretje Moonen*, 35-36.

As we can see above, the practice of the enactment of the main object of innocence is quite messy. So in the practice of writing the book, of combining all the information of different events, it seems that the main object innocence is enacted differently throughout the discussion, it presents itself in different forms. Thus we might argue that it reshapes and seems slippery, to borrow a term from John Law. ‘Objects may look indefinite because they are slippery, changing their shape and perhaps even their name.’<sup>217</sup> Although I have tried to grasp the main object by defining it as innocence, ‘perhaps we will need to rethink our ideas about clarity and rigour, and find ways of knowing the indistinct and the slippery without trying to grasp and hold them tight.’<sup>218</sup>

What does become clear is that the main object is *not* menstruation. It only appears twice in the entire discussion, and when it does appear it seems rather insignificant. It seems an enactment of pyromania, of age, of the body, of insanity, of lacking free will and eventually of innocence. It also has become clear that the main object is also not pyromania, as the title of the book suggests.

Thus, the main object in the practice of writing the book is a slippery, messy and reshaping innocence and menstruation is simply a link in a larger mechanism of doing innocence. But we remain puzzled by the fact that menstruation and pyromania have become the leading objects in the historiography surrounding the case of Marretje Moonen. It seems that an interesting translation has happened from the event of writing the book to the event of writing secondary literature. It makes us question which other translations have happened in the practice of writing the book. So let us go back to the events that preceded and came together in the writing of this book, and briefly analyse what the main objects in those events were. In this way we can indicate how knowledge has travelled, transformed and was translated within this case and perhaps it becomes clear what has happened to menstruation and pyromania.

#### *Translation, transformation and travel. Menstruation in other events*

Since we are particularly interested here in the production of knowledge of Marretje’s body and mind, especially in relation to menstruation, the events in which expert knowledge of her body and mind was produced – and later translated into the book – will be analysed below.

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<sup>217</sup> J. Law, *After method*, 82.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibidem*, 3.

### Event 1. Producing expert knowledge: question acquaintances

The first event that is invoked in this study is the moment when acquaintances of Marretje Moonen were questioned about her personality. As we have seen, a person named Zadelhof noticed something weird about Marretje, former employer Willem Kaptein said she was not completely sane and Jan Stoof – also a former employer – always deemed Marretje als ‘iemand van zeer weinig verstand.’<sup>219</sup> Thus the main object in the writing of witness reports seems Marretje’s lack of intelligence and possible insanity. We do not know this exactly though. Since Marretje was acquitted, the actual witness reports have most likely been destroyed. Therefore we cannot analyse the actual witness accounts and see which objects mainly have surfaced here. But we do know that what Van Goltstein took from these reports was Marretje’s mental health, her simple-mindedness. This is what travelled from these accounts to the book.

### Event 2. Producing expert knowledge: producing a *visum repertum*

The second event that comes back in this study is the examination of Marretje Moonen by the two physicians, Schroeder van der Kolk and Visscher. They were ordered to examine the state and mental condition of Marretje for signs of insanity or stupidity on August 17<sup>th</sup> 1839. Therefore they went ‘een en andermaal’ to the house of Arrest and conducted a ‘vrij langduurig’ examination of Marretje Moonen.<sup>220</sup>

This report is actually included in the book, as an attachment. Therefore we can analyse it as a practice of writing the report. Unfortunately this is the end result of the actual measuring practices, so therefore we do not know much about that, but we are able to analyse what the main object for the two physicians was.

First the physicians established the fact that Marretje had ‘een hoogst bekrompen geestesvermogens, aan onnozelheid grenzende.’<sup>221</sup> Therefore she was unable to fake insanity or stupidity. They judged this lack of intelligence by the fact that she was fat, ponderous and her face looked simple and stupid. These exterior characteristics were confirmed by the fact that her questions demonstrated dullness and ignorance; she could not give any explanation for the crime and seemed unaware of the consequences of committing arson. Finally she also often suffered from headaches.

So the first object seems to be lack of intelligence, which is enacted through fatness, simplicity, dullness, headaches, i.a. Yet, ‘daar echter onnozelheid en eenvoudigheid niet genoeg de

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<sup>219</sup> P.H.B. van Goltstein, *Marretje Moonen*, 24.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibidem*, 39.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibidem*, 40.

poging tot brandstichting verklaren, is het van het grootste gewigt te onderzoeken, of deze poging het gevolg is van eene onwilkeurige ziekelijke aandrift tot brandstichting, of dat dezelve als eene vrije daad van wraakzucht of kwade neiging is ontstaan.<sup>222</sup> Thus, the physicians argue that a second object is of importance, namely pyromania. As such, they further examined Marretje for signs of pyromania to explain her crime and judged that the arson was the result of an involuntary urge for pyromania. They reason as following. The medical literature has discussed three general characteristics for pyromania: a young age (between twelve and twenty), a more or less irregular menstruation, which causes a disruption of blood flow, leading to a congestion of blood in the head. Consequently, dizziness or dullness, and lack of intellectual capacity arise, which elucidates why patients could not explain why they had committed arson.

When the doctors compare the case of Marretje to these general characteristics, which they took from the literature on pyromania, they claim that her twenty years of age made her susceptible to this disease, that according to her own testimony her menstrual cycle was irregular, and that she complained about often having headaches, on the crown of her head and her forehead. Corresponding to these facts, she was unintelligent and had difficulty thinking. Or more explicitly, ‘hetwelk door hare bijzondere volbloedigheid en aanhoudenden sterken aandrang van bloed naar het hoofd genoegzaam verklaard wordt.’<sup>223</sup> Consequently, she was unable to explain why she had committed arson and did not understand the consequences of her actions.

Because of these observations, the physicians conclude that she had not committed arson because of bad intentions but because of an unnatural urge to set fire, ‘uit eene ziekelijke gesteldheid en ongeregeldheid in de natuurlijke verrigtingen van haar lichgaam; waaruit een meer of min aanhoudende bloedsaandrang naar de hersenen is ontstaan, waardoor zij in het vrije gebruik van hare geestesvermogens zeer beperkt en belemmerd is geworden.’<sup>224</sup>

Thus, when we analyse the *visum repertum*, the second main object is pyromania with a very strong emphasis on menstruation and blood blockage, besides the first object of simple-mindedness. Because of this stress on pyromania and menstruation, and its relation to the works of other authors, it is interesting that this report is hardly referred to in Van Goltstein’s text. To be precise, he makes three general remarks on the examination of Marretje’s health and the conclusion of insanity, nothing more. In fact, when Van Goltstein discusses Friedreich and Marc’s cases of pyromania, in which all the girls apparently had irregular menstrual cycles, leading to a congestion of blood to the brain, and thus causing lethargy, he does not even mention the *visum repertum* of the two physicians, which made the exact same argument. Van Goltstein merely

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<sup>222</sup> P.H.B. van Goltstein, *Marretje Moonen*, 40.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibidem*, 42.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibidem*, 43.

relies on the literature to make this point, especially that of Friedreich. This can mean a lot of different things, like the fact that Van Goltstein simply wanted to expound on the literature that both physicians could have implicitly invoked in their study, or that the expertise of the physicians was not authoritative enough for his plea. Yet this last explanation does not seem to hold up when we remember that the entire reason for writing the book was to demonstrate the importance of forensic psychiatry. As such it remains unclear why this *visum repertum* and its focus on menstruation remains so insignificant in Van Goltstein's text.

### Event 3. Producing expert knowledge: curing Marretje Moonen

Another document that was enclosed in the book and that comes back in the text is a statement of Marretje's progress and recovery in the asylum, written down by Van Goltstein and based on the information provided by Schroeder van der Kolk. After Marretje was examined in the House of Arrest her condition deteriorated, which according to Van Goltstein proved the conclusion of the *visum repertum*. She showed signs of insanity, anger and also nymphomania, because she kept undressing herself. Therefore she was taken to the asylum on October 13<sup>th</sup> 1839.

In the appendix, Van Goltstein summed up her entire stay at the asylum, by discussing her actions, her looks, the different medication and techniques for curing her. We can argue that her insanity, which is the main object of this report and the event to which it refers, is enacted in all these different references. Insanity was initially her loss of weight, her 'less reddish' face, the lack of talking, the laughing, her anger, undressing, and most importantly, her resistance to the medication. Several techniques were mobilized for her cure. The physician first put her in a straitjacket so she could not undress anymore, gave her laxatives and a vomitory, called *Tartarus Emeticus*, which repulsed her only slightly. In November, her menstruation failed to occur, which apparently used to be 'zeer rijkelijk en overvloedig'. Because of this, Marretje got angrier, and the *Tartarus Emeticus* did not help anymore.

Therefore they started giving her *Sulphas cupri*, which she could bear well. This is another sign or even another enactment of deteriorating insanity. Insanity was also still her anger and her urge to undress herself, which the doctors tried to obstruct by putting her again in a straitjacket and sometimes even in leather cuffs. Insanity was also her lack of speech, her savage dancing and jumping. At this point the physicians applied the technique of leeches, but this did not influence her bowel movement. What seems to be the most important enactment of insanity is the

moment where she could resist 32 grains of *Sulphas cupri*, which apparently was unheard of. Insensibility to the medicine thus becomes a crucial enactment of insanity.

Yet from the end of February she started to become more sensitive to the medication. After having vomited once, her menstrual cycle returned. Now insanity seems to have changed into enactments of sanity: the medicine caused sickness and stomach ache, her eyes became clearer, her face was less puffy, and Marretje started to talk again and give clear answers to questions. When she could not stomach a third of a grain of medicine without vomiting she was deemed cured. Sanity is further enacted in being wise, diligent, composed, neat and modest.

Marretje stayed in the asylum until her court hearing. Interestingly she claimed not to remember any of the events prior to her admission and did not recognize any of the people in court, like the farmer. According to the document, this is highly unusual.<sup>225</sup>

So the main object in this series of events, and thus in this appendix is insanity, which has all different sorts of enactments in practice. Interestingly, the menstruation pops up here, not in relation to pyromania, but in relation to the general insanity, which pyromania was part of. There seems to be a logic of a slippery slope or a logic of chain reaction. One thing causes another and sets into action a whole chain of events. When her menstrual cycle disappeared, Marretje got angrier and more insensitive to the medication, thus she became more insane. This reaction also worked the other way round: once she became more sensitive to the medicine, she started to vomit, and then her menstrual cycle returned. As such, she became saner. This logic of reaction or slippery slope is also aided by a logic of humour theory. Different parts of the body seem to be in contact with each other: the mind and its insanity is linked to the body with its blood-flow and stomach with bowel movements and qualms. Techniques to vomit or to stimulate blood flow are applied, through medicine and leeches.

So the menstruation and general fluidity of the body is an important part of the enactment of (in)sanity in this event. Yet whenever this event is called upon in the book, it is merely about Marretje's mental insanity, her insensitivity to the medication and her bodily actions such as the undressing and dancing. Therefore we can conclude that the menstruation, which became relevant in the event of curing Marretje in the asylum, has become insignificant in the practice of writing the book.

In sum, we can see that the other events focus mostly on insanity, but that especially the medical events demonstrate the importance of menstruation. Yet as we have seen above, menstruation

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<sup>225</sup> P.H.B. van Goltstein, *Marretje Moonen*, 48.

hardly becomes relevant in the last practice of writing the book about Marretje case. Although the aim of the book is to demonstrate the importance of forensic psychiatry, the object that was important for the physicians in both events, namely menstruation, is almost entirely excluded. The travelling of the object menstruation can thus be described as following: it pops up in the general forensic-medical literature, and becomes relevant in the *visum repertum*. Between these two sites there is a clear connection, which becomes evident through the technique of comparison, of comparing the literature to the case. Menstruation thus travels in a quite stable form, as an enactment of pyromania. Then menstruation becomes relevant in the asylum report, in a different shape and as part of a logic of body humours and chain reaction. Finally, menstruation almost completely disappears in the book, even though – quite possibly – similar literature is called upon and the technique of comparison is also applied. Furthermore, in the book pyromania and insanity are also important objects and are, like the *visum repertum* and asylum report, discussed with the logic of chain reaction. Nevertheless, innocence is the main object here and in the enactment of innocence menstruation becomes largely insignificant, or is at most a small link in the logic of chain reaction. Finally, menstruation becomes meaningful again in the secondary literature on Marretje Moonen. What is the politics of this disappearance in the book and its appearance in the historiography? As I mentioned above, we can only guess what Van Goltstein's reasons were for turning mostly to secondary literature on insanity and pyromania in his book, instead of deploying the *visum repertum*. But we might be able to analyse why menstruation is made important in the secondary literature by analysing why Marretje's case is invoked and in which contextual argument it is invoked by the scholars.



## Part II. The politics of (dis)appearance

### *Historiography of Marretje Moonen*

The first mentioning of Marretje Moonen that I would like to discuss appeared in J. Mooij, *The mental condition in criminal law: forensic psychiatric and psychological assessment in a residential setting* (Amsterdam 2007). Professor of law F. Koenraadt wrote a chapter ‘Historical roots and recent developments’ for this volume, in which he discussed the historical development of Dutch forensic medicine. He looks at early mental health assessments in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and argues for the collaboration of psychiatry and criminal justice at the turn of the twentieth century.

Let us look at what he says about Marretje Moonen.

‘Although Dutch forensic medicine was still in a deplorable condition in the first half of the nineteenth century, interest in this special area of expertise gradually developed in the latter half of the century. This was reflected both in a small number of Dutch-language publications on ‘forensic medicine’ and the production of various forensic reports, mainly after 1850.

In 1840 Marretje Moonen appeared before the Provincial court in Utrecht accused of arson. The physicians J. Schroeder van der Kolk and N. Visscher found in her “a sickly constitution and irregularities in the natural bodily functions, causing a more or less persistent flow of blood to the brain, as a result of which she has become very limited and impeded in the free use of her mental faculties and therefore has unthinkingly yielded to a pathological urge to commit arson.” Although the Procurator General demanded the death penalty, the Court ruled that the accused had committed the arson in a state of inanity and should therefore be allowed to go free under Section 64 of the Code Pénal.

(...) These, then, are three early examples of Dutch forensic assessment of the mental condition of the defendants. The fact that reports of this kind were produced for the judicial authorities was no mere coincidence, rather a sign of forensic medicine that was hesitantly gaining ground.<sup>226</sup>

As such it seems that Marretje’s case is invoked to argue for a growing importance of forensic psychiatry in the Netherlands. Consequently, Marretje Moonen’s case must be understood as a ‘success’ for the *geregtelijke geneeskunde*. Yet the main argument of the *visum repertum*, of menstruation, the report that is cited by Koenraadt, was hardly made relevant in the book that actually had as its main goal to argue for the importance of forensic psychiatry. Even worse, the

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<sup>226</sup> F. Koenraadt, ‘Historical roots and recent developments,’ in: J. Mooij, *The mental condition in criminal law: forensic psychiatric and psychological* (Amsterdam 2007) 38.

actual acquittal did not breathe a word about menstruation. It therefore seems incorrect to cite the reasoning of menstruation in Marretje's case to make the argument that forensic psychiatry was gaining ground. This was exactly the argument that was dismissed initially.<sup>227</sup>

Thus the politics of the appearance of menstruation here is to demonstrate the growing authority of forensic psychiatrists and to write a progressivist history of forensic medicine. With a praxiographic approach, it becomes possible to demonstrate that this case might not be that helpful for making that argument, because *in practice* and on closer inspection it seems that the menstruation argument of the physicians was dismissed.

In a similar fashion, Jannie Poelstra discusses Marretje Moonen's case in *Luiden van een andere beweging. Huishoudelijke arbeid in Nederland 1840-1920* (Amsterdam 1996). First of all, she argues that sexuality between the servant and employer was of importance,<sup>228</sup> and secondly that – in relation to two other legal cases concerning a sexual relationship between servant and employer – about sexual relations with the employer – the defence successfully pleaded pyromania as a result of female sexual development.<sup>229</sup> The argument of menstruation in Marretje's case is invoked by Poelstra to argue that in case of a problematic sexual relationship between maid and employer, the maid would come off worst: she would be declared insane, sent to the asylum and as such silenced. Since I have found nothing that directly refers to this potential sexual relationship, and the fact that Poelstra used the same source, it seems a

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<sup>227</sup> The reasoning of the prosecution was as following. According to the prosecutor, a lot had been written about monomania in Western Europe but there was no consensus on the topic. Only a few physicians argued that monomania was the result of underdeveloped genitalia. Then the prosecution went on to reject the physicians arguments. The witnesses never heard Marretje complain about headaches, she was not cold and detached but hot-headed and she had threatened the farmer's wife. This gave her a clear motive to commit arson. And further: 'de Adv.-Gen. zeide in substantie bij repliek, dat de besch. reeds 19 maanden voor het plegen der daad geregeld hare menstrua had, en dat dus alles van hetgeen is gepleit van de monomanie tot brandstichting bij vrouwen, bij welke de geslachtsontwikkeling nog niet was voltooid, op haar niet toepasselijk was.' (P.H.B. van Goltstein, *Marretje Moonen*, 7-9) Where this information comes from remains unclear unfortunately.

Then the public prosecutor concluded (17-9-1839): 'dat de kenteekenen, welke de deskundigen opgeven van de onnatuurlijke aandrift tot brandstichting te algemeen zijn, om daarvan in de onderhavige zaak, en voor als nu ten minste de toepassing te kunnen maken.' (P.H.B. van Goltstein, *Marretje Moonen*, 44).

Furthermore, the indictment stated (5-10-1839): [uit het onderzoek blijkt] dat echter, bij eene, zelfs oppervlakkige, vergelijking tusschen de beweegredenen, door de deskundigen tot staving van hun gevoelen bijgebracht, en de omstandigheden door het geregteijk onderzoek daargesteld, de daden, handelingen, gesprekken en zelfs de aanwijzingen omtrent de verstandelijke vermogens van de beschuldigde Marretje Moonen dermate uiteenlopen en verschillen, dat het niet mogelijk is een naauwkeurig verband tusschen dezelve te vinden.' Moreover, several arguments against the *novum repertum* were listed: witnesses knew nothing about headaches and the physicians did not have knowledge of Marretje in her daily life, the clear and full responses she gave during the interrogations argued against dullness and lack of memory, and she had a motive. (P.H.B. van Goltstein, *Marretje Moonen*, 56-58)

Clearly the expertise of the physicians was not uncritically adopted: witness accounts were deemed important, and the physicians should not have believed Marretje's testimony. The prosecution found several reasons not to believe it was an act of pyromania. As a contact zone of transmission of knowledge, to use a concept from Willemijn Ruberg (2013b), the forensic medical expertise was questioned and eventually barred in court.

<sup>228</sup> I did not find anything referring to this in Van Goltstein. There are two moments when there is talk of a possible sexual relationship: apparently in the house of Arrest Marretje cried that 'de veldwachter eenen gewelddadigen aanslag op hare eer beproefd had.' (P.H.B. van Goltstein, *Marretje Moonen*, 7) Furthermore, in the asylum she thought she was married to the farmer. There is no further indication that the two were romantically involved.

<sup>229</sup> J. Poelstra, *Luiden van een andere beweging. Huishoudelijke arbeid in Nederland 1840-1920* (Amsterdam 1996) 29-30.

problematic claim. Furthermore, one could argue that the entire insanity plea was not silencing Marretje but in fact saving her from the death penalty.

Finally, this case has been discussed by Sibbo van Ruller. He argues that Marretje's case demonstrates that 'the law was not always insensitive for the construction of pyromania as a disease. He writes that although the public prosecutor argued that Marretje knew exactly what she was doing and that her deed was an act of revenge, the court agreed with the physicians that Marretje was insane, both during the act and mostly after. This argument seems to be more in line with what we actually can find in Van Goltstein's report. Although he still mentions the argument of menstruation in the *visum repertum*, Van Ruller does not state that Marretje was acquitted because of her menstruation but because of her insanity.<sup>230</sup>

Thus menstruation in Marretje's case becomes relevant in the secondary literature in relation to the development of forensic medicine in the Netherlands and the relationship between employer and maid. Yet, a thorough practice analysis is able to demonstrate that things are far more complex in practice. Importantly, my praxiographic analysis has demonstrated that menstruation was not as relevant in most of the events as the historiography discussing Marretje's case makes us believe. The physicians tried to make menstruation important with their *visum repertum*, but this was dismissed by the public prosecutor and was not even thought to be that important by the lawyer who summed up the entire story in his book. It seems to be a matter of properly reading the source material. Besides the fact that menstruation was not as important as some historians have argued, Marretje's case also demonstrates that it is not simply one of the first victories of forensic medicine in the Netherlands. In fact, we have seen that the *visum repertum* was dismissed and months of treatment in the asylum could only convince the judge that Marretje was insane.

It might not be fair to argue that these historians got things wrong. A different method of analysis might simply lead to different results. Also, history always is enacted differently in different analysing practices and knowledge never stays the same while it travels. But what I do hope to have demonstrated the importance of analysing how the knowledge of Marretje Moonen travels through documents from one event to another. Through a praxiographic approach it has been possible to demonstrate that the knowledge of Marretje Moonen's body and mind was transformed and translated in this movement, and that its main object did not stay the same. Therefore it seems that the praxiographic method lends itself to analyses that focus on travelling knowledge.

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<sup>230</sup> S. van Ruller, *Genade voor recht*, 172-173.

So let us return to the observations that were made in previous chapters about praxiographic analyses of body history. I argued that with a focus on enactment, objects, techniques and materials, some sort of materiality of the body can be added to historical analysis. Through empirically reconstruction the real, living body and analysing its different enactments in different settings moves away from merely describing the body in terms of representations. In applying praxiography to this case study I focused on (knowledge of) menstruation and how it moved around between different settings. Thus the analysis moved more in the direction of travelling knowledge instead of having a strict focus on techniques and materials. We might argue, however, that this adds a different sort of materiality to body history, one that is still about the real, living body, but directs attention to the relation between ontology and epistemology of the body through empirically reconstructing the enactment of the body object – in this case menstruation – in different sites.

#### *Historiography of menstruation*

How can we relate these observations of the historiography of Marretje's case to the larger historiography of menstruation as we discussed at the beginning of this chapter? If apparently knowledge of the body from case studies can transform when it travels to different historiographical sites, what does this say about the general discussion of menstruation? Here we can make the switch from materiality and travelling knowledge to actors and agency. As discussed above, praxiography argues that all actors enact in the encounter, and in chapter 4 I have argued that the 'object' of knowledge, the patient, co-produces the knowledge of the body through participation and lifting body boundaries. Yet it has also become clear that something needs to be added to praxiography to reveal such participation and agency, and it seemed that discourse analysis of agency in practice could work. Thus, let us zoom in on the power relations in practice here, and analyse the actions of Marretje, the physicians and the court. Then we can relate these to the general historiography of menstruation, with which we started this chapter.

If we go back to the historiography of menstruation, we first saw that Julie Marie Strange analysed the power of medical discourse in relation to menstruation. By looking at the connection between medical discourse and case studies of menstruation, she argued that the pathologising of menstruation reflected the power imbalance between the medical male profession and the female patient. By arguing that menstruation caused psychological issues, physicians were able to other women and exclude them from society. However, when we focus on Marretje in this case, and assume that she does have some sort of agentic capacities that can be found in the source material, different observations can be made.

First of all, this overpowering medical profession does not at all become clear from Marretje's case. The *visum repertum* was dismissed in a fashion that did not at all acknowledge the expertise of the physicians. Furthermore, the book was written specifically to argue for the forensic-medical expertise, which suggests that this was not well established yet. In sum, the objective truth that the physicians were trying to provide was not unquestionably accepted.

Secondly, Strange argues that there was a lack of female authorship within stories about their bodies. Their stories were silenced. Although it is difficult to find Marretje's voice in all of this - mainly because the actual documents are probably destroyed - there are some clues that suggest otherwise. In the *visum repertum*, after outlining the general characterizations of pyromania, the physicians turn to Marretje's characteristics:

'Zij heeft, *volgens haar zeggen*, de maandelijksche vloeijing niet altijd geregeld gehad; maar gewoonlijk te snel en te hevig, zoodat dezelve om de drie weken, of ook wel om de 14 dagen vrij overvloedig terugkeerden, en dan weder eens geheel ontbraken.'<sup>231</sup>

So the main section that describes Marretje's menstruation, the actual medical description of the menstruation, *specifically* mentions Marretje's authorship. Indeed, the actual words in the *visum repertum* were 'hebben wij ondergeteekende (...) *met* bovengenoemde M. Moonen een vrij langdurig onderzoek in het werk gesteld.'<sup>232</sup> Moreover, the entire argument within the legal setting was about whether or not to believe Marretje's story, about the fact that she looked into the fire and got bad ideas, and that she did not know what she was doing, that she had once said to her employer that 'her head made her crazy,' and that her menstruation was irregular. The prosecution argued against her stories but the physicians made a case to defend her testimony, and trust her on her word when she said that bad thoughts came into her head, leading to an irresistible urge to set fire. This simply paints a different picture of the patient-doctor relationship.

I want to argue that it is important to not assume patriarchal structures and female othering beforehand, but reconstruct what actually happened in practice and find Marretje's actions and 'agency'. As Ruberg has demonstrated, it is important to also analyse the non-dominant ways of understanding menstruation, for instance by looking at legal practice which displays multiple stories of the body. In such a way it becomes possible to demonstrate some sort of agency of the patient in relation to her body. Again, it is difficult to fully depict Marretje's

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<sup>231</sup> P.H.B. van Goltstein, *Marretje Moonen*, 41. Italics mine.

<sup>232</sup> P.H.B. van Goltstein, *Marretje Moonen*, 39. Italics mine.

autonomy over her body, because her voice is hard to find in the remaining documents. Moreover, asylums, insanity and incarceration stimulate a whole different discussion about autonomy over mind and body. Nevertheless, I think the above analysis demonstrates that a practice approach to the history of the production of body knowledge is able to address the agency of the patient because it shifts focus to the movement of objects, the enactment in practice, the techniques, materials and different (non)human actors. Proceeding from the understanding that all actors contribute to the production of knowledge in practice and that the source material is multivocal, one is able to focus on the ‘object’ of study, in this case Marretje, and analyse her actions and words. This non-elitist approach to historical doctor-patient relationships aims to address participation in the events and autonomy and agency of the human-with-body without assuming beforehand all sorts of discursive structures – such as an overpowering medical discourse and profession – and power imbalances.

### **§5.3 Conclusion. Reconstructing a series of events**

In the historiography of menstruation, we have seen that Strange’s work has been inspired by discourse analysis and the linguistic turn. Yet the main issue with this type of research is that it merely focuses on elitist, dominant sources, excluding different types of knowledge that were also present in history. Through the concept of embodiment, Ruberg has demonstrated the fruitfulness of looking for the voice of lay people in the archival material, by focusing more on what happened in practice. However, the problem of a lack of materiality in these studies remains.

With my analysis I have tried to tackle both problems. I have tried to follow the different enactments of menstruation in different events and see how knowledge of the body travelled from one site to another. I have indicated that the knowledge changed shape, and that menstruation could be relevant in one site, but not in another. I followed menstruation through these different events, and focused on the different techniques and logics that accompanied the enactment of menstruation in those events. Through empirically reconstructing the enactment of menstruation, I linked the ontological body in practice to the epistemological travel of menstruation. As such, I have added a materiality of the body to the analysis of the production of knowledge in practice. Moreover, I thus have tried to combine a praxiographic approach with the more recently theorized notion of traveling knowledge and traveling objects.

Then I turned to the politics of the (dis)appearance of menstruation and argued for the agentic capacities of the ‘object’ of knowledge, Marretje, and the complexity of power relations in

practice. Although the argument that patients co-produce knowledge in practice is not entirely new,<sup>233</sup> I state that this focus is important because it sheds new light on power balances that historians of menstruation have assumed beforehand, and were therefore not questioned in the historiography. I contend that in the process of zooming out from case studies to general claims, historians seem to lose sight of the complexity and mutuality in practice. Although this is a known fact about the practice of generalizing, practice analyses such as these are important to test the generalizing claims that have been around for a while. Do they still hold up when we zoom in as much as possible or do we start seeing different things while we adjust our ethnographic microscope?<sup>234</sup>

So what has this chapter shown us about praxiography? First of all, by slightly zooming out from the doctor-patient encounter to a more difficult series of events in which knowledge of the body is important, our focus was shifted towards the concept of travelling knowledge. We have seen how knowledge of the body is transformed, hidden, rejected, or translated during travel from and to different sites. Thus, if we start in medias res and simply follow the actors or the objects in question, they lead us to interesting new places and sites and ask us to reveal the logic of their connection. As such, a new interesting aspect of a praxiographic approach to history of the body has surfaced.

Because I started in medias res, menstruation turned out to be something else that I first expected. Based on the historiography, I thought menstruation would be the main object in the series of events. Yet by praxiographically analysing it, it became clear that it was very difficult to follow menstruation around as an object; it was slippery and complex. I could not pinpoint it and define its concern. Because of my praxiographic approach, I had to answer the question what the main object was in these series of events, and a shift in focus to innocence proved to be far more fruitful. By following innocence with praxiography, I was able to understand the enactment of menstruation and its relation to innocence. As such, it became clear that menstruation was not the main matter of concern, while innocence and insanity were. Thus, praxiography opens avenues for new questions and new approaches to the source material. It makes it possible to see something different.

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<sup>233</sup> See for instance, R. Porter, 'The patient's view: medical history from below,' *Theory and society* 14 (1985) 175-198; B. Duden, *The woman beneath the skin. A doctor's patients in eighteenth-century Germany* (Boston MA 1991); G.B. Risse and J. Harley Warner, 'Reconstructing clinical activities: patient records in medical history,' *Social history of medicine* 5 (1992) 183-206; N. Theriot, 'Negotiating illness: doctors, patients, and families in the nineteenth century,' *Journal of the history of the behavioral sciences* 37:4 (2001) 349-368 and Ruberg, W., 'Mother knows best: The transmission of knowledge of the female body and venereal diseases in nineteenth-century Dutch rape cases' in: M. Dinges and R. Jütte, *The transmission of health practices (c. 1500 to 2000)* (Stuttgart 2011) 35-47.

<sup>234</sup> A. Mol, *The body multiple*, 50.

Secondly, chapter 4 argued that praxiography's stress on the enactment of objects due to material, techniques, sites and actors directs our attention to the agency of all actors in practice and their power relations. As we have seen, praxiography needs an additional focus or approach to analyse human power relations and human relations to bodies to specify the agency of actors in practice. Discourse analysis seems to lend itself to such an interpretation. As such, with both praxiography and a focus on human relations and power through discourse analysis, it became possible to reconstruct what happened with the case of Marretje Moonen, how knowledge of menstruation was enacted in different sites and, to some extent, what her agency was in relation to the knowledge of her menstruation.

As such, we have gotten a more complete picture of this case, one in which materiality and agency return to the historiography of menstruation through new methods. I therefore contend that praxiography is a very good method to analyse ordering or generalizing practices of zooming out, by zooming in and retracing all the different steps in which knowledge is produced. Although it might be a never-ending practice, if we realize that the writing of a praxiographic analysis is another ordering practice in itself, showing itself in new forms when applied to history, it certainly raises different questions, highlights different issues and reveals new objects and movements than discourse analysis, which, as we have seen with the historiography of menstruation, erases the materiality of the body by focusing on representations of menstruation and departs from several assumptions about power relations.



## **Conclusion. Evaluating the praxiographic method for body history**

This thesis centred on theoretical and methodological innovation for the history of the body. I indicated that current body histories lacked a material body that had agency: either the material body was culturally determined or it was merely present in the historiography as a representation. Departing from my assumption that zooming in on body practices would provide ways to overcome this issue, I analysed different theories of the body in practice for its take on materiality and agency of the body. This analysis can best be envisioned as a path or a journey: within each theory, materiality and agency of the body was enacted in a specific way, which brought up new questions, steering me in specific directions. The path led to Science and Technology Studies and specifically praxiography, where I indicated a powerful potential for body history. Its focus on the complexity and multiplicity of reality, the expansion of the understanding of actors, the enactment of objects in practice and the ordering logics and management of complexity opened up, to quote Lisa Helps again, ‘new ways into seemingly old problems.’

These strengths have been demonstrated by discussing two case studies in which praxiography was applied to historical practices in which knowledge of the body was produced. As has become clear, praxiography helps direct attention to practices in which objects come into being and shows enactment through empirically reconstructing *what happened*. It exposes the messiness and complexity of reality while at the same time stimulating the researcher to analyse the implicit logics in which complex reality is ordered. Most importantly, it has become evident that praxiography adds to the historiography of the body by addressing a real, living body through empirical reconstruction and its focus on ontology in practice. Also, the wide understanding of actors directs attention to the agentic capacities of *all* actors in the encounter. Finally, praxiography makes us ask questions that would otherwise not have been asked, for instance about multiplicity, complexity and ordering strategies. It provides a fundamentally different approach to existing source material and historiographies, by reading them more against the grain.

By slightly zooming out from the knowledge-producing practices another case study has highlighted a different strength of praxiography: it can be used to show the travel of objects and knowledge. As a relatively new concept in the history of science, ‘traveling knowledge’ seems to go well with praxiography and its focus on empirically reconstructing the different enactments of an object. Movement between sites and zooming out of particular practices has turned our attention to the politics of (dis)appearance of the object through which we were able to reflect on the historiography of the object in question – menstruation.

So how does praxiography provide new perspectives of old problems, how is it fundamentally different? In both case studies in which I used praxiography, the 'old' methodology did not work and praxiography made it possible to see things differently. With the Papuan case study, I initially addressed *Nova Guinea* III in a discursive manner, trying to examine to what extent Van der Sande's study contained notions of racism. Yet I could not pinpoint his ideas on race or his racist notions. My analysis remained vague as I could not understand the complexity of Van der Sande's argument. By empirically reconstructing the different practices and the enactment of race in those different events, a completely different picture emerged. I was able to define what race *was* through its enactment in different practices. As such I demonstrated how Van der Sande's study fit colonial projects. Similarly, I initially could hardly pinpoint menstruation as an object in the final case study. The historiography made me believe that menstruation was the main object here, but through praxiography I was able to see a different main object and analyse the relation of menstruation to the main object 'innocence.' I also demonstrated how knowledge of the body travelled and how objects can appear and disappear in different events. As such, these case studies show that praxiography provides tools to follow slippery objects in complex realities, but one has to let the practices guide the research. In this way, praxiography indeed offers new ways of seemingly old problems.

Yet I also have indicated issues with praxiography, which have become clear from these case studies. STS remains vague about what the agentic capacities of (non)humans mean in practice. Furthermore, it focuses on decentering the human, but might take this slightly too far for historical research by keeping the opposition between nature-unconsciousness-body and culture-rationality-human intact. Because body practices are essentially also power practices, a more specific focus on the individual-with-body is needed. Moreover, these power relations need to be analysed, by zooming out from practices. Although this move seems problematic from especially an ANT perspective, I have argued that it is essential to fully understand the production of body knowledge in practice and that practices can offer powerful foundations for larger generalizations. I have also argued that combining existing methods, such as discourse analysis, with praxiography will improve, enhance and innovate historical analysis overall, with a stronger focus on ontology, practices, empirical reconstruction and different actors. Further research should explore and clarify the issues and combining methodological strategies more precisely.

Another problem with praxiography that I did not discuss above is that reconstructing the encounter is very time-consuming. Praxiography asks us to analyse different techniques, materials, and actors per site to understand the enactment of an object and show complexity and

multiplicity. It also asks us to examine the ordering strategies and logics implicitly present. It commands us to follow objects between different sites and analyse the politics of (dis)appearance. This type of research takes a lot of time per 'site', 'practice', 'encounter' or 'enactment.' Although the results from these analyses are very interesting, further research could test to what extent praxiography can partially be applied, for instance through just focusing on techniques and enactments.

A final task for further research lies in zooming out even further to other types of body history, cultural history or even history at large and see what praxiography does for different types of research. Which new questions arise, which new ways of seeing old problems does it effect? We have to see what it might attain for specific subfields of body history in relation to its historiography. The history of body knowledge is just one aspect of the history of the body, how would praxiography work in the history of sports, or dress? Which aspects does it highlight, which problems emerge? It would also be interesting to compare the results of praxiographic analysis between different subfields to understand its overall use for body history. For instance, we already saw that agency became important in the practices of knowledge production, but lost a bit of its urgency when we slightly zoomed out: then the travel of an object between sites screamed for attention.

I hope that historians take on this challenge and apply praxiography or other STS approaches, even to historical case studies that do not particularly revolve around the body. Because of the new questions it raises, I hypothesize that STS can be helpful for other subfields of history too. The focus on multiplicity and complexity can be fruitful for any type of historical encounter. Thus, the practice of praxiography, the praxiography of practice, and the practice of matter, matters.

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