Towards Practice Oriented Product Design

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From consumer behaviour to practice

Routines are to some extent directed by general “rules”

General “rules” are reproduced through practice and they change over time

Everyday practices maintain and transform themselves

Consumption occurs not for its own sake but in the course of accomplishing practices
Understanding consumer-user behaviour.....

**Approach**

Users as experts
Users as creative consumers
Design for all

**Method**

Knowing the users: what to know, how to know it?
Pick and mix methodology, ethnographic techniques (but not theory)

**Theory**

Users’ needs exist prior to design intervention, they can be understood
Universal: senses, feelings, instinct, emotional ergonomics
It is possible to design a user relationship

**Characteristics**

focuses on single products and on individual users or ‘lifestyle’ categories
Consultancies promise to help understand consumer-user behaviour and innovation
product innovation (often) requires innovation in practice.

Practice is a process of integration resulting in a structured arrangement - i.e. resulting in a practice that exists (for a time) as a recognisable entity.

Elements that are integrated consist of material, image and skill.

Innovations in practice occur when everyday entrepreneurs (people) - make new connections between existing or new elements of image, material or skill.

For example..... Nordic Walking
1.6 million years on, LEKI claims ‘Four legs is better than two’

Don’t underestimate walking. Nordic Walking is becoming a new, extremely successful trend sport...

... According to manufacturers and retailers, the walking segment has been the fastest growing product category in terms of quantity and turnover, and Nordic Walking may just have what it takes to set the cash registers ringing.

Providing an ideal body work-out for optimum fitness, Nordic Walking reduces the impact on the lower joints, stabilizing heart and circulation.

(report of ISPO 2003)

Exerstriding, Viking hiking, Nordic walking

Finland (14% of the population), Austria, Germany (a million plus), Norway, Japan, USA, Australia
Innovation in practice
a question of making and breaking links
slightly new stuff, very new image slightly new procedure

Proto-practices, prior elements ski training, images of fitness, infirmity, tradition and wisdom

System building – mild nature, the nordic walking concept, health and well-being, science of the body, 100 more muscles

System integration – courses, experts, trainers, accreditation
material
Image of ‘mild nature’
Image of ‘well being’
competence
How to re-imagine walking
How to re-materialize walking
How to re-do walking
De-formation of practice and fossilisation

Images symbols

Stuff materials

Competence procedure

a matter of breaking links
“dead” objects, ideas, competences
Stranded elements of practice
Links have been broken. What would be required to bring this back into practice?
Niches of persistence?

Parallel to niches of innovation..
How do practices emerge, exist and die?

Making and breaking links between elements

proto-practices (pre-formation) practices (re-formation) ex-practices (de-formation)

Links not yet made, Links being made and sustained by a circuit of reproduction, Links no longer being made
How do practices recruit constituent elements and activating practitioners?

Recruitment and reproduction

Capture practitioners
Careers of carriers
Path and project
Careers of practice

People as integrators, carriers and elements of practice
Elements are partly autonomous because they are created through multiple integrations (practices).

Notice real intersections between competence and material (scripting, delegation), image and material, competence and image.
Transferable skills

Practice 1
Football
Conference presentation

Practice 2
Hockey
Workshop contribution

Practice 3 etc.
Ice Hockey
Seminar paper

Circulating images
For example, freshness, well being, etc.

Mechanisms of cross-practice creep
Generating and reproducing elements

First integration of elements

Subsequent integration, showing how elements have changed

time
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Understanding the dynamics of practice means understanding continuities and patterns of co-evolution over time.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Value is defined by relations between products, and between objects, skills, meanings and temporalities.</td>
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<td>Needs emerge from the dynamics of practice.</td>
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<td>Products, designers and consumers are all agents of change but none can change alone.</td>
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<td>Their interdependence defines and limits the scope of deliberate intervention.</td>
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Practice orientation - mild

Design – IDEO

“we think of product in terms of verbs, not nouns, not cell-phones but cell-phoning”

(Kelley and Littman 2001)

“individual technologies add value only to the extent that they are assembled together into effective configurations”

(Suchman, Blomberg et. al. 1999)

Practice orientation - strong

Take the practice as the unit of enquiry, analysis and intervention
POPD!
Practice oriented product design

POPD seeks to influence the on-going dynamics of practice.

POPD does not end when product sits on shelf.

POPD focuses on practices and practitioners, not on consumption or consumers.

POPD realises that we are all active integrators and carriers of practice.

POPD attends to relations between practices (systems of practice).

POPD analyses constitutive elements and their trajectories.

POPD considers mechanisms and patterns of recruitment, reproduction and defection.
**POPD methodologies**

User studies, local anthropology, understanding situated practices etc. But also.....

- collective understanding of the cumulative careers of materials, images, skills and of relations between practices
- statistical traces of practice trajectories across time and space
- Mechanisms of recruitment and defection
- studies of ex-practices
- studies of elements (material, image, skill), of how they interact, and of how they circulate
**POPD** as paradigm

Is it a really different approach?
Not about attention, brand and communication
Never dealing in pre-defined consumer groups
Anchored in communities of practice – never universal

Is it relevant
Is it limited to radical innovation only?
Can it be a tool? Does it work?
Is it (too) undermining?
Would it result in different products, problems and solutions?

**PO-POPD**

What new conjunctions of material, image and skill would be required for popd to become – for a time – ‘normal’ practice?