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The academization of art

A practice approach to the early histories of the Accademia del Disegno and the Accademia di San Luca

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Chapter Two

Theories of Practice and the Academic Literature

2.1. Theories of practice

The first thing to be noted about the term ‘theories of practice’ is the plural. There is no single or unified theory of practice, but there exists a manifold of theories in which the concept of *practice* is foregrounded. This is due both to the various scholarly disciplines in which they are applied and to the different philosophical traditions from which theories of practice have emerged. The scholarly (sub)disciplines in which practice approaches are applied since the 1970s are anthropology, sociology, history, philosophy, science and technology studies, cultural studies, and most recently business and organization studies.⁷¹ Philosophers such as Marx, Dilthey, Nietzsche, and especially early Heidegger and later Wittgenstein are most-often cited as forerunners or sources of inspiration for practice theorists.⁷²

Notwithstanding the lack of a general or unified theory of practice, there are certain convictions that are shared by most, if not all, practice theorists.⁷³ Most importantly, they all place *social practices* at the center of their theories and empirical analyses. According to these

⁷¹ Important publications in the practice-theoretical literature are: Ortner 1984 (Anthropology); Bourdieu 1979 and 1990, and Giddens 1984 (Sociology); Foucault 1991a (History); Taylor 1985 and Schatzki 1996 and 2002 (Philosophy); Pickering 1995 and Rouse 1996 (Science and Technology Studies); Certeau 1984 and 1998 (Cultural Studies); Feldman/Orlikofski 2011 and Nicolini 2012 (Business and Organization Studies).

⁷² See Schatzki 2001, 1-3, Reckwitz 2002, 243-244, and Nicolini 2012, 8-11. One can think of Marx’s ‘Theses on Feuerbach’ with the emphasis on *Praxis*. Dilthey and Nietzsche both focus in their work on life and processes instead of on things, substances and states. Heidegger and Wittgenstein can be read as successors to these ‘life-philosophers’ and they made decisive contributions of their own (See Schatzki 1993). For example, Heidegger distinguishes objects according to their way of being, or, in other words, to how they are used – as ‘ready at hand’ (*Zuhanden*) or ‘present at hand’ (*Vorhanden*) – instead of according to their measurable properties. With his notion of a ‘language game’, Wittgenstein focuses on the *use* of language instead of conceiving language as a (stable) system of signs. It should be noted that Nicolini conceives the ‘family of practices theories’ as substantially broader than the intellectual descendants of Marx, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein, also including activity theory from the early twentieth-century Soviet Union, ethno-methodology, and critical discourse analysis.

⁷³ According to Nicolini (2012, 9), the absence of a grand and unified theory of practice is not something that can or should be mended. He claims that ‘a grand synthesis would run against the spirit of most practice approaches’.

theorists, the focus on *social practices* improves our understanding of a wide variety of themes, such as subjectivity, the body, the meaning of objects and artifacts, rationality, language, human and non-human activity, conceptions of culture and society, knowledge, and power.⁷⁴

Although there is no definition of a *social practice* shared by all practice theorists – again due to their different theoretical scholarly backgrounds – it is possible to get a general idea of its meaning in the literature. In the first place, it is expedient to distinguish it from two common uses of the term ‘practice’.⁷⁵ On the one hand, in everyday life ‘practice’ refers to the process of learning or training, as in ‘soccer practice’ or ‘piano practice’. On the other hand, the term stands for a concrete action or for the whole of human activity. In this sense ‘practice’ is usually defined as the opposite of theory, reflection, and contemplation.

Both these common meanings of ‘practice’ play a role in theories of practice. For instance, concerning the first significance, practice theorists often focus on how neophytes become skilled practitioners through training and education. It is argued that much can be learned about a certain community by following how young members are educated, because this is one of the few situations in which the fundamental rules and goals of that community are made explicit. When expert practitioners are amongst themselves this – generally – does not happen because these fundamental presuppositions are taken for granted.⁷⁶ However, it should be noted that when observing the training of neophytes, practice theorists typically look at more than just the explicit rules and formulas. Also the examples, visual resources, and the situation in general are taken into account.⁷⁷

In theories of practice, the second common meaning of practice as activity is visible in the conception of culture and society.⁷⁸ Practice theorists view culture as something that is always in flux, both in the reproduction and in the transformation of social relations and conditions. The emphasis lies on processes and relations, instead of on states and things. It is sometimes brought forward that this conception of culture is

⁷⁴ See for example Schatzki 2001 and 2014, Rouse 2007, and Nicolini 2012.

⁷⁵ See also Schatzki 1996, 90, for this distinction.

⁷⁶ See, for example, Schatzki 1996, 100-101. Furthermore, the importance of education in Bourdieu’s publications is well-known. Wittgenstein typically rephrases the question ‘what does this word or concept mean?’ as ‘How did we learn it?’ In addition to learning situations, also when practices break down such as in severe disagreements the hidden rules and presuppositions of a community become visible. See, for the importance of breakdown experience for illumination of a practice’s organization, Heidegger 2001.

⁷⁷ Again Wittgenstein can be taken as an example. In his philosophical – or what he calls ‘grammatical’ – analyses of language examples and contextualizations play a crucial role.

⁷⁸ In this dissertation, the terms ‘culture’ and ‘society’ are treated as synonyms. Thus, all social practices are also cultural practices.

especially attractive for understanding the modern world, where ‘all that is solid melts into air’ and people and things are increasingly connected to each other.⁷⁹ Indeed, theories of practice are often developed in relation to phenomena in the contemporary Western world. However, this must not be taken as a principle or as an intrinsic feature of theories of practice. On the contrary, the idea that practice is central to social life holds for all cultures and societies, whether they concern ancient Egypt, contemporary China, or sixteenth-century Italy.

Although both common significances of ‘practice’ are present in the practice-theoretical literature, its primary meaning is more technical and theoretical. Most generally, ‘practice’ in this sense refers to organized and routinized types of behavior, in which bodily and mental activity and conditions, things, and their use are interconnected.⁸⁰ Famous examples are ways of walking discussed by Mauss, the gift-exchanges among the Kabyle from Bourdieu’s early work, and the penal practices in Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish*.⁸¹ But also cooking, reporting, and asking a question count as social practices in this sense, as well as more complex and institutionalized practices such as voting in political elections, practicing a religion, and the education of artists. The latter are, of course, two of the types of social practices that came together in the art academies in Florence and Rome, and that will be discussed extensively in the following chapters.

To some extent the practice turn in the social sciences has already resonated in the humanities. For instance, the historian Peter Burke identifies the focus on ‘practices’ as one of the determining features of New Cultural History, which, according to him, has dominated cultural historiography since the late 1980s. Instead of describing intentions, ideas, and systems of thought, cultural historians now emphasize practices, activities, and rituals.⁸² To a certain extent this shift is also

⁷⁹ According to Nicolini (2012, 2), ‘[t]he attraction of the practice idiom stems in particular from its capacity to resonate with the contemporary experience that our world is increasingly in flux and interconnected, a world where social entities appear as the result of ongoing work and complex machinations, and in which boundaries around social entities are increasingly difficult to draw’. The phrase ‘all that is solid melts into air’ is the title of a 1982 book by Marshall Berman about modernity. It is ultimately derived from Marx and Engels’ *Communist Manifest*.

⁸⁰ See Reckwitz 2002, 249 and Schatzki 2002, 71. A comparable definition can be found in Schatzki 2001, 2. According to Schatzki, practices are ‘embodied, materially mediated arrays of human activity centrally organized around shared practical understanding.’

⁸¹ Mauss 1934, which also contains the term *habitus* that would later be borrowed and made popular by Bourdieu; Bourdieu 1979; Foucault 1991a.

⁸² See Burke 2008, 51-76 for a discussion of the history and theoretical background of New Cultural History. According to Burke, the four theorists who have contributed most to the development of the New Cultural History are Bakhtin, Elias, Foucault, and

visible in the historiography of the academization of art in Italy. Whereas authors such as Pevsner and Waźbiński were mainly interested in the *intentions and ideas* of the artists involved in the foundation of the Accademia del Disegno and Accademia di San Luca, Barzman focuses on disciplinary practices in Florence, and several authors in *The Accademia Seminars* address artistic and pedagogical practices in Rome.⁸³

However, from a practice-theoretical perspective the increased attention for activity and doing, and the use of the term ‘practice’ is not enough. A further step is necessary. This step is committing to a practice-based social ontology.⁸⁴ Practice theorists typically explain what this ontology entails by contrasting it to both poles of the structure-agency debate in the social sciences.⁸⁵ Arguably the most important proponents in the early days of the debate, which originated at the beginning of the twentieth century, were Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) and Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) on the structuralist side and Max Weber (1864-1920) on the agency side.⁸⁶

Bourdieu. Furthermore, he holds that a paradox in New Cultural History is the theoretical attention for practices. This is an explicit theme in this dissertation.

⁸³ As already discussed, according to Pevsner (1940/1973, 42, 51-52, and 59-66), Vasari and Zuccari were the most important figures in the foundation and early functioning of the Accademia del Disegno and the Accademia di San Luca and their intentions were leading in his interpretation. Barzman (2000), by contrast, discusses the ‘disciplinary practices of *disegno*’ by means of which the artists at the Florentine academy became subjected to the will of the Medici Grand Dukes in their cultural political strategies. The articles by Roccasecca (2009), Marciari (2009) and Brooks (2009) in *The Accademia Seminars* explain how existing artistic educational practices were taken over and transformed in the Roman Accademia di San Luca.

⁸⁴ Nicolini 2012, 12-14.

⁸⁵ See Bourdieu/Wacquant 1992, 7-11 and Schatzki 1996, 6 and 2003, 174-175, for discussions of this debate from a practice-theoretical perspective and for further references.

⁸⁶ See especially Durkheim 1895/1963, Saussure 1916/1982, and Weber 1922/1988. According to Saussure (1916/1982, 23-35), the object of linguistics should be language as a formal system of signs (*langue*), rather than the concrete and individual use of language or (*parole*). Furthermore, in structuralism the meaning of signs – including words, cultural artefacts, social actions, etc. – depends on their relations and oppositions to other signs. For Durkheim (1895/1963, 4) the objects to be studied by sociology are ‘social facts’ (*faits social*). Characteristic of social facts is that they are external to human consciousness, i.e. that they are objectively observable, and that they have a coercive power over individuals. Durkheim gives money and language as examples of social facts. Furthermore, according to Durkheim, although a social fact such as religion has individual mental aspects, its most important function is to guard and reproduce an existing social structure and order, which cannot be reduced to individual mental conditions or representations. Weber (1922/1988, 542) defines the object of sociology as ‘social action’ (*soziales Handeln*), whereby he understands ‘action’ as human behavior that is connected to a subjective meaning. Such behavior is ‘social’ when it is directed at someone else. It is the task of the sociologist to interpret ‘social action’. The structure-agency debate was important for the status of the social sciences, since their relation to, and their place

From an ontological point of view, the central issue in this debate concerned the basic characteristics and building blocks of social life and action. Structuralists claimed that large-scale, objective, abstract, and theoretical structures such as ‘whole cultures’ or ‘social systems’ determine the social, including actions of individuals. Social scientists on the agency side held that social life and action transpire primarily and most importantly in and through the subjective, intentional and conscious mental conditions of individual actors. These different answers to the ontological question, obviously, had repercussions for the methodology of their respective social scientific research.

Practice theorists argue that both positions are inherently flawed. On the one hand, they criticize the proponents of individual agency for *reducing* social reality to interrelated individuals or features thereof, such as intentions and other mental states. On the other hand, they reprimand the structuralists for *reifying* conceptions of ‘cultural systems’ or ‘social structures’, that is, for treating these abstract and theoretical concepts as substantial realities. Furthermore, systems and structures deemed problematical because they are of a too large scale to explain and understand individual actions and too homogenous to make sense of the plurality within one culture or society.

Practice theorists attempt to go beyond the structure-agency debate by placing *social practices* at the center of social theory and by maintaining that most social phenomena occur within, and are aspects or components of social practices.⁸⁷ On the one hand, *social practices* are composed of concrete and empirically observable actions of individuals. This means that they are no reifications such as the structures and social systems of the structuralists. On the other hand, the actions composing a social practice are only intelligible, meaningful, and count as such actions against the background of other actions – and of actions of *others* – in that practice. This entails that the meaning of an action cannot be reduced to the intentions, desires, or beliefs of the individual actors involved, and therefore, the practice-based ontology avoids the problem of reductionism.

For instance, putting your thumb in the air and showing it to someone else counts as an encouragement to, or compliment for, that other person only insofar as there already exists a practice of encouraging and complementing people by giving them a ‘thumbs up’. Furthermore, practices are inherently *social* – which implies, incidentally, that the term ‘social practices’ is redundant – because their existence and persistence

between, the natural sciences on the one hand, and the humanities on the other, was at stake.

⁸⁷ Schatzki 2001, 2. See Rouse 2007, 645.

or transformation involves the interconnected activities of more than one person.⁸⁸ Finally, in terms of scale, social practices constitute a middle ground between (features of) individuals and wholistic structures.⁸⁹

Applying this discussion to the literature on the academization of art, it becomes clear that individualist approaches have been more dominant in the interpretations of the academies, as in the humanities in general. An explanation for this is the popularity of the already mentioned ‘great men models of history’ in these disciplines.⁹⁰ Although in Pevsner there are some wholistic strains of thought, insofar as he uses the ‘Renaissance’ and ‘Mannerism’ as reifications that influenced Italian culture and society, he and his followers exemplify individualist approaches, insofar as they explain the foundation of the academies by reference to intentions and actions of individuals and the relationships between them. Most authors who analyze the academization of art from the perspective of the cultural politics of the rulers in Florence and Rome also adhere to individualist approaches. And finally, this also holds for the common sense conceptions of the authors of *The Accademia Seminars* when they explain the difficult beginnings of the Roman art academy by reference to the different and often contradictory intentions of the people involved.⁹¹ A structuralist (or wholistic) approach is expressed by Rossi, insofar as he connects the emergence of the

⁸⁸ According to Nicolini (2012, 168), ‘[p]ractices, moreover, are by definition social phenomena, first because they keep participants together, and second because their organization and accomplishment depend on the working together of many people’. This point is derived from Wittgenstein’s treatment of rule-following in the *Philosophical Investigations* (sections 198-202), where it is argued that it is only possible for someone to perform certain actions such as obeying a rule, following an order, or playing a particular game insofar as there exists a custom (*Gepflogenheit*) or practice (*Praxis*) of rule-following, the obeying of an order, or the playing of that game. Without these customs and practices those actions would not be *understood as*, and, *therefore, would not be* instances of obeying a rule, following an order, and playing a particular game. Wittgenstein 1953/2001, 68-69. See also Schatzki 2002, 134-135 and Williams 1999 for similar social interpretations of Wittgenstein’s remarks on rule-following. The work of the later Wittgenstein and especially his remarks on rule-following are generally recognized as one of the major sources of inspiration for theories of practice. See Schatzki 1996, Rouse 2007, and Jonker 2014.

⁸⁹ See Nicolini 2012, 162, who talks about the ‘meso’ level of practice in this context. ‘Wholism’ should be distinguished from ‘holism’. Although both terms refer to the a totality or a total perspective, the latter is mainly used in the context of process and systems of healing, in which the focus lies on the total entity, e.g. mind and body together. Wholism can be used in different contexts. Wholistic theories of social reality focus on the entire makeup or structure of society and usually postulate principles that are supposed to be valid for that society as a whole.

⁹⁰ Bourdieu used the term ‘charismatic ideology’ for the belief in the talents and brilliance of individual men, e.g. artists, scientists, and philosophers.

⁹¹ See especially Cohen’s (2009) concluding article of the book.

academies to the transition from a pre-capitalist to a capitalist economic system.⁹²

Because of the predominance of individualist approaches in the literature on the first academies of art, the focus on ‘practice’ in this dissertation might seem more negative towards individuals and their intentions than it actually is. Therefore, it should be emphasized that a working wit a practice-based ontology does not entail that individuals, intentions, or ideas are deemed irrelevant for understanding cultural and social phenomena, only that these things are not the first and foremost objects of inquiry in scholarly research. Individuals and their intentions are discussed in this dissertation, but they are always related to, and understood from the point of view of the social practices, in which they originated and functioned.

2.2. *Subjectivity and objectivity*

A practice approach does not just shift the attention away from individuals toward social practices; it also entails a different conception of individuals and, more generally speaking, of subjectivity. According to practice theorists, the notion of *social practice* enables scholars to transcend three problematic conceptual dualisms related to subjectivity. These oppositions are that of self versus others, subject versus object, and mind versus body. Together these dualisms form the core of the so-called ‘Cartesian metaphysical framework’.⁹³ According to Descartes, the certain foundation of our knowledge of the objective world is to be found in the mental realm of the individual subject (*cogito, sum*).⁹⁴ In the Cartesian framework this mental realm or thinking substance (*res cogitans*) is categorically separated from the external world of extended and measurable things (*res extensa*), to which the body also belongs.

This leads to the following image of the subject: a lone, almost solipsistic, individual, who is enclosed in his mind and separated from the

⁹² Marx has justly been seen as a forerunner to contemporary practice theorists, insofar as he emphasizes the importance of practice (*Praxis*) and social relations instead of abstract ideas. However, his wholistic conception of society is generally not taken over by practice theorists.

⁹³ The term ‘Cartesian (metaphysical) framework’ is taken over from Bernstein (1971, 5) and others, who refrain from directing their critique specifically at Descartes. For, although certainly inspired by the French seventeenth-century philosopher, it is doubted whether all aspects of the position that is criticized converge exactly with his views. Critics also use this term because, according to them, these aspects are applicable to modern philosophy in general – or at least its main part – and not just to Descartes.

⁹⁴ Descartes 1996, 17.

external world, his body, and others.⁹⁵ Since Descartes, philosophers, scholars, and scientists have used this image of the subject as a basic presupposition in their research. One of the main challenges of modern philosophy has been to explain how the gaps related to subjectivity can be bridged. In particular, how can they be reconciled with the evident facts that man is both mind and body, often and in many ways intimately engaged with others, and at least on occasion truly seems to know the world and particular objects in it?

A radical new way of dealing with these problems was developed in the first half of the twentieth century by Heidegger and Wittgenstein.⁹⁶ These philosophers basically argued that there are no fundamental or categorical gaps to begin with. They forcefully rejected the Cartesian framework for being too intellectualistic and ‘scholastic’.⁹⁷ Heidegger held that in this framework the subject is unjustly modeled on the individual philosopher, scholar, or scientist, who either reflects on the world, or rationally and consciously observes and measures objects in order to understand them. By contrast, in Heidegger’s and Wittgenstein’s accounts, man is first and foremost unreflectively engaged in ordinary practices, in which others, objects and artifacts, and his body are intrinsic parts.⁹⁸ In this alternative image of the subject, theory, science, and philosophy are secondary or derived modes of being. Or better yet, they should themselves be understood as social practices.⁹⁹

The views of Heidegger and Wittgenstein have been fundamental for the work of later practice theorists. They entailed a different way of dealing with the three oppositions related to subjectivity. In the first place, concerning the mind/body relation practice theorists do not conceive the subject as primarily – let alone exclusively – a mental or thinking entity to which the body belongs as an instrument to be controlled and governed. Instead, the distinction between mind and body,

⁹⁵ See Bax (2009, 46-47 *et passim*) for a more elaborate discussion of the Cartesian picture of the subject.

⁹⁶ As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, Heidegger and Wittgenstein were not the first to emphasize the importance of practice – Marx, Nietzsche, and Dilthey can be seen as predecessors in this respect – but their arguments are most often used and developed by practice theorists.

⁹⁷ See especially Heidegger 2001, §13. Wittgenstein would agree with the critical remark of his student and translator G.E.M. Anscombe (quoted in Bernstein 1971, 6), that ‘(...) in modern philosophy we have an incorrigible contemplative conception of knowledge’.

⁹⁸ See, for instance, Heidegger’s (2001, §15) famous example of hammering and Wittgenstein’s (2001) many examples of languages games. The argument that unreflective action had been unjustly ignored in modern philosophy was also central to Marx’s early philosophy. See, for example, the ‘Theses on Feuerbach’ (Marx/Engels 1969).

⁹⁹ This insight occupies a central place in practice approaches in Science and Technology Studies. See, for instance, Pickering 1995 and Rouse 1996.

as well as that between mental and bodily actions is blurred. Practice theorists hold that the body carries out most actions unreflectively, routinely, or habitually.¹⁰⁰ This view goes against the long-standing conviction that each bodily movement is causally initiated by the mind, often after a process of deliberation – even though that process can be hidden from our consciousness.¹⁰¹ Consequently, actors' conscious intentions, ideas, and propositional knowledge are no longer leading in interpreting their actions, products and themselves.¹⁰² For the interpretation of the academization of art in this study it means that the actors' intentions – whether intentions of the artists or rulers – are but one factor among many.

Secondly, the social embeddedness of the individual is an important theme in theories of practice. According to practice theorists, we become who we are, form our identities, in the exposure to and especially the participation in social practices. Both our bodily routines and what we believe, know, feel, hope, etcetera are shaped in the practices in which we have been raised and in which we continue to participate.¹⁰³ This entails that identity is neither an intrinsic property that one possesses, nor is it somehow mysteriously located in the mind or soul, but it depends in a fundamental way on what one does. For instance, what one does in the context of existing family practices, religious

¹⁰⁰ It should be noted that this does not mean that these actions lack knowledge or understanding. Rather, this knowledge of a different type: 'tacit knowledge', 'practical understanding', 'know how', and 'skillful coping' are terms used in the practice-theoretical literature. Practice theory shares this view with theories of embodied and inactive cognition in cognitive science. See, for a seminal study in the latter discipline, Varela/Thompson/Rosch 1993. Moreover, these 'bodily habits' are acquired in the same practices, which they subsequently reproduce by carrying out actions of the same kind, or transform by carrying out actions of a slightly different type.

¹⁰¹ Nicolini (2012, 24) retraces this conviction to Plato, for whom '[e]very action would in fact be conceived as the application of general, calculable, precise, and truthful principles, while reference to universals, such as to the universal pure idea of 'good', would make it always possible to choose the best course of action. In this way, Plato established an intellectualistic prejudice at the very core of his philosophy and most of the Western tradition. This was the notion that good practice derives from the application of general and eternal principles.' See also Dreyfus 1991, 3-8. Practice-theoretical approaches completely overturn the hierarchy in the theory/practice opposition. Whereas in the traditional view action is the result of theoretical reflection and deliberation, in theories of practice, theoretical reflection is itself seen as a form of practice. This conception, of course, ties in with the above-mentioned idea that philosophy and science should be understood as social practices.

¹⁰² This is one of the central points of Loïc Wacquant's (2004) book on the habitus of the boxer and of Hubert Dreyfus' (2008) essay on skill acquisition.

¹⁰³ This practice-theoretical insight goes against the long-standing (again Cartesian) conviction that our mind (or soul) is essentially closed off and that it develops itself without influences from the outside world. See Bax (2009, esp. 77-79) and Schatzki (1996, 55-87) for further interpretations of this theme from a Wittgensteinian perspective.

practices, or business practices is equally, if not more, important for being a good daughter, catholic, or entrepreneur than the thoughts one has about one's parents, God, or starting a business.

What is more, because people usually participate in several practices, most practice theorists underwrite the thesis that 'the individual is the unique crossing point of practices, of bodily mental routines'.¹⁰⁴ This implies that scholars should refrain from ascribing a singular identity to a person. Moreover, what holds for individuals also holds for the identities (or meanings) of institutions. The identity of sixteenth-century artists *and* academies changed as they participated in different practices at (roughly) the same time, but also over time as these practices themselves changed. This means that a practice approach can offer an antidote against the subject-centered interpretations that have determined art historical research, including that on the academization of art, in the past.

Thirdly and finally, in theories of practice the relation of the subject to the world and to specific objects or artifacts in it is also conceptualized in a different manner. According to most practice theorists, material things, animals, and artifacts are intrinsic to practices. Moreover, these non-human entities possess their own kind of agency. Although practice theorists disagree about the exact nature and status of this agency, they concur with each other that artifacts, objects, and animals *do* something that contributes to the nature, form and reproduction or change of social life.¹⁰⁵

Furthermore, what holds for personal identity, by analogy, also holds for the meaning of objects and artifacts: what something is depends on its position and on its function in a social practice. As its function varies from one practice to the next, its meaning differs accordingly. This means that meaning, like identity, is not an essential characteristic that inherently belongs to an entity. It also entails that the meanings of the

¹⁰⁴ Reckwitz 2002, 256. See also Certeau 1984, xi: '... each individual is a locus in which an incoherent (and often contradictory) plurality of such relations [i.e. with other individuals] interact.'

¹⁰⁵ See Schatzki 2002, 105-122 for a discussion of the disagreement among practice theorists on this point. It would be interesting to connect the practice theoretical insights concerning the agency of objects and artifacts to the philosophical theory of *affordances*. See, for example, Rietveld/Kiverstein 2014. A central question in this theory is how objects and the environment in general provide the possibilities for action. Objects 'invite' or 'seduce' people to certain actions. From the practice-theoretical point of view it can be said that what affordances an object has depends on in what practice it is used. For instance, a glass on a table can invite someone to take a coffee break (office practices), to drink a portion of her/his daily two liters of water (modern health practices), or to water the plants (in gardening practices).

objects and works of art that originated in the context of the academies should be related to the different practices in which they functioned, e.g. educational, patronage, and religious practices.

2.3. *Pluralism*

Thus far, two aspects of the practice-theoretical conception of culture have been discussed, i.e. its dynamic nature and the fact that it consists of relatively small and local practices. One more aspect should be added and explained. This is the pluralism of practices within society. The fundamental observation at the basis of this idea is that within a society or culture there exist communities or groups of people (e.g. ‘subcultures’) that carry out widely divergent activities and as a result do not (fully) understand each other.

As a consequence, practice theorists conceive of culture as consisting of a variety practices, which each have their own organization or logic. Although these practices can partially overlap, they can neither be reduced to each other nor to a single set of underlying principles.¹⁰⁶ To name just one example, in contemporary society amateur sports practices and educational practices overlap in gym class, but these practices are organized differently and cannot be reduced to each other. This means that practice theorists reject reductionist and essentialist conceptions of culture and society. Instead of conceiving of cultures as unified and reified wholes, they see them as heterogeneous entities. Moreover, a manifold of practices can meet and intersect in a single institution, without any of them being the dominant or essential one. For example,

¹⁰⁶ An analogy with Wittgenstein’s notion of ‘family resemblance’ is expedient here. Wittgenstein (2001, 27-28, i.e. §§65-67) famously argued that certain concepts cannot be defined in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions, i.e. their essence cannot be determined. His example is the concept of ‘game’. There are many different sorts of games, but there is not one essential characteristic that they all share. Most, but not all games are played by more than one person; in most, but not all games there are winners and losers; most, but not all games have clearly defined rules, etc. Wittgenstein argued that there exist ‘family resemblances’ between the different activities that we call games: some games have certain characteristics in common, while other games share other traits with each other. According to Wittgenstein, family resemblances also exist between what he calls ‘language games’, a notion that expresses the conviction that language and activity are intimately connected. The concept of ‘language games’ has been of central importance for later practice theorists as they modeled the notion of social (or cultural) practice on it. For instance, both Bourdieu and Schatzki are deeply influenced by Wittgenstein’s work in this respect. See Schatzki 1996, 95-96. Bourdieu’s conception of culture or society as consisting of different games takes the analogy even further, as it includes stakes, strategies, and winners and losers.

this is the case in modern universities, where research and teaching practices come together.

By contrast, the literature on the Italian art academies contains essentialist interpretations throughout all methodological developments. For example, as already mentioned, in Pevsner's view the main goal of the academization of art was for the artists to liberate themselves from the constraining guild-system. According to him, the concept of the art academy is antithetical to that of the guild. He argued that the Accademia del Disegno betrayed Vasari's original intentions when it assumed the function of a guild in 1571.¹⁰⁷ Because Pevsner held that it is impossible for a guild and an academy to co-exist in a singly institution, he failed to notice, let alone give a satisfactory explanation of the fact that it were the academic artists themselves who petitioned Cosimo I to be released from their respective guilds and to form their own *Arte et Università* in connection to the academy. At least for the artists in question, there was no fundamental opposition between the educational and the guild functions of their institution. Pevsner's presuppositions about the contrary essences of the art academy and the guild prevent him from asking relevant questions about what actually happened in the early years of the institution.

Another example of this essentialist tendency is present in Goldstein's assessment of the status of the Accademia del Disegno in its early years. For Goldstein the crucial question is whether the Florentine academy only offered drawing instruction to its members, or whether it also taught theoretical dogmas and heralded certain artists as canonical figures. According to him, in the former case the Florentine academy 'would have been a drawing "school" masquerading as an academy'; in the latter 'it would have been an academy of a whole new type, the Ur-academy of the Renaissance tradition'.¹⁰⁸ Apparently, for Goldstein dogmatism and canonization belong to the essence of the art academy. This is confirmed when he claims that the French Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture, founded in 1648 in Paris, was the 'Ur-academy' because there at last emerged the doctrine 'conspicuously lacking in

¹⁰⁷ Pevsner 1940/1973, 49-51. Pevsner suggests that the incorporation of the guild was the reason why Vasari almost completely retired from the academy in the last three years of his life. Goldstein (1996, 19), clearly agrees with Pevsner's conviction that academy and guild are mutually exclusive when he writes that 'the whole concept of an academy of disegno is inimical to a guild workshop.' See Reynolds (1974/1985, 184 and 196) and Kempers (1992, 287 and 292) for similar views. The notion that art – or at least great art – is antithetical to the guild is also to be found in Panofsky (1952, 89), according to whom 'the idea that Michelangelo and Raphael should have belonged to a guild at all is almost ludicrous.'

¹⁰⁸ Goldstein 1996, 16. See also Goldstein 1975a.

earlier academies'.¹⁰⁹ This means that Goldstein judges the early years of the Accademia del Disegno – as well as those of the Accademia di San Luca – by his conception of the essential academy, which in his view was the Académie Royale in Paris.¹¹⁰ Incidentally, this means that there is also a teleological motive in Pevsner's and Goldstein's conception of the academization of art, since 'the artist' and 'the academy' are presented as slowly realizing their potential and manifesting their essence, from the sixteenth century onwards.

The tendency of measuring the first academies against the achievements of later ones is justly criticized by Hughes. He argues that this methodological fallacy is not only present in Pevsner's account of the early Accademia del Disegno, but also in that of Dempsey, even though both authors arrive at opposite conclusions. Whereas Pevsner holds that the Florentine institutions belongs to the pre-history of real art academies because it turned into a guild, Dempsey maintains that it was, in fact the first true academy of art, because it (occasionally) organized mathematical lectures and other educational activities. According to Hughes, instead of using later academies, such as the Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture, as a yardstick to measure the early Accademia del Disegno and Accademia di San Luca, the Italian institutions they should be understood against the background of other contemporary

¹⁰⁹ Goldstein 1996, 43. According to Goldstein, this doctrine was brought forward in Andre Félibien's preface to his *Conférences de l'Academie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture, pendant l'année 1667*, published in 1668 and Henri Testelin's 1680 *Sentiments des plus habiles peintres sur la pratique de la peinture et sculpture, mis en tables de préceptes*.

¹¹⁰ It should be noted that Académie Royale was the subject of Goldstein's dissertation from 1966. Goldstein's essentialism is perhaps even clearer in his 1975 article 'Towards a Definition of Academic Art'. Although the title of this article suggests that Goldstein will reflect on academic art in general, he only discusses the French Académie Royale and the English Royal Academy from the last quarter of the seventeenth until the first quarter of the nineteenth centuries. Apparently, earlier and later academies do not qualify as academies in Goldstein's sense. See Goldstein 1975a, 102, where he makes this point explicitly in relation to the Florentine academy: 'Although the first major academy was created by Vasari in 1563, it was some time before academies accepted the responsibility for teaching art students; early academies were either more or less exclusively concerned with material and moral conditions of the artist or they were convinced that art is a matter of inspiration that cannot be taught.' Both parts of this quote, i.e. that early Italian academies did not assume responsibility for teaching young artists because they believed that art cannot be taught and that they were exclusively interested in promoting the material and moral conditions of artists, are problematic. Subsequent publications have shown that early art academies did teach young art students, even if only irregularly. See Barzman 2000 and Roccasecca 2009 and Chapter Eight of this dissertation. Moreover, it is not clear which academies, if any, held the conviction that art cannot be taught. In any case, there is no evidence that the Accademia del Disegno and the Accademia di San Luca entertained such an idea and there is ample evidence that they believed the contrary. See chapters Eight and Nine of this dissertation.

organizations and developments, such as reformation of the guild system in Florence in the sixteenth century.¹¹¹

The essentialist tendency is also present in Barzman's Foucauldian analysis of the Accademia del Disegno. For, notwithstanding her discussion of the various activities that were carried out in the Florentine academy, such as religious and funerary celebrations, mathematical and drawing instruction, and the settling of professional disputes, in the end she reduces them all to the political dimension.¹¹² And therefore, instead of discussing these different functions in their own right, she conceives of them as working together to produce an art academy that is 'an extension of the disciplinary power of the Medici state and as an instrument of the family's cultural politics at home and abroad'.¹¹³ That is to say, Barzman reduces the academy's meanings to its function in the cultural politics of the Medici. Furthermore, even though Barzman does pay attention to the changes in the Accademia del Disegno in the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in terms of subjectivity and the creation of a public sphere, she highlights the institution's political significance, at the expense of its religious, professional, and artistic-educational functions.

Barzman's essentialism, reductionism, and strong focus on the person of the duke (and how he is represented in and by the academy) might seem at odds with her choice for Foucault as social theoretical guide. Foucault has always presented himself as a pluralist and he sees his historiographical work as a critique of, and alternative to, subject-centered accounts of the past. Moreover, because of his focus on 'discursive practices' in his later work he can be seen as partaking in the 'practice turn'.¹¹⁴ These points come together in an interview that is

¹¹¹ Hughes 1986a, 3-5.

¹¹² In the light of Barzman's detailed account of the various activities that were carried out in the Accademia del Disegno it is surprising that she did not attempt to 'document the organizations daily activities', because 'this undertaking would have been futile, as the secretaries kept records only of business-meetings, sometimes merely stating that the officers and members had convened.' Moreover, she seems to use this lack of archival material as a justification for her application of a Foucauldian theoretical framework, in which all activities are reduced to the disciplinary powers of the discourse of *disegno*. See Barzman 2000, 7. Although it might be literally correct that it is impossible to reconstruct the institution's activities from day to day, it is certainly possible, on the basis of the archival sources such as those discussed by Barzman, to identify and distinguish the different social practices that the academicians performed in the academy and how these were related to the existing practices outside of it. See Chapters Four to Ten.

¹¹³ Barzman 2000, 1. See Witte's (2002) review of Barzman's book for similar criticism.

¹¹⁴ The term 'practice theorist' is, however, not readily applicable to Foucault, because he does not develop a theory about practice (nor is this his goal). This becomes especially clear when comparing his work to that of Bourdieu and Schatzki. Furthermore, it should be noted, that Foucault saw the analysis of practices as a characterization of his work in

published under the title 'Politics and the Study of Discourse'. In this interview Foucault states that his aim is not to compose 'a global history – which would regroup all its elements around one principle or one form – but rather of opening out a field of general history within one could describe the singularity of practices, the play of their relations, the form of their dependencies.'¹¹⁵ Moreover, he also claims that '[n]othing ... is more foreign to me than the quest for a sovereign unique form' and the discourse should not be related 'to a thought, mind or subject which engendered it, but to the practical field in which it is deployed.'¹¹⁶ This means that Barzman's emphasis on the person of the duke and his lieutenants can be criticized from a Foucauldian point of view.

On the other hand, Barzman's focus on the constitution of modern subjectivity in power relations and political practices, and especially through the 'discipline of disegno', do have a genuine Foucauldian ring to it. For, Foucault also writes that it is his goal 'to define how, to what extent, at what level discourses, particularly scientific discourses can be objects of a political practice, and in what system of dependence they can exist in relation to it.'¹¹⁷ Indeed, the discourses Foucault is especially interested in and most often describes in his books are scientific ones with political implications. In other words, his analyses focus specifically on knowledge practices in connection with practices of power – or on 'power/knowledge' – at the expense of other social practices. This lack of balance is taken over by Barzman in her book about the Florentine academy.¹¹⁸

In a sense, the method adopted in this dissertation is the opposite of Foucault's genealogical approach in *Discipline and Punish*. Whereas Foucault sets out to determine how the 'micro-physics of power' in modern society works by analyzing a single type of practices, i.e. punitive practices, in various institutions – prisons, hospitals, schools, the

general. See the brief overview of his work from 1980, which Foucault co-authored and which was published under the pseudonym 'Maurice Florence' (1994).

¹¹⁵ Foucault 1991b, 64.

¹¹⁶ Foucault 1991b, 55 and 61. In addition, concerning his concept of the 'episteme' Foucault states that this is not determined by 'the sum of its knowledge, nor the general style of its research, but the divergence, the distances, the oppositions, the differences, the relations of its various scientific discourses: the episteme is not a sort of grand underlying theory, it is a space of dispersion, it is an open and doubtless indefinitely describable field of relationships.'

¹¹⁷ Foucault 1991b, 69.

¹¹⁸ See, for Foucault's emphasis on scientific practices his inaugural lecture for the Collège de France from 1970, in which he laid out his upcoming projects. Foucault 1981, esp. 55-56. It should be noted that although in Foucault's later work, e.g. the project of the *History of Sexuality*, he moves beyond the interpretation of practices that are connected to the human sciences, his main interest remains to analyze how the subject is constituted in relations of power and in 'games of truth'. See 'Florence' (1994).

army – the goal of this study is to understand how a variety of practices came together and overlapped in a single type of institution, i.e. the sixteenth-century art academy.¹¹⁹

2.4. *Disegno: The ‘demotion of practice’ and the promotion of the artist*

The opposition of the terms ‘theory’ and ‘practice’ frequently plays a role in the practice-theoretical literature. The main body of this literature consists of systematic arguments, often developed in opposition to or extending those of other authors. However, occasionally, the argumentation is accompanied by (elements of) a history of how the hierarchical opposition between the terms ‘practice’ and ‘theory’ has governed the dominant currents in Western intellectual history.¹²⁰ This opposition is usually traced back to Plato and Aristotle. Notwithstanding some important differences in their philosophical systems – especially concerning the status of the Ideas (or Forms) and the question of the uniformity or multiformity of reality – both philosophers postulated a fundamental gap between theory and practice, a gap that had epistemological, socio-political, and psychological aspects.

Epistemologically, the distinction between theory and practice was the distinction between sciences that were concerned with obtaining knowledge for their own sake and activities that desired knowledge for more mundane goals such as money and fame.¹²¹ Whereas theory (*episteme*) concerned the first causes and divine/eternal things, moral practice (*praxis*) and productive practice (*poiesis*) dealt with particulars and changeable things. While in Plato’s philosophy these latter activities did not count as real sciences and only produced opinions, Aristotle did conceive of their products as legitimate and worthy forms of knowledge.¹²² However, for both philosophers *praxis* and *poiesis* had a substantially lower status than *episteme*.

Socially and politically, Plato’s and Aristotle’s hierarchical conceptions of domains of knowledge were connected to their conceptions of the ideal state, in which philosophers, theologians, and scientists enjoyed higher social positions than cobblers, blacksmiths and

¹¹⁹ For Foucault’s description of the method adopted in *Discipline and Punish* see Foucault 1991a, 26.

¹²⁰ Nicolini (2012, 23-43) is most explicit in developing the place of ‘practice’ in Western intellectual history. See also Bourdieu 1990, 27-28 and Jonker 2014.

¹²¹ See Bernstein 1971, ix-x.

¹²² For this reason practice theorists generally have a more positive attitude towards Aristotle than towards Plato. See, for instance, Nicolini 2012, 25-28 and Dreyfus 2008, 15.

sculptors. Finally, psychologically, this was also connected to a hierarchical conception of the human soul, which was divided into higher and lower parts.¹²³ The higher parts of the soul were more developed in philosophers and scientists, and the lower parts in cobblers and soldiers. In this context, Plato's famous ban of painters (and tragic poets) from his ideal state is relevant. According to him, painters are dangerous because their products are directed at the passionate and low part of the soul, which enable them to manipulate people, and especially the masses. Another reason why Plato excommunicated painters from his ideal state is that their art is an imitation of an imitation and, therefore, twice removed from the truth of the Ideas.¹²⁴

The hierarchized distinction between theory and practice was reflected in the ancient and medieval educational system in Europe. In Antiquity the *artes liberales* referred to a varying group of scientific and scholarly disciplines that were deemed fit only for free men. They were contrasted to the *artes illiberales* or, later, the *artes mechanicae* ('mechanical arts'), which were practiced by slaves (*servus*) or freed men (*libertus*). The Latin word *ars*, and its Greek equivalent *technē* – which forms the basis for the modern word 'technology' – had a broad meaning and referred to more than just arts and crafts. The term comprised a body of knowledge or rule system that was based on true reason.¹²⁵

In late Antiquity a more or less stable system of the seven liberal arts was established. It was divided into the *quadrivium*, to which belonged the mathematical disciplines of geometry, arithmetic, astronomy, and musical theory, and the *trivium*, which consisted of the

¹²³ See for Plato's ideas about the hierarchy of knowledge domains and of the role of the philosopher in society especially Book 7 of *The Republic*. See Plato 2003, 226 (520b-d) and 233-241 (525b-533a). Although Aristotle distances himself from Plato by conceiving *phronesis* ('practical wisdom') and *technē* ('art', 'craft', or 'skill') as legitimate and independent forms of knowledge in addition to *epistēmē* (scientific knowledge), he concurs with his former teacher by clearly deeming the latter more worthy than the former two. Furthermore, action and production (*praxis* and *poiesis*) have a lower social status, because they deal with concrete and particular things, whereas theory (*epistēmē*) takes the highest position because it deals with universals and first causes. See Book 6 of the *Ethica Nicomachea* (Aristotle 1997, 189, (1139a26-30)). Aristotle also agrees with Plato in that the philosopher should be a leader rather than a follower in the ideal state. For example, an important prerequisite for becoming a philosopher, according to Aristotle, is that one is born a free man, thereby excluding not only slaves, but also freed men. See Aristotle 2003, 23 (982a18-19).

¹²⁴ Plato 2003, 314-318 (596-598) and 326-327 (605).

¹²⁵ On the meaning of the term *artes liberales* see Wittkower 1952, 4 and Dempsey 2009, 47. See Wagner 1983 for a discussion of the development of the system of the *artes liberales* and the *artes mechanicae* in the Middle Ages and see Kristeller 1951 and 1952 and Wittkower 1952 for a global overview of how the visual arts were related to this pedagogical system in European history from Antiquity until first half of the twentieth century.

linguistic disciplines of rhetoric, grammar, and dialectics (i.e. logic).¹²⁶ These disciplines formed the cornerstone of education in medieval Europe and they were turned into preliminary sciences at the first universities, and later also into core subjects. In the twelfth century, a corresponding scheme of seven mechanical arts was formulated, which consisted of tailoring (or weaving), hunting, armature, agriculture, medicine, navigation, and theater. Architecture and some forms of painting and sculpture belonged to armature.¹²⁷ The lower status of the mechanical arts was justified by the fact that they were mostly manual and productive, whereas the liberal arts boasted intellectual and theoretical foundations.

According to practice theorists, this ‘demotion of practice’ continued to govern Western intellectual history under influence of the Christian tradition.¹²⁸ For instance, the hierarchical opposition between theory and practice was central to the medieval universities and this remained the case in the early modern period.¹²⁹ The Cartesian metaphysical system – which was already discussed and criticized from a practice-theoretical perspective above – constituted another important moment in this history of the dominance of theory over practice. Finally, in the modern social sciences and humanities the ‘demotion of practice’ has taken the form either of the over-intellectualization or of the neglect of activity and concrete practice.¹³⁰ That is to say, either practice was misrepresented as (a form of) theory, or only ideas (or theories, philosophical systems) and finished works/products (*opus operatum*) were studied – at the expense of the investigation of how ideas are related to concrete actions and of the way the products were made (*modus operandi*).¹³¹

¹²⁶ In the sixteenth century, the *letterato* Benedetto Varchi (1503-1565) divides these seven *artes liberales* into the three arts of talking (*favellare*) and the arts of quantity (*quantità*). Varchi 1550/1960, 15. Varchi’s distinction derives from a lecture on the arts delivered for the Accademia Fiorentina in 1547. The role of this lecture in the foundation of the Accademia del Disegno is discussed in section 9.2.

¹²⁷ Martianus Capella, who lived in the fifth century, is credited with formulating the final version of the seven liberal arts, whereas Hugo of St. Victor (c. 1096-1141) was probably responsible for establishing the corresponding scheme of seven mechanical arts. See Wagner 1983, 15-16 and Kristeller 1951, 504-508.

¹²⁸ See Nicolini (2012, 28-29), from whom also the phrase ‘demotion of practice’ is borrowed.

¹²⁹ However, from the sixteenth century onward, the universities slowly and gradually started to display a greater appreciation for practice. See section 7.2.

¹³⁰ See, for example, Dreyfus 1991, 3-8.

¹³¹ See for this criticism especially Bourdieu 1979 and 1990.

However, since the nineteenth century philosophers such as Marx, Dilthey, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein have formed what might be called a ‘counter-tradition’ to this demotion of practice. They did this by forcefully and convincingly arguing for a theoretical reorientation towards conceptualization of practice (and activity) in its own right.¹³² This implied a rethinking of the hierarchical relation between theory and practice, in which the traditional dichotomy has been replaced by a new picture. In this picture, practice and theory interpenetrate each other and stand on the same level. For instance, theorizing and thinking are not conceived of as separated from the realm of practice, but they are seen as (social) activities themselves.¹³³ As a consequence, the ‘practice turn in contemporary theory’ can be used for achieving emancipatory objectives, especially for those authors standing in the Marxist tradition or otherwise combining it with a normative perspective.¹³⁴

This brief and general sketch of the history of Western thought as it occurs in (some) theories of practice can be filled out in more detail by connecting it to the standard view of the academization of art in terms of the social elevation of the arts and the artist. According to historians of the art academies, in the sixteenth century the term ‘*accademia*’ alluded to groups and gatherings of people who discussed and debated theoretical and intellectual subjects and issues. The term, it is argued, was almost synonymous with theoretical or intellectual learning. Therefore, modern scholars argue that by calling their institutions ‘academies’, painters, sculptors, and architects attempted to elevate the social status of their trades.¹³⁵

For instance, according to Rossi, traditionally these trades belonged to the mechanical instead of the liberal arts (*artes mechanicae* vs *artes liberales*), because they were thought to involve little or no intellectual effort on the part of the producer. From the fifteenth century onward this categorization slowly started to shift under influence of humanist treatises, in which the theoretical foundations – mostly of a mathematical and anatomical nature – of these arts were discussed. In addition, according to Rossi, the opposition between *fatica di corpo* (physical toil) and *fatica di mente* (mental toil) is one of the central

¹³² It should be noted that some contemporary practice theorists point out that the practice turn is, in fact, a *return* to practice, insofar as some of the abovementioned philosophers were inspired by Aristotle’s discussions about practice and production. See, for a discussion of this point, Nicolini 2012, 25-29.

¹³³ Schatzki 1996, 90.

¹³⁴ On the emancipatory objectives in theories of practice see section 3.4.

¹³⁵ See section 7.3 for a discussion of the term ‘*accademia*’ in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italy.

conceptual distinctions in the work of the art theorists. According to him, the nobility of an art form was measured on the balance of intellectual and manual work. The better one was able to downplay the manual or productive aspects of painting and sculpture, the more one could claim to practice a liberal art or science.¹³⁶ Therefore, the argument goes, in the course of the sixteenth century, art theorists in the context of the art academies, such as Benedetto Varchi (1503-1565), Vincenzo Danti (1530-1576), and Federico Zuccari, developed a concept of *disegno*, which not only justified the grouping together of painting, sculpture and architecture as ‘sister arts’, but also foregrounded the intellectual aspects of these professions in the creative process.¹³⁷

This means that, according to this interpretation, the academicians appealed to exactly the same theoretical and conceptual framework as before, i.e. the framework developed by Plato and Aristotle, in which theory and theoreticians occupied a higher position than practice and practitioners. In other words, whereas the status of these arts and their relationships to other trades changed under the influence of the writings of artists and the academization (and institutionalization) of art, this did not happen with the relative status of practice and theory. Therefore, from a practice-theoretical perspective the academization of art would not be a major turning point in history at all, because it works with the same conceptual framework, according to which intellectual activity (theorization) is fundamentally opposed to and more worthy than physical labor (practice). This means that the social elevation of the artist can be seen as part of the ‘demotion of practice’ that has dominated Western intellectual history.

However, a closer scrutiny of the theoretical treatises that originated in the context of the art academies shows that theory and intellection were less emphasized than often thought by interpreters, and that it was not simply an instance of the ‘demotion of practice’. When connecting these treatises to the educational practices that were performed in the academies, it becomes clear that there was a more complex interplay between theory and practice than hitherto

¹³⁶ Rossi (1980, 83-85, 108, and 152) refers in this context especially to the writings of Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519), Benedetto Varchi and Giorgio Vasari. It should be noted that the fact *that* artists wrote and published art theoretical treatises about the principles of their arts, regardless of the content thereof, *eo ipso* proved the point they wanted to make, namely that they were intellectuals and their professions intellectual activities.

¹³⁷ See Williams 1997, 29-57 and 136-150, Barzman 2000, 145-151, and Dempsey 2009, 43-44.

considered.¹³⁸ The analysis of the theoretical arguments of sixteenth-century humanists and artists gives a more detailed account of the genealogy of the relation between theory and practice, which leads to nuancing some of the received opinions about this genealogy in the practice theoretical literature. Furthermore, the different conceptions and interpretations of *disegno* in the treatises of the academicians can be taken as evidence of disagreements about the future of educational and artistic practices.¹³⁹

2.5. A practice approach to the academization of art in early modern Italy

The previous discussions about the literature of the Accademia del Disegno and Accademia di San Luca and about the common features of theories of practice have several consequences for the interpretation of the academization of art in this dissertation. A first consequence has already been stipulated in the last paragraphs, where it was outlined how rethinking the relation between theory and practice can be relevant for understanding the academization of art; and how, in turn, the analysis of theoretical treatises that were written in the academic context can improve our understanding of the relation between theory and practice.

Second, the application of a practice approach to the academization of art can be seen as a philosophical grounding of, or as a next step in, developments that have already been underway in research on the art academies (and in cultural historical research in general). This approach fully acknowledges the social dimension of art and artists by placing them in a social ontological framework, in which social practices occupy the central position. Furthermore, the turn to practices implies the application of a range of conceptions – of culture, subjectivity, objectivity, and meaning – that are convincing alternatives to outdated and modernist ones that have been used in the past, including those discussed above in relation to the literature on the academization of art.

Finally, the focus on social practices in a practice approach can help to answer questions that have been left unanswered in the literature on the academization of art. Most importantly, it remains unclear how the

¹³⁸ This is not meant to suggest that the way in which the academicians conceived of the theory-practice relation in the arts is correct. Rather, the aim is to nuance the standard picture of the history of the theory versus practice. An exception to the standard interpretation in the modern literature of sixteenth-century artistic treatises as essentially downplaying the mechanical aspects of artistic production and highlighting the intellectual dimension is provided by Mendelsohn (1982, 45) in her discussion of Varchi's lectures about art for the Accademia Fiorentina. See for Varchi's lectures section 9.2.

¹³⁹ See Chapter Nine.

different functions of the Accademia del Disegno and the Accademia di San Luca can be related to each other. For example, how, if at all, are their didactic and representational functions related to their political strategic functions? And how are these, in turn, related to the religious and juridical functions of the institutions, which have been neglected in the literature? As suggested, the reason for this neglect is that the authors work with preconceived, fixed, and essentialist ideas about what an art academy is, for example when the academy is called a failure because it took on the function of a guild or because it carried out charitable works for the poor members. In these cases the sixteenth-century art academy is measured against its later counterparts.

In the practice-theoretical approach that is taken in this study, the essentialist conception of the art academy is rejected. Instead, the academy is conceived as the crossing point of various social practices. In other words, what the academy is depends on the practices that are carried out in it. As these practices change, so does the (identity or meaning of the) academy. Thus, in order to understand the academization of art, the relevant practices should be analyzed. Especially, the pluralist notion of culture is important here because it does more justice to complex and composite reality of the art academies than previous interpretations have. By conceiving the Florentine and Roman art academies as the crossing points of artistic-educational, guild, literary-theoretical, political or patronage, and religious practices, which, moreover, all underwent transformations at the end of the sixteenth century, this study attempts to disentangle the various activities that were carried out in them. Thereby, it provides a new and comprehensive understanding of the early history of these art institutions.