MAKING INVISIBLE CONNECTIONS VISIBLE -

A PRACTICE AND SOCIALITY BASED STUDY OF ORGANIZATIONAL AND INSTITUTIONAL LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

Our goal is to identify in a non-utopian way the time-space dynamics of knowing, learning, and organizing in the context of a library and its practices. We address how knowledge is produced and reproduced in this mature institution and, if at all, disseminated over time and across space in processes of institutionalization through an ethnography of a public library's reference practice and one exemplary micro-narrative. Analysis of inter and intra-practice dynamics reveals that reference practice in libraries can be characterized as an epistemic and relational practice, mediated by a firm we-mode sociality between library staff and patrons. The macro-dynamics between sociality and reference practice at work in the larger field of the library as institution and in all of the organizations that comprise the institutional field of libraries point to knowledge and learning gaps that threaten institutional learning opportunities.

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A Practice and Sociality Based Approach to Organizational and Institutional Learning

1 INTRODUCTION

A key theme in contemporary practice-based literature on knowing, learning, and organizing is to capture accurately how these interrelated processes unfold over time and space (Antonacopoulou, 2007). One of the challenges is to increase the explanatory power of the practice concept by making visible the 'rhythm and patterning' (Schatzki, 2006) in the recursive dynamics between what individuals actually learn in everyday practice and the organization of their knowing in processes of institutionalization.

In broad strokes, the dynamic connection between learning-in-action and institutionalizing knowledge can be painted as follows. Institutions such as the library or the law essentially are sets of constitutive norms that, if used recurrently, give a 'special institutional status' (Tuomela, 2007a) or 'memory' (Schatzki, 2006) to the practices involved in those institutions. This special institutional status of practices comprises a conceptual, a normative, and a social component; that is, it conveys underlying ideas, it specifies how to think and act, and it requires a form of collective acceptance of those participating. These abstracted constitutive norms function as bodies of knowledge that economize on the mental energy needed to reproduce and stabilize practices (Douglas, 1986). They structure and guide patterns of interactions amongst humans and with material objects in rules, understandings and teleoaffective structurings (Schatzki, 2006), and they distance these patterns of interaction in time and space (Giddens, 1984). As such, institutional norms preserve, recognize and visualize relevant knowledge that was once learned. Practices, in this sense, are 'collective pattern-governed behaviors' (Tuomela, 2007a) that became institutionalized.

Another dimension of practices is their capacity for change and renewal; practices are also 'epistemic practices' (Rouse, 2001; Knorr Cetina, 2001). For individuals to perform competently in their everyday practices, the relevant institutional norms need to be enacted in each situation of concrete action, and modified if that is inspired by the specific circumstances faced, their practical needs, or skilled competencies (Carrier, 1990). Hence, enacting and modifying the institutional status of a practice is a creative process of 'translation' (Latour, 1986) that may recursively affect the prevailing perceptions of practice and professional identity as they are inscribed in the institutional norms. It is precisely here where the potential for organizational and institutional learning lies (Orlikowski, 2000). Alternative ways of using institutions and their constitutive norms may generate new practical knowing that once it starts to 'travel' (Czarniawska and Sevón, 1996) through the practice and beyond will become more visible and recognized in organizational and institutional learning trajectories. The more this new knowing spills over to others, the more likely it will become regularized, habitualized and, ultimately, institutionalized to provide it with "greatest temporal and spatial extension" (Giddens, 1984: 17). This condensed yet full-circle time-space dynamic explains how practices are simultaneously changed and stabilized in relentless,

emergent processes of 'becoming' (Clegg *et al*., 2005). In the interplay of knowing, learning, and organizing, practices are never completed.

Typical examples of capturing real-life dynamics are provided by those who in recent years have emphasized 'what we do not know' instead of 'what we do know' while theorizing the intricate relationship between knowing, learning, and organizing. Knorr Cetina's (1997a) lack-in-the-object/wanting-in-the-subject dynamic, Gherardi's (1999) mystery driven knowledge, and Spender's (2008) meaning-absences have in common that they all see 'passion for the unknown' as the primary motor explaining the ongoing co-constitution of knowing, learning, and organizing. As occasionally noticed (Gherardi *et al*., 2007), however, passion for knowing has a utopian ring to it. Moreover, even when practitioners are that passionate about their knowledge, it is not a given that knowing and learning on the one hand, and organizing by institutionalizing on the other hand are neatly connected in a mutually reinforcing reciprocity. Learning being associated with change and organizing with stability, these processes in 'tension' (Antonacopoulou and Chiva, 2007) may facilitate or just as easily frustrate each other. Thus, the dynamics between the everyday and the institutionalized practice are only potentially co-enhancing. A challenge for practice-based analyses is therefore also to make visible in theoretical discourse where these fragile dynamics dissolve, and how such identifiable disconnects result.

In this article we aim to take on the challenge of identifying in a non-utopian way the time-space dynamics of knowing, learning, and organizing in the context of a library and its practices. How is knowledge produced and reproduced in this mature institution and, if at all, disseminated over time and across space in processes of institutionalization? The library has been chosen as the research site because it is a quintessential learning institution, recognized both historically and in present-day knowledge societies, through its legislative acts around the world. Within the library, the reference practice has been selected to study, because it is the reference desk that patrons visit to resolve their knowledge gaps in interaction with the 'librarian ways of knowing' (cf. Cross, 2001). It is at these specific time-space presences that the heterogeneous elements of this practice – such as people, books, buildings, furnishings, information and communication technologies, and institutional norms – need to converge for the patron-librarian interactions to succeed. The exploratory ethnography on which this article is based comprises over 4 months and 150 hours of participant observation, 480 face-to-face interactions at the reference desk, and 30 in-depth interviews with managers, practitioners and patrons in three branches of a metropolitan Canadian public library.[1]

In what follows we will first portray our practice-based approach to organizing. Using the insights of analytic philosophers of social reality (Psarros and Schulte-Ostermann, 2007), we will characterize patron-librarian interactions as plural subject commitments, and combine this view on sociality with the materiality and institutionality of practices. We will then briefly introduce the library as institution highlighting its essential norms and values. Next, we will describe in detail the intra-practice micro-dynamics of establishing joint commitments at the reference desk and how practical knowing is generated as these commitments unfold over time. Next, while discussing the inter-practice macro-dynamics of institutionalizing, we will illustrate how and where the connections between knowing, learning, relating, and organizing dissolve, resulting in missed opportunities for organizational and institutional learning. Concluding remarks end this paper.

2 A PRACTICE-BASED APPROACH

Inspired by this ethnography, we seek our contribution to the rapidly expanding field of practice-based approaches by delving into a notion that is remarkably underexplored in the corresponding literature: human sociality. For this reason, we turn to the analytic philosophy of social reality (Psarros and Schulte-Ostermann, 2007), in particular to those who privilege 'collective intention' (Tuomela, 2002, 2007a, 2007b) or 'joint commitment' (Gilbert, 2000, 2007) in the understanding of practices, institutions, and sociality in general. With the inclusion of these accounts on sociality in our practice-based approach, we do not mean to return to a mentalistic view of cognition and learning, which is generally eschewed in practice-based analyses (Nicolini *et al.*, 2003; Gherardi, 2006). Our goal is not to theorize *what* is going on in people's heads or *what* they specifically intend, but to capture sociality 'as it happens' (Schatzki, 2005) as part of the dynamics of knowing, learning, and organizing.

Sociality is the human tendency to bind oneself with others in interdependent relationships and, thus, to create and join organized forms of acting together (cf. Fiske, 1992; Knorr Cetina, 1997). Practice is an ontologically distinct form of organized togetherness, but what does 'acting together' in this context mean? What is it for people, for instance, to voluntarily help push a broken car? And what are the 'dynamics of binding self with others' at play here?

Practices comprise materially mediated strings of human activities that are oriented towards goals to which people variably attach emotionally. That is, the performative activities in a practice are connected by normative 'teleoaffective structurings' (Schatzki, 2001) which prescribe the goals of the practice, the preferred code of conduct, the tasks to be done and "acceptable or correct emotions out of which to do so" (ibid.: 53). These activities typically entail joint action among agents, which requires that they act in view of a collective intention in order to achieve the practice goals. In the words of Gilbert (2007: 157), the general account of the sociality needed for teleoaffective structurings to be successful, is: "Persons A and B (and so on) collectively intend to do X if and only if A and B (and so on) are jointly committed to intend as a body to do X." A joint commitment is a commitment that binds at least two people into a 'plural subject' (Gilbert, 2000). Such a plural subject acts as one irreducible body (Kannetsky, 2007) that simultaneously enacts, modifies, thinks, speaks and learns in interaction with its organizational and institutional context. Hence, it is not only a mere set of joint actions and relationships, mediated by objects, but also a way of co-constituting that constantly affects both the everyday and the institutionalized practice.

Not all practices can or need to be characterized by jointly committed, closely cooperating plural subjects, however. Tuomela (2002, 2007a,b) clarifies this point by making a distinction between different versions of 'we-mode joint action' and 'I-mode joint action'. In the I-mode versions, the participants have private intentions and goals that they typically cannot attain on their own. They therefore seek cooperation, contending that they will all individually gain from doing so. By contrast, versions of we-mode joint action are based on shared intentions and goals that require participants to act as interdependent group members rather than privately. In we-mode joint action, participating agents "stand or fall" together (Tuomela, 2007: 172) such as when they unite to push a broken car.

Both Gilbert and Tuomela have developed demarcation points to identify the two main modes of acting together in real-life practices. A genuine joint commitment, according to Gilbert's concurrence condition, cannot be rescinded unilaterally, i.e. participants need the permission of the others to break off the cooperation if they are to be "entirely without fault" (2007: 155). Tuomela's connects practice activities in his collectivity condition stating that goals are "satisfied for a member if and only if it is satisfied for all members" (2007a: 4).

In this article, we apply Gilbert's and Tuomela's demarcation points, because the dynamics of knowing, learning, and organizing are fundamentally different in the two modes of acting together in practices. In Schatzki's terms (2001), the teleoaffective structurings, understandings and rules in both modes of cooperation are differently patterned.. As we will demonstrate while reporting on findings from this ethnography, patron interactions with staff at the reference desk in libraries can most accurately be typified as we-mode joint actions performed by jointly committed plural subjects.

The last dimension of our practice-based approach concerns the materiality of practices and the connections with their sociality and institutionality. In practice-based approaches, sociality not only refers to human relationships, but also to connections with nonhuman objects that "bind us as much as we bind them" (Pels *et al*., 2002: 1). Objects are institutionalized bodies of knowledge that materially frame and reproduce human relationships through the norms inscribed in their forms, uses, and overtimeness.

 This expanded notion of human and nonhuman sociality is part of our practice-based approach. Objects matter. Apart from being bodies of knowledge reproducing institutional norms, however, we also foreground objects as relational props. Instead of suggesting that objects might "displace human beings as relationship partners" (Knorr Cetina, 1997: 1) in what would then become our post-social societies, we see objects as mediating ways of relating to each other whose agency is relative to human uses, no matter how pervasively they are seen or how pervasively they conceal their influence**.** The closer objects are in time and space to human relating in practices, the more active, significant and 'subjective' they are in our sociality. Conversely, over time and space distances, objects become more distinct, disconnected and 'objective'. In the first case, objects can be 'evocative' (Turkle, 2007), 'affiliative' (Suchman, 2005) or 'knowledge objects' (Knorr Cetina, 2001); in the latter case, they are disembodied, disembedded, and detached. In the co-performance of sociality, institutionality, and materiality of practices, we observe subject-object-subject or S-O-S relationships rather than 'object-centered sociality' (Knorr Cetina, 1997, 2001), even in situations in which objects seem so dominant, such as in social media, on-line games or libraries. Like patrons leaving notes for the next patron in their returned books, we relate *through* objects not just *with* objects. This view on human and nonhuman sociality also entails that experienced relational gaps can be just as potent as knowledge gaps for people to engage in organized forms of togetherness. 'Connecting as knowing' and 'connecting as relating' are interdependent practice activities.

3. LIBRARY AS INSTITUTION

The public library is a modern institution in the sense that its existence is based on a legislated set of norms, behaviours and public practices (Birdsall, 1995; Black, 1997; Buschman and Leckie, 2007). These three components characterized as conceptual,

normative and social together frame the library's practices as a 'social institution' (Tuomela, 2007a). Conceptually, the public library's rationalist-humanist tradition is grounded in a social epistemology where, although values of intellectual freedom, equity of access, stewardship and individualized learning are inter-subjectively enacted, these individual enactments are finally transcended by a larger conceptual frame of social knowing and acting (Budd, 2001; Buschman, 2003). These values form the library's common 'ideational' (Whetten, 2006) identity and intellectual public space that supports social democratic ideals that are recursively reproduced by its practices. The public library is constituted, bounded and administered by legislation, regulations and processes of public accountability. As a government agency, it is hierarchically organized with decision-making and authority residing in a politically appointed board of officials representing the citizenry's collective interest. Finally, the public library is understood as a social institution because its identity is constructed in a 'we-mode' as a collective of everyday behaviours enacting a knowing citizenry (McCabe, 2001). Collectively, citizens and library staff are agents in an array of practices in which the main activities are seeking, finding, informing, knowing, and learning through interaction with library staff, information systems and other objects (Goulding, 2006; Cassell & Hiremath, 2006; Kapitzke & Bruce, 2006; Savolainen, 2007).

From the institutionalized perspective, the reference practice has historically been defined as a series of transactions in which two subjects (the patron and the library staff member) rely on objects in I-mode joint action of subject-object-subject (IS-O-IS) arrangements, to bridge epistemic gaps across time and space and situated within the institutional field of library (Dervin, 1977, 1998; Kuhlthau, 2004; Ross *et al.*, 2002; Taylor, 1991). However, findings from this study suggest that these arrangements can be more accurately understood as we-mode interactions with a different structure where both subjects connect with each other and with their objects from two we-mode perspectives: connections of knowing and connections of relating. We depict this latter arrangement as we-mode subject-object-subject, a WS-O-WS sociality. These findings, with particular emphasis on the library's reference practice as a 'we-mode' sociality, substantiate our contribution to the practice-based approach and will be discussed in detail through analysis of the intra and inter-reference practice dynamics.

4. THE INTRA-PRACTICE DYNAMICS

In the following narrative this we-mode interaction between the reference librarian (Alex) and the patron who engages her in dialogue using library objects as their relational props - exemplifies Tuomela's notion of collective activity, as it emerges from a joint commitment and intention to share to resolve the patron's particular (in time and space) knowledge question. Regardless of the presence of mediating objects such as the library catalogue or collections, the reference activity itself does not occur except through this shared WS-O-WS interaction and in this regard, the agents form a plural subject (Gilbert, 2007). Occurring across time and space, the rhythm and patterning (Schatzki, 2006) of these successive interactions constitute the dynamics of an everyday practice of knowing, learning and relating.

Excerpted from an interview with a reference librarian, the narrative below invites a larger question about the relational dimensions of the library's reference practice: 'What is the nature of the sociality in this library organization that would invite such a personal discursive overture by a patron with a reference librarian with whom she had no prior

relationship?' This narrative is an emblematic case which forms the basis of a discussion about these dynamics of the reference service as epistemic and relational practice. Framing their readiness, finding an opening, connecting as knowing, connecting as relating, and negotiating the larger field are the dynamics that are disassembled in the following discussion.

Librarian: It's almost like case by case … you never have a pre-set formula, you know. You're always trying to help them explore what they're trying to find. And I don't think that they come to you, you know sometimes they come to you and they don't have their ideas fully formed, so you're trying to tease that out, and work that through. Most people come with kind of a half an idea and you have to work through it.

Interviewer: You're relatively new at the branch – and we've talked about this on the desk – do you feel like you're building relationships with people? Whether you know their names or not?

Librarian: Yeah, oh yeah. It is so funny, how you're like the confessor, you know you are the priest, or the bartender, like a guy today starts spilling his guts. It was a good one. I wish you'd been there. He was having a spiritual crisis. He's very well dressed, economically very well off, middle aged. It's so funny what people will tell you, you know they almost have to tell you because they're like … A lot of times they're researching something that's very private and he wanted this book, "What should I do with the rest of my life?" by a self-help author that's really popular. And he just started talking to me – he said, "My sister died 2 years ago and my brother died the year before that" – and he's like "You know, I'm starting to have some questions, you know I'm a chef, I know what I'm doing with my work life but I just have some bigger questions." And he wasn't upset, though. He wasn't upset – he was ready to start thinking about things. And I just said, "You know death's like that, you have to start thinking about things, you know you can't put things off."

Interviewer: You said that?

Librarian: Yeah. It was a serious conversation.

Interviewer: Why would you say that? Why do you feel like you can and want to?

Librarian: Because he was reaching out, you know, he's opening up and that sometimes is a little uncomfortable. It can be, but at the same time, in modern life people are very isolated sometimes. And it's a public library and it's some place they can be out in public. And I do think people do feel isolated and it's a way for them …. And if they're going to open up, you know, I don't think you should go "oh --- get back, get back, too much." And sometimes yeah, but death, you know, death you're not supposed to talk about in public. And I'll talk about death, I'll talk about that. And his point was, he says, to me, "You know my sister died, and my dad, he thought it was nothing. Get over it. Just get over it. … And I don't think so. Death – something like that you shouldn't just get over it." And I thought, you know that's a very wise thing to say, and so he wanted to get this book to help explore that.

Interviewer: Did you know this book?

Librarian: Yeah, other people, had asked for it. But I mean, I'm not perfect. I do find that sometimes when people do that, you know, I mean you do feel a little uncomfortable, and I think that's more your problem, not his.

Interviewer: Why do you feel uncomfortable?

Librarian: Well I just think that anytime you're talking to a stranger about something very personal, it can be a little uncomfortable, but you know I'd rather criticize myself and think it's my own neuroses, not his problem. You know, if I'm uncomfortable, it's because I'm uncomfortable and it's not his problem, you know?

Interviewer: Do you think it's part of the job?

Librarian: Yeah, yeah I do ….

Interviewer: Now if this guy comes back in a couple of weeks, and returns the book, would he recognize you? And would you remember him?

Librarian: Oh yeah. (MBLINT1)

In order to establish joint intention and commitment which mediate the practice activity, the agents must first express their individual readiness to each other to make this commitment to a shared goal (Gilbert, 2007). In Schatzki's terms (2006), this is the first step in a teleoaffective structuring of practice. The objects must also be ready in the sense that they are available to the agents as potential actors within the general structure of the practice. In this narrative, readiness is evident by the spatial assembling of subjects and objects within this organizing structure of the reference practice. The fact that the patron chooses to come into this particular library at this moment tells us that he almost certainly has some kind of prior knowledge and/or experience – a 'practice memory' (Schatzki, 2006) - of the public library as institution and of the availability of agents to answer questions using library collections. His physical presence at the reference desk, the library's designated place to 'ask a librarian,' further establishes his readiness to commit to this practice. As soon as the question is verbalized to the librarian, this commitment becomes a joint commitment which cannot be rescinded unilaterally (i.e., the question cannot be 'un-asked') and the question, including its goal and its meaning, becomes jointly owned. In her capacity as staff representative at this service point, the librarian is obliged to respond. In the event that the patron wanted to withdraw his question immediately after asking it, he would have to verbally indicate that to the librarian and gain the librarian's acknowledgement of this abrupt closure to this activity. However, in verbally directing his question to the librarian and asking for a response, both agents are relating and acting within this particular practice and a 'we-mode' subject is constituted for the duration of this conversation.

The librarian's presence at the reference desk also constitutes an expression of readiness, framed by her occupying this position within the library organization and by her also being present at this particular place and time. The embodiment of the librarian's joint commitment in this common ground of the library is constituted by the nonverbal communication acts of affinity and proximity (Nardi, 2005), by hearing the patron's question and by being open to responding, to not backing off or saying this is 'too much.' By choosing to work as a reference librarian, she acknowledges an ongoing readiness and an opening to enter into joint commitments around the shared practice of assisting patrons. What is not formally structured by either the professional or

organizational roles in this practice is the librarian's readiness to engage with this patron emotionally about a 'life or death' topic, to not 'back away' from the joint commitment to the relational aspect of this practice. Knowledge about these types of commitment is also learned through the rules and concepts governing the practice and identity-formation of becoming a librarian. The reference practice operates as one arrangement of sociality bound together from two perspectives: 1) addressing a knowledge absence and 2) bridging an interpersonal, affective gap. The intellectual activity of resolving the knowledge gap is negotiated at the same time as the relational connections of trust and empathy are being formed in a co-constitutive arrangement of epistemic relations.

The materiality of this practice also becomes mutually known, identified and committed as soon as the patron poses his question; they include the library building and furnishings, its collections of books and other information resources, the online catalogue and related information technologies. Once this WS-O-WS commitment is materialized and made known in this speech act, the plural subject of the practice is constituted and we can anticipate shared relating, acting, knowing and learning through these objects.

These dynamics of framing readiness and establishing an opening for joint commitment in this WS-O-WS micro-narrative are only partially visible at the street-level boundary insofar as they are framed by the institutional status of the practice. Were the same actors to meet in another physical or virtual space where their agentic identities were being mirrored by another organizing structure, for example in a cafe or store without the same conceptual, normative and social cues of the public library, then these same dynamics might look very different and would enact different meanings because they would be dynamics of another practice altogether.

In 'connecting through knowing,' patrons come to the reference desk to ask questions and in posing their questions their knowledge absences are shared within the context of the practice. The librarian notes that most patrons come with only "half an idea" which "you have to work through" together; working through an idea to completion is itself the practice of connecting via knowledge absences and knowledge content. The knowledge object mediating this connection is both the real and the abstract idea of a book entitled *What should I do with the rest of my life?*' which itself poses a knowledge mystery type of question. The patron enlists the librarian in a practice to locate the book in chronological time and space; the library catalogue as a object provides a focus for the librarian and patron to act together. These subjects enact their sociality through bridging their knowledge gap about this particular book. This performative pattern is what most visibly structures the reference practice; connecting through relating, however, opens the practice to richer learning and knowing.

This activity of 'connecting as relating' through conversation - "He just started talking to me .... He said, 'You know, I'm starting to have some questions, you know I'm a chef, I know what I'm doing with my work life but I just have some bigger questions'" – suggests that a relational gap is being filled in this spatial-temporal moment through this reference practice. Using the library catalogue as a relational prop, the librarian and patron search the database together while simultaneously engaged in this 'difficult' conversation about death. In admitting that she also feels "uncomfortable," that "I'm not perfect" and that this discomfort is "more [my] problem, not his" and to go as far as acknowledging that such conversations are "part of the job," the librarian tells us that connecting with the patron through sociality, through this human tendency to bind oneself with others in interdependent relationships, is just as essentially part of the

practice of reference service as is finding the book. Though we do not know the patron's motives or reflections about this relational interaction, the fact that he discloses to the librarian with such personal detail and in spite of his father's previous exhortations, he has not been able to just "get over it" and thus he opens up to the librarian. We see that the librarian is clearly filling a relational gap filled with "bigger questions" than those presented in the patron's "work life" and evidenced by the patron's comfort in revealing himself and in relational sharing occurring within the known and trusted practice of the library.

This co-constitutive arrangement of relational and knowledge connections in the S-O-S structure of the public library's reference practice is an exemplar of 'we-mode' sociality. Although comparisons may be made superficially with similar practices such as bookstores or web-based information services, this practice is unique in its arrangement within the broader field of 'library' as institution and in its enabling structure of joint intention and commitment. Bookstores are structured for individual transaction in an I-mode where the dynamic of exchange for private gain and without a relational connection is the organizing structure of arrangements within this practice. According to another of the patrons in this study, a bookstore is "someplace where you look for your book, buy it and go" whereas a library is a place "where you can go and *be* out in public." Another librarian from this organization characterizes this "comfortable" feeling that distinguishes the public library from other types of everyday practices: "what makes it different than say a grocery store or somewhere else, is that the library is more personal – you learn and grow here all the years …. You develop part of your identity here."

These practices contrast sharply with online 'ask' and 'answer' information services and databases such as Yahoo or Google which enact a version of object-centered sociality primarily in transactional, I-mode structures. Commitments remain individual and tenuous, as easily rescinded as they are enacted in their particular time-space acts. Relational connections are not required and moreover, are often limited by the structures of these online services, begging this question – precisely what do we intend with the idea of sociality in this world of object-centered social networks (Wittel, 2001; Nardi *et al*., 2002)?

The final dynamic which completes the reference practice and exemplified in this micro-narrative is the negotiation of meaning and learning which is stored for future use. This negotiation is visible as a 'dance of meaning' where the back and forth sharing and responding to the patron's story affects both subjects and affects their responses and interactions with each other. This 'dance' ends and they return to their I-mode perspectives only when both subjects mutually agree that the shared goal has been reached to their joint satisfaction. And although the explicit purpose of this patron's approach to the reference librarian was to find a specific book, the narrative suggests that there are other related goals that are not verbally expressed, but which both subjects understand and have accepted in the course of their conversation.

As a learning activity, the patron has had whatever his prior notion of the reference practice within the institutional field of the public library changed and/or reinforced through his interaction with the librarian; he has experienced the librarian's relational connection through the librarian's expressions of empathy, he has experienced some affirmation and perhaps gained meaning for his questions, he has located the book that he thinks might help him understand his life differently, and finally he leaves a residue of knowing in a shared 'practice memory.' As Alex notes, if this patron were to return on

another occasion, they would share this history and relational knowing and connection regardless of the goal of any subsequent interaction. Whether it is ever explicitly expressed again or not this knowing would also influence all of his subsequent interactions with Alex and any interactions with other participants of the reference practice.

From Alex's perspective, she has perhaps been surprised at feeling "uncomfortable" with the patron's disclosure in the context of searching for this particular book, but she indicates she has begun to process this emotion as it affects her present and future ability to perform her work in this practice. The fact that Alex wanted to recount this narrative to the researcher also suggests evidence of learning. In encounters with other colleagues in the same practice or in similar practices in other locations, she may want to repeat this narrative because it has potential for inviting other practitioners to learn or share their learning from their perspectives within this community. Different stories including different ways of handling these types of patron-librarian relational connections would almost inevitably surface and be debated; these varying stories could then affect how the practices are shaped in future interactions among all of the branch library reference communities of practice. Alex's identity as a librarian is reinforced through her willingness to practice her professional values and the values of the larger 'library field.' Although both subjects leave this time-space enactment of the reference practice returning to their I-mode selves, they leave visible, material traces of this activity in the specific book as knowledge object and in this narrative available for multiple retellings and learnings. What we cannot know from this interaction, however, is if and how the library as an institution also learns from the knowing, relating and meaning rendered visible in this practice.

This librarian-patron interaction recounted by Alex is one story. Observations of all 480 face-to-face reference interactions in three different branches of this library as institution are also characterized according to three conceptual dimensions: knowledge processes at work, interpersonal communication and mode of practice. Four types of interactions are identified, all of which exhibit a WS-O-WS sociality with varying degrees of intensity and various types of epistemic gaps, but always within the same practice structure. Whether the patron is asking for a help in locating a book, in using a computer, understanding the themes of a subject, or simply "stopping by to say hi", these dynamics can be observed directly or inferred from their situated learning.

The relational dynamics of this reference interaction as they have been disassembled and discussed here enrich our understanding about how this library practice in particular is an epistemic and relational practice and how other practices more generally may be shaped and rendered visible recursively through processes of 'rhythm and patterning.' The library's reference practice is imagined differently from its normative, professionally defined structure which is part of the institutional status of the practice suggesting an I-mode transaction and an object-centered sociality. From Alex's description we see relating, learning and sociality through the eyes of a jointly committed human to human 'we-subject' animated and mediated by the book as relational prop. We see a librarian's identity being revised because of this relational connection ("if I'm uncomfortable ... it's not his problem"), we see the reference practice being re-framed ("you're like the confessor ... you are the priest or the bartender ... a lot of the times they're researching something private"), and finally, we situate this practice in the larger institutional field of the public library and that is also being re-framed within the practice ("it's a public library, and it's some place they can be out in public").

5. THE INTER-PRACTICE DYNAMIC

In the previous section we have observed and captured the dynamics of the everyday reference practice in libraries in a string of mutually reinforcing activities. These recurrent activities comprise the framing of both patron and librarian's readiness to interact, finding an opening to establish a joint commitment among both, connecting as knowing, connecting as relating, closure of their temporary commitment and, finally, storing new knowing for future use in practice memory. In this everyday practice, learning and knowing are particularly mediated by a we-mode sociality, a joint commitment performed by a plural subject and assisted by a host of material objects. We-mode sociality is a strong form of connecting through relating that results in rich learning on the behalf of both patrons and library practitioners, in time and across time. In short, the everyday reference practice in libraries can be most accurately described as an 'epistemic and relational practice.'

We can then ask if and to what extent this enactment of library practitioners, this idea of their knowing practice, resonates in the institutional status of the practice and the constitutive norms of the library as institution (cf. Czarniawska and Sevón, 1996). The everyday reference practice is but one 'voice' (Gherardi, 2006) in the larger field of library that also comprises, amongst others, the practices of other library practitioners, management, legislators, librarians' educational and professional networks, and the library's communities of patrons and citizens. The more the idea of reference service as epistemic and relational practice is represented in and accepted by these other practices, the more visible it becomes and the larger its potential effects in processes of institutionalization (Tuomela, 2007a). As we will briefly illustrate in this section, however, the we-mode sociality of the everyday practice is negotiated with different forms of I-mode sociality.

Within all of the local branch library spaces where library staff regularly see, hear and enact the we-mode sociality available in Alex's story, institutionalizing relational knowing and learning from immediate or observed reference interactions occurs via shared interactions, and stories, shared knowledge absences, a shared sociality, and a practice memory. In the three library branches of this study, distinct we-mode identities are visible and are characterized in part by the various informal reference practice rules, understandings, and teleoaffective structurings, subjects and object arrangements that uniquely identify each location for all actors.

There are, however, other views of sociality at work in the field of library as institution. As said before, the reference practice has historically been defined as a series of transactions or I-mode joint actions of subject-object-subject (IS-O-IS) arrangements (Dervin, 1977, 1998; Kuhlthau, 2004; Ross *et al.*, 2002; Taylor, 1991). One indicative way the reference practice has been institutionalized in the larger library field is through the availability of a checklist of 'model reference behaviours' to train and evaluate staff. Although the reference practitioners participate in the creation and enactment of the policy with attached checklist, this is not their primary focus. The managerial discourse on the reference practice promotes a different sociality – a transactional I-mode interaction where knowing and relating connections remain unspoken and invisible. This *Checklist* affixed to the computer monitor at Alex's desk reminds her among other behaviours, to 'speak in interested helpful tone', 'maintain eye contact', 'give full attention', 'ask "does this completely answer your question?"', and finally 'close the interview politely' but it is silent on 'exploring', 'teasing it out', 'working it through', getting 'personal' and 'remembering.' When reflecting on the sociality of the reference practice, Alex exposes her own learning and knowing gap that she has subsequently

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filled in her practice-based 'situated curriculum' (Gherardi, 2006): "That's the one thing that I don't think they [professors] teach you, that you would form relationships with people."

Another manifestation of competing views of sociality is observable in how reference service is documented within the library field including the organization studied. Reference interactions are typically translated by managers and legislators into a 'number of questions answered.' In the most recent performance framework prepared by the managers of this library, the reference practice no longer appears in even this simple object-centered sociality, suggesting in this trajectory, that perhaps it is a practice already in the process of being disassembled by the organization. As the senior strategy manager explains the library's competitive goals are to "get the repetitive [questions] out of the way" because, "we have to do the whole technical thing. We need 24 hour around the clock reference service in conjunction with other folks."

Although managers are themselves participants in the reference practice insofar as they are responsible for library rules and norms and although they may share a commitment to the idea of epistemic and relational everyday practice, this commitment is not joint as understood in the we-mode but exhibits itself more as a thinner or weaker version of connection - an 'I-mode we-attitude' (Tuomela, 2007a). While we cannot speculate on their individual commitments to the practice, we can observe that there is not clearly a collective acceptance of the conceptual, social and normative dimensions of the everyday practice as epistemic and relational practice.

In conclusion, the dynamics of the inter-practice field are occupied by competing and conflicting negotiations about the institutional status of the reference practice, which might prevent a wider enactment of the idea of relational and epistemic practice exemplified by Alex's narrative in other library or library-related organizations and practices. Librarian educators may not formally teach 'relationships'; library managers, politicians and funders may not always see the relational dimensions, they may not often have instruments for institutionalizing these dimensions and perhaps because their managerial practice holds their greatest we-mode commitments, they may have only a thin collective acceptance, if collective at all, of this practice within the larger library as institution. Despite the certain diversity and dissonance of discourses at individual libraries and among individual reference staff and their patrons, the evidence of these interactions of which Alex's story is only one, strongly suggests, however, the presence of an often unarticulated, unacknowledged, virtually invisible but firmly committed we-mode sociality of relating and connecting for shared learning.

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The goal of this paper is to capture in detail the time-space dynamics of knowing, learning, and organizing in the context of a library and its reference practice. How is knowledge produced and reproduced in this context and, if at all, disseminated over time-space distances in processes of institutionalization?

One finding of our study is that the reference practice in libraries can be characterized as an epistemic and relational practice that is mediated by a firm we-mode sociality between library staff and patrons visiting the reference desk and by complementary intra-practice dynamics. Another finding is that there are different 'translations' (Latour, 1986, Czarniawska and Sevón, 1996; Gherardi, 2000) of the relationship between sociality and reference practice at work in the larger field of library as institution. In

these macro-dynamics of institutional negotiation and learning the idea of library reference service as epistemic and relational practice largely remains invisible and, hence, unrecognized. The 'unheard voice' of this everyday practice creates a knowledge gap in institutional learning, and in all of the organizations that comprise the institutional field of libraries. As a result, learning opportunities threaten to be overlooked. Speculating on the future of reference practice, the translations of the competing views on sociality-in-action suggest that library patrons who may continue to have personal and unpredictable relational questions will increasingly be directed to online services, finding their sociality in objects that are as (theoretically) close as the end of their fingertips, but detached from the epistemic potency of a WS-O-WS sociality. In a broader sense, if and when the many researchers on sociality are right in suggesting that we-perspectives are increasingly favored over I-perspectives in our individualized societies (Granovetter, 1973; Knorr Cetina, 2007a; Bauman, 2001; Wittel, 2001; Tuomela, 2007a), then libraries might ironically lose one of their practices that distinguishes them from the online services they have to compete with.

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1 All references to libraries in this paper refer only to the municipal **public** library institution.