INTEGRATING MATERIALS INTO PRACTICE

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The Tablet Computer

- Since its re-release in 2010, the tablet market has experienced an explosion of sorts on the mobile device market with now over 400 models available, globally.
- Over 54% of UK households own at least one tablet computer (Ofcom, 2015)
- Yet, what ‘new’ functionalities do they actually offer?
- The device has been rapidly adopted by two particularly interesting age groups: older adults and very young children (Ofcom, 2015)
  - Significant increase in adults over 65 accessing the Internet, and cited tablet computers as one of the main drivers behind this (Ofcom, 2014)
User Studies

- Taken up in a number of disparate domains (e.g. innovation studies, STS, HCI)

- Wide ranging ambitions (examples of these inc.):
  - the role of the user in the development of a technology (von Hippel, 1976)
  - the effect of different users upon a technology (Cowan, 1983)
  - the negotiations made between designers and (potential or future) users (Akrich, 1992)
  - the ‘taming’ of a technology once it has entered the home (Silverstone et al., 1992)
  - the interpretive flexibility of a technology by its relevant social groups until it reaches stabilization (Bijker 1992)
Material Culture Studies

- Examines the relationship between the material and the social world (Buchli, 2002; Dant, 1992; Hicks and Beaudry, 2010)

- Explores the ways that ‘things’ reflect the experience, values, desires and cultures of their designers and users (e.g. Appadurai, 1986; Miller, 1987; Dant, 1999)

- Materiality is sometimes used as shorthand to capture such relations in general.

- However, there is critique about studying the social and the material as discrete and separate entities (Olsen, 2006; Ingold, 2007); and about the abstraction of concepts such as ‘material culture studies’ and ‘materiality’
Compared two definitions of gold; one chemical and one alchemic (Conneller, 2011 cited by Ingold, 2012)

The differences were attributed to the different practices into which these materials were implicated; having a material effect and thus, producing meaning.

“The experienced practitioner’s knowledge of the properties of materials, like that of the alchemist, is not projected onto them but grows out of a lifetime of close engagement in a particular craft or trade” (Ingold, 2012: 434)
Integration into Practice

- Materials as constituted and defined not in the abstract, but in and through practice is taken up by a selection of writers (inc. Reckwitz, 2002; Pantzar and Shove, 2010; Shove and Pantzar, 2005; Warde, 2016).

- Somewhat different lines of enquiry emerge:
  - How has X practice evolved?
  - How have tablets become embedded in practice(s)?

- The central figure of the user disappears, to emphasise the ‘doing’ of a practice.

- The notion of the user prioritises the user-tech relationship, over the evolution of a practice

- Reckwitz explains that things (like a ball, or tablet) are centrally and unavoidably implicated in the production and reproduction of practice (Reckwitz, 2002; Shove and Pantzar, 2005)
Shove and Southerton, 2000
Hand and Shove, 2007

- Despite having been standardised (/normalised) for many years, the freezer was reinvented through a process of ongoing integration, and as it adapted to surroundings and contexts of use.

- “creative process involving the active and simultaneous integration of constitutive elements”
  (Hand and Shove, 2007: 97)

- Integration: an active and ongoing achievement, but also as a matter of responding and adapting not only to ‘central’ and related materials, but contexts, surroundings and other practitioners as well.

Significant increase in adults over 65 accessing the Internet, and cited tablet computers as one of the main drivers behind this (Ofcom, 2014)

- Observation of an adult learning course on how to use tablet computers (2hr x 4 classes/4 weeks)
  1 interview with course leader
  10 interviews with attendees/older practitioners

- Integration of the tablet computer into the practice of photography
  10 amateur and 10 professional photographers

- Follow up interviews with all respondents (at least once, possibly twice)
Practices of Communication (Alan)

- 83 year old man, with little previous experience of “computing technologies”

- “I belong to the Rotary Club, and what is known as a 41 club – although it’s more like an 81 club now. It’s people who were over 41 when I joined. It’s little more than a dining club, we meet once a month. I’m an ex-magistrate and I belong to an association of ex-magistrates and we again meet on a bi-monthly rota and of course, all of these things are done online. All the minutes from the rotary meetings and so on, come online. ”

- Despite this, the new ways of doing something, must take into account the old ways. Substitution is not the complete substitution of a material for another. (Yli-Kauhalumoa et al., 2013)
iPad ( + Mail App) + AirPrinter

Prior experience is crucial in framing what it means to perform a practice (Shove and Pantzar, 2007)

“ I'm going to get a printer. I'm beginning now to think that I need a printer. I mean I've looked, I went into a PC world or wherever. I've looked but I haven't got it yet. [...] Sometimes you do need to have a paper copy of something [...] That is the need I have discovered, I've either got to remember 'Oh I mustn't delete that one', while I work through and clear out a lot of them.”
Conclusion:

Integration allows for the investigation of technologies-in-use, whilst prioritising the evolution of practice over the tech-user relationship.

Research Questions:

1. The tablet computer has become integral to many practices at once. It is ‘used’ in many situations and contexts, and is integrated alongside different materials, forms of competence and meaning. How can these multiple roles be conceptualised and analysed?

2. Has the tablet served to draw new ‘recruits’ into existing practices?...yes

3. How does the tablet relate to, or reconfigure, the forms of competence involved in the conduct of the different practices into which it is integrated?