

# Thinking With Diplomacy: Within and Beyond Practice Theory

## Abstract

Following the considerable interest in practice theory, this Collective Discussion interrogates what it means to *practice* and, ultimately, to *think with* diplomacy. In asking *how empirical, methodological, and axiological disagreements over what constitutes diplomatic practice can be productively employed to develop or revise practice theory*, the Discussion engages the historically and culturally contingent practices of diplomacy. In doing so it goes beyond the conventional interactions that assume a fixed and singular identity for diplomacy. The Discussion aims, on the one hand, to pluralize the notion of diplomatic practice, and, on the other, to reflexively retrieve “theory” from the everyday and alternative practices of diplomacy that are often missed by the radar of practice theory. It thus seeks to reassess practice theory using insights from the very terrain of action it employs to develop its distinctive viewpoint. The Discussion contributes, moreover, to the rapidly changing field of Diplomatic Studies that has recently opened up to cross- and trans-disciplinary conversations with political geography, social anthropology, digital studies, visual studies, and new materialism.

**Keywords:** Diplomatic Studies; Practice Turn; Spatial Politics; Everyday Diplomacy; Decoloniality; Assemblage.

## Introduction

As a profession, diplomacy displays particular mores and modes of socialisation and these dispositions have been extensively explored in developing the practice turn in Diplomatic Studies and International Relations (Neumann 2002, Adler and Pouliot 2011, Adler-Nissen 2016). Practice theory is a broad family of approaches that share a common unit of analysis: practices, that is, socially meaningful patterns of action. Best conceived as a “theory-methods package” (Nicolini 2012: 8), practice theory is an inductive and interpretive form of empirical theorizing that pays significant attention to the level of action and the practitioners’ perspective. Analytically, practice theorists make the wager that practices are socially

generative, in causing and constituting a variety of social structures and processes. Finally, the approach and its many variants treat practices as an ontological crucible of sorts, where structure and agency meet, and meaningfulness and materiality mesh.

Applying practice theory has created an extensive research agenda and body of work that examines an array of diplomatic settings where the profession operates and implements its skills, while also problematizing the elite-controlled meaning of the practice to open up new potentialities (Pouliot and Cornut 2015, Sending, Pouliot and Neumann 2015, Pouliot in this Discussion). It is therefore an opportune time to take stock – to stand back and assess what this application of practice theory has enabled us to do, what this literature overlooks or subsumes under this category, how it might be rethought/reworked, and thus how we might push the engagement in new directions – particularly in terms of pushing outside the comfort zone of conventional accounts or critical orthodoxies. There is ongoing potential to think with practice theory but, just as it rejects stasis in favour of the processual, so scholars need to continually question it, to explore its boundaries, ethics and exclusions, and to think beyond it (Brown 2012, Kustermans 2016, Standfield 2020). It befits to discuss these problematizations in IPS, given its strong commitment to create “a new and ‘less restrictive topology’ of international relations and their boundaries” (Huysmans and Nogueira 2016, 299).

Practice theory has intensely posed the question of what it means to practice diplomacy. By examining what diplomatic practitioners do and how they do it, it has drawn on the wider epistemological implications that a practice perspective brings to the understanding of global governance, hierarchy, and the making of world orders. By focusing on the boundary-work of diplomatic practice, including the practices that take place at the boundaries of diplomatic spaces, it restates and expands the reach of diplomatic studies (Kuus 2020, Pouliot and Kuus in this Discussion). However, this diplomatic boundary-work is sometimes taken to be colonial in terms of what it recognizes as diplomatic as well as who it excludes (Opondo 2010, 2016 and in this Discussion). Yet, by approaching diplomatic practice as a “category of analysis”, practice theory has significantly contributed to existing debates in Diplomatic Studies in a number of ways. Firstly, on how *diplomatic subjects* are constituted and acquire authority to represent and operate in different contexts, be it multilateral (Adler Nissen 2014, Pouliot 2016), or military and defence (Barkawi 2015, Svendsen 2020 ), or religious (Lynch 2015), or frontline (Cooper and Cornut, 2019), or humanitarian (Sending 2015, Turunen 2020). Secondly, it has systematically expanded *diplomatic spaces* to sites and settings not commonly examined in the study of diplomacy (Neumann 2013), valorizing sociability and social interactionism (Hurd 2015, Kuus 2015),

informality (Wiseman 2015) and performativity (Adler-Nissen, Galpin and Rosamond 2017). Thirdly, it has rekindled interest in *diplomatic modes*, the skills and habits of professional diplomats, be it negotiation techniques (Adler-Nissen and Pouliot 2014), improvisation and virtuosity (Cornut 2018), and the drafting of agreements and cables (Adler-Nissen and Drieschova 2019, Cornut and de Zamaroczy 2020).

That being said, for a theoretical approach that is so open-ended on the face of it, many of its applications so far belong to a rather conventional set of cases primarily centered on state diplomats. Foreign ministries, intergovernmental summits, multilateral negotiation tables and the headquarters of international organizations have been favorite sites thus far, partly at the expense of less traditional forms. While this is an empirical limitation and not necessarily a conceptual one, our Discussion seeks to take advantage more fully of practice theory's promise to broaden the universe of diplomacy. If we take seriously the proposition that diplomacy is a *claim* to represent a group or entity to the outside world (Sending et al. 2015), then the scope of its practices ought to better cover heterodox scripts, unconventional sites, subversive performances, unrecognized challengers, alien narratives, muted voices and a variety of non-human artefacts. Therein also lies the politics of diplomacy which practice theory seeks to recover.

This brings us to the question of what it means to *think with* diplomacy. What definition or understanding of diplomacy do we employ when engaging in practice theorizing? Whose practice do we analyse – and in doing so perhaps also valorize – and whose do we marginalize or make invisible? On these questions – in line with the diplomatic ethos that encourages living with, and not always resolving, differences – we have agreed to disagree in the contributions that follow. It is a productive disagreement. The lack of consensus in our Discussion illustrates the plurality of diplomatic theory and practice, and our varied responses to these questions very much informed whether we were thinking diplomacy *within* or *beyond* existing understandings of practice theory. It is worth registering with the reader the creative tension that we had as it will help her to follow our interventions below. And, of course, to appreciate that there are indeed different ways – credible or less credible, this is a call the reader needs to make – one can think with diplomacy.

In our conversations, unsurprisingly, it became evident that the way we were approaching diplomacy had a lot to do with academic investments we had already made, in terms of reading and writing, and the political worlds that we engage. We were influenced by different disciplinary and cross-disciplinary approaches, from our doctoral study onwards. We subsequently published books and articles on the subject and adopted particular

identifications (of which more in our interventions below) so as to explore the themes and phenomena that interested us, be it multilateral diplomacy, or diplomatic bureaucracies and expertise, or liminal diplomatic actors, or diplomatic assemblage and materiality, or colonial and decolonial diplomacies, or heterodox and everyday diplomacies. Thus, the term *diplomacy* would variably become an analytical category, or a heuristic, or a disposition, or a concept whose meaning contextually shifted with far reaching implications for which spaces, practices, actors, or knowledges were recognized as being diplomatic. In other words, the way we had been *thinking about* diplomacy had also to do with what we were *doing* with it.

Nonetheless, we consider that these cleavages between us can generate a productive account of the limitations and possibilities of putting practice theory to work on diplomacy. Not by way of resolution of differences, but of serious interrogation. To that extent, the central question that guides our Discussion is: *how can empirical, methodological and axiological disagreements over what constitutes diplomatic practice be productively employed to develop or revise practice theory?* The contributions below draw on different epistemological perspectives, including methods and writing style, but also conceptual and disciplinary framings. Indeed, practice theory has travelled extensively and changed from its origins in Sociology through its (re)workings in Anthropology, Geography, Management, Political Science, IR, etc. The ambivalence around what constitutes diplomatic practice – which is reflected in many of the contributions – is also due to how practice theory has been varyingly interpreted and read through different disciplinary and epistemological lenses.

One area of disagreement reflected in our Discussion is the extent to which one is more or less open to the vernacularization of diplomatic practice. By vernacularization of practice we mean how “local cultural forms and practices are incorporated into imported institutions”, either by superficially adapting or deeply hybridizing the institutionalized practice (Merry 2006, 44). We argue that the recognition and spectrum of diplomatic vernacularization generates empirical, methodological and axiological contention. Firstly, it intensifies dissent over what empirics one should value or retrieve from the field: whether one should concentrate on policies or official communications or life-stories or artefacts or governmental or subaltern or ecological concerns. Secondly, it intensifies rivalry over what methods (or anti-method) one adopts in inquiry, be it positivist or constructivist or textual or visual or ethnographic or heuristic or anarchist ones. Thirdly, it amplifies differences over the scope and value of theorizing, the possibility of systemic comprehension or only fragmentary insight, the primacy of explanatory or normative theory, the intrinsic or instrumental merit of rational, ethical or aesthetic approaches.

Consequently, those of us who are more focused on the official or mainstream diplomatic practice reasonably expect social scientific and rigorous analysis, and may see in vernacularization a shift into catachrestic or folkloric taxonomy (e.g. Pouliot in this Discussion). Those who are more concerned with how the knowledge of concepts and practices translate across subjects, locales and (digital) platforms find considerable analytical value in the idiomatic and idiosyncratic (e.g. Kuus and McConnell in this Discussion). Those who may, in addition, be more invested in radically vernacularizing the institution, are at ease with the hybridization of diplomatic practice, exploring and building on marginal, amateurish, spiritual and more-than-human encounters and activities (e.g. Marsden et al 2016, McConnell 2018, and Dittmer, Opondo and Constantinou in this Discussion). The analytical purchase of each contribution thus depends on how one ultimately (and credibly) translates diplomatic practice in different locales and situations.

Furthermore, whereas all of us realize the importance of posing ontological questions, there is a dissonance with regard to how we pose them in our research work. Following on the useful distinction between “scientific ontology” and “philosophical ontology” (Patomaki and Wight 2000, 215; cf. Jackson 2011, 27-28), we could be read to fall into the one or the other type, mostly, if not entirely. Some contributions are more concerned with scientific ontology, adjusting epistemology and method into ontology, thus offering accounts of diplomacy and its processes that are relevant and analytically robust in respect of mainstream practices (Pouliot and Kuus in this Discussion). While other contributions are more concerned with philosophical ontology, the testing of knowledge claims and axiological propositions without resting on a final definition of diplomatic entities and objects (McConnell, Dittmer, Opondo and Constantinou in this Discussion). Whereas it is important to clarify that we should not be read strictly on the basis of this dichotomy, given that our research on diplomacy may at times lean towards the one or the other side of the cleavage, we do recognize that the topics we periodically choose to study but also the way we choose to write and present ideas can reflect distinct ontological and epistemological commitments.

Specifically on writing style, whereas we may choose (or be compelled by the standards of our discipline) to write “articles”, we may also choose (and indeed allowed by less discipline-oriented venues) to write “essays” on diplomacy. As Theodor Adorno (1991, 12-13) explains, the essayistic form of writing has an “antisystematic impulse”, “introduces concepts unceremoniously” and follows an “unmethodical method”. It thus valorizes the fragmentary, the episodic and the experimental in a way that scientific writing and systematic thinking may consider as invalid, peripheral or heretical. We all agree that these experimental

detours into diplomatic knowledge can provide a valuable perspective; our disagreement remains, however, whether they are of *equal* value to the scientific ones. What supports our reaching of a *modus vivendi* – and so the need to seriously interrogate this cleavage in our Discussion – is the increasing recognition that diplomatic practice has a historical connection to knowledge and can be replicated when inquiring into knowledge production (Constantinou 1996, Cornago 2016). With regard to scientific disagreements Isabelle Stengers (2010, 29) has underscored how diplomatic practice offers “the possibility of generating rhizomatic connections where conflict seems to prevail”. As also suggested by Bruno Latour (2013, 483-4), who highlighted the value of diplomacy when value conflicts persist, by way of flattening ontological claims, persisting not necessarily in reconciling differences but in reformulating ideal positions.

Finally, it is important to note that thinking about diplomacy has significantly changed over the last three decades within the field of Diplomatic Studies (see Murray et al 2011, Cooper 2016). We remain indebted to the range of conceptual openings and boundary work that provided broader definitions of diplomacy beyond interstate relations, *inter alia*, as “the mediation of estrangement” (Der Derian 1987), or as “a discrete human practice constituted by the explicit construction, representation, negotiation and manipulation of necessarily ambiguous identities” (Sharp 2009). One of the main proponents of the practice theory approach has recently defined diplomacy as “the handling of the Other” (Neumann 2020). Our contributions follow different conceptual understandings in the spirit of our *modus vivendi*. Yet, we build on these broader ideas because they allow diplomacy to travel in and across fields that even practice theory may have initially considered non-viable or too experimental. Of course, it is crucial to keep in mind not only the interpretive potential of different conceptual understandings but also their analytical limitations (Cornago 2013, Constantinou and Sharp 2016, Leira 2016). Overall, our Discussion argues for not only the allowability of but also the necessity for greater conceptual and methodological flexibility—a nimbleness attuned to approaches within and beyond IR—in the study of diplomatic practice.

### **Beyond the Profession, Into the Everyday? Grasping the Politics of Diplomatic Practices** (Vincent Pouliot)

In its modern inception, diplomacy has arguably always been about exclusion. As Viola (2020) shows vividly, starting with Italian city-states *circa* 1500, and gradually spreading across Europe and later throughout the world, practices of resident embassy, reciprocal

accreditation and formal protocol emerged as part of a struggle for the monopolization of political representation by a limited number of rulers over their competitors. Armed with international law, successive generations of diplomats progressively reinforced this “closure system” (*ibid.*) by limiting international subjecthood to territorial states, and then further restricting statehood to “civilized” states. All the while, diplomacy became the prerogative of a distinct group of state “professionals,” who have since claimed exclusive jurisdiction over foreign representation.

From an IPS perspective, characterized by “an almost insatiable curiosity to explore politics” (Guzzini 2020, 369), this is an incredibly important story to tell. Historically and to this day, diplomacy is deeply implicated in the foreclosing of alternative possibilities at the global level. It has strongly contributed to eliminating the variety of political forms of collective rule, leading to the triumph of the territorial state. Diplomacy has deprived individuals and grassroots organizations from international subjecthood. It has transformed decolonization into a massive process of political assimilation erasing countless “stateless” communities from the international stage. Today, the diplomatic monopoly over foreign representation precludes the emergence of innovative political arrangements. Despite its merits in the peaceful settlement of disputes, then, the fact remains that historically diplomacy has often operated like a political bulldozer.

The troubled history of modern diplomacy presents a daunting challenge for its students. To simplify, two broad approaches may be taken in response. The first approach consists in taking the full measure of diplomacy’s disciplinary modes of exclusion by looking at the hard boundary work that it operates against a variety of challengers. Here the main object becomes the political struggles that preside over the changing social configurations comprising the international. Second, scholars may problematize diplomacy by exploring its potentialities outside institutionalized forms. By subverting meanings and practices, this approach shifts the gaze away from state elites, global governors, and other privileged actors to focus instead on liminal and subaltern forms of self-other relations.

I argue that advancing the practice theory of diplomacy requires scholars to combine both approaches: confronting how the profession struggles to maintain its institutional privileges while also problematizing the elite-controlled meaning of the practice to open up new potentialities. To me, these frameworks are mutually reinforcing. While the focus on professional diplomats can be ontologically limiting, it is also the best way to understand how the existing system came into being and continues to structure the international system to this day. For its part, the subversive approach has a clear edge, both empirically and normatively,

in expanding the scope of diplomatic studies; however, it faces important conceptual challenges when it comes to specifying its object.

In terms of this Collective Discussion, I for one believe that these two approaches are far from incommensurable—on the contrary. While it is true that the second approach is particularly attuned to so-called vernacularization, the first one is also deeply interested in hybrid diplomatic practices. Empirical differences are thus a matter of degree, not of principle, with more or less emphasis on the liminal. Both approaches are amenable to a variety of methods, in line with practice theory's methodological flexibility, and share an inductive, interpretive spirit that rejects hypothesis testing or generalization as modes of knowledge development. Finally, when it comes to the purpose of theorizing, it may look like the first approach is primarily explanatory while the latter is more explicitly normative. However, I see no reason why a focus on the profession and its exclusions could not serve normative purposes, or why an emphasis on the everyday could not perform explanatory work. As always, intellectual distinctions are useful but entrenched divides are detrimental: as we foster practice theories of diplomacy, let us go beyond the profession into the everyday—and then back again.

### *Beyond the profession?*

No one has better expressed the perils of the so-called “professional bias” in the study of diplomacy than Constantinou (2013, 142):

An avalanche of exclusions, marginalizations, and exoticizations has accompanied the conventional, state-centric perspective. All kinds of pre-Westphalian polities, institutions, and practices have been set aside or given only brief or anecdotal mention. All kinds of colonial encounters have been left outside the Western diplomatic purview or downgraded to ‘internal’ relations and governance. All kinds of unofficial mediations and innovations have been left unexplored or treated as worthy of concern only to the extent they run in parallel to the official diplomatic track and its priorities. All kinds of human ways and means of dealing with others within and across cultures have been seen to bear only anthropological or trendy metaphorical significance.

As other contributions in this Discussion demonstrate, the state-centric perspective, which excludes out of hand those that do not conform to diplomatic elite and culture, is not only empirically incomplete but also normatively problematic.



Without a doubt, limiting the study of diplomacy to official diplomats dramatically forecloses its scope, making it impossible to understand its fluidity and transformation (McConnell in this Discussion). What are we to make of the agency of “amateur” diplomats, for example (Opondo in this Discussion)? Won’t historically marginalized groups (whether based on racial, gender, political or cultural lines) be *ipso facto* deprived of existence? In other words, how can we account for the politics of diplomacy if we take its dominant form—which has attained this position through struggle and power—at face value (Constantinou in this Discussion)? Because of its reificatory consequences, such an ontological move also imprisons researchers in certain modes of operation (e.g., intergovernmental negotiations, brinkmanship, etc.), at the expense of a variety of alternative political courses of action.

That being said, resorting to the sociology of profession to study diplomacy is meant not to reinforce but—precisely—to *problematize* state-centrism. From a practice perspective, the interesting question is emphatically not “who are the diplomats,” but rather how certain patterns of action impose themselves as diplomatic and with what political effects. This no doubt requires expanding our understanding of the “know-where” of diplomatic work to include a variety of sites (Kuus in this Discussion); making sense of the structuring role of material objects (Dittmer in this Discussion); and capturing more fluid diplomatic practices performed at the margins (McConnell in this Discussion). Diplomatic practices are far more diverse than the professional narrative would have it. After all, from the relational angle that characterizes practice theory, it is not the actors themselves, but their relationships that explain the world and its politics. Recognizing the professional infrastructure of diplomacy, while also casting a wide relational net, foregrounds the politics of the jurisdictional claims and the boundary work that attempt to monopolize its practice. Historically and to this day, members of the diplomatic profession have struggled to prevail over their challengers through a “claim to jurisdictional control over certain tasks that are sanctioned by the state and recognized in international law” (Sending *et al.* 2015, 5). Yet a variety of heterodox diplomatic practices and actors have consistently survived, and sometimes even thrived, at the margins of, or in parallel to the profession.

Confronting the professional infrastructure of diplomacy is the first step toward problematizing its historical and contemporary domination. In 21<sup>st</sup> century global governance, unorthodox diplomats apply a variety of registers of action that problematize the centrality of statecraft in the practice of diplomacy. Practice theory throws light on endless conflicts at the “frontline” (Cooper and Cornut 2019) between those who are in and those left

out. Ontologically, then, this is an expansive not a restrictive move, akin to vernacularization (Introduction in this Discussion), which helps understand not only the competition but also the cooperation taking place within and across professional boundaries. A key analytical goal is to foreground the intense boundary work that goes into defining *what* counts as diplomacy (as a category of practice) and, by implication, *who* counts as diplomat. Obviously, these are political issues, which should be openly acknowledged as such, lest we reify the world and fix a set of inherently contested meanings. Without a doubt, the historical and contemporary dominance of the diplomatic profession over alternative modes raises deep normative and ethical questions.

### *Into the everyday?*

Among practice approaches to diplomacy, one alternative to the sociology of professions is to study what Constantinou calls (2006, 351) “homo-diplomacy”—that is, “the interpersonal dealings of the homo sapiens, or the experimental and experiential diplomacy of everyday life.” This perspective seeks to reconnect with everyday meanings of diplomacy and to understand the rich variety of global social intercourse far beyond statecraft. All of a sudden, the pool of participants in world affairs is exponentially expanded: “Anyone from the globalized demos can now become a citizen-diplomat or an activist-diplomat without much difficulty in view of radical changes in communication and traveling” (Constantinou 2013, 158). Through their social encounters at the café, citizen diplomats “produce their own alternative ‘diplomatic services’ where the need arises” (*ibid.*).

Formidable as this semantic opening may be, especially in making sense of the diversity of global experiences as well as in capturing the extent and possibilities of transformation, I also think it is important not to overstretch the concept of diplomacy. After all, if doing diplomacy becomes essentially the same as practicing human relationships (which inherently involve the mediation of difference and sameness), then the notion risks becoming redundant and could lose its utility and specificity. For example, Constantinou (2013, 143) summarizes the diplomatic ethics in quite a generic way: “how we can innovate to live together with others with whom we inescapably interact, who will not become ‘us,’ and with whom we cannot hope to agree, at least not always or in everything.” Arguably, this description fits not only with diplomacy, but also with the civic experience of democratic citizenship, to stick to the political realm—and then all the way down to family relations, for instance.

Unbounded (and political) as diplomacy may be as a category of practice, it seems useful to specify—as openly as possible—the notion’s extension *as a category of analysis* (Brubaker and Cooper 2000). Bear in mind that from a pragmatist perspective, concepts are not true or false, but useful or not. In tune with ideal typification, the goal of dwelling over the meanings of diplomacy is emphatically *not* to mirror reality, but to organize our observations in ways that reveal new analytical connections. Without a doubt, to define inherently means to exclude, but such a balancing act is foundational of scholarly knowledge development—regardless of epistemology. In my view, equating diplomacy with any kind of everyday engagement with alterity risks making the concept redundant with a variety of (analytically distinct) social forms—diluting its analytical purchase along the way. In order to foreground the politics of diplomacy, as well as to balance the dual needs for conceptual openness and specificity, I conclude with two analytical suggestions.

First, diplomacy is a particular kind of social intercourse in that it involves the claim to represent a larger entity than oneself. When individuals interact in their own names, they mediate sameness and difference but without representative claims. By contrast, diplomacy is political precisely because it deals with groups whose plurality is embodied by (self-) proclaimed spokesperson. Crucially, these collectives need not be states; and the representational claims being made may be challenged, contested, silenced, or usurped. The concept of polity, which in its broad sense covers a variety of political entities and organizations, intends precisely to leave open the exact nature of the group being represented; while the contingency of any diplomatic *claim* leaves open the question of the group’s constitution and fabric (Sending *et al.* 2015). This falls in line with the notion that diplomacy is a particular form of social interaction premised on the representation of politically separate groups (Sharp 2009).

Second, diplomacy deals with public matters of governance. Individuals negotiating a private issue, say neighbors discussing the building of a new fence, are not engaged in collective rule even as they mediate their difference and sameness. Of course, there exist many intermediate cases where the private and the public overlap (Constantinou in this Discussion), yet these conceptual gray zones precisely further demonstrate the need to foreground the politics of diplomacy’s claim to public governance. Contested as the label may be in practice, it generally involves forms of governing and the collective steering of societies that are absent from, or tangential to, private interactions. Thus, diplomacy is public not because of its actors (several of which are not), but rather in its *process* and *object*.

As other contributors in this forum show, grasping everyday practices of diplomacy is a useful move, both empirically and normatively. It opens up new empirical terrains, makes methodological innovation necessary, and introduces more flexibility in modes of theorizing and their ethics. As we expand our understanding of its manifold politics, though, it seems important not to lose sight of what makes diplomacy analytically distinct from other bundles of social practices. A concept of diplomacy coterminous with any social relationship is at risk of losing its analytical and explanatory edges. My proposed markers are certainly debatable and other scholars may emphasize different dimensions. Such discussion is not only welcome; it is absolutely vital to advancing the study of diplomatic practices with an eye on power relations.

### **The Know-Where of Diplomatic Sociability: Expanding the Spaces of Practice Theory** (Merje Kuus)

This intervention accentuates a spatial vantage point in the study of diplomatic practice. I foreground the question of “where” in such study in an effort to nudge practice theory in two ways. First, expanding the analysis of diplomacy from its usual focus on the “what” and the “how” to the “where”—or from know-how to know-where (Agnew 2007)—prompts us to be more curious about the transnationalization of diplomatic work: the ways in which diplomacy transcends, and not only mediates, state and inter-state spaces. It helps practice theory to engage with the scholarship on transnational professional networks in international political sociology and cognate fields.

Second, the “where” question prompts and requires a greater methodological range of motion. It takes us necessarily into those ephemeral performative spaces, such as hotels, restaurants, or golf courses, where a great deal of the most delicate diplomacy actually takes place. It is in those spaces—more marginal, more liminal, and more sociable (Nair 2020)—that transnational currents of knowledge and power come into view. It is there where we sense that opening up the “where” question enables novel angles on the “who” and the “how” of international practice. If diplomacy is a “social negotiation of meaning” (Pouliot 2016, x), we need to account for it as a spaciouly social and not a tidily governmental or political practice—a practice that is more elliptical than linear or circular. The rest of the intervention lays out each enlarging move in turn.

Too much of the research on global governance, Avant, Finnemore and Sell (2010, 1) point out, is in passive voice: governance seems to have no agents. The talk is about governance rather than governors, practice rather than practitioners. To the extent that agents are highlighted, they tend to be states, networks of governments, or government officials. To delineate agency in more precise terms, we need to examine more carefully “the operators of globalization: those individuals and social and professional groups, rooted in evolving national and transnational societies, who govern global governance” (Kauppi and Madsen 2014, 324). Diplomacy can be studied as a practice with its own repertoire of action in part because at its center is the diplomatic profession with its distinct, internationally codified and historically coherent, codes of recruitment, training, and sociability. That profession is most visible inside foreign ministries and embassies, but its spaces and conventions are more accurately described as trans-national rather than national. To understand diplomatic agency, we need to examine the centrifugal dynamics that enable that particular group of state officials to maintain that transnational know-how and to inhabit a transversal professional world in parallel with the national world (see Bigo 2016, 399). Focusing on the fluid, boundary-near, and in-between spaces of diplomatic practice helps us to foreground the fluidity of diplomatic actorness (McConnell in this Discussion). Closer attention to such boundary-near and transversal worlds takes us to various transdisciplinary fields at the intersection of sociology, geography, and other social sciences. The terminology of these fields varies, but they all include substantial discussion of transnational power elites (Kauppi and Madsen 2014), transnational professionals (Eagleton-Pearce 2018; Faulkonbridge and Muzio 2012), transnational guilds (Bigo 2016), professions (Kuus 2020), or influence elites (Wedel 2017). The effort in that scholarship is not to develop neat definitions of groups but to unpack the mobile, dispersed, and geographically specific operation of transnational networks regardless of simple designations of nationality, professional affiliation, or rank (see also Constantinou, McConnell and Cornago 2016; Bueger and Gadinger 2015). The boundary-work of diplomatic practice that is a core concern of practice theory (Pouliot in this Discussion) often takes place at the boundaries of diplomatic spaces—neither the front-stage nor the back-stage but the wings, as Iver Neumann (2012, 127) puts it. The study of diplomatic agency needs to focus explicitly on such “wings” spaces.

The geography of transnational professional worlds is not the geography of foreign ministries. To be effective, a diplomat says, one needs to “achieve something at the level of human relations. [...] What justifies the cost of all this [they gesture to their surroundings] is

the capacity to advance national interest beyond direct messages. The ability to create *local* relationships of trust” (Kuus 2020). That work takes place *in situ*, in particular places. Focusing on those places—on restaurants, lounges, or tennis courts, including those in third countries and not in the capitals of the negotiating states—gets us out of foreign ministries into the actual spaces of diplomatic sociability. It directs us to treat such spaces as essential and not incidental parts of diplomatic practice. Ministries are spaces of national strategizing whereas these other locations are necessarily liminal (McConnell 2019), transversal, and interstitial spaces.

Unpacking the “where” of diplomatic practice also requires a more varied and perhaps more tousel methodological toolbox. A core contribution of practice theory stems from its attention to the everyday contexts of international practice: not what is supposed to happen according to IR models, stated policy goals, or meeting agendas, but what actually happens when the professionals of international politics do their work. Practice theory has done much to open up IR to various experience-near approaches and to thereby nudge the discipline to study everyday diplomatic situations in a more sustained manner (Pouliot 2016). However, the empirical study of these phenomena quickly runs into the limits of the traditional methodological toolbox centered on the statements of state diplomats. As a result of these limits, the place of practice, such as a hotel, a restaurant, or a golf course, is often lost in academic accounts, which tend to revert back to state interests and governmental networks once the contextual lip service is done (Kuus 2019). We need methods that enable us to follow the more “oblique routes” and “erratic trajectories” of everyday diplomatic practice (see Constantinou in this Discussion).

Once the “where” is foregrounded and we are arrested to remain in the actual places of diplomatic practice, we are also better able to discern the embodied and theatrical character of that practice. In particular, focus on the concrete places enables us to foreground sociability as “the play-form of association” (Simmel 1910, 36). Diplomatic skill, a practitioner says to Pouliot (2016, 74), is experiential: “something that, if you’re doing it, you know it. I cannot quantify exactly how you come to know.... It’s a complex wave”. The metaphor of a wave captures the fluidity of daily diplomatic practice and reminds us that our methods of studying diplomacy must have some of the mental and sensory agility required for navigating waves.

Two clarifications are in order here. First, my argument is not for traditional ethnography, which is largely unviable in diplomatic settings. My argument is for a certain methodological relaxation that would allow us to see where diplomatic work—coffee

diplomacy, lunch diplomacy, golf diplomacy, sauna diplomacy, and so on—actually takes place. Such relaxation allows us to get out of national and intergovernmental office spaces into more varied milieus. From the vantage point of a restaurant, a sauna, or a golf course—even if the view is provided by journalistic accounts or memoirs—we can discern the facets of diplomatic practice that remain obscure in the arid air of windowless meeting rooms. Second, to emphasize place is not to advocate naïve empiricism or to downplay that places are themselves processes and not products. It is rather to begin theorization from a different vantage point and on a more meandering—one might say elliptic—path.

In sum, the “where” question directs us to examine the concrete spaces of diplomatic practice and thereby brings greater specificity to the study of diplomatic practice. It takes practice theory to slower and more sociable spaces so that it can pursue “the international the political and the social at the same time and in equal measure” (Lisle 2016, 418). It enables practice theory to meander outside the comfort zone of IR, diplomatic studies and sociology and become more comfortable with the inherent ambiguity and indeterminacy of sociability (Kuus 2019). Less boundary-drawing in terms of the object of study and the intellectual space of studying it may give us more atmospheric, more relational, and more realistic accounts of how diplomatic practice actually takes place.

### **Diplomacy as Performative Practice From/For the “Margins” (Fiona McConnell)**

Like all international meetings held during the COVID-19 pandemic, the 75<sup>th</sup> session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in September 2020 was conducted almost entirely online, with state leaders submitting pre-recorded video messages. Amidst reporting on the challenges and limitations of “Zoom diplomacy”, *The Guardian* newspaper ran a tongue-in-cheek story ranking the staged settings of world leaders’ speeches.<sup>1</sup> Topping the poll was Cuba, which the journalist Oliver Holmes described thus: “Without obvious explanation, Miguel Díaz-Canel chose to sit in front on a melange of striking palms and ferns (possibly fake?), which themselves are lit by green light.” Whilst this piece provided light relief in coverage of escalating geopolitical wrangling at the UN, it also points to the pivotal role of performance – and specifically theatrical techniques – in diplomacy.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/sep/22/world-leaders-un-video-call-backdrops-ranked>

Yet it is not just state leaders who carefully stage-manage their diplomatic appearances. At the same time as the UNGA was happening in New York, in Geneva the UN's Human Rights Council was holding its 45<sup>th</sup> session in "hybrid" mode, with some delegates physically at the Palais des Nations and others participating remotely. This included a number of representatives of marginalised communities – stateless nations, minority communities, and indigenous peoples – for whom raising issues of pressing human rights concern at this international forum has never been more important, and yet, as Pouliot argues in this Discussion, are effectively erased from the international stage precisely through the exclusionary practices and institutions of diplomacy. However, a silver lining to the pandemic's impact on international diplomacy has been the potential opening up of opportunities for wider participation at the UN: a rapid acceleration of existing but thus far hampered trends towards remote participation, and the practical realisation of hitherto somewhat rhetorical gestures towards increasing inclusivity at the organisation. With financial and visa/passport barriers to travel erased, a wider range of diplomats – including those who are stateless – could participate at the Human Rights Council session through submitting video statements and following the proceedings live on UNWeb TV. Indeed, the interventions during interactive dialogue sessions that arguably made the most lasting impression were those from family members of political prisoners, and victims of state oppression. In contrast to the national paraphernalia on display in member state's interventions, these video statements were shot against the UN-required neutral background. Yet the often poorly-lit speaker looking directly at the camera to deliver their heartfelt plea to the international community had the effect of puncturing the staid atmosphere in the socially distanced conference rooms in Geneva, and capturing the attention of those watching remotely via UN WebTV.

In seeking to interrogate the power dynamics and modes of diplomatic exchange that is happening in these hybrid, boundary-spanning spaces of online/in-person diplomacy, much can be gained from a turn to practice theory. As Pouliot notes in this Discussion, the now sizeable body of practice-focused work within diplomacy studies has been invaluable in shining a spotlight on the power relations and categories of political subjectivity that underpin and are produced by diplomacy as a profession (e.g. Kuus 2015; Jones and Clark 2015; Pouliot and Cornut 2015; Wiseman 2015). The resulting reification of social boundaries is particularly acute when it comes to representatives of marginalised groups who seek to engage in formal international diplomacy. In bringing to the fore how state and non-state diplomats are exposed to diplomatic habitus and thus the ease through which they can



navigate diplomatic culture, practice theory thus offers valuable insights into who are perceived to be legitimate subjects of international politics. As Pouliot notes in this Discussion, practice theory is effective in capturing the “politics of diplomacy.” In turn, this opens up vital questions about “the conditions under which colonized subjects and peoples are considered diplomatic or non-diplomatic and the differential treatment accorded to peoples or places that were considered external to the European diplomatic milieu” (Opondo 2016, 41; Opondo in this Discussion).

Yet, whilst paying close analytical attention to what diplomats *do* can highlight the potential for creativity and innovation in the margins of conventional state diplomacy (e.g. Bouris and Fernández-Molina 2018), with its focus on competition and struggle (Cornut 2018) practice theory often fails to fully capture the fluidity of diplomatic actorness and the ambiguities that emerge from individuals engaging in a range of seemingly contradictory diplomatic repertoires (McConnell 2017). Moreover, despite its focus on the scale of the everyday, the site of the body, and questions of behaviour and taste, practice theory also struggles to account for the fact that diplomacy is an inherently *performative* practice, with emotional registers affecting how particular behaviours and linguistic styles are both presented and received. Both of these concerns are brought to the fore in novel ways by the rapid shift to online participation precipitated by the pandemic wherein spatial registers, hierarchies between diplomatic actors, norms of transparency, and modes of diplomatic performance have been disrupted and reconfigured. In contrast to other contributions in this Discussion (Pouliot, Kuus), my focus here is not to suggest an account of diplomacy that can be rigorously applied to its mainstream practices. Rather, by turning empirical attention to stateless actors whose diplomatic credentials are ambiguous and employing a deliberately open and ethnographically inductive methodological lens, I suggest that interrogating the nature of diplomatic practice in this milieu thus exposes the limits of practice theory.

How, then, can the conceptual reach of practice theory vis-à-vis diplomacy be expanded in order to start to take these shifting dynamics into account? One strategy is that promoted by Leander (2011): to offer a counter-reading of Bourdieu that downplays the structuralism within his work and instead opens up space for agency, contingency and improvisation. However, employing a theoretical eclecticism that underpins approaches in human geography, I suggest instead that it can be productive to bring more conventional readings of Bourdieu’s work into dialogue with other bodies of scholarship – particularly those outside of and/or seen as outdated within IR – and that teasing out points of synergy

and divergence can usefully pluralise and vernacularize the notion of diplomatic practice (see also Kuus in this Discussion on diversifying methodological approaches).

There are obvious connections between practice theory and the notion of performativity (Butler 1990), for example around the processual nature of identity construction, and an understanding that relations fostered through diplomatic practice are constitutive of diplomatic agency and actorness (Sending et al 2015). However, here I want to suggest that there are also productive interchanges to be had between practice theory and dramaturgical notions of performance, as inspired by mid-twentieth century sociological work on symbolic interactionism. In many ways it is intuitive to think of diplomacy in terms of theatrical performance – it is a highly ritualised political practice that involves elaborate choreographing and is always conducted in front of an audience, ranging from an individual interlocutor to a potentially global audience for diplomatic summits. The fast-tracked shift to online diplomacy in 2020 – a trend related to but also distinct from trends towards digital diplomacy (Manor 2019) – has seen changes not only in modes of diplomatic participation, but also in the affective registers employed in online interventions and negotiations, and the scope of engaging with more varied potential audiences. Writing in the pre-digital diplomacy era, and with a focus on practitioner perspectives rather than conceptual framings, Raymond Cohen (1987) articulated the theatricality of diplomacy clearly in his dissection of how the ubiquity of television shifted the nature of how non-verbal communication was staged in diplomatic signalling. Yet, whilst performance has become a fruitful metaphor across a range of social science disciplines in recent years, and a productive lens through which to analyse everyday state practices (e.g. Jeffrey 2013; McConnell 2016), national days (e.g. Ley 2000), and political ceremonies (Rai 2010; Spary 2010; Alexander et al 2006), there has been surprisingly little sustained application of ideas of dramaturgy to diplomacy since Cohen's volume (for exceptions see Shimazu 2014; Sidaway 2002).

The logical place to start is with Goffman's (1959) work on dramaturgy, and indeed Bourdieu's occasional citations of Goffman's work (e.g. in Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) points to the plausibility of a more sustained dialogue. Goffman's ideas are particularly apposite to the dynamics of diplomacy in terms of examining the strategies through which individuals manage themselves in the presence of others, especially with regards to the notion of impression management in the distinction between "front regions" where performances are enacted and observed, and "back regions" where an individual's appearance and performance is prepared (Cohen 1987). Where Goffman's approach problematically contradicts practice theory is in the assumption of conscious agents pre-existing and separate from a performance.

A more nuanced understanding of subjectivity is instead found in the work of Victor Turner (1987), a key figure in the development of dramaturgical perspectives but thus far overlooked in diplomatic studies. Turner's collaboration with avant garde theatre producer Richard Schechner (1985) spurred innovative analyses of the mutually reinforcing interconnections between ritual and theatre, social drama and aesthetic performances, and his analysis of the creativity that can arise in situations of liminality has particular resonances with the case of marginal diplomatic actors who can "shape shift" their political subjectivity more easily than state diplomats (McConnell 2017).

I want to suggest two ways in which fostering a dialogue between dramaturgical framings and practice theory might pluralise and vernacularize the latter, bring particular dimensions of diplomacy to the fore, and push thinking with diplomacy in new directions. First is to foreground staging within diplomacy, and in particular the deliberate scripting and performing of specific emotional and affective registers. For, just as sociability in the backstage offers valuable insights into "identity formation and group maintenance, serve as a mechanism of learning and socialization, produce social capital for actors" (Nair, 2020: 197), so a more critical and sustained focus on the frontstage offers insights into strategic performances of particular diplomatic practices and rhetorical registers in order to seek legitimacy. This focus on the legitimating dynamics of *where* diplomacy takes place (as per Kuus in this Discussion) is particularly the case in marginalised communities seeking to mimic official diplomacy (McConnell et al, 2012), and takes on a heightened importance in the context of digital diplomatic performances which can take on a life of their own via online circulations (see Dittmer in this Discussion on non-human agency).

Second, and relatedly, there are potentially expedient synergies to be explored between dramaturgical approaches, practice theory and recent work on affective atmospheres (e.g. Closs Stephens 2015; Anderson 2006). The latter goes beyond the rather formulaic and restrictive treatment of emotions in diplomacy (e.g. Hall 2015), which have focused "only a small number of emotional pathways that are activated when we confront the horrors of the world" (Lisle, 2016: 423). A focus on intersections of affect, dramaturgy and practice also brings to the fore the ambiguous nature of intentionality vis-à-vis diplomatic signalling (cf. Cohen 1987; Jönsson 2016) and the fluidity of diplomatic actorness. Returning to the current modes of diplomacy at the UN offers a case in point. On the one hand we have the absurdity of the stage-managed video messages from state leaders juxtaposed by the tragedy of many of the same states actively undermining multilateralism at the UN and using the COVID-19 pandemic to crack down on social, political, and economic freedoms. On the other hand we

have the likes of a special rapporteur responding live via video-link to UN interactive dialogue on pressing human rights issues, with his children's paintings on the wall behind him. This perhaps not-accidental staging signals a purposeful breaking down of personal and professional boundaries: it humanises the special rapporteur's role and goes some way to challenging the "profession" bias in practice theory.

### **Between Practice and Assemblage: Bodies, Materials, and Space (Jason Dittmer)**

The practice turn in International Relations marked an inversion of the traditional stuff of IR; a shift from *what* states do to *how* states do. That is, it turned to what civil servants and others who people the state do when they do the work of the state. As such, it elevated diplomatic studies, which had always had a complex relationship with IR. The theory/practice distinction that the practice turn attempts to do away with makes diplomacy more central to the world of international relations, if not the paradigmatic site for a certain kind of IR. In this intervention I argue that while this is an advance, and a key re-framing of the international, it does not go far enough. Rather, it replicates an anthropocentrism that has hindered IR and diplomacy studies for far too long (cf. Cudworth and Hobden 2011). I argue instead for a more-than-human practice theory, one which sets the agency of humans alongside that of materials in the flat(ter) ontology of assemblage, which makes locating practices trickier than is commonly indicated in the literature.

IOne might say that the practice turn has made IR more attentive to its own practices. Indeed, the practice turn has pluralised the methods of diplomatic studies, bringing in ethnographic methods, creative forms of academic output, and other more subject-centred approaches to research. But where are these subjects located? They are embodied, materialised in fleshy forms that perform both individually and collectively within larger social contexts (Neumann 2008). This of course is not unfamiliar to scholars of diplomacy working with practices (Kuus 2014; Bueger 2018; Standfield 2020), and emotion and affect have been taken up within diplomatic studies in exciting ways (Jones and Clark 2019). In response to this Collective Discussion's central question, this proposal revises practice theory's ontological commitments, broadening them in ways that are exciting but which also point to the potential hazards of purely ethnographic approaches. The temporal present-ness and spatial here-ness of ethnographic methods can delimit diplomatic practices in ways that

write out the distribution through space and time of elements of the diplomatic assemblage that shape both practices and subjectivities.

To understand practices is also to follow them out into the material contexts that circulate affects and link diplomats with their home governments, with the cities in which they work, and with each other. After all, affects are not located in “the body which practices”, rather they circulate and shape the fields of practice themselves. That is to say, more-than-human affects are compositional of the spaces in which diplomacy unfolds (Adler-Nissen and Drieschova 2019). In the remaining space I would like to briefly trace two anecdotal case studies, one focusing on the difficulty of locating practices within the wider more-than-human assemblage in which they are enmeshed, and another emphasising the role of the non-human in shaping practices. They are linked, however, by their focus on the role of *force relations*, rather than social relations, within diplomatic practices (Meehan, Shaw, and Marston 2013). These force relations are generative of the effects and affects that locate both diplomats (and the states they embody) in fields of practice (Dittmer 2017). That is, these case studies are of bodies, enmeshed in technological and bureaucratic assemblages that shape their personal subjectivities, and therefore their political practices.

An interesting field of practice from which to examine this is digital diplomacy, one of the aims of which is to form best practices for practitioners new to the world of diplomacy unfolding on Twitter and other social media platforms. As such, it is already attuned to the tenets of the practice turn (Bjola and Holmes 2015). A story in the *New York Times* (Albeck-Ripka and Ramzy 2020) highlighted a recent event in which a spokesman for the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs posted a (reportedly fabricated) photograph of an Australian soldier with a bloody knife to the throat of an Afghan child. The incident frayed already weak ties between China and Australia, even provoking a response from the Australian prime minister.

More important for our purposes, however, is that the spokesperson in question is linked to the rise of a group of Chinese diplomats described dramatically in Western media as the “Wolf Warriors”, after the renewal of jingoistic patriotism found in recent Chinese action films (Shi and Liu 2020). Of course, it would be easy to trace this evolution of diplomatic practice to enmeshing of diplomats’ bodies with the Twitter platform, which privileges pithy outrage and sharp insults. This is certainly part of the story, and the embrace of certain pugilistic clichés of online communication by Western practitioners of statecraft, especially with regard to China, will have certainly paved the way for China to follow. The algorithms

of Twitter affect the performed subjectivity of diplomats everywhere, and China ought not be any different.

And yet, the particularities of the Chinese context matter here as well. First, it is notable that “Wolf Warrior” diplomacy is generally not aimed at inflaming a populist base in the way that many Western social media performances are. That is, the bodies that are linked through Twitter are – for these Chinese diplomats – largely foreign audiences who are traditionally cultivated by diplomats, because China’s domestic population is not (legally) able to access Twitter because of the so-called “Great Firewall”. This techno-political chokepoint was implemented to prevent the circulation of non-Chinese knowledges and affects within the Chinese online environment. However, it also has produced Chinese digital diplomacy as a field that is not driven by domestic consumption; rather, this is a practice that is crafted primarily for foreign audiences.

The second way in which “Wolf Warrior” diplomacy relates to the specific Chinese context is that it follows from a set of reforms within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in which performance appraisals began to include public engagement (Loh 2020). This, in conjunction with President Xi’s more assertive foreign policy, has incentivised the cultivation of social media presence by a wider array of diplomatic actors. Here we can see how it is not simply a body-Twitter assemblage, but rather (at least) a body-Twitter-HR assemblage that generates the Wolf Warriors’ diplomatic practices.

In this example, we have a compelling example of how the “Wolf Warrior” diplomatic assemblage might be understood as located not only in the diplomatic subject’s practices, but in wider techno-bureaucratic contexts that stretch from the practices of human resources bureaucrats in Beijing to the algorithmic engineers of Silicon Valley. The sprawling assemblage that produced the “Wolf Warrior” diplomatic practices is difficult to map, but crucial to understand, as practices beget other practices.

If digital diplomacy provides an all-too-obvious site where diplomatic practices are shaped by practices and affective engineering that originate far from the inner sanctums of high diplomacy, perhaps another more traditional example will convince of the specific role of the non-human in shaping bodily practices. In my earlier research I traced the history of debates around the re-design and re-location of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century British Foreign Office (Dittmer 2016; 2017). A brief anecdote from that research will perhaps highlight the role of the non-human in shaping diplomats’ embodied practices. Instead of focusing on the foreign secretary, I would like to focus on the foreign secretary’s dining room table.

As Parliamentary select committees discussed the “new” Foreign Office through the early 1800s (the topic proved controversial and expensive, and so dragged on for decades), the MPs quizzed Foreign Office staff about the most important factor in building design: their everyday practices. Or, rather, everyday practices were the second most important factor in building design after cost-savings. One topic for discussion was whether or not the new Foreign Office ought to have a state dining room. At the time, London’s diplomatic corps was much smaller than today. However, the times were changing as more countries became independent and a new round of time-space compression was underway, leading to the growth in resident ambassadors. Up until then, the fact that the foreign secretary – a traditionally aristocratic post – could fit the entire diplomatic corps around his dining room table had been a tacit expectation. That is, that the diplomat’s body would be one marked by lofty class emerged in relation to the state’s provision of dining infrastructure. Of course, the reasons for the foreign secretary traditionally coming from the aristocracy go much further than “they had the biggest dining rooms.” Nevertheless, it is true that this expectation was materialised in the state’s capital investments, shaping previous incarnations of the Foreign Office estate in and around Whitehall. These sunk costs and design decisions affected subsequent diplomatic practices, locking in certain norms and habitus for decades to come.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century re-design – which produced today’s Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office on King Charles Street – considered the possibility of non-aristocratic foreign secretaries, or at least of still-aristocratic foreign secretaries whose hospitality could not keep up with the expanding diplomatic corps. Initially it was decided to save money by not investing in a state dining room, further ensconcing the aristocratic norm. However, this was revised in a subsequent select committee as the diplomatic corps had expanded greatly even in the time during which the re-design was being debated. This resulted in what is today known as the Locarno Suite (Redmond 2013).

It would of course be reductive to solely attribute the class background of the foreign secretary to the lack of a state dining room; however, this is just one example that has been rescued from the history of everyday diplomatic practices, which has frequently been seen as too banal to preserve (as opposed to the history of foreign policy). It is safe to assume that this example – which centres on long-lived decisions about design and capital investment – is but one from a whole field of power in which material objects (or the lack thereof) shape diplomatic practices. Rather than thinking of objects as tools people use in their practices, we have to become attuned to the idea that people may be tools of larger more-than-human agencies, and the practices that emerge from those contexts.

The anecdotal case studies offered here point to the expansive more-than-human assemblage that shapes diplomatic subjects, and therefore diplomatic bodies' practices. The challenge for the practice turn is, therefore, to develop a sensitivity to the role of affects, circulating geographically through material infrastructures (such as Twitter or HR forms) and transmitted through time via past decisions about investment and design. These affects intersect in the bodies of today's diplomats, shaping the habitus, capacities, potentials of the diplomatic assemblage. Practices are not solely the province of the here and now, but also of the over-there and way-back-when. As such, practice theory requires methods that can trace the material contours of the assemblage as it recomposes space and time, making some practices more or less likely. Knowing where and when diplomatic practices occur just got a little more complicated.

***Pharmakon: Amateur Diplomacies and/as Decolonial Practice*** (Sam Okoth Opondo)

Can diplomacy be saved? Can diplomacy save us?

(Constantinou and Der Derian 2010, 1)

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The pluralization of the concept and sites of diplomacy has also multiplied the practices considered to be of diplomatic significance. In response to this pluralization, practice theory has attempted to “bring together inter-paradigmatic and theoretical debates around a conceptual focal point” like diplomacy with a view to generating “dialogue rather than synthesis” (Adler and Pouliot 2011, 6). While such conversations seek to clarify our conception of diplomacy, they often overlook the constitutive exclusion, conversion, and over-coding practices that reproduce the colonio-diplomatic “phantasm of the other” and its ideal of god, knowledge, world, sovereignty, community, immunity, and humanity (Mbembe 2001, 212). As such, practice theory's generous gesture of inviting thinkers to focus on practices as a way of figuring out the international and establishing a research agenda does not question its own capacity to order (as both arrangement and command) things and beings. It also fails to question the values and valuation practices that enable it to define what is or is not diplomatic or the competences and sites it considers meaningful, impactful, and worthy of scholarly attention.



Obviously, a lot can be uncovered by treating diplomacy as both “a category of practice and a category of analysis.” However, the quest for definitions (however broadly conceived) or the desire for a “unified theory of practice” limits and institutes a hierarchy of practices and practitioners even as it makes claims about diversity (Pouliot and Cornut 2015, 299). This is especially so when diplomacy’s “claim to represent a given polity to the outside world” based on the relational and political dynamics of representation and governing assumes that we already agree on what constitutes the whole, the inside/outside of polities, world order, and even humanity itself. As Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni has illustrated, the forceful incorporation of Africans into a colonial order that subjugated them led colonial and postcolonial subjects to “see themselves from outside of themselves and to think of themselves not from the inside but from the outside using an external lens” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018, 138). This being the case, the “old diplomacies” that excluded colonial subjects from recognized privileges and immunities have to be read alongside the fictions of Man, philosophy, god, and time that created the idea of Europe and its para-diplomatic apparatuses (Cornago 2010). It is also worth noting that from the perspective of the colonized, these old diplomacies were new. Their anti-diplomatic and colonial practices disrupted African diplomatic worlds while naturalizing a hierarchical order of beings and practices that instituted regimes of “internationalization as internalization” (Walker 2005, 58).

To the credit of practice theory, it does not fetishize the new or today’s turn to new diplomacies. However, it proceeds from the notion that we already know or at least agree on who or what counts as meaningful diplomatic practice as it maps old and new things. For instance, referring to traditional “gentleman diplomacy” and diplomatic handbooks — which also act as colonial books of conduct — leads to a narrow focus on geopolitical imaginaries and Western genealogies that claim to be concerned with the world as a “whole” while downplaying their particularities.

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In order to explore what is characteristic of this mode of thought but is ultimately disavowed by the presentist readings of diplomatic practice, one could turn to the structuring force of the Pauline epistles where the “ambassador in chains” (Eph 6:20) “becomes all things to all men” (1 Corinthians 9:22) so as to proselytize and “redefine the philosophical category of the subject as a universal singularity” (Badiou 2009, 9). As an ambassador who is also a “poet-thinker of the event,” St. Paul is said to be an “antinomian thinker” who transforms identities

and their relationship to the law (Gal 3:22). For some, the ambassador in chains and the universalism he proclaims is the basis for converting, colonizing, and chaining the non-Christian other. For others, he is a figure of the remnant and a messianic thinker, “of the time that remains.” Accordingly, Paul’s *Letter to the Romans* is read as a way of opening up the question of vocation and separation thus “allowing for a new perspective that dislodges our antiquated notions of a people and democracy however impossible it may be to renounce them” (Agamben 2010, 7). In seeing St. Paul as the one called to a messianic “vocation that is the revocation of every vocation” (1Cor 7: 29-32), Giorgio Agamben notes that Paul’s position as emissary radically departs from conceptions of one’s calling in contemporary texts like Max Weber’s *Politics as Vocation* (Agamben 2010, 149).

Insofar as diplomatic theory is concerned, Costas M. Constantinou has read the Pauline practice of “reverse accreditation” as one of the dimensions of homo-diplomacy. Alongside “gnostic discourse” and “introspective negotiation”, these Pauline homo-diplomatic practices and dispositions are characterized by interpersonal, non-professional, experiential, and experimental diplomacies of everyday life. By going beyond heterologies (discourses on the other), the homo-diplomacies that Constantinou treats facilitate the problematization and knowledge of the self while opening us up to the other such that diplomacy becomes a *philo-gnostic* as well as a *philo-barbaric* venture and adventure (Constantinou 2006).

However, it is also the Pauline will-to-convert and its universal mission that connects the present and future as well as near and far places such that we can identify a set of diplomatic/colonial practices that run from the Augustinian order of things to the discourse on humanity in the Sepúlveda / Las Casas debate on the “nature” and convertibility of the Amerindian. This will-to-convert and define otherness through practices that are at once diplomatic, colonial, ethnological, and theological, is also found in the desire to know others enacted by Ramón Pané – the Hieronymite Monk who accompanied Christopher Columbus on his second voyage to the island of “Hispaniola” – and other heirs to this world-making and world-destroying tradition (Lopez-Maguina 1992).

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As a corrective to these colonial para-diplomacies, Frantz Fanon – the Martinican revolutionary psychiatrist, literary figure, and the provisional Algerian Government’s diplomat to Ghana – constantly interrogates the normalizing scripts that frame what it means

“To Be a Diplomat” (Neumann 2005) and most importantly, to be human. By raising urgent questions about race, the psychopathology of oppression, the pitfalls of national consciousness, representation, recognition, violence, alienation, and the material and phenomenological conditions of the colonial subject, Fanon challenges the colonial ideal of “Man” and the world that sustains it. He also calls for a critical humanism that affirms the idea of a “new man”, a decolonized world, and a disalienated self where one does not only confront and negotiate with themselves and others but also asserts the right to “demand human behaviour from the other” (Fanon 1986, 179).

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In two letters appearing in his collection of essays *Toward the African Revolution*, Fanon draws our attention to practices of everyday life in the colony as well as the positions and dispositions that maintain the Manichean colonial world. In a letter addressed to a “Frenchman” who decided to leave the Algerian colony as the colonial world began to crumble under the weight of local resistance, Fanon excoriates his interlocutor for “his essential ignorance of this country and its ways” such that it was possible for the “humanist” Frenchman to be concerned about generic human beings “but strangely, not the Arab” (Fanon 1967, 47-51). The second and more widely cited letter is Fanon’s resignation from his position as the medical director at the psychiatric hospital Blida-Joinville. Written to the resident minister in late 1956, the letter marks the end of Fanon’s “professional” mission to Algeria while signifying his entry into active service of the Algeria National Liberation Front (FLN). Fanon’s refusal and resignation was based on his recognition that one could not perform their healing duty ethically and effectively in the colony for “any attempt to put the individual back where they belonged” further tortured the alienated mind of the colonized subject who was “permanently an alien in his own country” (Fanon 1967, 53). The double commitment to healing and/as liberation that underlines Fanon’s refusal encourages one to carry out a *situational diagnosis* of everyday life that questions their calling and the conventions of their profession while at the same time embracing a more life-affirming mission (Fanon 1967, 10).

The Fanonian amateur commitment to newness, care, and rehabilitation of the human that runs against his professional commitment also acknowledges how colonialism and racism alienate polities from each other while creating hellish zones of non-being that estrange the colonial and postcolonial subject from themselves as well as their material and symbolic worlds. As Achille Mbembe illustrates in his writing on Fanon’s *pharmakon* and its

relations of care, the Fanonian subject “is born into the world and to itself through the capacity to say no” to subjugation or the dutiful performance of practices that further the colonial project or deepen the infrastructures of infra-humanity (Mbembe 2019, 139). Based on the awareness that in racist and colonial contexts, representation “disfigures” and “does not necessarily lead to the possibility of mutual recognition,” this Fanonian refusal is simultaneously anti-colonial, anti-diplomatic, and diplomatic in its orientation (Ibid). That is, the Fanonian effort to decolonize the present and to compose a more affirmative politics or diplomacy in a world characterized by separations, partitions, or forced associations embraces an affirmative, amateur, and actional ethics which stipulates; “man is a yes...yes to life. Yes to love. Yes to generosity” (Fanon 1986, 173).

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The persistence of the modern/colonial partitioning of the world that simultaneously erases and generates diplomatic actors and practices alongside new forms of enmity and suffering is evidence of the unfinished work of decolonization. In a series of Fanon-inspired theses on coloniality and decoloniality, Nelson Maldonado-Torrès illustrates how efforts to “advance modernity without challenging coloniality” are the outcome of a metaphysical catastrophe that “changes the meaning and function of the basic parameters of geopolitical, national, as well as subjective and inter-subjective dynamics to the extent that it creates a world to the measure of dehumanization” (Maldonado-Torrès 2016, 12). Maldonado-Torres goes on to demonstrate how amateur relations (*amor*) of “decolonial love” reveal and question colonial histories and the coloniality of being while combining “knowledge, practice, and creative expressions, among other areas in their efforts to change the world” (Maldonado-Torrès 2016, 6). In so doing, these decolonial relations “demand a holistic movement that involves reaching out to others, communicating, and organizing” so that a new “kind of knowledge and critique become part of the process” (Ibid). Unlike the totalizing summoning of practice theory, the decolonial approach reveals the coeval emergence of diplomatic and colonial world orders and questions practices that seek to deepen rather than undo the already accepted understandings of what counts as diplomatic theory and practice.

Not only does it encourage us to ask where and how diplomacy is being deployed in new ways, it also looks at whose idea and ideal of diplomacy is recognized and at what cost. That is, it departs from the ideological attachment to diplomatic professions and demonstrates how the modern practices “needed to mediate estrangement while maintaining separateness”

have become the cure and poison of our contemporary condition. Such an avowal of the *diplomatic pharmakon* acknowledges the entanglement between a diplomatic subject who “aspires to a mode of living beyond governmentality” and the increasing reach of the discriminatory forces of recognition, negation, and negotiation that subject colonial and postcolonial others to control, command, and conversion (Constantinou 2013, 142). By taking other diplomacies and modern diplomacy’s others seriously, we are forced to confront “our” attachments to a diplomacy that saves but also enslaves. A diplomacy that some strive to save while others seek to save themselves from.

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As a doctor, diplomat, and revolutionary writer, Fanon was acutely aware of diplomacy’s capacity to heal and kill in equal measure. His attention to the everydayness of oppression, estrangement, violence, and the mediation practices deployed in an effort to bring forth a more life-affirming world challenges recognized diplomatic positions and the professional dispositions and habitus that sustain them. Doubtless, Fanon’s *pharmakon* has been mobilized to make sense of violent anti-colonial struggle or to illustrate how war, “as both remedy and poison,” works as “the *pharmakon* of our time” that facilitates the “exit from democracy” and the creation of “societies of enmity” (Mbembe 2019, 4; Derrida 1981, 93). However, Fanon, just like St. Paul, also provides us with a theory of the *diplomatic pharmakon* that amplifies the multiplicity and even duplicity of modern/colonial professions and missions while illustrating how anti-colonial diplomatic counter-practices work in the service of the wretched of the earth. Such a critical orientation towards diplomatic practices becomes increasingly important at a time when the proliferation and virtualization of diplomacies and reconfiguration of the human and more-than-human worlds is taking place alongside the exit from diplomacy and creation of new ‘societies of enmity.’ As Fanon illustrates, diplomats are sometimes unrecognizable figures whose everyday practices and commitments challenge the order of a colonial or even postcolonial world that limits the possibility of ethical encounters. As such, the ultimate diplomatic mission becomes one of questioning and transforming the self, the world, and the conditions of representation, recognition, and encounter with others. Such an amateur diplomatic stance does not abandon or valorise the diplomatic disposition but questions the very positions and codes that authorize it. It involves a kind of errantry that recognizes how diplomats are formed, deformed, and transformed by multiplicities that exceed the recognized diplomatic milieu.

Unfortunately, it is also this multiplicity and potentiality of diplomacy that practice theory overlooks as it records and re-codes diplomatic practices which are always already overcrowded and over-coded domains.

### **Beyond Strategy: Diplomacy and the Practice of Living** (Costas M. Constantinou)

Practice theory has broached the subject of diplomacy, offering novel insights and valuable exegeses of its changing practice. Its diplomatic purview, however, has remained limited. It has missed what Michel de Certeau identifies in *The Practice of Everyday Life* as “errant trajectories” (1984, xviii). Errantry enhances an understanding of diplomacy beyond the teleology of state power, policy implementation and direct engagement. It espouses a holistic vision that includes experimental and experiential modes of diplomacy typically left out from foreign policy analysis. It envisions the field on which diplomatic practice is exercised, not as “a stable notion of social space” (Leander 2011, 297) but as a stage that invites and accommodates diverse performances and improvisations (Neumann 2013, Cornut 2018, McConnell 2019 and McConnell in this Discussion). For, historically, besides strictly instructed embassies sent to power centers, polities also dispatched missions with open ended goals, exploring foreign societies, informally engaging, learning about and from other cultures. Literally called “theories” (*theorias*) in ancient Greece or “free embassies” (*legationes liberas*) to the Romans, diplomatic routes such as these brought new knowledge back to the polity that helped to rethink its laws, institutions and policies (Constantinou 1996).

How far are errant trajectories not only interesting historical episodes but a necessary knowledge pool for developing or revising practice theory? Reflecting on altered forms of diplomacy, isolating paradoxes that transverse the dominant practices of power, does entail risks of conceptual overstretching and analytical disutility when viewed from a particular epistemological perspective (see Pouliot in this Discussion). But dismissing informal missions and diverging activities risks missing alternative ontologies of diplomacy. Beyond authorized routes, those mundane, swerving or abstruse trajectories of everyday life affect and shape the “visible” or “mainstream” practice one identifies as occurring: e.g. the sociability where actors might hit-it-off or resolve disagreement (Holmes and Wheeler 2020; Nair 2020), the sensory experience of bureaucratic settings (Kuus 2019), the “menial” labor

through which frictions are resolved and coexistence daily negotiated (Constantinou 2016, Conway 2019).

The logic of practice in the field of diplomacy – in *any* field – is not singular. Contra Bourdieu, de Certeau (1984, 45-60) highlighted how daily errands beget their own logic by imbricating different fields and operating outside the structure of habitual practice. For de Certeau, the field, or terrain of action, upon which practitioners calculate force-relationships, foster their habitus and strategize the exercise of power, problematically assumes a distinct or visible totality. The terrain being already foggy – to tease Clausewitz’s dictum about the battlefield – never corresponds to the actual place one mentally maps as the site of strategic action. Means-ends calculations that require total field vision discount the “ethnological ‘fragments’”, or daily struggles occurring on less visible grounds, that is, the tactics and wayward moves that open paths “in the jungle of functionalist rationality” (De Certeau 1984, xviii and 58). Covering up the practitioner’s social life and errant tracks, practice is (wishfully) presented to the strategic eye as a clear and plain field of action. Yet, practice theory can be shaken by the “sudden unevenness of terrain” for “the theorizing operation finds itself at the limits of the terrain where it normally functions.” (De Certeau 1984, 61, and see Opondo in this Discussion).

What does it mean to approach diplomatic practice through the unevenness of terrain where it operates? Let us think with a paradigmatic case where diplomacy maybe narrated both as an orthodox unified practice and a heterodox amalgamation of practices: namely, Mahatma Gandhi’s *satyagraha* (i.e. the “soul-force” or passive resistance movement). *Satyagraha* is credited for taking on the asymmetrical power of the British empire and delivering Indian independence. As is well known, Gandhi’s diplomacy directly engaged yet defied power politics (Datta-Ray 2015: 193-214). But, as Gandhi reminisced (2018, 498-499), the birth of *satyagraha* started as an experiment (“when it was born, I myself could not say what it was”), directly linked to his religiosity and vow of celibacy, than a strategic plan to outmaneuver the British. By cultivating non-violent moral force, primarily on himself and also striving to conscientize those around him and all parties in the conflict, Gandhi transversed terrains: making a legal case in court or with tea at the viceroy’s residency, taking it to the street, walking the long march, adopting an ascetic life in the ashram, following transgressive dress codes and fasting trials, negotiating at the imperial conference on India in London, participating in countless social events. Where did Gandhi’s diplomacy begin and where did it end? Which performance or setting is diplomatic and which not? Can we really appreciate the outplaying of imperial diplomacy without opening up to these *other* vernacular

diplomacies? Or can we ignore the “atmospherics” of encounter that created affect in his negotiations (Legg 2020)? Posing the “know-where” of diplomatic practice, expanding the spaces of practice theory (see Kuus in this Discussion) is especially pertinent in his case.

Gandhi could be viewed as an innovative and complex “mediator of estrangement”, to opt for one definition of diplomacy (Der Derian 1987). Being a British-trained Barrister, Gandhi became an advocate for Indian (*not* African) rights in South Africa, seeking to “humanize” the British empire and legitimizing it in the process (Desai and Vahed 2015), progressively becoming disenchanted, and then leading the Indian struggle for home rule (*swaraj*). He was also an advocate of the rights of the subaltern, the peasants, the Dalits, as well as the rights of women. But Gandhi did not just represent collectives. With regard to India, he sought to transform the polity he was meant to represent. His *swaraj* reimagined India bottom-up, arguing that mere independence from Britain would not deliver the longed-for Hindustan, but only an Englistan (Gandhi 2009, 176). Although not as radical or unflawed as popularly presented (Roy 2017), he de-Brahminized and de-intellectualized Hinduism, and whilst making it a potent force, he alienated the Hindu elites that otherwise admired his campaign (Nandy 1980, 70-98). His initiatives entailed mediation between conflicting groups in India, particularly Hindu and Muslim extremists, and even collaboration with colonial authorities to restore order. Whilst it is important to both demythologize Gandhi and rescue him from the politics of mere activist advocacy, there is no doubt that his spiritual experiments and public diplomacy truly inspired. The iconic status Gandhi acquired – e.g. the “Indian Christ” as Romain Rolland dubbed him – allowed him to reach diverse audiences, gaining global support for his idiosyncratic struggles.

How can Gandhi’s life story inform practice theory? Gandhi’s diplomacy could be insightfully read from within an even diplomatic terrain and Bourdieusean logic of practice. It could be interpreted as strategic engagement whereby the symbolic power that Gandhi accumulated from various struggles was capitalized in the high-power field of diplomacy. The leverage he acquired in mobilizing the masses allowed him to counter-strategize against British rule at the negotiating table. For Bourdieu, adopting strategies that preserve or transform relations of power across different fields produces not only competition between fields but also a hierarchy of fields. It leads to the invention of the state, which (revising the Weberian formula) “successfully claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical and *symbolic* violence” (*italics in original*; Bourdieu 1994, 3-4). The state is the ensemble of fields, “a differentiated space of power” that operates “as meta-power able to act on the different fields” (Bourdieu 2014, 311). From this perspective, Gandhi’s confrontations with



the colonial state become strategic exercises over a clear and plain diplomatic field, challenging the imperial monopoly of symbolic power/violence. His habitus multiplied by his symbolic capital activated political-diplomatic meta-power. It empowered the masses, disempowered the colonists, and delivered the postcolonial state.

But this covers only half of the story. The other half should account for Gandhi's idiomatic mission and errant trajectories, which for him were central. What is at stake is whether we take his practice of living seriously, whether we recognize the topology of his diplomacy beyond habitual practice. Gandhi strongly believed that the anticolonial struggle could not be disentangled from everyday life. He campaigned for simplicity of lifestyle, withdrawal from cities, limited or no use of modern technology, religious devotion to duty, abstinence and vegetarianism. His lived experience in the ashram became a microcosm of true *swaraj* and an aspiration for postcolonial India. Regretting in his autobiography the public knowledge of only "my experiments in the political field" but not "my experiments in the spiritual field", he explained and elaborated on their potency. Underscoring self-realization and liberation as the ultimate goal of life, he saw "all my ventures in the political field directed to this same end." (Gandhi 2018, 46). Drawing inspiration from the *Mahabharata*, politics for Gandhi was underpinned by the "notion of a cosmos unified by relations and neutral at inception" (Datta-Ray 2015, 200). Violence was prevalent and all-encompassing, yet ethical conduct and liberation could not be delivered from above through governmental authority or monopolization of physical power. Contra Bourdieu, the political qua spiritual had been the meta-field from which Gandhi derived the soul-force and commitment to act and transform other fields. Meta-power was in *satyagraha*, not in habitual power politics, symbolic power, or strategic forms of diplomacy. Consequently, he espoused his own life as his message and how one had to "be the change one wanted to see in the world". His vernacular diplomacy, even when directly negotiating with the colonial government, featured a circumambulation of spiritual goals and experiments.

Does this mean Gandhi had no strategic goals? Not at all. From the early South Africa days, Gandhi strategized and tried to transform the Empire, before advocating for independence and planning direct action with his associates in the Indian National Congress. However, drawing from his diverse spiritual errands with, inter alia, the *Baghavat Gita*, *The Bible*, Plato, Tolstoy, Ruskin, Sufism and Stoicism (also sharpened through encounters with Theosophists, Jain monks, his deeply religious mother, and the troubled relationship he had with his eldest son who converted into Islam), he approached strategic goals not as ultimate ends but as preferred indifferents (Sorabji 2012, Sharma 2013). His approach emphasized

*means over ends*, virtue ethics as politics. Post-independent India had been a failed and tragic end from this perspective. Quite apart from the partition and the deadly violence that followed it, it did not achieve *true swaraj* (Gandhi 2009, 176-177), the spiritual awakening Gandhi hoped for and experimented with in the ashram. This alternative road, the clear terrain of action for him, was foggy and utopian to the Indian political leadership after independence. He surely influenced leaders like Nehru and bequeathed Indian diplomacy with a distinctive non-eurocentric discourse (Datta-Ray 2015), but the habitual power politics gained hold in official diplomatic practice vis-à-vis Gandhi's principled stands and heterodoxies.

Is another diplomacy possible? Can it emerge out of such practices of living? Recognizing other diplomacies that imbricate different terrains of action is epistemically valuable and an ethical imperative (see also McConnell and Dittmer in this Discussion). It pays heed to practices of living that inform the distinctive cosmologies that people inhabit and through which they comprehend *differently* their relations with each other and their political world. For Gandhi, the cosmology that inspired his practice of living incorporated manifold aspects, social entanglements and continuum across life cycles. Within such cosmology, the “mediation of estrangement” or “handling of the Other” operationalize practices of diplomacy very differently compared to customary diplomatic practice or the strategic imaginary. For example, in Gandhi's *satyagraha*, negotiation is not just about achieving one's political objective but also a means of uncovering intentions and testing commitments. To compromise and “lose” an advantage can still be a “gain” by learning the ethical limits of one's “opponents”, their capacity to act in good faith, what communities and relationships of trust are possible or impossible with them (Sharma 2013, 103-106). From the perspective of cosmic unity, conflictual relations remain symbiotic, and a *satyagrahi* engages the world with an ethical aim to eliminate or reduce violence and harm, rather than constantly calculate interest and power, or getting one's way with others.

Could such heterodox accounts of diplomacy be accommodated within practice theory or do they require that we move beyond it? The answer depends on how far practice theory keeps opening up to accommodate alternative conceptions of diplomacy. Or, to employ de Certeau's felicitous terminology (1984, 62-64), how far it can avoid in its theorization of practice both “ethnological isolation” (studying only a select group of practitioners) and “theoretical panopticism” (seeing the entire field of diplomacy through them). The challenge for practice theory is the extent to which it can move beyond notions of diplomacy as a mere “claim to represent a given polity to the outside world” (Sending et al 2015, 6), embrace the

ethnological richness of diplomacy that transverses given polities, and thus relate to issues, beings and entities that are not visible or legible to the professional diplomatic imaginary. Gandhi's is but one example of this multivocal and multidirectional diplomacy.

This is not contrary but follows on the relational promise of practice theory that views "diplomacy as social entanglement" (Adler-Nissen 2015, 295), which approaches power not as something possessed and controlled by single entities but produced and processed through social interactions. The valorization of relationality – given the diverse and indeterminate relations "we" can have with the Other – could thus be more accommodating to the experiments and errandries of practitioners. It could encourage forms of practice theorizing that unsettle and potentially transform fixations with the strategic playing field of diplomacy at the expense of the practice of living.

## **Conclusion**

Our Collective Discussion has explored the politics of diplomacy that accompanies the development of practice theory and its contributions in re-envisioning world politics. It has enabled us to ask challenging questions of diplomacy – a field of study whose time has returned both in terms of theoretical significance and of the crisis of and renewed urgency for multilateralism and the negotiation of global complexity. It has looked at the possibilities of expanding diplomatic spaces and interlocutors by delving less into the traditional inter-state spaces of the profession and more into everyday practices that may exhibit a diplomatic disposition or predicated on different ontologies of diplomacy. It underscored the value of both recognizing and moving beyond hierarchies in and of diplomatic practice, appreciating the question of who the practice of diplomacy works for and whom it fails, and enhancing more democratic and more-than-human diplomacies. The main task of the Discussion has been to develop or revise practice theory, and also to illustrate that interesting diplomatic phenomena can be captured and analysed beyond practice theory, especially when considering sites and varieties of (diplomatic) practice that are not commonly identified as diplomatic. The Discussion also showed that the broadening of the scope of diplomacy, and the meandering pathways through which this can be accomplished, do not undercut analytical rigor. Both conceptually and methodologically, broadening and deepening can be complementary rather than contradictory moves.

Overall this Discussion has shown that *thinking with diplomacy* can be productive. But it is certainly not an easy ride, nor bereft of internal disputations over the meaning of

diplomacy or practice theory. From this perspective, it is not unlike the task of thinking within the parameters of IPS, whose three key concepts have not “achieved their capacity to express unity without many struggles”, yet there is wonderful possibility in laying bare that struggle, continuously bringing the concepts in conjunction and conversation (Walker 2017, 13-14). In this way, approaching thinking not merely as the explanation of phenomena or reproduction of institutionalized knowledge frames, but as creating “conditions of possibility for imagining alternative worlds” (Shapiro 2013, xv). We hope that our Discussion underscores precisely this need for a cross- and trans-disciplinary commitment that “keeps the field of inquiry open” and which allows for “more creative, reflexive, and experimental research trajectories in IPS” (Lisle 2016, 417 and 419), including practice theory and diplomacy.

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