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Social practices in a café: community through consumption?

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Abstract. The transformations of economic structures as well as of transportation and communication means have altered neighborhood-based interaction in the last decades. Therefore most urban studies argue that local neighborhoods have lost their function as places of sociability and solidarity. But if one looks at the more semipublic local contact sites and therein on a more "superficial" and fluid interactional level, interactions and ties among local residents do not seem to decrease in the same way as close and intimate ties have exceeded the neighborhood boundaries. This article thus examines the neighborhood-based interactions in one example of an important neighborhood space – a café – that demands different kinds of commitments.

Practice theories thereby provide a particularly advantageous set of approaches to examine these rather spontaneous and loose micro-interactions. This is why this article ethnographically analyzes a café, as one of the important social neighborhood spaces. The article elaborates on Theodore Schatzki's (2010) and Elizabeth Shove's (2012) idea of practices as linked entities of material, competence, and meanings, coupled with Erving Goffman's conceptualization of public behavior (1959, 1963) regarding why local businesses represent locational material neighborhood settings for local micro-interactions (as social practices). Furthermore, the article addresses how these interactional practices lead to a sense of belonging and community for their carriers.

1 A new research agenda for the study of consumption places

The transformation of the labor market as well as transportation and communication structures have altered neighborhood-based interaction over the last decades: professional and leisure activities most often take place outside of places of residence, wherewith most interaction between familiar and strange people is no longer confined to the common neighborhood.[1] From an urban studies perspective it is often argued that local neighborhoods as places of sociability and solidarity have become less important for their residents (see Guest and Wierzbicki, 1999; Webber, 1963;

Wellman and Leighton, 1979; Wellman and Wortley, 1990). However, this article claims that neighborhood-based interactions still occur in numerous ways, albeit calling for different kinds of commitments: they take place mostly in the more (semi)public neighborhood spaces and often at more fluid and less intimate communication levels. It is thus argued that interactions and ties among urban residents do not seem to decrease in the same way as close intimate ties have exceeded the neighborhood boundaries.

Local businesses (considered as retail and dining/drinking facilities) constitute one important type of these local spaces that still bring together people on a local level. As such, they represent spaces that host nearly all characteristics of social, cultural, and economic life.[2] This article thus argues that as potential local contact sites, they also provide a powerful

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[1] "Neighborhood" and "community" are not seen as normatively privileged terms in this article. I reject the notion of a neighborhood as a natural community area as well as the romantic affirmation of neighborhoods or local communities as an urban public good in itself (see Madden, 2014:492).

[2] Exemplary characteristics are various forms of exchange, modes of production, and the symbolic meanings of consumption.

context in which questions about class, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality play out (Beriss and Sutton, 2007:1).

With this said, this article ethnographically examines in depth a café as one semipublic site for local interaction. The aim is to reveal the ways in which customers and salespeople's practices turn the café into a place of fleeting but nonetheless meaningful interactions and a place of higher sociability – as a so-called third place – defined as "public place[s] that host[s] the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work" (Oldenburg, 1999: p. 16; see also Oldenburg and Brissett, 1982; Oldenburg, 2001).

As a study of social practices, this article addresses first and foremost the employees and customers' everyday practices with a particular focus on their bodily and material aspects and how these generate a distinct social and physical setting that enables the kind of sociability and communal spirit that Raymond Oldenburg describes as typical for third places.[3] In addition, Goffman's (1963, 1971) ideas of front and back stage behavior are used to conceptualize these distinct social practices. According to Goffman, the fundamental characteristics of interactions between more or less known individuals in public settings are a complex production of social order, the gradual integration of individuals, and their practices into a pattern of mutually understood cooperation, such as "techniques that pedestrians employ in order to avoid bumping into one another. These seem of little significance. However, they are constantly in use and they cast a pattern of/in street behavior." (Goffman, 1971:6) The crucial question for the study of interactions within individual businesses is then how this order emerges and how participants consensually interact without irritations.

2 Local businesses and the idea of third places: places of practiced sociability and familiarity

Many central concepts of urban geography and sociology, including the distinctions between private and public or domestic and public life, as well as the rules that govern relations with kin or strangers, are challenged and blurred in retail and gastronomic facilities. In short, from the 19th century working-class meetings in neighborhood taverns to today's lifestyle cafés, geographical and sociological research has tried to capture how social (and political) life emerges in and through these establishments, as well as how they have become important symbols of postmodern life, often contribut-

ing to a (promoted) image of neighborhoods, cities, regions, and states (see Beriss and Sutton, 2007; Zukin, 2011, 2012). However, while businesses might have become the central neighborhood institutions and organizations in many places, they are rarely acknowledged as spaces for sociality and sociability (see Oldenburg, 1999, 2001). Furthermore, "going shopping", "eating out", or "daily supply" do not necessarily carry the same meanings in different geographical, cultural, and social contexts. This raises the following questions: what is really being practiced – produced, exchanged, and consumed – in these spaces, and which meanings are involved when people use local or remote commercial facilities outside of their homes?

So despite the high interest in neighborhood businesses as features of local employment and supply, and despite the many historical analyses on restaurants and their respective societal roles (see, e.g., Mennell, 1996; Ferguson, 2004), along with the growing interest in food and food habits, urban studies still lack ethnographic studies on the social practices that make up the everyday social life in shopping streets as well as in the local businesses.[4] Although recent research on consumption and its geographical sites acknowledges the routine embedding of most consumption in typically inconspicuous sociotechnical systems and mundane routines, many studies focus either on the contexts in which these meanings are materialized – as in "shopping" – and on rather self-conscious identity construction through the purchase and display of consumer goods or on ordinary consumption with a stronger interest in how the hardware of material culture figures in the doings and in the displays of social life (see Gronow and Warde, 2001; Watson and Shove, 2008). Further theoretical developments of the sociology and geography of consumption and shopping thus require more experimentation with new heuristic frameworks as well as more empirical case studies that work with a micro-focus (Warde, 1997; Warde and Martens, 2000; Reckwitz, 2002).

This need for a more micro-focus also prompted renewed interest in applying "practice theories" to the field of consumption (see, e.g., Warde, 2005; Everts and Jackson, 2009). They help to focus the research on routinized "ordinary" provisional consumption, the organization of consumption, interactions in the course of conspicuous consumption, or window shopping. Their common research subjects represent different social practices with respective emotional attachments and meanings for their carriers. Since only a practice theory approach can work out the core processes, mechanisms, and meaning of social interaction, practice theories provide a useful framework for the inquiry of consumption-

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[3]Certainly businesses as semipublic places of sociability have an exclusionary dimension for some customers. Not only do these places have clear behavioral rules, depending on the type of ownership and business, but they also attract on the basis of the offers only certain consumer groups, depending on their social and ethnic background, milieu, lifestyle, age, gender, and so on. However, for the current case, the café is formally and informally open to and receives customer from all local population groups that can afford the café's (low) prices.

[4]Examples of ethnographic studies within urban geography are Everts (2008, 2010), Shove and Warde (2002), Laurier (2008), Laurier and Philo (2004, 2006a, b, 2007), Laurier et al. (2001), Coles and Crang (2011), and Coles (2013). However, not all of them work with a practice theory approach.

and shopping-related interactions and their socio-spatial settings (see Shove, 2012).[5]

For the latter, the concrete socio-spatial settings, I draw on Oldenburg's idea of "third places" (1989, 1999) in order to examine how everyday social life (as mainly routinized practices) is enabled and practiced in a single consumption space: a café. After presenting Oldenburg's conceptual ideas of what makes a business a third place, I outline the practice theory framework, differentiated with Goffman's ideas for front and back stage behavior, for the last part of the paper: an empirical case study of a café as a potentially "third place" business.

Although Oldenburg does not delineate the single practices that contribute to public familiarity and sociability as his ascribed main third-place characteristics, he develops a list of business features that support the social interaction among customers. In his search for the "remaining" "local" (Oldenburg and Brissett, 1982; Oldenburg, 1989) places where sociable associations tend to take place, he laments the loss of social capital and interaction just in the same vain as Putnam (2000) decries the steady decline in people's sense of responsibility and control, caused by the narrowed range of available arenas for social participation. As per Oldenburg, this decline is due to the societal two-stop model between home ("first") and work ("second") place (Oldenburg and Brissett, 1982:265 f.). Bemoaning the decline of public life and the rise of "non-places" (Augé, 1995), such as shopping malls, he discovers that it is often the local, independently owned, small-scale bars, diners, coffee shops, and hangouts that represent the remaining places outside of home and work places where strangers and categorically known people come together and may interact. He thus defines third places as "a generic designation for a great variety of public places that host the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work" (Oldenburg, 1989:16). Observing the social life in the selected neighborhood bars and restaurants, he further claims that third places nourish the kinds of fleeting relationships and interaction that tempt people to engage in social interaction and conversation with others: third places are usu-

ally patronized by a group of regular customers who often transform the business space into their second homes (Oldenburg and Brissett, 1982).[6] Contingent upon the whole range of social practices in the business, many regulars develop a consistent access to their so-called commercial friendships as one of the key social benefits of third places (Goodwin and Gremler, 1996; Price and Arnould, 1999):

> There is more than escape, more than a respite from obligations to be derived from third places and the quality of human association which they offer. They provide opportunities for important experiences and relationships in a sane society, and are uniquely qualified to sustain a sense of well-being among its members. However, before their socially obscured virtues are held up to examination, it will help to specify them more concretely. Third places exist outside the home [...]. They are places where people gather primarily to enjoy each other's company (Oldenburg and Brissett, 1982:268 f.).

For Oldenburg (1999, 2001), third-place relationships represent a playful type of association that is found not in family life, work life, business relationships, or in other rather organized and formal groups, where people subordinate themselves to their roles' requirements. However, in settings of pure sociability – third places – people enter into associations with others that are not based on the social qualifications of the people involved. In other words, every customer or consumer has the opportunity to "rub elbows" in third places (Rosenbaum, 2008:181).

For the current research, the third-place concept is mainly used in order to generate first assumptions about the kind of places, their spatial outlay and design, as well as the ethnographic observation of the social practices therein, all of which might jointly generate higher levels of sociability among unknown or "categorically known" (Bahrdt, 1969; Lofland, 1989) people on a neighborhood level. In his search for local contact sites, Oldenburg finds that among all local businesses, those establishments that are operated by people who seem to be familiar with almost everyone in the neighborhood host an "atmosphere" (Kazig, 2012) that facilitates social interaction and inclusion. Since Oldenburg's work left a conceptual gap by not examining the distinct social practices of the store owners, bartenders, and other employees that create this atmosphere, the ethnographic observations were particularly focused on these social practices.

This article's main argument, having emerged from the ethnographic data, is that it is less the physical attributes of a

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[5]Even if the conceptualizations of consumption-related practices differ widely, most see consumption as an integrated practice, encompassing all of the addressed issues. However, Warde (2005) considers consumption as a dispersed practice, occurring often and on many different sites, but not an integrated practice. As per him, "[p]eople mostly consume without registering or reflecting that is what they are doing because they are, from their point of view, actually doing things like driving, eating or playing. They only rarely understand their behavior as 'consuming'; though, the more the notion and discourse of 'the consumer' penetrates, the more often do people speak of themselves as consuming. However, such utterances are usually references to purchasing and shopping. Shopping, by contrast, is an integrated practice, with understandings, knowhow and teleo-affective structures" (Warde, 2005:150). As such, they constitute everyday urban life.

[6]However, Oldenburg's work lacks a precise empirical analysis of his broad assumptions on third places and their important function for the social cohesion of American "cities". He also never refers to the scale and reach of the discussed places (blocks, neighborhoods, villages, towns, cities, etc.).

business and more the social practices of staff and customers that turn a local business[7] into a place for sociability. Oldenburg's work helped thereby to conceptualize the type of marketplace communalities and time–space-bound communities woven around the physical space as well as the social practices in and the opening hours of one case business – a café in Neukölln, Berlin. However, since his concept did not help to address the manifold social practices in this café (and particularly their exclusionary dimensions), a short introduction into practice theories and their benefit for examining business spaces follows in the next section.

3 Practice theories for the ethnographic study of consumption-related micro-interactions

Practice theories provide a particularly advantageous set of approaches to examine some of the local everyday contact spaces – retail and gastronomic businesses – and their corresponding loose, spontaneous, and often ephemeral micro-interactions, and explain and help to analyze the interactions' more fluid nature. Particularly Shove's (2012) idea of practices as linked entities of material, competencies, and meanings allows for the examination of the different constituents of practices (as doings and sayings) and how they act together in a practiced locational material business setting, where the micro-interactions around consumption generate a sense of belonging and community for their carriers.

In brief, practice theories start with the claim that practices enable and constitute social life, each practice consisting of specific ways of doing and saying, such as consuming or working, thereby including a specific understanding and know-how, as well as specific states of emotions and meanings (Reckwitz, 2002:249 f.). Although practice theories have circulated in social theory for over a century, undergoing cycles of revival and decline in recent last decades, they have only experienced their current revival in cultural sociology and geography in the last decade. The majority of the current practice theorists (e.g., Reckwitz, 2002, 2003; Schatzki, 2001; Shove, 2012) draw on Bourdieu (1977, 1990)

and Giddens (1984) and particularly on Giddens' theory of structuration (see Everts et al., 2011). They basically argue that social life is constituted in and through practice – that "the doing itself is everything" (Nietzsche, 1998 [1887]:29), the social derives out of the activities, the doings and sayings are performed by a knowledgeable actor, and social practices involve artifacts and things (as human and not-human made). Their praxeological approach constitutes an attempt to overcome the "rigid action–structure opposition" (Schatzki, 2001:1).[8]

A practice theory approach thus helps to draw attention to the more ordinary and banal sides and sites of social life, run by mostly routinized actions, intentional or not – many of which seem too banal to be researched in sociology and geography. Consumption, everyday shopping, and the related interactions are among these possible banalities. Particularly Theodore Schatzki and Andreas Reckwitz see consumption as an integrative practice – a bundle of (intentional or routinized) actions that possibly involve for instance grabbing and touching the wares, pushing the cart, chatting to the salesperson, or asking the cashier questions about the products, combining more strategic, intentional, and routinized actions (see Everts et al., 2011:325). A business can therefore host a variety of (often simultaneous) practices, each of which forms interdependent relations between the hardware of consumption (cutlery or tools, sold products, tables, etc.), distributions of competence (between humans and non-humans), the emergence of consumer "projects" (Watson and Shove, 2008:4), and, with them, new patterns of interactions and emotional attachments.

Schatzki (2003) elaborates on the spatial context a bit more than Reckwitz and Shove, making his deliberations particularly helpful for urban studies research. Most prominent are his more recent developments of a "site ontology" that include more explicitly the time–space setting of practices, addressing material and immaterial entities and their relation to each other, which then constitute the practices' respective meanings, orders, and arrangements (Everts et al., 2011:324).[9] These, as practices themselves, are likewise en-

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[7]Despite this, his concept helps to distinguish their different sets of practices that generate sociability and sociality in businesses. Although this article only examines the empirical data of one single café, other (less gastronomic) businesses and also more standardized chain store may be used as contact sites and places for sociability and familiarity. In addition, Oldenburg's elaborations remain too focused on geographies whose physical designs invite longer stays and conversations, such as his emblematic "neighborhood tavern." Oldenburg and Brissett develop their idea of third places only out of their observations in gastronomic facilities: "[t]he tavern, or bar, is without doubt the dominant third place in our society and we are not unique in this. Be it saloon, cocktail lounge, pub, or whatever – place it among the golf links and call it a clubhouse, put it at the water's edge and call it a yacht club, or organize a fraternal order around it and call it a lodge – the bar is nonetheless at the core of the institution" (1982:269).

[8]In general, four items, which are also part of the practice itself, constitute a practice: practical understanding, rules, teleo-affective structures, and general understanding, all of which enable the knowledgeable – but often routinized – performance of a practice (Schatzki, 2001; Everts et al., 2011). In a similar vein, Reckwitz defines practices as "a routinized type of behavior which consists of several elements, interconnected to one another: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, 'things' and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge." (Reckwitz, 2002:249) A "simplified" and more empirically applicable version of practice theories is developed by Shove et al. (2012), who conceptualizes practices as doings and sayings, involving specific meanings and competencies, but also artifacts or things.

[9]Schatzki (2002: XI) claims that the best way to approach the nature of social life and the character of its transformation "is to tie

sembles or arrangements of people, artifacts, things, and organisms, again tied together by the practices (Schatzki, 2001). Hence, orders also comprise material and immaterial aspects of the social, which, as their sites, are not stable. In fact, they are temporally and spatially unfolding sites, according to the respective "timespaces" and enmeshed practices (Schatzki, 2002:226). From this derives a rather dynamic and activity-orientated understanding of space and place, existing only within and through activities, while the activities themselves also only occur within these arrangements (Everts et al., 2011:327).

Despite this spatial dimension in Schatzki's development of site ontology, there has been only occasional engagement with his take on urban studies, most of which represents rather empirical and less theoretical works such as work on the use of mundane objects in DIY culture (Shove et al., 2007a; Watson and Shove, 2008), on Nordic walking (Shove and Pantzar, 2005), as well as on everyday practices of shopping (Everts, 2008; Everts and Jackson, 2009; Warde, 2005), all of which use ethnographic observations for the respective case studies. This article also works with a praxeological approach on a more empirical level – for the ethnographic field work in one selected business, a café and bakery, in an ethnically and socially diverse neighborhood in Berlin.

4 Socio-spatial conceptualization of the sampled business

With the addressed practice theories and Oldenburg's work on third places as two of the sensitizing concepts, I conceptualize the sampled café as a social lifeworld[10] or micro-public (Amin and Parkinson, 2002), which is made out of manifold practices, doings, sayings, organizations, projects, arrangements, orders, and timespaces. With this conceptualization I aim to reveal the local everyday interactional practices related to, but also exceeding, the more explicit processes of working (owners and staff) or purchasing/consuming (customers). This sorting of the different practices, supported by Goffman's (1963, 1971) differentiation into back and front behavior, is supposed to provide a more holistic idea of how

the different micro-interactions add up to an eased socio-spatial setting that in turn supports community-building sociability among the customers and staff alike: drinking coffee, eating baked goods, selling, and cleaning tables are considered as alibi-practices that allow for small talk and conversations with only categorically known or completely unknown co-present people. The first-hand practices provide the basis for low-level and eased social participation, thereby demanding less self-confidence and performance. Goffman (1959) describes these practices (as behavior) as primary and side involvements.

The café's geographical setting[11] is an inner-city mixed-use shopping street in the socially and ethnically diverse neighborhood Neukölln, Berlin, where longstanding and newer businesses compete for the purchasing power of similarly longstanding and newer residents.[12] Most customers and business people are of German, Turkish, Polish, and Arabic descent. Increasingly more younger people of west European and American descent, who have moved into the northern parts of the district that neighbor the more gentrified Berlin neighborhoods, shop, consume, and open up businesses in the area. The café's neighborhood consists of mainly densely built pre-war buildings, with 1960s–1980s public housing in the backstreets. Located on the main shopping street, which serves as a major thoroughfare and neighborhood center, the neighboring bigger shopping mall, district's city hall, cinemas, and theaters draw additional visitors (also from adjacent neighborhoods) to the street, its businesses, and thus also the café. Most customers in the area walk to stores and conduct their daily shopping by foot or bike. With the exception of so-called men's cafés, gambling halls, and butcher shops, the local facilities just as the café receive highly (socially and ethnically) diverse customers.

The café was sampled for this article because the bodily and material aspects of interactional practices became most apparent here – compared to the observations in the other businesses that were sampled for my dissertation's empirical research (between late 2012 and early 2016). The café is owned by two middle-aged men of Turkish origin, who employ mainly younger women with a Turkish migration background.

The business opens to the street with a full glass front and door, also providing six outdoor communal tables during the warmer months. The glass windows and doors allow

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social life to something called 'the site of the social'". The social site or "the stuff of social practice" (Shove et al., 2007a:12) forms the core of all social life.

[10]These small social lifeworlds are created by the business people and customers through their social practices (e.g., shopping, consumption, selling, caring, serving practices) on the very local level, yet each lifeworld is always linked to broader national and global levels: the on-site practices link the global (e.g., the sold products) with the national (e.g., the legal framework) and the local level (e.g., the business ethos). Hence, through the practices people socially locate and position themselves within these lifeworlds and further create their identities within these social lifeworlds. Most of these practices are routinized, led by practical understanding, which helps the social participants to conduct these practices in a consistent way, in an everyday life mode (Reckwitz, 2002).

[11]Since consumption-related practices also provide a framework for "public conflicts over what constitutes cultural authenticity", as well as over gender, race, and class relations, I consider retail and dining/drinking businesses as ideal setting for a socio-geographical study (see also Berris and Sutton, 2007:12).

[12]Neukölln has 325 716 inhabitants from more than 147 different countries. Of all inhabitants, 42.1 % have a so-called migration background and 22.8 % are so-called foreigners (in 2013); the majority of both groups live in the denser, northern parts of the district around the field site shopping street (31 December 2014, District Administration of Neukölln).

for a good view inside the café and vice versa. The interior consists of about 11 tables, each surrounded by four to six chairs. A long seating bench runs along the red and golden painted walls with dimmed chandeliers; on the opposite side, the counter and self-service boxes display the baked goods. The café has a smell of freshly baked goods, brewed coffee, and tea, inviting even more distant passersby in for a short visit. The café is usually very crowded. Particularly from the late morning until the afternoon, people squeeze in and out of the business, but nonetheless the initial chaos has a routinized order: people lining up for the self-service counter, the cashier, or the restrooms; people looking for free tables; people searching for additional cutlery or newspapers; people observing other customers; waitresses sidling through the sales room, people looking for friends, family, or other familiar people – thereby segregating spatially into the different business parts. Sometimes their activities intersect, altering, preventing, constraining, changing, or producing new (interactional) activities.

5　The café – bodies, practices, and material at work

According to the works of Shove et al. (2012), Reckwitz (2002, 2003), and Schatzki (1996, 2010) on practice theories, bodies along with artifacts constitute social practices' core elements: bodies carry out and perform the practices, and artifacts represent the further material basis for the social practice, such as the café's bought or sold items or its furniture. This section thus presents some examples of the ethnographic analysis on how bodies and things are constantly moved and involved in the social interactions in the café and on how they thereby contribute to the creation of sociability, attachment, and a sense of belonging for staff and/or customers.[13]

It seems that newcomers, entering the café for the first time, and particularly if being watched by regulars, the owners, staff, or customers[14], need to figure out immediately the implicit and explicit rules of the café. With this tacit knowledge they are then able to organize their visit without interrupting the flow of people lining up for their purchase, waiting, or walking around: how are things done in the café, how are orders placed (self-service or waiters), which products are where, what voice volume is considered appropriate, where does the line for the cashier or the counter begin and end, where the open tables are, whether a given table location would fit the visitor's preferences and intentions for the visit, etc. This is why newcomers are easy to detect: they stop at the entrance and try to make sense of the social life by observing the present people and their practices.

The decoration, lighting, background noise and music, furniture arrangement, the (physical and symbolic) layout and display of the offered goods and services, and the presence of other people have a strong impact on how customers and other visitors act and interact, in line with Oldenburg's concept. The observed newcomers seem to take this atmosphere into account and depending on their mood and the socio-spatial setting, they then decide how they will act in the café's social and material environment and select for a purchase and place to eat or drink. With this, the café and particularly its sales and dining room become a stage for the following social practices and eventual social intercourse.

The observations reveal that new visitors who enter the café during busy business times encounter a scene in which customers and salespeople are constantly moving around in the kitchen and the sales room, behind the counter, tripping around and between the tables, wiggling in and out of the smoking room, break room, or storage rooms, and rushing to the sidewalk and back. Due to the crowdedness it is often difficult to differentiate customers, salespeople, and different delivery men. In the mornings and quieter times, most of the waitresses work behind the counter or in the kitchen, preparing the warm meals and stuffing the self-service boxes; if the weather allows for outdoor seating, the waitresses clean and prepare these tables as well, while more and more customers enter the dining or salesroom. Hence, in the beginning of a business day, the distinction between front stage and back stage (Goffman, 1959, 1963) is quite recognizable: customers in the front and staff in the back. The behavior of both customers and salespeople is guided by the rules of the space: customers as "audience" wait to be entertained, or served, and their governing space is the front stage. Salespeople as "actors" need to follow both the rules of the front stage as well as of the back stage and constantly switch between the two. At this point, the café's small social lifeworld consists of socio-spatial relations of consumption (Crang, 1994:677) but does not work as a third place, where everybody interacts in a rather intimate way. The café's micro-geography defines still who moves where and how, permitting use of certain spaces and constraining practices for some and forbidding others. For instance, the entrance, lines, and bathroom lines mark a spatial order and cornerstones for the bodily movements in the business space.

Just as Jacobs (1961) describes sidewalk life between more or less strange people in urban neighborhoods as "sidewalk ballet", as walkers' rapid crisscrossing and skipping around each other, the social life in the café can be framed the same way as a dynamic "business ballet". Ballet refers to the constant movement of bodies and material – a dance that is confined to a particular space, time, and social setting, involving different dancers in different tempi and styles depending on the available space and time of the day or week.[15]

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[13]In this context, one starting point for the analysis is my own experiences in the café.

[14]Sometimes newcomers to the café unexpectedly also encounter friends or family in the café.

[15]With "dancing" or "ballet" I mean in its widest sense the spontaneous activity of the muscles under the influence of some strong

Hence, with increasingly more customers, the "dance" in the café speeds up. Around midday, local employees as well as students from the local schools come over for a quick lunch or just for take-out. As their bodies stream through the entrance and into the business space, the dance reaches its peak: due to the crowdedness and noise, people in the café shout at each other in order to place orders or to carry on their conversations – most often, their behavior make customers and salespeople laugh and teasing each other and thus also involves unacquainted people. Waitresses and customers intermingle in such a way that front and back stages (Goffman, 1959), work and consumption spaces, public and private spaces, and the respective types of behavior merge, creating public familiarity that seems to easily include strange or only categorically known people as an unanticipated byproduct of the business ballet.

However, the staff's practices seem to be carried out in a more nuanced way, differentiating and often (unintentionally?) acknowledging the front and back stage lines. For instance, front and back behavior becomes clearly recognizable when the saleswomen come from the kitchen to the counter or salesroom: they straighten up, smooth their clothes and their hair, and smile. In the more (nonetheless public and visible) back spaces behind the counter, they often loosen their clothes, shake their hair and rearrange it; in the kitchen they also put their feet up on one of the few stools, sometimes even taking their shoes off when they take a break. Here, their bodies loose and relax, sometimes teasing and pinching or massaging each other.

However, sometimes they also carry out these more private or "back" practices in the front rooms. During the observations, waitresses also sit down with customers and chat with them, thereby loosening their aprons, shoes, and overall posture. Hence, because of this kind of staff behavior – displaying private behavior in (still) public settings – their social practices lead to a rather informal and familial setting, in which some customers also infringe upon the implicit rules and the socio-spatial orders of the business. However, if salespeople do not know or do not feel comfortable with customers entering "their" space, they will tell them so.[16] Nevertheless, customers and sales staff interact with each other at all places; they sometimes converse by shouting over the entire room, but most often interaction takes place at the counter and the tables.

In addition, the back stages of the café are constructed in a way that offers a little protection for the employees (at least visually) but does allow them to rejuvenate. This is also

where the "real" work is done: where meals and baked goods are prepared, and where deliveries and other ingredients are stowed, where schedules and daily tasks are distributed. Even if salespeople or owners complain about work to customers in their chats over the counter or on the tables, customers are generally meant to see as little as possible of the back stage work, and the physical division therefore also allows for a little bit of offstage behavior for the employees, namely to chat, relax, rest, drop the front stage character for some minutes or seconds, and finally prepare themselves for reentering the front stage. Consequently, interaction in the kitchen remains confined to the staff, whereas interaction behind the counter as well as in the salesroom and sidewalk circles mainly between customers and salespeople in a less distinguishable way.

Despite the limited size of the café, the sales space is rather packed with furniture and fast-moving people, making physical contact and interaction likely. For instance, when waitresses enter from the back space with hot meals in their hands, they shout the name of the meal into the dining room in order to get a little bit of free space to move to the respective table and to get the customers' attention – and sometimes also respect for how hard they are working. Then they wriggle through the crowded room to the sought-for customer. Most often they need to direct customers away while dancing and balancing the meal to the table, often teasing them. The lack of space further prevents them from moving forward. If they have a free hand, they lightly touch the customers in a friendly and familiar way.[17] Most often, further verbal and physical interaction evolves out of the contact: customers banter the waitresses or comment on the meal in their hands. None of the customers react with irritation to the rather intimate contacts.[18]

This dance reveals insights into the role of the café for customers, staff, and the wider neighborhood as an important low-threshold contact site. First, as a micro-public, the café and its ballet bring together diverse people that might not interact in other local places. As such, the café and its ballet blur the lines of what is considered public and private spaces in many ways. If the business is imagined as a stage, the curtain as the dividing principle between front and back stage does not necessarily run between dining room and the kitchen or between the street and the business space.[19]

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emotion, such as joy, and a combination of movements performed for the sake of the pleasure. However, it is also an exercise that the dancer affords to the spectator.

[16]However, only three times during my fieldwork staff corrected or guided back customers to the "formal" rooms; in one occasion it was a lost elderly lady who was looking for the restrooms but ended up in the kitchen. However, this example also highlights who the "formal" and "legal" place owners are the owners and their staff.

[17]Since most customers react with a smile or banteringly touch back, it seems that they enjoy these body contacts.

[18]Customers' bodily movements are nonetheless more confined, since they cannot enter all of the café's spaces. Clearing the way for the waitresses, they are confined to the self-service boxes, counter, and tables.

[19]As per Goffman (1959), different public and private settings have different audiences and thus require the actor to alter their performances for each setting. In the front stage, the rather public space, the performance serves to define the situation for the observers: the actor "formally" performs and adheres to specific conventions that have meaning to the audience – the other peo-

Rather, the social practices define where and when the play is over (and the curtain falls). The practices lead to intimate and more private interactions (e.g., by touching shoulders, carrying each other's dishes back to the counter, pulling off shoes) as well as the more "public performances" (Goffman, 1959) across all business space.[20] Second, in the course of the dance as a more dynamic performance, the observed primary practices of selling, serving, and buying or consuming ease (as alibi-practices) the performance and invite further practices, including interactions and conversations among diverse people. Hence, the practiced dance merges front and back stage behavior in as much as it merges consumption and socializing practices.

Through the performance of the dance but also certain practices such as shaking hands, the actors give meaning and identity to themselves and others, as well as their common situation. For example, the café owner greets and hugs selected customers when they enter the business. Thereby he enacts their identity as renowned regular customers or members of the café's social circle, creating a social relationship that is bound to these (greeting and consumption) practices and their timespaces in the café. Hence these practices create a business "community", even if only for the time of the customers' stay and confined to the business' space. In other words, the owner's practices of greeting and hugging, touching and smiling, chatting, and serving (as doings and sayings) contribute to a relationship with these selected customers and increase the inclusion and well-being for many customers and staff alike.[21]

Hence, the social practices of the people working in the business and through the café's ballet not only bring together diverse customers but also foster the generation of social relationships among customers and between customers and staff. Only an approach that combines insights from practice theories and from Goffman's differentiation for public behavior reveals how the business ballet, but the other observed social activities that accompany this dance, such as caring, socializing, eating, chatting, relaxing, observing others, and so on, and their assignment to front and back stages also represent the core social practices in the café. As these practices culminate with the staff and customers' bodies, and the café's

material and space, they turn the café into an "extended living room"[22] or "home away from home" (Oldenburg, 2001:160) for some of the customers (see Erickson, 2007:19).

6   Conclusions

This article has explored different ways of conceptualizing and explaining the social practices in a café with a focus on the bodily and material aspects of practices. Social interactions in a business might not be sustained without the material and spatial setting, such as the tables, seating facilities, food, and drinks. However, without the familiar and informal character of the employees' practices, such as touching shoulders, smiling, and pulling chairs for customers, the café presumably would not provide a "home away from home". By conceptualizing consumption as a form of integrative practice, I suggest that it is the practices of the people in the café, which sustain the sociability of the place. The café example served to underline the material, conventional, and temporal dimensions of a third-place sociability and third-place community, all of which are held together by such practices.

The brief depiction of the café's everyday ballet also highlights how and where social practices conflate or reestablish front and back stage behaviors, carrying different meanings and social qualities. Self-confident, intended front stage performances, directed towards an audience, constantly alternate and blend with more eased, less impressive and expressive, intimate interactions. So if one imagines the local café as a theater, one can observe the actions and performances in the front and the back interlacing in a dance that involves the interaction of customers and staff. However, interaction is much more confined and restricted by the rules of the space – as practices themselves – than in Oldenburg's idea of third places.

Accordingly, it is the practices which build community in local contact sites like the café. By whatever notion this community might carry, the café is one of the places where community is practiced. At one time and in the restricted space of the café different – intersecting, interdependent, or mutually excluding – communities also intersect in this space. On the one hand, observations reveal communities not only of the owners and their families or (extended) relatives and employees but also of employees and acquainted or related persons that go beyond the café's temporal and spatial structures. On the other hand, there are rather institutionalized communities of selected customers on certain days of the week and at times of day, such as regular coffee tables or business meetings, whose cohesion might also go beyond the café, but which are nonetheless practiced (and thus reinforced) on a

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ple present in the café. The performers know that they are being watched and act accordingly to the set of (imagined or present) observers.

[20]Nevertheless, the kitchen remains mostly confined to the staff.

[21]However, these everyday practices might become institutionalized as abstract stereotyped expectations about how the actors should behave or interact in that situation. This reveals the underlying power relations between "formal" owners and "temporal" owners of the space: if the owner would not greet the same customer in such a warm way the next day, disappointment and feelings of exclusion may result from this moment of abstraction. If the customer or staff take on a new role or task, they might encounter several already well-established fronts among which they must choose (Goffman, 1959).

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[22]A male customer told me that whenever waitresses have a chat with him, even if they primarily focus on their work practices, he feels as sitting on his home sofa in front of his sofa table and thus he uses the café as an "extended living room."

regular basis in the café.[23] There are further "imagined" or "perceived" communities on the basis of a commonly practiced language among customers (and salespersons) as well as on the basis of other observed commonalities or common practices, such as a preference for the same table or baked goods in the café or the same nearby place of residence, school attendance, and so on.[24]

Put together, the crowdedness and interior design of the café's (semipublic) space with the correlating and rather intimate practices, such as touching, shouting, or teasing, along with other practices that are considered to belong to rather private social settings, such as hugging, child caring and nursing, hair dressing, and taking off shoes, create a specific type of sociability that Oldenburg (1989, 2001) ascribes to his third places. However, Oldenburg missed the importance of the employees and customers' bodies and their intimate engagement in the work in the café, which constitute a necessary element of the interactions: not only are they the carriers of the practices in the café but they also enable the physical contact necessary for the creation of a third-place sociability or community.

This article discussed and applied the possibilities and potential of a "practice-based" approach to the analysis of how community is created in everyday life outside of work and residential places. However, the article leaves many questions unanswered. One, for instance, concerns the temporal and geographical stability of the practiced sociability and community. In other words, are the feelings of belonging and community confined to or do they exceed the duration of the stay and the business space?

If community is practiced and re-enacted in the course of mundane everyday life, I see the need not only for further research to focus more on the respective everyday contact spaces such as the sampled café but also for more ethnographies on the social practices in these spaces; thus there is a need for a stronger integration of practice theory approaches to urban studies.

7 Data availability

Field notes and conversational notes as well as transcriptions of the more formal in-depth interviews with owners and staff are safely stored at Technical University Berlin, Center for Metropolitan Studies. Since all interview partners were of-

fered anonymity throughout the field work from 2012–2016, the stored data are not publicly available. All observations and interviews were conducted by solely the author of this article.

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[23]Regular coffee table meetings were observed for different customer groups: "senior", "middle age" and "teenage", with different or no migration background, as well as mixed-gender groups.

[24]For instance, customers or salespeople started chats on the basis of a heard (common) dialect, hinting to their own or related people's origin. Other examples of how and why unrelated people started to chat involve artifacts such as school backpacks or shopping bags, clothes, or strollers that symbolized commonalities and induced the conversations. Since all field notes on these conversations include observed "smiles" and "joy/enjoyment" of the involved people, I consider these types of chats as increasing the people's well-being.

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