Social Geography

"Doing with space": towards a pragmatics of space

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Abstract. This article intends to explore the conditions of possibility of a pragmatics of space. How are practices constructed through space? How are the different ways of practising places are informed by different aspects of spatial dimensions? In order to get into this question, three points are developed. Firstly we will delimit the field of what is termed here "pragmatics" as larger than "pragmatism", with reference to recent developments within French sociology. Secondly we will propose a shift from geographies of "being in space" towards geographies of "doing with space". Thirdly we propose two expressions and concepts for a pragmatics of space: the notions of "doing with space" and space "at proof" are explored in order to be used as tools for investigation. Finally, we will explicit the analytical tools developed of practice within situations will be developed. Especially, the treatment of a situation as arrangements of multiples relationships of humans, necessitating a multiple-layered approach, from the recollection of discourse, objects and observation is developed.

1 Introduction

As geographical theory tries to get an increasingly precise and subtle conception of the constitution of space and of the spatial conditions of society, the question of practice has found a stronger echo within geography (Thrift, 1983; Werlen, 1997; Lussault, 2000; Stock, 2004; Lussault, 2007) and in the social sciences in general. Some have even referred to a "practice turn" (Knorr-Cetina and Schatzki, 2000). Different directions have been explored, from approaches taking the body and the performances of individuals seriously (Teather, 1999; Crouch, 2001) to others where prac-

tice is meant to go further than the traditional representation issue within what had been termed an "interpretive turn" in geography (Ley, 1985), alongside approaches to interaction based on ethno-methodological concepts and techniques (Laurier, 2001). In fact, a highly differentiated literature engages with the issue of practice. On the one hand, they are seen as a means of capturing the manifold ways of construction of space more precisely than structuralist approaches, on the other hand, they consider the spatiality of the different kinds of actors.

Although the last thirty years have seen progress in formulating the research questions – especially in the constitution of space by and through practice –, one main question remains unresolved and highly controversial: how practices are constructed through space, or how the different ways of practising places are informed by different aspects of spatial dimensions. The question of how the various spatial dimensions occurring through practices make a difference and thus can be theorised or modelled, lacks still substantial answers. Indeed, this question implies that we acknowledge that no practice can be "a-spatial", that actors always "cope with space" *nolens volens*. Space is mobilised in various ways in order to get things done. The question of how space is mobilised helps us to understand that practice is neither purely social, as seen in traditional formulations on "social practice", nor purely spatial, as seen in traditional formulations on "spatial practice", and indeed it cannot be described as "socio-spatial" either. Expressed in a philosophical way, one could say "there is practice" that has spatial dimensions coming with different styles of spatiality. Those spatial dimensions are important, because they make a difference to how practice is performed[1].

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[1]Several theoretical conceptions of how space is involved in actions or in practices. We can observe that they mostly put forward an *opposition* between space and humans – be it the dimension of society or the dimension of the individual –, as if space was *separate*

We aim at a specific way of engaging with these questions, called here "pragmatics of space". In order to grasp this "dealing with space" (*faire avec*), we propose to focus our attention on the different ways in which "space" is integrated by the (individual and collective) actors in situation, through a pragmatist approach. The acts of operators, with their instruments and technologies, come here under scrutiny. It seems therefore important to focus on situations – which does not mean that we only consider the scale of the present action, as is the case in sociological approaches to pragmatism – where the actions of operators with space can be observed.

This "pragmatics of space" aims at leaving behind us the idea of practice as arts of doing *in* space. Instead, we will propose a conceptual toolbox in order to show the importance of conceiving of practice as arts of doing "*with*" space. To achieve this goal, we first give an outline of what is intended by the term "pragmatics" here: we will show how a quite large understanding of "pragmatism" can be an interesting point of the discussion by moving from pragmatism to "pragmatics". Then, we will try to show how a pragmatics of space can be constructed as a ways of "doing *with*" and not "being *in*" space. We will finally outline how the practice within situation of proof can be analysed by a "pragmatics of space".

2 From pragmatism to pragmatics: various sources for a pragmatics of space

Practice is approached through various theoretical programmes. This is a problem for a theory of spatially-informed practice, for the reference to "pragmatism" or "pragmatics" is not self-evident. Indeed, the term "practice" is used in several theoretical traditions and is not necessarily restricted to what is termed "pragmatism" in philosophy. Different traditions of approaches of practice exist – we could at least distinguish Anglo-American style (dwelling on the philosophical traditions of Dewey, James, Pierce) from French contemporary sociology around Thévenot and Quéré (dwelling on the sociological foundations of Schütz and Goffman) and German style (dwelling on a Marxian, Heideggerian and Schützian tradition) – which is problematic for scientific communication[2]. "Pragmatics" is therefore a term used here more loosely in order to express a research area, in which practice is the focus, acknowledging the very

different theoretical options that could be taken[3]. More precisely, the expression "pragmatics", first used within a semiotic context as a theory of "usage" of language, is here used as a descriptor of a theory of usage or "arts of doing" following Michel de Certeau (1990). It can be defined as the study of what humans do and the ways of doing, rather than the pragmatic effects of practice or the study of praxis as opposed to like in pragmatism.

2.1 Towards pragmatics as "science of practice"

In order to develop a conceptual toolbox called "pragmatics of space", we can mobilise several elements.

The question of "doing with space" acknowledges linkages to different theoretical domains. It heavily relies on Michel de Certeau's approach on practice as modes of operation with the structural elements of the world. Indeed, Michel de Certeau's (1990) theory of "arts de faire" ("arts of doing") is able to observe highly differentiated ways of performing practices. By establishing the problem of space as the focus of analysis, it allows for an understanding of the highly differentiated ways of coping with space. De Certeau (1990) works with the hypothesis that practices were of a "tactical" nature going beyond the disciplinary productions of society. He tries to push forward a theory of practice of the "lived space"[4] and was interested in "ways of doing" (*manières de faire*) and modes of operation (*faire avec*). This is important in order to understand how the individual is "programmed" to fulfil a certain number of actions, but is nevertheless able to develop counter-hegemonic tactics.

A second important element is Michel Foucault's (2001) approach to human societies because it emphasises the social as spatial ordering in order to perform discipline, surveillance, clinic, etc. He elaborates on the thesis of the necessary use of space in order to get things done. His analysis of the army and the hospital as policed sociality fundamentally mobilises categories of space. More fundamentally, his archaeological approach is useful in order to describe the conditions of possibility of situated practice. Indeed, the concept of "*ensemble pratique*" he develops in order to understand the assemblage of practice is allows for the analysis of "inter-actions"[5]. Therefore, an actor is always in *inter-action* with

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from society. See for example Thrift (1983) for different models of relationships between practice and space.

[2]It is by no means an exhaustive one: the contribution to the concept of "problematic situation" by Popper (1976) and Bourdieu's (1972) "practical logic", and the growing body of situational analysis (see for example Barwise, 1983). We also do not consider here the field of praxeology as an economic approach to practice, developed by Ludwig von Mises (1949), *Human Action. Treatise on Economics*.

[3]This is one reason because our discussion includes also philosopher or sociologist that are not classified within the philosophical domain of pragmatism.

[4]"*appropriation* of the topographic system by the pedestrian", "a spatial *realization* of place" and "*relationships* between differentiated positions" (Certeau, 1990, p. 148, trad. MS).

[5]The definition of "ensemble pratique": "l'ensemble des manières de faire plus ou moins réglées, plus ou moins réfléchies, plus ou moins finalisées à travers lesquelles se dessinent à la fois ce qui était constitué comme réel pour ceux qui cherchaient à le penser et à régir et la manière dont ceux-ci se constituaient comme sujets capables de connaître, d'analyser, et éventuellement de modifier le réel. Ce sont les 'pratiques' entendues comme mode d'agir et de

others, therefore there are "ensembles pratiques", constructs of interactive acts of intentional actors – be they individual or collective – or non-human operators.

Yet, pragmatics as understood here acknowledges also phenomenologically-informed action theory, as put forward by Schütz (1932). It proposes, among others, the notions "Mitwelt" (world of contemporaries), "Umwelt" (world of fellows in direct experience), "Vorwelt" (world of predecessors), "Nachwelt" (world of successors) in order to understand the multiplicity of relationships present in action. It allows for taking into account not only the bodily co-presence of the actors. This is important in order to conceive of practice not only as corporeal engagements – as would do the performance approach – but also to understand what Elias (1970) called the "web of interdependencies" of the human being. It allows also for an understanding of the *competences* engaged within a situation. Within a pragmatics of space, the *spatial* competences of the actors become important, meaning the various ways of developing techniques of coping with distance, places, limits and so on.

Fourth, the approaches based on "situated action" – initiated among others by Thomas (1927), Popper (1955) and Goffman (1964, 1963) – allow for a spatial context on the micro-level where face-to-face interaction occurs, although criticism has been raised on the way in which space has been conceptualised. Especially the fact the scale taken into account is only that of the micro-situation, without acknowledging absent features constitutes a serious limit of those approaches. Yet, if defined as a circumstantial convergence of actants in interaction[6], the concept of situation takes into account the mobilisation of elements that are physically absent. The analysis of situated action leads to an observation of "assemblages" (Latour, 2000), constructed within a situation and then deconstructed. It allows therefore for an investigation of *ephemeral* assemblages, whose spatial dimensions are ever-changing. Practice as a process within a situation means therefore to engage with those convergent elements.

To sum up, if developed fully, pragmatics of space could be an area of investigation theoretically informed by the different approaches such as a phenomenologically-based practice approach, where the situated action, the conditions of possibility and the creative "tactics" and "involvement regimes" as well as the spatial competences of the individuals are mobilised in order to understand the highly differentiated ways of mobilising space as problem or as empowerment. Pragmatics is conceived of here as a theoretical tool designed as an approach to situations, where the different elements occur as "proof or as "probe".

2.2 Practice as actions "at proof"

The question of practice as a problem can be linked to the pragmatic tradition of James Dewey and his notion of experiment, but finds a specific translation through the notion of "*épreuve*". In French sociology, the expression "*épreuve*" has been developed in order to gain insight into the practical relationship to the world. Again, the question arises of how to find an English expression for this. It has been translated into English by "test" (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2001), although different expressions might be possible. The Oxford Dictionary shows the following translations of "*épreuve*": proof, test, examination, event, trial, but also piece of evidence. Yet, we find a very interesting meaning of "proof" in the Oxford Dictionary: "the proof of the pudding is in the eating", a proverb indicating that "the real value of something can be judged only from practical experience or results". The notion of "at proof" might help to describe ways of doing with space. "Testing space", "experimenting space", "proofing space", "probing space" might also be possible expressions. We shall use here the expression "at proof" because it may be used in a wider sense than "test". It comes quite close to the French meaning of "*épreuve*".

The sociological notion "épreuve" was invented by the French sociologist Chateauraynaud (1991) in order to express the encounter with difficulties in everyday life that individuals have to cope with. It was developed and elaborated more thoroughly by Boltanski and Thévenot (1991, 2001), Thévenot (2000) and Boltanski and Chiapello (1999). It is a key concept designed to overcome deterministic theories of the social, be they exterior structures or embodied norms. It focuses on the processual aspect of an action, where resistance and problems may occur. "L'épreuve est toujours une épreuve de force c'est-à-dire l'événement au cours duquel des êtres, en se mesurant (imaginez un bras de fer entre deux personnes ou l'affrontement entre un pêcheur et la truite qui cherche à lui échapper) révèlent ce dont ils sont capables et même, plus profondément, ce dont ils sont faits" (Boltanski and Chiapello, 1999:73–74)[7]. It helps to underline the uncertainty of social situations, as a result of which expectations may not be met. This importance assigned to the power relations between individuals constitutes the specificity of this approach, relatively absent in Anglo-American theoretical tradition. Boltanski and Chiapello (1999) draw a distinction between two kinds of proof – "*épreuve de force*", revealing the degree of power, and "*épreuve légitime*", revealing the "dimension" of the persons involved – elaborated as two poles of a continuum of different situations. It is differentiated "selon le degré de légitimité, de réflexivité ou

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penser à la fois qui donnent la clef d'intelligibilité pour la constitution corrélative du sujet et de l'objet" (p. 635).

[6]See Dewey (1938) and Goffman (1964) for the approach of the situation, although from different theoretical stances, and Fornel and Quéré (1999) for a recent development in French sociology.

[7]"The proof is always a power test, an event during which human beings, while measuring themselves (imagine arm wrestling between two persons or the confrontation between a fisherman and a trout) reveal what they are capable of, and even, more profoundly, what they are made of" (transl. by the authors)

de stabilité relatives des êtres engagés" (Boltanski and Chiapello, 1999:406)[8].

An interesting point can be made here: the concept of "proof" enables us to change the scale of the different situations studied. It is therefore a different semantic field to that of Dewey's "experiment", which translates more the idea of trying new things out, not to be confronted with a difficulty while practicing nor the claiming of a proof. Therefore, all acts are "proofs" for the individual, but there are emblematic situations where the "event" is more significant than in mundane situations.

3 From "being in space" towards "doing with space"

Theories of practice focus on the actions as being engaged, processually, by actors. From the point of view of space, it is an approach whereby action is seen as situated, embedded in a time-space frame or, as psychologists call it, a "setting". It also means that actors make use of spatial elements such as distance, quality of place, limits, location, and spatiality etc. There is therefore an important point to be made for geographies of practices: human beings cope with space. Their ways of being-in-the-world are characterized not by "being on Earth" – as argued in philosophy –, but by coping *with* space – as argued within the approach of pragmatics of space. One of our main arguments, the question of "being-in-space", has been at the centre of investigation for at least the last one hundred years in geography. Though, as Werlen (1995) argues, in a world where "traditional" societies are replaced by "late-modern" societies – especially characterized by relatively greater autonomous action based on reflexivity of individuals –, it is theoretically consistent to focus on "geography-making" of people in their lifeworld. Therefore "doing with space" permits a more adequate approach of the spatial dimensions of events, where space is not longer conceptualised as an absolute or relative structure, but as an ephemeral element co-constructed by practice.

3.1 Leaving the "in" behind

In order to demonstrate the usefulness, adequacy and specific perspective of the approach of practice and space, we will focus on the necessary shift from "being in space" towards "doing with space" as a fundamental difference and potential improvement in geographical research programmes. The relationship between human societies and space relies fundamentally on the basic idea of "being in space". This question can be tracked back to the philosophical treatment of humans as being in or within space (Plato, Heidegger). In his Timaios, Plato maintains that everything has to have a location in space, a topos; and so does every human being. Heidegger (1927, 1954) elaborates on his theory of spatiality

by stating that "Dasein means being on Earth". He calls this being on Earth[9] "dwelling".

Focusing on the aspect of practice as "doing", we argue that it would be more appropriate to develop the perspective towards what "humans do with space" rather than "being in space". Several arguments can briefly be developed here[10].

First, the expression "within" space or "in" space suggests that there is a pre-existent spatial volume or *res extensa*, a conception of space as container or as a substance. As could be shown (Lévy, 1994; Werlen, 1995), this conception is misleading if one considers the power of action, which does not fix the relationship between actors and space. It does not allow for an understanding how the various spatial elements are mobilised within practice.

Moreover, it means that space is conceived of as separate from the practices of individuals, even as an opposition between society and space as two "blocks", whereas it has become an interesting idea to consider space as a dimension (Lévy, 1994) or a condition (Werlen, 1995) of action. The traditional way of conceiving practice/space also conveys the idea that space is conceived as "already-there" ("*déjà-là*") and that practice moulds itself into it. The more differentiated approach to space as a result of practice, through processes of qualification, arrangement, building, conception and bodily gestures, is absent. There is therefore more precision of the scientific knowledge achieved by focussing on practice.

Furthermore, there is an important dimension of the spatiality of practice, also put forward by de Certeau (1990): practising is always a practice *of* space. The different kinds of activities transform a place into space, therefore creating space by mere practice. This is an interesting delimitation between place and space drawn by de Certeau (1990): place is referred to as the geometrical arrangement of things, space the linking-together of the geometrical arrangements through practice. Therefore, space is an emergent dimension realised by the actions of individuals. It is therefore a "lived space" or "inhabited".

Finally, there is a link that can be drawn from the practice/space nexus to the question of "dwelling", as considered within geography and philosophy, but also in sociology. Classically, it has been considered as "being-in-space". Conceptualising "dwelling" as practice "with" space suggests a more active meaning, a process or an activity rather than a passive and static relationship to space, raised for example in the question of geographical referents of identity, values of landscape etc. It could therefore fuel research in those

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[8]"alongside the degree of relative legitimacy, reflexivity or stability of the involved human beings" (transl. by the authors)

[9]This is not the only definition given: Heidegger (1952) also defines dwelling as "relationship to places through space".

[10]This thesis would call for a more thorough demonstration than possible here and would go beyond the limits of the article. See Stock (2007) for an appreciation of philosophies of dwelling to this respect.

research areas in which questions of practice have been underscored.

Therefore, the question of "being in space" becomes less adequate, because of the understanding that the "in" states a concept of space as a "container" that contains people. "Dealing with space" means the process of encountering places, to playfully or in a constrained way get over distances, transgress boundaries and to arrange and to rearrange things, and, through discourse or other kinds of acts shape the quality of places, and to be "at proof" while doing things.

Nevertheless, there might be situations where the "being in space" is an adequate way of framing the practice/space nexus. One important mode of existence of human beings as *enveloped* is one of them (Volvey, 2000)[11]. The envelope as a fundamental spatial situation for human beings (Volvey, 2004) gives clues to the understanding of practices of land art (Volvey, 2003, 2009), field work in geography (Volvey, 2004) but also architecture, speleology, tourist practices, sexuality. Sloterdijk's (2003) description of "inhabiting spheres" might be another manifestation of the "being *in* the world" or being *in* space, and shows how shelters and globes can be inhabited.

It would lead to far here to reflect on the concept of space that is at stake here. We acknowledge the idea for space as a concept of a high degree of synthesis (Elias, 1996) that focuses on the relationships to the distance-dependent ordering of elements. It has a specific quality for human societies: it is inhabited, that is co-constructed by practice and symbols, and not only a question of pure arrangement of "things", albeit "earthy things". "Doing with space" means therefore to get in proof with distance, territory, place, landscape, environment, technologies of space, placing and displacement, images, spatiality etc.[12] All these elements constitute "problems" to be solved, "tests" to be passed, "proofs" of competence in the process of practice. This conception of space engaged in agency has therefore to grasp how arrangements, scales, distances – specific to a situation and justified and qualified by the actors as "co-constituents" of space – appear and disappear in processes. The question is therefore how to understand the manifold ways in which space is constructed as resource or condition in practices.

3.2 Finding the right expression: "doing with space"

If we take seriously this engagement of space as an element within action, a first problem is about finding the right expression. How should we call the fact that space constitutes a "problem" to solve for practice? Traditional expressions, we would like to suggest, fail to address the problem adequately: "spatial practice" is typically an expression that leads one to think of practices as only spatial. Yet, the spatial dimension or the spatiality of practice seems more adequately addressed by focusing on the differentiated ways in which practice is related to space. Individuals do something, and they do it with space, i.e. by mobilising space as a problem and resource. Labelling it "spatial" practice may be misleading because of the potential exclusion of other dimensions, and of the often "non-intentional" character of the construction of space (Werlen, 1997), neglected in classical geographies of practice. It is therefore important to take the spatial dimension of practice as a decisive, but not an exclusive, element of analysis.

We found the French expression "*faire avec*" useful in order to describe the ways in which the spatial dimensions of human societies are "active" within, "integrated" in, and "co-constituent" of practice. It means that *nolens volens* people engage with space: the French expression "*il faut faire avec*" means that one has to do something although it might not be very pleasant, desirable or even aimed for. One has to cope with it and integrate the data into the action; one cannot either push it away or change it. With Certeau (1990), it means the engagement of practice, the tactical dimension and the usage, the "arts of doing". Several solutions might be possible in order to express this in English. For instance, the expression "coping with space" might help to translate one of the meanings. "Coping with" means to "deal effectively with something difficult" (Oxford Dictionary). An alternative expression could be the following: "dealing with space", "practising space", or "experimenting (with) space". The closest expression to the French might be to "make do with", defined by the Oxford Dictionary of English as "manage with the limited or inadequate means available". The discussion of the most convenient word is not closed, for arguments in support of a different option may arise. One solution might also be to choose "dealing with space" as a general neutral expression, which would be differentiated into "coping" when space is a problem, and "playing" when space is the object of playful practice.

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[11]Drawing on Volvey (2004), this means within a psychoanalytical framework the relations with the *entourage* based on corporeal and psychical exchanges that hold the individuation/subjectivation processes of the infant, and that can be experienced again/later on under certain facilitating circumstances. Their spatial dimensions (dimensions of the setting and of the doings) make possible for the infant the experience of being a container and its psychical elaboration into a mapping of an Ego able to contain contents of various natures (emotions, fantasies, thoughts, etc.).

[12]It might not be a satisfactory definition of space because of its enumerating character. Nevertheless, it is more helpful than conceptions opposing space and place, or space and society. See for recent discussions on the concept of space within geography: Harvey (1972), Schatzki (1991), Werlen (1993, 1995), Lévy (1994), Cox (1995), Graham (1998).

4   Situations with space "at proof"

The tests and experiments of practice conceptualised as "proof" are problematic within a situation. We can define "situation" as the relational convergence of actants, in which strategies, objects, instruments, values etc. are manifest[13]. Geographically expressed, it is also interaction with space, for the relationship to space in the form of distance, placing or the visual sphere (landscape) "circulates" between actors through practice. The network of actants is constructed not only by social contents, but also by spatial contents. Space is constructed during the action, not before or after the action. Space and action are co-constructed: on the one hand, practice fabricates spatial arrangements, qualities of place, distances and limits; on the other hand discourses with spatial contents and spatial elements such as location, distance, spatial competences, accessibilities, limits, discourses and imaginaries with spatial contents is present in practice.

Situational events can therefore be seen as "fait spatial total"[14]. They construct an assemblage of various realities: human and non-human operators, speech acts, matter, form, arrangement and image. It could be understood through a theory of spatiality within which the concept of arrangement constitutes the essential element. From a material frame pre-existent to the situation, the process of a situation institutes a spatial arrangement congruent with the practice. It is a spatialised, circumstantial and labile collection of objects, things, persons, ideas and language that an actor configures within a situation. Therefore, space is fundamentally modified by processed events. It changes continuously: after a practice had taken place, it constructs a new quality of space although it is not completely different until its re-activation and incorporation into a new activity. The material form pre-existent to the practice – the "geography" of antecedent acts mingling configurations such as bio-physical milieu, objects, architectural artefacts etc. – constitutes a resource for practice. It is used specifically by the actors and incorporated into the arrangement they create. It constitutes more or less a potential to the practice, which pre-exists and is configured in a certain way by the actors. Focusing on those ephemeral configurations using pre-configured elements allows for the acknowledgement of a comparative advantage of pragmatics of space over traditional pragmatist approaches, for the spatial form exists before, during and after practice has configured it specifically.

4.1   The competences of the actor at proof within a situation

In a situation, the operators and particularly the human actors are "in proof" (*à l'épreuve*) regarding to space because of his differentiated competences in order to deal with the situation. We can therefore observe how they mobilise their perceptive, cognitive, linguistic, technological and relational *competences* in order to cope with spatial problems.

Different competences in order to be able to deal with the situation are mobilised. It opens up for an analysis for the spatial competences of actors, discussed more and more within French geography under the heading of "spatial capital" (Lévy, 1994, 2003; Cailly, 2007; Lussault, 2007; Ceriani-Sebregondi, 2007) as individual dispositions aiming at the solution of spatial problems[15]. We can think of three kinds of skills of coping with space: cognitive skills – such as knowledge of locations (the "best" ski slope is found in Chamonix), or distances (the shortest way to go from London to Paris, or the most scenic route...). This allows for orientation and the association of the adequate place for a practice. Then, we can distinguish behavioural skills – such as differentiated civility in public space and private space, on the underground or the plane, in a palace hotel or a club hotel, or even "corporeal techniques" (Mauss, 1999) allowing for skiing, tanning on the beach, strolling in the city. Finally, the instrumental skills – such as knowing how to use the ticket vending machine, to drive a car, to find an apartment, to book a package tour on the Internet, etc. – are important for the variability between individuals for accessing places are heavily relying on the capability of using instruments. The interplay between those three kinds of competences constitutes the capacities of individuals of solving spatial problems.

Such competences are socially acquired – through socialisation in different places: home, school, football club, dance school, university etc. – but kept up to date by "doing", and, as such, constantly updated in those situations. This might also provide us with the solution to one of the great enigmas of the constitution of society: social and spatial structures do not exist: there are only stabilized and culturally and socially recognized situations, within which actors constantly update their practices and competences.

Especially, the analysis of language allows us to grasp judgements of situations and practices. Ideas, discourse and judgements as speech acts refer to spatial configurations and predicate space (Mondada, 2000), mobilised in certain situations: Switzerland or Tahiti as "paradise" within a touristic situation, Paris as "romantic city" for a couple, California as

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[13]"Actant" stems from the latourian "actor-network-theory", originally composed by "actants" circulating and forming a "network", as in semiotic theory (Latour, 1991). We shall use this word in order not to get in confusion with the "actor" as *human* operator (see Lussault, 2007).

[14]This expression is inspired by Marcel Mauss' (1994) "*fait social total*".

[15]The notion of "spatial capital" explicitly stems from and aims at developing Bourdieu's theory of capital by focussing on the spatial ressources of the individual, such as location or accumulated experiences of metropolises facilitating the practice of ever new metropolises. Ceriani-Sebregondi (2007) focuses explicitly on a mobility capital of individuals, being able to deal effectively with mobility situations.

"healthy place" for the 19th century ill US citizen from the East Coast, Iraq as "rogue state" within a conflict situation on the global scale, mountains as "beautiful" for the painter, the *banlieue* as "ugly" for architects and tourists, etc. It is particularly interesting to observe the contrasting and conflicting discourses on one place. The same place is constructed in a multiple manner through discursive action. One can even raise the hypothesis that the same place is constructed differently by the same actor according to the situation within which it comes to express through speech acts the significance of the place. This linguistic competence seems to be central in order to understand how situations are dealt with, and how the spatial complexity of situations is reduced by language.

4.2 Elements for the analysis of a situation

The analysis of a situation where actors are in proof develops the following three elements. Firstly the focus on the situation does not lead to the neglect of the "elsewhere" and the "anteriority", both socially and biographically. Indeed, individuals and societies are always with "other" spaces, connected to them by tools – more and more by handheld telecommunication devices – or by the imagination – projection to the place one is about to go to next or places lived in by those one thinks of, fantasies about places, etc. Hence, approaching the situation as a container that contains practices seems inappropriate. The conditions of possibility and archaeology of the situation are important in this respect. This relational perspective seems crucial to the adequate analysis of practice, as for example put forward by Schütz (1932) in order to understand the multiplicity of relationships present in action[16].

Secondly the conditions of possibility of the situation, the observation of the current situation and the reflexive feedback on the convenient action as *ex post* analysis, need to be considered. These elements require different techniques: observation, biographical interview, archaeology of situations that analyze language, gestures and instruments. An analysis of gestures and instruments allows for observation of the various ways in which "co-spatiality" is fabricated synchronically and diachronically. Through "transitional instruments", such as the MP3 player, cell phone, credit card, rucksack, notebook, car, book, dog, umbrella, hat etc, individuals are accompanied by instruments from one situation to another. It is also through some such instruments that the individual interconnects with other individuals and places.

Finally, there is therefore an "archaeology" of situations to put forward. It allows for an understanding of how meaning is produced in a specific situation and how competences have been acquired. The analysis focuses on the processes of learning of individuals – for example a tourist being able to encounter otherness or not, knowledge of the housing market –, on technology – development of transport, ATM, money, –, societal conditions – the development of democratic, relatively more individualized and differentiated societies, with more or less legal security – etc., which co-constructs the situation where space intertwines with practice.

5 Conclusions

Pragmatics of space is conceived here of as a theoretical tool designed as an approach to *situations* rather than an approach to space[17]. Indeed, it helps one to understand that "spatial logics" vary with different situations, rather than being one-dimensional. It aims at developing more differentiated thought on how space is co-constituent of society.

How could pragmatics of space contribute to the growing body of theory in geography? Is it an incommensurable contribution or might it be useful in tackling the "big" questions in geography? We would argue that pragmatics of space might help to obtain a more thorough insight into the key questions of contemporary geography – be it the society/nature nexus, the globalization/localization tension, individualization and the construction of community, the identity/alterity tension or the growing differentiation of society, not to mention neglected issues such as love, death, solitude by developing a more differentiated perspective, because they all rely on acts implying space. It might also fuel attempts to overcome the epistemologically constructed oppositions such as place/space, society/space, quantitative/qualitative in order to grasp them as simply different ways of producing knowledge. It continues the dialogue with other social sciences. It could even be a specific geographical contribution to the question of practice, widely discussed in social sciences: space as resource and condition of practice, mobilised in situations through "proofs". Or, as Werlen (1997) called it: "Praxis der Weltbindung". This beautiful expression might enable us to investigate how people are related practically to the world, in different situations, by mobilising space.

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[16]The pragmatist approach can be seen as a relational approach, such as Schütz (1932), Bourdieu (1980), Elias (1987), Foucault (1984) proposed to do. It is less a new "relational geography" than the implementation of relational approaches within a discipline and for a certain purpose.

[17]See Werlen (1988, 1993) for the plea of geography as science of situations, rather than "science of space".

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