



CONSUMPTION PRACTICES AND RITUALS: THEATRE-GOING AS A RITUALISTIC INTEGRATIVE PRACTICE

ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to examine the connection between consumption rituals and practices in the context of a theatre visit. Following an earlier emphasis on understanding mundane consumption, practice theorists are increasingly turning their interest to cultural aspects of consumption. In ritual studies, consumption is often seen as a method of communication within and between groups. We seek to elaborate on the similarities and differences between these two research traditions. In the analysis, we identify three shared elements: artifacts, roles, and proper conduct. Furthermore, consumption rituals have two distinctive elements: magic and audience. By interpreting the data utilising a combined framework, we broaden the understanding of a theatre visit as a ritualised integrative practice and extend the applicability of the two consumption research traditions. In addition, we deepen the understanding of what constitutes a theatre visit. Based on our findings, we also suggest several actions for the theatre institutions and present ideas for future research.

TIIVISTELMÄ

Tämän artikkelin tavoitteena on tarkastella kulutusrituaalien ja -käytäntöjen välistä yhteyttä teatterissa käymisen kontekstissa. Seuraten aiempaa painotusta arkipäiväisen kulutuksen ymmärtämisessä käytäntöteoreetikot ovat enenevässä määrin kiinnostuneet kulutuksen kulttuurisista ulottuvuuksista. Rituaalitutkimuksissa kulutus nähdään usein kommunikaatiomenetelmänä ryhmien sisällä ja välillä. Pyrimme selvittämään näiden kahden tutkimusperinteen yhtäläisyyksiä ja eroja. Analyysissa tunnistamme kolme yhteistä elementtiä: artefaktit, roolit ja oikea toiminta. Lisäksi kulutusrituaaleissa on kaksi ominaista elementtiä: taianomaisuus ja yleisö. Tulkitsemalla aineistoa yhdistetyn viitekehyksen avulla laajennamme käsitystä teatterikäynnistä ritualistisena integratiivisena käytäntönä ja kahden kulutustutkimuksen perinteen sovellettavuutta. Lisäksi syvennämme ymmärrystä siitä, mistä elementeistä teatterivierailu koostuu. Havaintojemme pohjalta ehdotamme myös useita toimia teatteri-instituutioille ja esitämme ideoita tulevaa tutkimusta varten.

Keywords: Consumption, Practice theories, Ritual, Theatre, Culture

INTRODUCTION

Consumption practices became an important focus in consumer studies following the introduction of the concept by Schatzki¹ and Warde² and the extended analysis by Shove, Pantzar and Watson³. To date, consumption has been analysed as both a practice and a ritual, and rather than assigning each a single theory, the literature has presented a range of ideas and perspectives. Previous research has supported a shared understanding of practice as a “spatially dispersed nexus of doings and sayings”⁴. Hence, a practice consists of elements, although the classifications of the elements vary. A ritual, on the other hand, is “an episodic string of events” that follows a certain script and consists of different elements⁵.

While the two analytical frameworks utilise the same basic concepts of a script and elements, they have been used to analyse disparate experiences. Practice theorists have sought alternative points of view for the cultural turn⁶ and have focused on the routine consumption of everyday life⁷ including, for example, energy⁸ and food⁹. Several studies have also addressed leisure practices, such as Nordic walking¹⁰, floorball, and photography¹¹. More recently, however, practice theorists have begun to study the cultural and interactional aspects of consumption¹², both of which are crucial in theatre research.

These cultural and communicational aspects have been central in the research of consumption rituals, which use shared experiences to create togetherness through the exchange of gifts¹³ and the transition of participants from one group to another in rites of passage¹⁴. For these reasons, the research has often targeted consumption rituals that are annual celebrations, such as Christmas¹⁵, or once-in-a-lifetime rituals, such as weddings¹⁶. These celebrative and even “magical” aspects of ritualistic consumption have directly influenced the theorising of consumption rituals¹⁷.

The objective of this article is to analyse theatre-going as both a practice and a consumption ritual, two traditions that have previously been viewed as co-existing and yet distinct. We thus suggest a theoretical framework that combines theories of practice and ritual studies. From our perspective, rituals are a type of practice because they share common elements; however, the research literature has identified that some ritual elements are not present in all practices. The research gap addressed in this article concerns the study of rituals as practices. In addition, we compare the elements of rituals and practices as analysed by Warde¹⁸ and Shove et al.¹⁹, the widely cited theorists in the field of consumption practices. We focus on theatre visits as ritualistic consumption practices and utilise

1 Schatzki 2002.

2 Warde 2005.

3 Shove et al. 2012.

4 Schatzki 1996, 89.

5 Rook 1985.

6 Warde 2014.

7 Gronow & Warde 2001.

8 Gram-Hanssen 2011, e.g.

9 Warde 2016, e.g.

10 Shove & Pantzar 2005.

11 Shove & Pantzar 2007.

12 Halkier 2020; Welch et al. 2020.

13 Cheal 1988.

14 van Gennep 1960.

15 Belk 1989; McKechnie & Tynan 2006.

16 Nelson & Deshpande 2004; Park 1997.

17 Driver 1991; Rook 1985.

18 Warde 2005; 2014; 2016.

19 Shove et al. 2012.

interviews with theatre visitors. Although researchers have also recognised other types of practices, such as routines²⁰, this paper focuses solely on rituals. By extending the study of rituals as practices, we can begin to overcome the artificial conceptual division and broaden the overall understanding of consumption with a more comprehensive approach.

Sociologists have previously analysed theatre visits from different aspects such as gender²¹, social background²², and political orientation²³. Also marketing researchers have shown an interest in theatres²⁴. This article extends the research by focusing on theatre-goers and how they make sense of their theatre experiences. The existing literature has rarely analysed theatre visits from the practice-theoretical perspective²⁵, and the research examining the ritualistic point of view is limited²⁶. We, however, address theatre as a collective phenomenon: ritual as an integrative practice. This article sheds new light regarding how practitioners can develop more compelling theatre experiences by revealing the range of meanings theatre-goers attach to their ritualised practice.

This article begins by introducing practices, rituals, and their respective elements. A description of the data and method is then followed by the analysis. Finally, we present our findings and discuss the limitations of the study and potential guidelines for future research.

THEORIES OF PRACTICE

Practices can be divided into practice-as-entity and practice-as-performance²⁷. According to Warde²⁸, practice-as-performance “refers to the carrying out of practices, the performing of the doings and sayings”, which, citing Schatzki²⁹, “actualizes and sustains practices in the sense of nexuses”. In other words, practice as performance refers to a specific occasion in which a practice is carried out. Hui³⁰ described making a specific sandwich as an example. Practice-as-entity, on the other hand, refers to “practice as a temporally unfolding and spatially dispersed nexus of doings and sayings”³¹. While performances can never be repeated in the exact same form³², one can still identify the entity as a practice. Such an entity, for instance, could be eating the midday meal: although it may occur in different locations and include different dishes, one still understands the activity as lunch.

Schatzki³³ divided practices into two types – dispersed and integrative. In the case of theatre, this dichotomy appears to be relevant for the successful performance of the ritual. According to Schatzki, dispersed practices do not constitute a practice as a whole and are only fully understood when they are a part of a broader practice, such as talking in relation to gossiping or walking in relation to exercise. Theatre-going, on the other hand, is an integrative practice, as it has its own specific features and a teleo-affective structure, which refers to the “correct” ends and goals of the

20 Ehn & Löfgren 2009; 2010; Gronow & Warde 2001; Heinonen 2012.

21 Christin 2012; Liikkanen 1996.

22 Purhonen et al. 2014, e.g.

23 Sivonen & Purhonen 2021.

24 Courchesne et al. 2021; Jobst & Boerner 2015; Voss & Cova 2006; Voss et al. 2006.

25 Varpa 2019.

26 Caldwell 2001; Gainer 1995.

27 Schatzki 1996; Shove & Pantzar 2007.

28 Warde 2005.

29 Schatzki 1996, 90.

30 Hui 2016.

31 Schatzki 1996, 89.

32 Hui 2016.

33 Schatzki 1996.

practice³⁴. Furthermore, integrative practices are culturally constituted and complex because they presuppose understandings as well as competences, expertise, and materials³⁵.

Although practices consist of elements, practice theorists have not reached a consensus regarding the elements that constitute a practice³⁶. Warde³⁷ applied Schatzki's³⁸ philosophy to consumption research and defined elements as understandings, procedures, and engagements. Shove, Pantzar and Watson³⁹, on the other hand, referred to elements as materials, competences, and meanings.

Practice theories have traditionally emphasised mundane consumption, an approach not widely applied to theatre research. Varpa⁴⁰ has explored how theatre practices form a network with other practices, such as those centred on the family. However, as the existing literature is limited, it is important to identify the practice-theoretical implications in the theatre studies context.

CONSUMPTION RITUALS AS PRACTICES

When defining a ritual, Dennis Rook⁴¹ identified that in the first instance “an episodic string of events” is typical of a ritual experience. This string can be short and simple or more elaborate as in the case of civic ceremonies. Second, the episodic events in a ritual follow one another in a rather fixed sequence. Thus, a ritual action follows a certain script⁴². Third, the event sequence is repeated in the ritual behaviour over a period of time, which ensures that the ritual is performed in a consistent manner⁴³. Rook⁴⁴ also emphasised that rituals and behavioural habits have many features in common, but they also have important differences: a habit tends to be represented by a singular behaviour, whereas a ritual is a plural experience that is more symbolic, expressive, serious, and intense. Finally, Rook recognised that a ritual includes body language that facilitates interactions between people and functions and acts as a natural symbol⁴⁵.

While the elements that constitute a practice have been discussed in the literature, it is notable that the different kinds of practices have not been classified to the same level of detail as rituals. Bell's⁴⁶ typology of rituals is introduced in Table 1:

34 Schatzki 2002.

35 Warde 2016.

36 see Gram-Hanssen 2011.

37 Warde 2005.

38 Schatzki 1996.

39 Shove, Pantzar and Watson 2012, 24.

40 Varpa 2019.

41 Rook 1985, 252.

42 also Bell 1997, 139.

43 also Bell 1997, 150.

44 Rook 1985.

45 Rook 1985, 253.

46 Bell 1997.

Table 1. Different types of rituals with examples⁴⁷.

Type of Ritual	Example of Ritual
Rites of passage	Ceremonies for significant life events, such as birth (Hennessey 2019), coming of age (Mead 2004 [1928], e.g.), marriage (van Gennep 1960; Nelson & Deshpande 2004; Park 1997), and death (Bonsu & DeBerry-Spence 2008).
Calendrical rituals	Celebration of Valentine's Day (Minowa et al. 2011) and public holidays, such as Thanksgiving (Pleck 2000; Wallendorf & Arnould 1991) and Christmas (Heinonen 1998; Pleck 2000; Rook 1985).
Rituals of exchange and communication	Gift exchange, offerings, and communions (Cheal 1988; Malinowski 1922; Mauss 1990; McCracken 1988; Pleck 2000).
Rites of affliction	Healing rituals (Cova & Cova 2019) and funerals (Nations et al. 2017), for example.
Feasting, fasting and festival rituals	As well as religious rituals, these experiences can include elements of consumption (Goulding & Saren 2016, e.g.).
Political rituals	Rituals in which societal power is used by politicians (Lovenduski 2012) or press (Elliott 1981), for example.

The classification above should be viewed solely as an analytical tool, as one ritual can belong to several groups simultaneously. In this study, we focus on consumption rituals, which have traditionally been regarded as rituals of exchange and communication. In contemporary society and consumer culture, all of the above-mentioned rituals can include consumption. Similarly, Warde⁴⁸ described consumption as being a part of any practice. In this analysis, we view theatre visits primarily as rituals of communication and symbolic exchange as shown by Gainer⁴⁹. However, we acknowledge that theatre visits can also serve other purposes, such as facilitating healing and therapy.

Rituals can be used to deepen and strengthen the ties between group members⁵⁰. Such a motive has been found, for example, in the mundane practices of a shared family meal⁵¹, but also in high culture consumption⁵². Rituals are similar to practices in that there is no single classification of elements. Table 2 presents a range of classifications that have been applied to practices and rituals:

47 Bell 1997.

48 Warde 2005.

49 Gainer 1995.

50 Driver 1991; Gainer 1995.

51 DeVault 1994 e.g.

52 Debenedetti 2003.

Table 2. Elements of practices and rituals.

Practices		Rituals	
Warde (2005)	Shove et al. (2012)	Rook (1985)	Driver (1991)
Understandings			Order in society
		Ritual performance role(s)	
	Competences		
Procedures		Ritual script	
Engagement	Meanings		
	Products	Ritual artifacts	
		A ritual audience	A sense of community
			Transformation

In the following section, we briefly discuss the key elements identified during the data analysis, and we show how the elements constituting an integrative practice and a ritual indicate a connection between the two.

Ritual artifacts. Goods play an important role in a range of rituals⁵³, and ritual research has often focused on the institution of gift-giving⁵⁴. In particular, gifts and the exchange of goods have traditionally been of interest to anthropologists, who concluded that social order and gift-giving are widely interconnected⁵⁵, with a modern example being Christmas gifts⁵⁶. On the other hand, artifacts have the power to alter as well as enhance rituals⁵⁷. For a high culture audience, the material world is present and may play an important role. For example, during classical music concerts, the architecture helps the audience find anchorage points to their own history⁵⁸, while the stage design, costumes, and props are important for theatre-goers with low motivation⁵⁹.

Roles in rituals. Ritual roles, which according to Rook⁶⁰ can be extensive, limited, or non-existent, are related to the proper conduct of a ritual. In addition, Goulding and Saren⁶¹ found that the roles have different levels, from expert to spectator. Roles are maintained and strengthened by carrying out the ritual, for example, when a person with knowledge of the arts initiates a museum visit⁶². While roles have not been established as an element in practices, according to Shove et al.⁶³, different roles could contribute to the meanings of practices and enhance people's understanding of appropriate behaviours and attitudes.

53 Rook 1985.

54 Cheal 1988; Mauss 1990; McCracken 1988, e.g.

55 Malinowski 1922, e.g.

56 Pleck 2000.

57 Chitakunye & Maclaran 2014.

58 Carù & Cova 2005; 2006.

59 Jobst & Boerner 2015.

60 Rook 1985.

61 Goulding and Saren 2016.

62 Debenedetti 2003.

63 Shove et al. 2012.

Proper conduct. Rituals must be conducted correctly⁶⁴, and both the rituals and practices analysed by Warde⁶⁵ and Shove et al.⁶⁶ were carried out in specific ways. In relation to theories of practice, Schatzki⁶⁷ described a teleo-affective structure, which is characteristic of integrative practices: an integrative practice has a kind of script that includes an understanding of the proper conduct and results that should be achieved when carrying out the practice. In the case of a ritual, the script may be even more significant⁶⁸ and have a rigidity that is predetermined⁶⁹. A wedding, for instance, may consist of several stages that must be completed according to a traditional script⁷⁰, although new elements can be included⁷¹. Similar to practices⁷², rituals are the result of ongoing discussions⁷³. From the perspective of a high culture audience, rituals may even disturb the experience. According to Carù and Cova⁷⁴, it is difficult to find points of anchorage if the ritual is not understood. There are, however, also certain elements of practices and rituals that do not overlap, including audience and magic.

The magic. Magic is a difficult concept to define in relation to rituals. Rook⁷⁵ and McCracken⁷⁶ identified “magic” in a grooming ritual as the power to change one’s appearance – physically and mentally. Driver⁷⁷ linked this change to the concept of liminality, which Turner⁷⁸ developed from van Gennep’s⁷⁹ work on rites of passage. Liminality refers to the disorientation experienced in the mid-stage of a rite of passage. When engaging in a ritual, a person is freed from the roles and social structures of everyday life⁸⁰. In the high culture audience context, the sense of uniqueness is derived from the audience’s omnipotent perspective and their communication with the performers. As we address next, the audience’s experience can also be ruined by a break in one’s concentration.

A ritual audience. The audience is an additional theatrical concept relating to a ritual, and a ritual event involves at least two audience types. First, a range of rituals express inclusion or exclusion from a specific group⁸¹, and the audiences these events include are the group itself, such as a family⁸², and those who observe the ritual from a distance⁸³. In a high culture context, companions may be of great importance⁸⁴. The audience can potentially improve the overall evaluation of the experience if the behaviour is identified as enriching⁸⁵, or they can disrupt one’s focus⁸⁶. The social aspects linked to the performance involve not only the other spectators but also the performers⁸⁷. Thus, the concept of audience is connected to the concept of magic.

64 Rook 1985.

65 Warde 2005.

66 Shove et al. 2012.

67 Schatzki 2002.

68 Bell 1997, 150.

69 Rook 1985.

70 Park 1997.

71 Leeds-Hurwitz 2002.

72 Hui 2016.

73 Hüsken 2007; Hüsken & Neubert 2012.

74 Carù & Cova 2005; 2006.

75 Rook 1985.

76 McCracken 1988.

77 Driver 1991, 157.

78 Turner 1969.

79 van Gennep 1960.

80 Turner 1969.

81 Rook 1984.

82 Heinonen 1998.

83 Goulding & Saren 2016.

84 Debenedetti 2013.

85 Boerner & Jobst 2013.

86 Carù & Cova 2005; 2006.

87 O’Sullivan 2009.

While the practice-theoretical theatre research is limited⁸⁸, the ritualistic point of view has rarely been explored⁸⁹. Therefore, there is a need to understand theatre audiences in terms of both carrying out practices and performing rituals.

RESEARCH MATERIAL AND METHOD

The research material for this study consists of 12 semi-structured interviews with Swedish-speaking theatre visitors, which were carried out by the first author in the Helsinki metropolitan area. The interview data was saturated, as the theatre visits and their meanings started to repeat similar patterns. The length of the interviews varied from about twenty minutes to two hours. The variation was in part due to the interviewees' different leisure interests. The only prerequisite for participation was that the interviewee had visited the Swedish theatre in Helsinki at least once in their lifetime. We sought variation in the interview discussions by recruiting people with different attitudes towards theatre.

The interviewees were between 24 and 78 years old and were either from a Swedish-speaking family or had a close connection to the Swedish language and the Swedish-speaking minority in Finland. Finland's Swedish-speaking population is relatively small, about 290 000 people in 2021⁹⁰. Therefore, to ensure anonymity, we cannot provide detailed information about the interviewees. According to Heikkilä and Kahma⁹¹, the discussion of taste differs between the Swedish-speaking minority and the Finnish-speaking majority, although these differences are small, and the group is heterogeneous⁹².

All the interviewees had a master's degree or were studying at a university, which are attributes associated with the consumption of high culture⁹³. Only two of the interviewees were men; previous studies have shown that women tend to be more enthusiastic consumers of culture⁹⁴. The high number of female participants could also be due to the snowball method, which was used to access groups of theatre-goers for the collection of research material⁹⁵. The first interviewees were women; thus, it is understandable that most of the participants they introduced to the study were also women. All the interviews were recorded by the first author and then transcribed by a research company. The first author also translated the excerpts used in this article from Finnish and Swedish into English.

Qualitative research requires a deep understanding of the studied phenomenon to facilitate data analysis⁹⁶. Informed by our past research on consumption rituals and practices⁹⁷, we were able to build a framework using the two research traditions to carry out an in-depth analysis of the material. The qualitative research approach emphasises the importance of the theoretical framework⁹⁸. Theories of practice and ritual studies utilise similar methods for conducting research, and both

88 Varpa 2019.

89 Carù & Cova 2005; 2006; Gainer 1995.

90 Statistics Finland 2022.

91 Heikkilä & Kahma 2008.

92 Heikkilä 2008.

93 Bourdieu 1984; DiMaggio 2004; Purhonen et al. 2014.

94 Bihagen & Katz-Gerro 2000; Christin 2012; DiMaggio 2004; Katz-Gerro 1999.

95 Browne 2005.

96 Moisander & Valtonen 2006.

97 Heinonen 1998; Varpa 2019.

98 Collins & Stockton 2018.

traditions have frequently relied on observation as a research method⁹⁹. Recently, however, interviews have been used successfully in practice-theoretical studies¹⁰⁰. This interviews in this study utilised Silverman's¹⁰¹ concept of interactionism: the interviewees were invited to make sense of their experiences by reflecting on their motivations and further analysing their preliminary responses to, for example, the feelings induced by their theatre visits. Communication is at the core of rituals¹⁰², and the interpretations verbalised by the interviewees were a motivated means of understanding a ritual using interpretive content analysis¹⁰³.

ELEMENTS SHARED BY RITUALS AND OTHER PRACTICES

Based on our data, we have introduced three distinct elements that are shared by rituals and practices: artifacts, roles, and proper conduct. In this section, we illustrate how the elements materialised in the interviews. The subsequent section analyses the elements that were only characteristic of rituals.

Artifacts

[- -]it's actually a part of cinema etiquette that you can eat sweets, but you don't eat sweets at the theatre. I wouldn't even dream of it. Or let's say my mobile rang by accident. I would be much more embarrassed in the theatre than at the cinema because people are actually acting in front of you. A film is just recorded [- -] of course, a ringing phone annoys others among the audience at the cinema too, but people have come just to watch that play. If you are at the theatre, the performers are putting everything into their performance right at that moment for the audience. (Female, 28)

The unique aspects of a performance prompt the audience to maintain an engaged focus¹⁰⁴. In some rituals, such as gift-giving or religious ceremonies, the artifacts play a central role¹⁰⁵. In the theatre context, we suggest that the absence of unnecessary artifacts is equally as important for the ritual: one's full attention can be given to a play when unnecessary artifacts are removed. In the excerpt above, the interviewee mentioned sweets and a ringing telephone as potentially jeopardising the experience. As previously stated, spectators of a performance can potentially ruin the experience by distracting other audience members¹⁰⁶. In the following section, the element of magic is discussed. To access this magic, all unnecessary distractions, such as hearing someone eating or a ringing telephone, must be avoided. The ability to concentrate on a play is also enhanced by the theatre closing the auditorium doors and requesting that phones are switched off; these aspects of spatial order, which are achieved by the theatre ritual, are discussed later in the article.

An important material aspect in a theatre performance is the stage with its settings, costumes, and props¹⁰⁷. We must also acknowledge the curtains, the musicians' chairs, the instruments, the music racks, the purchased programmes, the theatre seats, and the entire auditorium space as material aspects of a theatre visit. A significant material aspect contributing to the magic is the

99 Halkier & Jensen 2011; Hitchings 2012; Malinowski 1922; Mead 2004 [1928], e.g.

100 Hitchings 2012 e.g.

101 Silverman 1993, 90–95.

102 Durkheim 2013, e.g.

103 Berger & Luckmann 1967; Moisander & Valtonen 2006.

104 O'Sullivan 2009.

105 Cheal 1988; Durkheim 2013; Mauss 1990; Pleck 2000.

106 Carù & Cova 2005; 2006.

107 Carù & Cova 2005; 2006; Jobst & Boerner 2015.

theatre building itself¹⁰⁸. When asked about their favourite features of a theatre visit, one of the informants opted to describe the building and its interior: “[- -] the stage and the auditorium are so beautiful” (Female, 37). Many theatre buildings have an entrance that has been designed to give an ennobling impression when entering the building. It is evident that the elements of a ritual often overlap; for example, the theatre building as a physical object also serves the other elements of a ritual: magic and social order.

Roles

According to Rook¹⁰⁹, roles are an element of a ritual. In many rituals, the roles deepen and support the organisation of society through the accepted actions in social interaction¹¹⁰. Gender roles are an example of such a structure: a woman is more likely to be viewed as the household member responsible for shopping and feeding the family¹¹¹. In the theatre-going context, the mother of the family also has an important role as a facilitator¹¹². In the following excerpt, an interviewee explained how the traditional family structure is reinforced when the theatre practice is performed: “Often if we go with Mum, we might go and eat beforehand – a pizza or something, and so, you know, she pays for my food, which is nice” (Female, 26). In this way, family roles are confirmed even once a child has reached adulthood, and thus social order is duly strengthened.

Family roles, however, are not the only roles linked to theatre visits. One interviewee was a retired teacher who had continued to organise theatre visits for a group that had been formed when she was still working. According to the interviewee, the group was rather structured:

There are three people involved in organising this. I get the material from all of the theatres, and then I contact a theatre and make a reservation for us. Then we have a bank account, and there is someone who takes care of it. Then they send a message to all of the members telling them that we have chosen something – which play, when it’s on, and when they should pay for the tickets through the business account. So they pay and register in that way, and then when the money is in the account, this person transfers the money to the third person who goes and picks up the tickets. (Female, 78)

The interviewee stated that the organisation of the theatre visits was straightforward: the well-established group collectively knew what they liked to see. In addition, the process of reserving the tickets and handling the money had been refined over the years. This type of continuity is a prerequisite for both rituals¹¹³ and practices¹¹⁴.

In practice theory literature, the roles of participants have not been widely discussed. On the other hand, Warde’s¹¹⁵ explanation of “understandings” in practice can include an acknowledgement of who is assigned to each role. Goffman’s¹¹⁶ analysis of roles contributed an additional insight: individuals play a role in social interactions and to maintain dignity and respect, one needs to understand the social rules that govern the performance of their role. Shove et al.¹¹⁷ discussed competences as another aspect of role assignment: individuals who are regarded as the most

108 Carù & Cova 2006.

109 Rook 1985.

110 Goffman 1959; 1967.

111 DeVault 1994, e.g.

112 Courchesne et al. 2021; Varpa 2019.

113 Bell 1997, 150; Rook 1985.

114 Bourdieu 1990; Warde 2005.

115 Warde 2005.

116 Goffman 1959; 1967.

117 Shove et al. 2012.

competent may be allowed to play a more central role. Among the group of retired theatre-goers, the former teacher had undoubtedly inherited the leading role because of the group's previous structure. By organising the outings even when the course had ended, the former teacher was able to maintain her prestige¹¹⁸.

Proper conduct

The third element we identified in our data was proper conduct – a characteristic with more than one concept in ritual studies. Proper conduct has also been defined as repetition¹¹⁹ or a ritual script¹²⁰. However, the main idea of the element is consistent: to be recognised as a ritual, the ritual must maintain a similar form every time it is carried out; this concept also applies to practices. Although repetition is required, both practices¹²¹ and rituals unavoidably experience a degree of variation¹²².

The repetitive nature of both rituals and practices is highlighted in the following excerpt:

[- -] back when this was part of a course organised by the workers' institute [me being the teacher], back then we, like, first I introduced the play, and produced some kind of introductory paper as well. And then we went to see it, and the next time we would discuss it and prepare for the next one. So the play and the discussion alternated – like discussing the previous one and preparing for the next one. But now we've arranged things so that we go to see two or three plays and then we discuss them. And they said that when we continued this way, informally, it was no longer a course, but we still needed the discussions and that they are the best part. And that after you discuss it, you might understand what it was all about. (Female, 78)

The former teacher described the process that had transformed the official course into an unofficial group of acquaintances with shared interests. Even though the activity was no longer guided by a formal curriculum, the participants agreed to continue with the original structure under new circumstances. Here we see an example of how a ritual's meaning can be maintained even as the ritual continues to develop¹²³.

However, once again, the different elements overlap. Proper conduct potentially includes both the approved use of appropriate artifacts and the performance of a given role in the ritual or practice. As previously discussed, switching one's phone off before a play begins is an example of the proper use of an artifact. In terms of playing a role, we have described how a mother buying her daughter a meal is an expression of "good" motherhood.

The repetitive nature of a ritual is exemplified in one of Driver's¹²⁴ "ritual gifts" – order in society: if a ritual is consistently and repeatedly performed in the same manner, it will reproduce the structures of a society, such as gender roles¹²⁵. The ritual also produces distinctions between "us" and "them", as observed by Carù and Cova¹²⁶ in a classical music concert audience context. Treise et al.¹²⁷ divided this order into spatial and temporal categories. As a fixed building, a theatre naturally

118 Debenedetti 2003.

119 Bell 1997.

120 Rook 1985.

121 Hui 2016.

122 Nelson & Deshpande 2004; Rook 1985; Sandikci & Omeraki 2007.

123 Edwards 1982.

124 Driver 1991.

125 Minowa et al. 2011.

126 Carù & Cova 2006.

127 Treise et al. 1999.

limits the spatial variation within a theatre-going practice. However, the temporal aspects of order can be more interesting in the context of a social structure, as exemplified by one interviewee:

JV: When you go to the theatre, is it just because you want to see that play or musical or whatever, or is it for another reason as well? Will you go for dinner with friends or to a bar afterwards, for example?

I5: For sure, you can combine everything, yes. It depends on which day you go. If you go straight from work...

JV: It's something you do on weekdays?

I5: [- -] Yes, sure. It's not something you can only do at the weekend. You can definitely go on weekdays as well, but whether you do something before or afterwards depends on what you've been doing beforehand. If it's a Friday or Saturday evening, then you can go out afterwards for a drink or two. It also depends on whether you go for a meal beforehand with the person you're going to the theatre with. (Female, 29)

According to the interviewee, a theatre visit has to be coordinated with the rhythm of everyday life¹²⁸, particularly on weekdays. Significantly, many of the interviewees normalised weekday theatre visits, despite otherwise appearing to connect a theatre visit with a festive occasion. Ger and Kravets¹²⁹ noted that practices can create a "special" time within normal everyday life. From this perspective, a theatre visit is not rendered festive if it takes place during the weekend. However, achieving the ritual goal is enough to produce "special" time in the midst of everyday life¹³⁰.

ELEMENTS CHARACTERISTIC OF RITUALS

In this section, we focus on the following two elements that we identified as characteristic of rituals: magic and audience. Max Weber¹³¹ discussed the concept of a disenchantment with the world caused by the rationalisation process and the secularisation of societies. As a countermeasure, art and theatre as genres can provide magical experiences in people's lives. To this end, the audience plays a fundamental role in the theatre, and in some performances, audience participation may even be expected. We first focus on magic and then conclude our analysis by addressing the element of audience and its significance in the ritual of a theatre visit.

Magic

Magic has been identified as an important element of a ritual¹³². The possibility of escaping reality has also been explored in consumer studies¹³³. In the following excerpt, an interviewee described the magical feelings she connected with the theatre:

There is some kind of magic when it's happening right now, live. And it's being played at that very moment in the presence of the audience. So there's that glamour... or glamour is a wrong word, but that kind of magic when one thinks that this is really happening right here, right now, and you can see the people there [- -] so there is this huge respect. (Female, 28)

128 Shove 2009.

129 Ger and Kravets 2009.

130 Boudier-Pailler 2008.

131 Weber 1997.

132 Rook 1985.

133 Belk & Costa 1998; Darveau & Cheikh-Ammar 2021; Goulding & Saren 2016, e.g.

For the interviewee, the magic of a theatre visit was related to experiencing a play being performed at that very moment in time. Using the dichotomy presented by Shove and Pantzar¹³⁴, the interviewee emphasised the performance aspect of the theatre visit as a practice. Each performance of the play constitutes a unique singular experience. To emphasise the special nature of a theatre experience, the interviewee had previously compared it to visiting a cinema, where a recorded film is merely repeated. However, this does not necessarily mean that a performance experience can only be enjoyed once: one interviewee had seen *Mamma Mia* five times.

Uniqueness appears to be a significant part of the “ritual magic”¹³⁵ that is delivered by a theatre experience. The unique nature of a performance also means that the audience must devote their full concentration¹³⁶. While the presence of artifacts is essential in many rituals¹³⁷, we have argued that the absence of unnecessary artifacts is equally important for the proper conduct of a theatre visit.

The interviewee’s concern about missing aspects of the performance and their attitude towards possible distractions may also be caused by transformation¹³⁸. In this context, transformation can be reflected in a mental state, a liminal space in which a person is no longer tied to the social structures and logic of their everyday life¹³⁹. By accessing the liminal space, the spectator can gain a magical experience by leaving their everyday life and joining the alternate reality introduced by the play. Liminality is timeless¹⁴⁰; thus, this experience connects a theatre visit to Driver’s¹⁴¹ temporal order.

In the context of magic, the spatial dimension of the “gift” of order¹⁴² is equally important, as spaces enhance liminal experiences¹⁴³. For example, before a play starts, the auditorium doors are usually closed to prevent outside distractions. This action increases the possibility of achieving transformation. To successfully perform the theatre ritual and experience the magic through transformation, the attendee is required to give the play their full attention. Thus, the theatre visit as a practice is clearly integrative, and the ritual can only be connected to an integrative practice that forms its own entity¹⁴⁴. The theatre space and its architecture can also contribute to the audience’s feelings of festivity¹⁴⁵. As stated earlier, one interviewee described the beautiful auditorium as the element she enjoyed most when visiting the theatre. This again confirms that the elements constituting a ritual are, indeed, interdependent.

Audience

The final element analysed in this article is audience. The group of retired theatre-goers emphasised the importance of theatre-related discussions and the social benefits of theatre visits. However, several interviewees were even more enthusiastic about the social aspects associated with viewing a play:

[-] normally you’re with someone who travels from somewhere else, so at the beginning it’s “Hello, hello” and all that social stuff, and then we go and see the play. Then there’s

134 Shove and Pantzar 2007.

135 Rook 1985.

136 O’Sullivan 2009.

137 Goulding & Saren 2016, e.g.

138 Driver 1991.

139 Arnould et al. 1999; Turner 1988.

140 Darveau & Cheikh-Ammar 2021.

141 Driver 1991.

142 Driver 1991.

143 Hirschman et al. 2012.

144 Schatzki 1996.

145 Carù & Cova 2005; 2006.

the interval and the second part, and then perhaps a drink, and then we go. We mingle a bit, and it's not that important what the play is, but the fact that you're at the theatre. Of course, you remember some things that were good and some that weren't so good, but the main point is that you're out and meeting people, which is nice even if the play is not very good. (Male, 58)

In this context, the theatre functions as a location that facilitates the maintenance of personal relations outside of the home¹⁴⁶. Similarly, mothers and daughters use public places, such as shopping malls, as locations for their shared time¹⁴⁷. In another example, a successful musical *Kristine från Duvemåla* was used as a medium to reinforce social interactions¹⁴⁸. The importance of the social aspect of theatres has also been recognised by venues that offer a drink to audience members following a performance¹⁴⁹. Debenedetti¹⁵⁰ noted similar patterns among consumers of art museums: while some individuals were passionate about the art, others only attended functions to socialise.

From the ritualistic point of view, the concept of the audience is more complex. Rook¹⁵¹, for example, described an audience as a group of people spectating a ritual. The communicative aspect of rituals has also been widely researched¹⁵². Erving Goffman¹⁵³ analysed face-to-face interactions from a ritualistic perspective and revealed their richness and strict order in micro-sociological situations. Many family rituals, for instance, are carried out in the home¹⁵⁴ with an audience consisting of family members. In public places, such as a theatre or a shopping mall, the audience includes family members as well as the other people present in the space. In this way, the membership is strengthened within the group and also communicated to others¹⁵⁵. In consumer studies, this shared and communicative consumption has been identified as important for connecting people and creating group identities, even in consumer tribes¹⁵⁶. Carù and Cova¹⁵⁷ also identified such distinctions among people attending classical music concerts.

Anthropologist Victor Turner¹⁵⁸ defined the concept of *communitas* as a state in which all members of a community are equal, allowing them to share a common experience. He observed that *communitas* is characteristic of people who are experiencing a collective liminality. In an ideal situation, the audience in a theatre could be interpreted as a *communitas*, and thus theatre practice can be used to strengthen the group's cohesion. However, according to one interviewee, it is also possible to over-discuss a theatre experience: "When it's over, I really enjoy going for a drink afterwards and sitting and talking for a while, not about the theatre. Of course you can mention it, but just being together is nice" (Male, 58). Sharing an experience appeared to be the primary motivation for this interviewee: he was less concerned about the play's details and more focused on spending time with friends, particularly during the post-theatre drinks. It is possible that over-analysing a play may even taint the magic of the theatre experience.

146 Gainer 1995; Varpa 2019.

147 Boyd Thomas & Peters 2011; Minahan & Huddleston 2010.

148 Varpa 2019.

149 Obaidalaha et al. 2017.

150 Debenedetti 2003.

151 Rook 1985.

152 Bell 1997; Duncan 1994; Durkheim 2013; Gainer 1995; McCracken 1988, e.g.

153 Goffman 1967.

154 Heinonen 1998; Wallendorf & Arnould 1991

155 DeVault 2000

156 Cova 1997; Cova & Cova 2001; Cova, Kozinets & Shankar 2007.

157 Carù & Cova 2006.

158 Turner 1969; 1974.

CONCLUSIONS

In this article, we have analysed the theatre visit as a ritual and an integrative practice. Utilising two frameworks, we have presented a broader understanding of practices and identified their core elements. For example, while materials form an important part of rituals, their position in practices has divided opinion¹⁵⁹.

Our study has focused on the theories of practice outlined in the works of Warde¹⁶⁰ and Shove et al.¹⁶¹. From the perspective of ritual studies, our theoretical framework is based on the works of Rook¹⁶² and Driver¹⁶³. Although Rook only addressed the elements of rituals and Driver focused on the outcomes, these conceptualisations have aided our comparison of the dynamics of rituals and consumption practices. By analysing the research material using the two frameworks outlined above, we have identified similarities in the structures of practices and rituals; the key elements are illustrated in Figure 1.

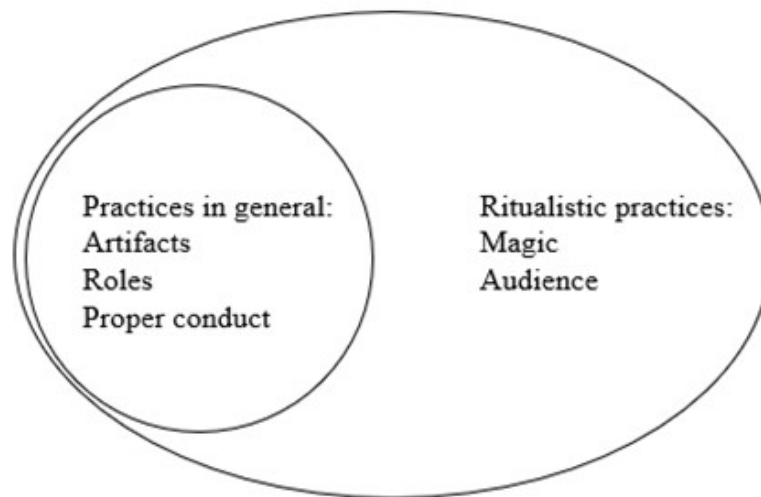


Figure 1. Elements characteristic of ritual practices and shared by practices in general.

Based on our study, the elements shared by both practices and rituals are artifacts, roles, and proper conduct. As stated above, there is no consensus regarding how “things” should be understood as a part of a practice. When discussing consumption, however, the material aspect is unavoidable. According to Warde¹⁶⁴, the material aspect as analysed by Reckwitz¹⁶⁵ is central to the increased interest in practices within consumer studies. In addition, the ritual literature has observed that an artifact’s significance depends on the ritual at hand¹⁶⁶. When artifacts play an important role in a practice or ritual, it is often because the artifact is intrinsically essential. Our analysis, however, also identified the absence of unnecessary artifacts as equally important.

159 Gram-Hanssen 2011.

160 Warde 2005; 2014; 2016; 2017.

161 Shove et al. 2012.

162 Rook 1985.

163 Driver 1991.

164 Warde 2005.

165 Reckwitz 2002.

166 Rook 1985.

Roles have been discussed more frequently in ritual literature than in the theories of practice. According to Driver¹⁶⁷, order in society is one of the ritual “gifts”, and it can be achieved by maintaining roles. In a previous study concerning theatre-going within a family, Varpa¹⁶⁸ observed that mothers often initiated the shared theatre experience even when their children were leading independent lives. This aligns with previous research that has found that mothers frequently lead the cultural socialisation of children¹⁶⁹. From the practice point of view, however, we have interpreted roles as belonging to understandings or competences. This analysis indicates that there is an understanding of the proper division of roles in the practice itself, and that competences, at least to some extent, define this division.

Proper conduct is a concept we created to include the varying terms in both practice and ritual studies. Such terms include teleo-affective structure¹⁷⁰, competences¹⁷¹, and understandings¹⁷². In ritual studies, Rook¹⁷³ employed the concept of a “ritual script”. These conceptualisations all share the same focus: every practice or ritual adheres to a logic, which must be followed in order for it to be understood as a specific practice or ritual.

In addition, we identified elements that are recognised in ritual studies but absent from the theories of practice. Such elements include the magic of a ritual and the audience. A sense of magic¹⁷⁴ is somewhat connected to religion, which has traditionally been an important field in ritual research¹⁷⁵. Another concept related to magic is that of transition¹⁷⁶, which has also been studied in the context of consumption¹⁷⁷. Magic also appears to play an important role in modern societies and economies¹⁷⁸, and further research is required to deepen the understanding of this connection.

The other concept primarily related to rituals is that of the audience. Theories of practice have been clearly differentiated from the communicative “cultural turn”¹⁷⁹. Thus, practice theorists have not focused their attention on the communicative aspects of consumption. Ritual literature, however, has highlighted the importance of communicating one’s group membership¹⁸⁰.

Based on our analysis and conceptual work, we suggest that there is a link between the practice-theoretical and ritualistic traditions within consumer studies. As practice-theoretical interests have primarily been directed towards everyday consumption¹⁸¹ and ritualistic interests towards celebration¹⁸², further comparisons should provide valuable insights into broader consumption. In this article, we have introduced a new perspective on theatre-going practice by applying a framework that incorporates both practice-theoretical and ritualistic elements. Rituals appear to include all of the elements that constitute a practice as analysed by Warde¹⁸³ and Shove et al.¹⁸⁴; therefore, we suggest that a ritual forms a special integrative practice.

167 Driver 1991.

168 Varpa 2019.

169 Courchesne et al. 2021.

170 Schatzki 2002.

171 Shove et al. 2012.

172 Warde 2005.

173 Rook 1985.

174 Rook 1985.

175 Solomon et al. 2012.

176 Driver 1991.

177 Arnould & Price 1993; Goulding & Saren 2016; Rook 1985.

178 Löfgren & Willim 2005; Mauss 1972; Meyer & Pels 2003.

179 Warde 2014.

180 Durkheim 2013; Turner 1969; van Gennep 1960, e.g.

181 Gronow & Warde 2001.

182 Rook 1985.

183 Warde 2005.

184 Shove et al. 2012.

The application of our framework to theatre visits provides insights into the meanings consumers attach to their theatre experiences. These insights are also of interest to theatre institutions. Based on our findings, the social aspects of a theatre visit are a crucial component. Most interviewees attended the theatre with one or more companions, and even when visited alone, the theatre environment is social by nature: the presence of other spectators can contribute to making the experience more powerful¹⁸⁵. Simultaneously, understanding the ritual is critical to the enjoyment of the performance¹⁸⁶. Hence, theatre institutions may benefit from focusing on the inclusion of new audiences by explaining the theatre ritual. A theatre mentioned in the literature further encouraged social interactions by offering a free drink to spectators after the play¹⁸⁷. Theatre personnel could utilise this time to interact with multiple individuals and thus create an anchorage to the play and a welcoming space in the theatre-going ritual.

An additional important aspect is derived from the practice-theoretical understanding of a theatre visit. Connections between practices are always present, such as the link between theatre practice and family practices¹⁸⁸; thus, theatre institutions should examine the relationships between their own activities and other practices. For example, the Swedish theatre could consider how to strengthen their connections with family reunions, but also schools teaching Swedish.

Our research has focused on the theatre visit as a ritual of exchange and communication. However, other ritualistic points of view could also be applied to extend the analysis. For example, the theatre visit could be understood as a ritual of affliction, in which the spectator uses the experience to manage emotional challenges in their personal life. These other ritual categories could, in future research, deepen the understanding of rituals as practices.

The practice-theoretical literature could also benefit from a more detailed discussion of what constitutes a practice. In this article, we have analysed consumption rituals as practices, while other studies have discussed routines¹⁸⁹. There is potential to broaden the understanding of consumption rituals by focusing on the outcomes of a wider range of practices and routines.

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185 Boerner & Jobst 2013.

186 Carù & Cova 2006.

187 Obaidalahe et al. 2017.

188 Varpa 2019.

189 Ehn & Löfgren 2009; 2010; Gronow & Warde 2001; Heinonen 2012.

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