

# Emergent Objects, Developing Practices: Human-Nonhuman Interactions in a Reiki Training

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*Over the last three decades, sociologists have expanded the scope of sociological analysis to include nonhuman objects. We build on these works to address the role of nonhuman, nonphysical objects in social interaction. Through participant observation at a Reiki training course, we examine how students learned to identify, experience, and meaningfully interact with Reiki energy, a nonhuman, nonphysical object. We show how Reiki energy emerged as a significant interactant through the following processes: participants in the class historicized Reiki; they defined the capacities and consequences of Reiki; and they learned to detect Reiki energy's apparent presence in their bodies. We then show how Reiki energy resisted the initial definitions and expectations of it, leading participants to redefine the energy's qualities and develop new practices to accommodate its emerging capacities. These findings support theoretical claims about humans' ability to "do mind" for nonhuman objects and the temporally emergent qualities of material agency. Keywords: interaction, human-object interaction, material agency, health, body/embodiment*

*Species of all kinds, living and not, are consequent on the subject-  
and object-shaping dance of encounters.*  
—Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (2008)

Over the past three decades, sociological studies of interaction have drawn attention to human- nonhuman interactions (Cerulo 2009). Sociology's turn toward "things" (Komter 2001), "objects" (Cohen 1989), and "actants" (Latour 2005) has brought

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technologies, laboratory objects, animals, everyday objects, and bodies into the purview of sociological analysis; it has also occurred despite long-standing traditions, particularly Weberian and Parsonian ones, that deny that nonhumans participate in social life. The present article builds on these advances to investigate the role of nonhuman, *nonphysical* actors in social interaction.

Although rarely observed in sociological research, nonhuman, nonphysical actors may be powerfully experienced and can figure prominently and meaningfully in human interaction. This article provides an empirical case study to support the inclusion of nonhuman, nonphysical actors in the broad category of objects that warrant sociological inquiry. To address this category of actors, the article presents findings from ethnographic research that the first author conducted at a Reiki training course. Reiki is both a complementary and alternative healing practice and a healing energy (an object) channeled during the Reiki practice. We focus on the construction or discovery of Reiki energy in the classroom by analyzing how the students in the class learned to practice Reiki. This focus provides a window on the transformation of Reiki energy from an unfamiliar entity to an independent and powerful energy that participants experienced as both healing and transmitting illnesses. We further demonstrate that Reiki energy was not simply animated by participants in the training but, in fact, animated those participants in expected and unexpected ways. We show that encounters with Reiki energy rebounded on the practice of Reiki and led participants to rework their practices to accommodate the energy's emerging qualities. We show, in other words, that the training participants' practice of Reiki and the Reiki energy that revealed itself to participants were mutually constitutive. In this way, Reiki energy figured as a meaningful participant in social interaction. By approaching Reiki as an object, albeit an emergent one, rather than as belief, we illuminate the rich interactions between people and a nonhuman, nonphysical object.

We open our discussion by outlining the gradual exclusion and then reinclusion of objects in sociological theory. We focus on the contributions of symbolic interaction, including the work of Blumer (1969) and Goffman (1990) and the more recent contributions of Cohen (1989) and Owens (2007), to the recent sociological turn to nonhumans. Specifically, we focus on Owens's theorizing on how people "do mind" for objects. Our study aims to contribute to the sociological study of objects by bringing the symbolic interactionist concept of "doing mind" to the study of nonphysical objects, taking into account the *type* of mind attributed to objects and the subsequent divergent outcomes, and drawing on symbolic interactionist and science studies literature to theorize the interactive processes by which objects can animate humans and significantly reorganize human practices. We then turn to the empirical data, which is divided into four sections. In the first section, we discuss how the historicization of Reiki energy provided students with evidence of its effects, reasons to engage with it, and information that helped students identify it. We then discuss "attunement," a ritual that enabled students to engage with the energy. Next we present the embodied practices and rhetorical strategies by which the students learned to identify Reiki energy. In the final section, we show how Reiki

energy refused to act according to the intentions of the class. This refusal evidences that Reiki energy had become able to act on and interact with students in the training. This article provides both a theoretical and empirical argument for including nonhuman nonphysical entities in sociological analysis, not only as objects of belief but also as potential actors.

### THE SOCIOLOGICAL LIFE OF OBJECTS

Although the systematic inclusion of objects in sociological analysis is a recent development, it has roots in classical sociological theory. Indeed, this development is partly a recovery of vectors of analysis in the work of Karl Marx and Émile Durkheim and a rejection of the anthropocentric tendencies found in the work of Max Weber and Talcott Parsons.

Of these theorists, Marx was the most committed to including material conditions in the study of society. For Marx, material conditions determined human consciousness; a study of them, then, was necessary to adequately comprehend human life.

The premises from which we begin are not arbitrary ones, not dogmas, but real premises from which abstraction can only be made in the imagination. They are the real individuals, their activity and *the material conditions under which they live*, both those which they find already existing and those produced by their activity. (Marx and Engels 1970:42; emphasis ours)

Marx positioned the study of material conditions as central to understanding the social world. Marx further contributed to the sociological study of objects by systematically theorizing the “fetishism of commodity” as the process by which objects become imbued with properties that are experienced as independent of human creation (Marx 1986:63–65). Although Marx theorized fetishism as an avoidable and undesirable condition of capitalist production, his observations have inspired theories of consumption that uncover other possible forms of interaction between humans and consumer goods (Bennett 2001; Lash and Lury 2007).

Durkheim’s “religious sociology” (cf. Alexander 1988) differs in important ways from Marx’s historical materialism; however, Durkheim’s study of totems, in both their physical and abstracted forms, is suggestive of Marx’s analysis of fetishes, insofar as both highlight the projection of social meaning onto material things. For Durkheim, totemism is but one (“primitive”) way to imbue objects with “collective feeling” and meaning; he writes that “a collective feeling can become self-conscious only by being *anchored in a material object*. But by that very fact it participates in the nature of that object, and vice versa” (Durkheim 2008:180; emphasis ours). In this way, Durkheim brings to bear the centrality of objects in the development of social life and the necessary sociality of objects.

Marx and Durkheim both saw nonhuman things as constitutive of human social life. Why, then, did sociological inquiry purge society of nonhumans? Any answer to this question is a retrospective rendering of the past made to account for the contingencies of the present. Still, it remains useful to clarify how nonhumans were placed

outside the sociological imagination, if only to better understand what is gained when they are returned to it.

Weber's definition of action is one oft-cited source of sociology's anthropocentrism (Cerulo 2009). In defining action, Weber (1978:22) asserted that for action to be social it must be purposeful: "Not every kind of action, even overt action, is 'social.' . . . Overt action is non-social if it is oriented solely to the behavior of inanimate objects. Subjective attitudes constitute social action only so far as they are oriented to the behaviors of others." Action is relevant to sociological inquiry, then, only when it is purposefully oriented to another purposeful being, namely, humans. The material world, which according to Weber is not purposeful, figures neither in social action nor in sociological analysis (Cerulo 2009).

The influence of Parsons is another source of sociology's bias away from non-humans (Cohen 1989). Parsons clearly delineates social from nonsocial entities: "A situation provides two major classes of objects to which the actor who is the point of reference may be oriented. There are either (1) nonsocial, that is, physical objects or accumulated cultural resources, or (2) social objects, that is, individual actors and collectivities" (Parsons and Schils [1951] 2001:5). In developing his theory of action, Parsons argues that only humans have the socially necessary capacities for internalization and to be internalized, and, as such, only humans should be considered in sociological study (Cohen 1989:194; see also Cerulo 2009). Like Weber's social theory of action, Parsons's includes well-defined categories that distinguish the social from the nonsocial; like Weber's categorizations, Parsons's associates people with the former and nonhumans with the latter; and, like Weber's, Parsons's sociological theory provides an analytic justification for systematically excluding nonhumans from sociological study.

### Nonhumans in Early Symbolic Interactionism

Recently, important theorizing on human-nonhuman interactions has come from sociologists working in the tradition of symbolic interaction (see Cohen 1989, Merrill 2010, Owens 2007, and Weigert 2008). These works uncover subjugated lines of inquiry about nonhuman interactions in the foundational works of symbolic interaction.

Mead's work on "the self as an object" provides a departure point for this line of inquiry. In developing his social theory of selfhood, Mead (1938:428) describes the self as an object that is "dependent upon the presence of other objects with which the individual can identify himself." For Mead, the human self depends on the existence of other "objects" for its own social existence and, moreover, the self develops in relations of interactions with such objects. This definition of selfhood opens the theoretical space for objects of varying types to figure in the sociological study of self and identity.

In articulating the project of symbolic interaction, Blumer (1969) develops three categories of objects: physical objects (this paper and ink), social objects (the author

and reader), and abstract objects (symbolic interactionism). He further clarifies the interactionist approach to objects by theorizing that “the nature of an object—of any and every object—consists of the meaning it has for the person for whom it is an object” (Blumer 1969:11). Howard Becker’s (1953) study of marijuana users is perhaps the clearest illustration of Blumer’s thesis, as Becker showed that the properties of the drug and, thus, the experience of using it emerged through social interactions between novice and experienced users.

Finally, Goffman’s work on the presentation of self foreshadows several important analytic uses that sociologists would later find for objects. In his work, Goffman approaches objects in two ways: as props and as (partial) barriers to perception. In both ways, objects figure prominently in people’s public performances of self. As props, objects “prop up” a person’s or group’s performance and are also used in public displays of self (Goffman 1990; see also Holstein and Gubrium 1999; Ramirez 2006; Silver 1996). In this rendering, props (objects) play a vital role in social action; however, they are often portrayed as being managed, controlled, or handled exclusively by the human actors who perform with them (see also Cerulo 2009:532). A second way that objects appear in Goffman’s (1990: 106) work is as barriers to perception that constitute the performative stage on which people make selves: “Thick glass panels, such as are found in broadcasting control rooms, can isolate a region aurally but not visually, while an office bounded by beaver-board partitions is closed off in the opposite way.”

These observations have driven recent work in symbolic interaction on the public display and performance of embodied existence (Cahill 1985) and foreshadow elements of Bruno Latour’s work (2005, 1996) on objects’ ability to establish the “local” boundaries of social settings (see also Lynch 1996).

The legacy of early symbolic interactionist theorizing on nonhumans is ambiguous. It is clear that objects figure prominently in Blumer’s and Goffman’s theories of social life. In a particularly important move, Blumer’s categorizations of objects expand what counts as an object for sociological inquiry beyond the human self (as object) and beyond material objects. Still, Blumer pacified objects, subordinating them to human perception and actors; this position, in turn, obscures how it is that objects act on humans. In this regard, Goffman’s approach to objects as props is particularly suggestive. Goffman articulates a view of social interaction in which it is slippery and riddled with unintended consequences. People, as deft as they are at performing, cannot master it. As Goffman conceives them, objects appear to be under the conscious control of human actors; however, it is not unreasonable to imagine props, in interaction, performing in unanticipated ways. In other words, there is potential for objects to act contrary to the intentions of human actors. It is this aspect of human-nonhuman interaction that recent theorizing on objects has retrieved.

### The Active Object

Over the last two decades, sociologists have begun theorizing and empirically studying objects as active participants in social action and reality. Symbolic interactionists

have made important contributions to the introduction of active objects to sociology. Cohen (1989), by rejecting Parson's position and articulating a symbolic interactionist position on objects, provides an early argument for this. Specifically, Cohen argues that the self can actively mediate the relationship between the human and the object. Essentially, the human object can "do mind" for the nonhuman object, which allows for a meaningful interaction between the two. Owens (2007) has, recently, returned to this argument and has shown convincingly that humans "do mind" for a range of objects by projecting conscious thought onto objects; this, in turn, permits humans to meaningfully interact with those "minded" objects. Owens further offers four conditions under which people are likely to "do mind":

1. the object must be understood as capable of independent action;
2. the object must threaten some human goal;
3. the goal must be "sufficiently" urgent;
4. and the object must be necessary to meet that goal. (P. 567)

Owens's work marks an important step in systematically theorizing the conditions under which humans "do mind" for objects, and recent case studies (Merrill 2010; Weigert 2008) lend weight to Owens's claims that nonhuman objects can participate in social interaction. There are, nonetheless, several limitations in Owens's analytic approach to objects. First, Owens's analysis is largely limited to objects that are visible physical objects (i.e., a hammer or a computer). However, "the world of things which we routinely inhabit has of course always extended far beyond raw tangible matter and 'really existing' realities into the vast realm of the abstract, the invisible, the imaginary, and the virtual" (Pels, Hetherington, and Vandenberghe 2002:3). This position is analogous to that taken by Blumer (1969:10), who defined an object as "anything that can be indicated, anything that can be pointed to or referred to—a cloud, a book, a legislator, a banker, a religious doctrine, a ghost and so forth." Socially significant objects, then, are not limited to physical objects but include "anything that can be indicated" (p. 10). Finally, we find inspiration toward treating Reiki energy—a nonphysical yet still tangible (within the Reiki training) object—as a meaningful participant in social interaction in Latour's (2005:71) definition of an actor as any thing that modifies "a state of affairs by making a difference." This understanding of actors opens sociological inquiry to all *things*—human and nonhuman, physical or not—that participate in action. Indeed, Latour goes so far as to include nonphysical nonhuman *things*, such as the Virgin Mary, in his list of actors (p. 48). The task we set out to accomplish is the theoretical and empirical merging of "doing mind," as articulated by Owens, and the inclusions of nonphysical objects in sociological analysis. In other words, we are interested in exploring how humans "do mind" and have meaningful interactions with nonhuman, nonphysical objects.

Owens also does not distinguish between human-object interactions in which the object is authentically attributed its *own mind* that is understood as a permanent and constitutive feature of it and when an object is given mind but the human actor does not *authentically* give it its own mind. Owens, for instance, uses an example from

carpentry to illustrate how humans “do mind” for objects: “witness the amateur carpenter who, having hit her thumb with a hammer, throws the ‘stupid goddamned hammer!’” (Owens 2007:569). If, however, this hypothetical amateur carpenter perceived the “mind” as an authentic and permanent feature of the hammer—if, in other words, the carpenter perceived the hammer as having willfully attacked her thumb and liable to willfully attacking it again—she would quickly box up the hammer, tape and staple it shut, and run it to the nearest garbage dump. But, of course, the hammer is not given authentic mind, and the human actor keeps the hammer nearby, unconcerned about a future attack. Anthropology provides compelling examples of truly “minded” objects. For instance, in his study of the Southeastern Indians of the United States, Hudson (1976:126) documents that

the Cherokees believed that sacred fire, like the Sun, was an old woman. Out of respect, they fed her a portion of each meal; if neglected they thought she might come at night in the guise of an owl or whippoorwill and take vengeance on them. Successful hunters would throw into the fire a piece of meat (usually liver) from any game they killed. One could be stricken by disease as a consequence of urinating into a fire, spitting into it, or throwing into it anything that had saliva on it.

Authentically minded objects seem to exert a unique, if especially powerful, influence over human actors. More generally, people often develop elaborate practices and rituals around nonhuman objects that they perceive as cursed (see Cannon 1957), haunted (see Ong 1988), or polluting (see Douglas 1966). Because the practice of Reiki involves encounters between humans and an object (Reiki energy) perceived to be divinely guided and capable of healing, this study is well suited to explore the dynamics of interactions between agential humans and *agential* nonhumans.

This study extends the interactionist concern for nonhumans in a third way. Studies of human-nonhuman interactions within the sociology of science suggest that the capacities of nonhumans emerge over time and, in some cases, in resistance to people’s preferred understanding of those nonhumans. Callon’s (1986) and Latour’s (1987) term “trial of strength” is particularly illustrative of this process. Callon and Latour hold that humans speak on behalf of nonhumans and that people, further, attempt to enroll nonhumans in human projects. The spokesperson attempts to define the identity of nonhumans. During “trials of strength” between the nonhuman, its spokespersons, and others (human or otherwise), the nonhuman may cooperate or betray the role assigned to it by its spokesperson. These cooperative or resistive encounters may result in the spokesperson redefining the identity and role that he or she attributed to the nonhuman actor and others in their network, or may result in the disintegration of the spokesperson’s project. Pickering’s (1999) notion of “the mangle of practice” is similarly suggestive. Pickering argues that sociologists “can take material agency as seriously as traditional sociology has taken human agency, but we can also note that the former is *temporally emergent* in practice. The contours of material agency are never decisively known in advance” (p. 374). Pickering develops a dialectic process of “resistance and accommodation” through which humans,

their symbolic categories, and their practices encounter material agencies (p. 377). Put in Owens's terms, we would say that humans may "do mind" for objects, but the capacities of that mind are the outcome of ongoing negotiations between humans and nonhumans. By approaching the interaction between Reiki users and Reiki energy in this way, this study illuminates the ongoing processes by which the former attempt to incorporate the emerging qualities of the latter into a healing practice.

## BACKGROUND

There is no agreed-on historical documentation of the origins of Reiki. Thus, in this discussion of Reiki's historical emergence and its rapid global expansion, we draw from a diverse collection of documents, including those collected by the first author at the training (Graham 1975; including documents constructed by the training instructor without citations), scholarly publications (Melton 2001; Miles and True 2003; Whelan and Wishnia 2003), and international and U.S. Reiki Web sites and publications (Backos 2004; Herron 2005; Lubeck et al. 2001; Ray 1983; Rand 1991, 2008).

Reiki means "universal life energy," and it is described as exactly that: a vibrational energy that is eternal and omnipresent (Ray 1983). Despite the obscurity surrounding its history, there are several people and events that figure prominently in competing accounts of its origin. Most accounts of the practice credit Dr. Mikao Usui, a Japanese man born in the mid-1800s, with "discovering" the energy in the early 1900s. Usui passed the tradition to Chujiro Hayashi in the 1920s. During this decade, the practice was contained within Japan and taught only to Japanese people. In 1935, however, Hawayo Takata, a Japanese American woman, traveled to Japan, met Hayashi, and convinced him to instruct her in Reiki. After becoming a Reiki master in 1937, Takata returned to Hawai'i, where she taught the practice. In 1970 Takata traveled to the mainland United States where she made the decision to train Reiki masters. To instill the seriousness of the training in her American students, Takata charged \$10,000 for the master training; before her death in 1980, she had trained approximately twenty masters and one thousand practitioners. In 1998 William Rand began training masters for \$600, reasoning that the original fee inhibited the expansion of Reiki. Rand's decision appears to have the intended effect: the year prior to Rand's decision to lower the cost of training there were about eight hundred masters and sixty thousand healers worldwide (Melton 2001); currently, Reiki Web sites boast that there are five hundred thousand Reiki masters with as many as three million healers worldwide (Singhal 2009; Rand 2009). Notably, the development and expansion of Reiki has mirrored the overall development of alternative medicines, which have experienced significant and sustained expansion since the 1980s (Barnes, Bloom, and Nahin 2007; Kessler et al. 2001; Tindle et al. 2005).

Reiki's emergence was predominantly accomplished through individual training—as opposed to institutional implementation—and within lifestyle enclaves (Bellah et al. 1985). One reason for this narrow use of the practice is that Reiki and

other alternative healing practices that use energy fields are not widely accepted within scientific communities, as their energies “have defied measurement to date by reproducible methods” (NCCAM 2007:2). Despite the equivocal research, medical practitioners have responded to consumer demand for the practice by integrating Reiki into treatment plans (Alandydy and Alandydy 1999; Whelan and Wishnia 2003). Importantly, in this study, we bracket the “putative” status, within scientific communities, of Reiki energy. Indeed, we are concerned with the processes by which members achieve a reality of Reiki energy and the consequences of that achieved reality, rather than the “objective” reality of the energy. In this regard, our stance toward Reiki energy is analogous to Berger and Luckmann’s (1967:1) toward reality; we concern ourselves with analyzing how Reiki energy becomes, within the training, recognized “as having a being independent of [participants’] volition.”

### SETTING AND METHOD

In 2007 the first author began qualitative research in healing communities in Elderville, a small New England city.<sup>1</sup> The researcher became acquainted with the Reiki community in Elderville while teaching yoga classes at a studio that donated space to a Reiki circle. Her familiarity with yoga, which is often categorized as an alternative medicine, as well as with the yoga community, which overlaps with the Reiki community, afforded her a certain amount of insider status among participants at the field site.

In many respects, Elderville is unique in its integration of complementary and alternative medicine. Among New Age spiritualists, the city is known for its spiritual properties. Indeed, on three separate occasions, the first author was told that Elderville was built on a spiritual vortex, which draws the spiritually minded together. The city is also known for its concentration of Reiki practitioners. There are, for instance, six well-established Reiki healing circles in the area. While Reiki circles are generally held free of charge and help develop the Reiki community, Reiki practitioners are also employed in two regional hospitals. Integration into the hospital creates an economic niche for Reiki practitioners in the area and serves as a significant source of legitimacy. Although the geographic and substantive specificity of the site allows little in the way of generalizability, this study provides insights into the processes involved in learning healing practices. Further, focusing on one case allows for in-depth, detailed, and focused observation and analysis (see also Pollner and McDonald-Wikler 1985). Future research should address variations by addressing multiple sites.

Data collection included seven weeks of observational work at Reiki I and II training courses, a healing exposition, and one local Reiki healing circle, as well as four informal ethnographic interviews and one semistructured interview with a leader in the Reiki community. While data from the interviews, Reiki circle, and the exposition helped contextualize the nature and depth of Reiki practices in the region, this article draws from the data collected at the training courses, which were offered by a local community education program. The trainings appealed to students who needed healing, had loved ones they wanted to heal, and were interested in

starting their own Reiki practice (or business). Through this training, the first author became certified as a practitioner in the healing technique of Reiki. The first four weeks were training for Reiki I certification, which focused on attunement to the Reiki energy, self-healing, and healing a client. The final three weeks were for Reiki II certification, which introduced students to the symbols of Reiki and distance healing. Completion of these classes qualified practitioners to provide Reiki healing in hospitals and at Reiki healing circles.

The training courses were an ideal setting for participant observation, field conversations, and document collection. Julia, the Reiki master conducting the training, has over a decade of experience teaching and practicing Reiki. Also, unlike Reiki healing circles, which involve (mostly silent) healing sessions, the training courses provided students with both informally structured lectures on Reiki healing and time to share their experiences of the practice. Typically, a class began with a “check-in,” during which the students recounted experiences from the previous week, including those related to the practice of Reiki, as well as more general personal experiences. The check-in was usually followed by an hour to an hour and a half of Reiki sessions, during which students gave and received Reiki. Finally, classes typically ended with a discussion of experiences in the Reiki session. Classes also afforded time for informal conversations between students, discussion of class readings on the topic of Reiki, in-class debates on a variety of topics, and lessons on bodily positions and practices involved in Reiki.

The field researcher had explicit permission from the instructor and the class to take notes throughout the trainings. At the same time, she participated fully in the courses, answering questions based on class readings, asking questions of the group, giving and receiving Reiki, and completing the certification requirements, such as take-home assignments on Reiki. Although the researcher’s note taking was overwhelmingly accepted by the group, it still served as a social force in the class; students often told the researcher to be sure that she “got that down” when they thought their comment was particularly funny or insightful. Note-taking and observations were in no way invisible or neutral but appeared to engage the students and invite another level of reflexivity in the discussion. The researcher transcribed the field notes with speech recognition software directly after each class and coded those data with the aid of NVivo8. The researcher coded for emerging themes while also drawing on relevant literature to develop a structured and systematic coding scheme.

Sociological research, particularly qualitative research, is especially well equipped to explore complementary and alternative medicine. Sociological inquiry has historically dealt with measuring nonphysical phenomenon (Levin et al. 1997); qualitative inquiry can capture the liminal effects that might be missed by more linear approaches; and qualitative methodology, in its capacity to capture emergent experience, fits the holistic paradigm of alternative health treatments (Adler 1999). Studying alongside practitioners who were learning to practice Reiki and had little experience with or knowledge of Reiki allowed us to examine the transformation of Reiki energy from a vague notion to a powerful actor in the classroom.

## AN EMERGING OBJECT, A DEVELOPING PRACTICE

In this section, we focus on the interactive process by which Julia, the charismatic and often controversial Reiki master leading the training, and the students enrolled in the training learn to perceive Reiki energy and its effects. We present the process in four steps. Although in practice the “steps” are overlapping, they are suggestive of the trajectory of Reiki as an emerging nonhuman object and as an interactant in the training. These steps include (1) the historicization of Reiki energy, (2) students’ “attunement” to Reiki energy, (3) the establishment of the apparent presence of Reiki energy, and (4) Reiki energy’s resistances toward its defined role in the training.

### Historicizing Reiki

From the first day of the training, Julia gave Reiki a historical past. The construction of Reiki’s history was achieved in two ways: Julia provided documents on the historical development and general properties of Reiki energy, and she discussed her own lived experiences with Reiki energy. These documents and discussions presented Reiki energy as an object that predated the encounters students would have with it during the training. Indeed, Julia explicitly claimed that Reiki energy predated its discovery by humans, noting that “Reiki is energy and energy has been here forever.” This claim, which depicted Reiki “as existing prior to any method for detecting it and every way of talking about it” (Garfinkel, Lynch, and Livingston 1981:138), figured prominently in the historicization of Reiki. Beyond establishing Reiki energy as a “real” entity, Julia’s discussions of the history of Reiki also (1) defined Reiki energy’s qualities, (2) portrayed it as having positive, healing effects, and (3) provided indicators of the energy’s presence in people’s lives.

On the first day of training, students received a thick packet of papers outlining the history, basic properties, and healing potentials of Reiki energy. In the packet, there were two accounts of the discovery of Reiki by Usui, both of which portrayed Reiki energy as having immediate and powerful consequences. In the narrative of discovery, Reiki energy’s healing power is evidenced by, as the handout calls them, “the miracles” performed by Usui. For instance, after emerging from meditation, Usui met a young girl with a bandage wrapped around her head and a swollen cheek; the girl complained to Usui of a toothache that had been bothering her for several days. Usui “put his hand on her swollen cheek” and, after only a moment, she exclaimed, “my dear monk, you have made magic! The toothache is gone!”

The documents in the packet also described Reiki energy’s nature, giving it substance and form, and provided students with reasons, intended to be compelling, to engage with Reiki energy. For instance, one document described Reiki energy as

Universal Life Energy, as long as something is living it has life energy all around it and circling in it. When you die this life energy departs. If your life energy is low or there is a restriction in the flow of energy (like a kink in a hose) you are

more susceptible to illness. While life energy is high and free flowing you are less likely to get sick.

This description helps the student imagine the flowing liquid substance of Reiki energy while also providing students with an account in which the energy figures as a necessary element to human health. Likewise, Julia, in a flier advertising her services, wrote that “any imbalance, pain, trauma, or circumstance you can think of can benefit from the healing powers of Reiki.” She also provided students with a chart that indicated a different area of the body in each row and had three columns specifying categories of healing, including organs, emotional disorders, and physical dysfunctions. Each cell in the chart indicated the specific ailments that could be addressed at that cross-section. For instance, at the intersection of the row titled “throat” and the column titled “physical dysfunction,” the cell listed the physical ailments best addressed by Reiki with the healer’s hand at the throat: “Raspy throat; Chronic sore throat; Mouth ulcers; Gum difficulties; TMJ; Scoliosis; Laryngitis; Swollen Glands; Thyroid problems.” The chart included thirty cells and each included lists of disorders that Reiki energy could ameliorate.

Early in the training, Julia also testified to the effects of Reiki energy. These testimonials were meant to convince students of the efficacy of the energy. At the same time, they suggest some of the characteristics and indicators of Reiki energy. For instance,

Julia shared a story in which her friend gave her Reiki. Julia described herself lying on a massage table, when, “all of the sudden,” she could smell Eucalyptus. She asked her friend if she had lit incense or opened an oil, and her friend said “no.” She then described feeling extreme cold on the spot on her knee where she had pain. Julia shouted to the class, “I was channeled BenGay!” She enthusiastically asked, “if we can channel Eucalyptus, why would we ever need to buy oil?”

This story illustrates, again, the potential of Reiki energy to heal and also points to the tangibility of Reiki energy. As Owens (2007:567) notes, for humans to continue to meaningfully interact with objects, the object must meet a need of a human actor. Many of the students in the training enrolled in it to receive (or be able to give) some form of physical or emotional healing that they were unable to find elsewhere (cf. Kotarba 1983 and Lowenberg 1989). Reiki energy, as initially presented in the training, provided for that need. These stories, in written and oral form, provided the energy a thick history while providing students in the class a reason to engage with Reiki energy, evidence that it will work, and a basic idea of how to identify the energy. In this way, Julia constructed Reiki’s “out there-ness,” its objective reality independent of people’s control; the next task was to enable students to encounter and identify Reiki energy.

### Encountering Reiki

For the students to be able to perceive and produce effects during Reiki healing sessions, they must first go through an “attunement,” in which a Reiki master gives them “the ability to easily access the Reiki (Universal Life Force) energy” (Herron

2005). During the Reiki training, attunement consisted of a lengthy, silent period, during which Julia passed from student to student and, through a series of bodily movements, attuned them.

We all sat in our chairs with our eyes closed and our hands on our knees. Julia asked us to be very still and quiet, to begin a simple meditation, and to focus our minds. Each individual attunement took several minutes, and Julia did one attunement at a time. She began in the front and slowly made her way around the room. Julia began the attunement by blowing onto the top of our heads. She then tapped our shoulders twice, indicating that we should lift our hands above our heads with palms touching. Once we lifted our hands, Julia opened them, blew into our palms, and then placed our palms at the center of our chests. She opened our hands up as if they were plates and placed “Reiki objects” in them by pressing the tips of her fingers into our palms. After closing our hands and returning them to our chest, Julia went around to the back of our chairs and placed her hands on our shoulders and blew again on the tops of our heads. Finally, she went to the front of the chair, knelt down, and blew onto our feet. The attunement took approximately forty-five minutes, during which everyone sat fairly still.

Once the class was attuned to the Reiki energy, little time was spent learning to *do* Reiki (as a healing practice). Julia required students to practice Reiki on themselves and family members, and she provided packets of information that described where to place one’s hands during Reiki; beyond this, she downplayed the healer’s role in *actively producing* discernible effects while practicing Reiki.

Importantly, the passivity of the healer (the “Reiki user”) depended on the ability of Reiki energy to act independently of humans. In other words, the lack of action and initiative required by the healer highlights the activity and agency of the energy. Reiki, Julia told the class, is divinely guided, and students need only “set an intention and Reiki does the work.” Julia further described the Reiki healer as “a channel” who creates “a safe space for the healee.” Healers may, in Julia’s descriptions of them, chant symbols and direct them to a particular affliction; still, even when the affliction is unknown to a healer, Reiki energy can effectively heal. Julia used the example of an ovarian tumor to illustrate this, saying that “even if you place your hands on the head, the energy flows through and knows to go to the tumor first. You can’t screw this up guys!” In other words, the Reiki practitioner needs to do no more than be attuned, be present at the treatment, and let Reiki energy do the work. Notably, Reiki, the object, is constructed as more active and more agential than the human in the healing interaction.

This relative inattentiveness to the practice of Reiki—that is, to *doing* Reiki—appears to be a product of beliefs about the energy itself. Reiki energy, as portrayed by Julia, can heal without a human’s active assistance. In other words, Reiki is constructed as possessing a “mind” that allows it to be an active and interactive actor. Indeed, most healing practices that posit a universal energy also tend to view the healer as a channel who requires few technical skills and, typically, no mastery of healing instruments to heal (McGuire 1988). The healer then may be portrayed passively. Further, even when the healer is portrayed as agential, he or she only acts by focusing energy,

which remains responsible for the bulk of the healing work. McGuire (1988:115), for instance, cites one energy healer as describing herself as “an instrument of universal energy.” The striking similarities between Julia’s descriptions of how the Reiki healer heals and the model of the energy healing documented in McGuire’s research suggest that the former may be representative of energy healing practices elsewhere. Reiki energy, in these healing interactions, is posed as the primary and active agent in the interaction between humans and the energy. Once the students are attuned, Reiki is able to manifest in the classroom, and the students anticipate encounters with an active entity. Within one class, the groundwork for the nonphysical object, Reiki, had been set: the entity is identifiable, desirable, and, now, technically possible to access.

### The Apparent Presence of Reiki

In their study of the discovery of an optical pulsar, Garfinkel et al. (1981:137) observe that scientists use an “apparent pulse” to identify the “real pulse”: “the real pulse is the presence of the pulse to be derived from the characteristics of the apparent pulse.” These terms “real” and “apparent” serve this study of Reiki well. Julia continually asked students to identify apparent Reiki energy by noticing sensations in the body and mind; she, in turn, helped students interpret these as evidence of the real Reiki. Garfinkel, Lynch, and Livingston aptly describe this process as the “intertwining of worldly objects and embodied practices” (p. 137). Reiki (a worldly object) is manifest and recognized through embodied practices.

While Julia took for granted the reality and nature of Reiki energy, her relative inattention to the production of effects did not foreclose students’ concerns about the energy. Although students did not allude to the “putative” existence of Reiki energy, they consistently raised questions about the energy. Specifically, students wished to know how to identify the effects of the energy, so as to discern between sensations caused by Reiki and imagined or incidental feelings. For instance, on the first day of the Reiki I training, a student asked, “Can you feel Reiki when you are giving it?” Julia replied that “you can have different sensations when you give yourself Reiki than when you give someone else Reiki. The healer and healee might feel the Reiki differently. And sometimes you won’t feel it at all. Sometimes you will. But either way, it is still healing.” One student in the training visibly winced at Julia’s explanation and appeared unconvinced by Julia’s claim that one might not feel Reiki energy, even as it works. Julia continued by affirming that the practice works and then listing various feelings Reiki produces in the body: “heat, like a stove, not just warm, water, like waterfalls through your hand, magnetic force.” On several other occasions, Julia referenced the sensations, healing or otherwise, that students will likely feel during or after Reiki sessions.

Having prepped students about the range of sensations that they could expect to experience, Julia attempted to address students’ concerns about identifying Reiki energy by having them pay attention to their bodies when giving or receiving Reiki and, following their practice, asking them to describe the feelings and sensations

(“apparent” Reiki energy) that resulted from it. This, in effect, brought history-making “testimony” into the present. Not only could students draw on Julia’s stories—the stories in the packet and their own experiences to assist in the discovery of Reiki—they could now actively draw on the experiences of their classmates.

The resulting conversations generated a back-and-forth, during which students would describe a sensation and Julia would interpret it as, in some way, referring back to Reiki energy. For instance, on the first day of class, one student noted that she felt that she had “objects” in her hand. Julia reinterpreted these as “Reiki objects” that are “real things.” The student contested this reinterpretation, repeating that the sensation was “physical” and not just energy. It took several exchanges between the two for the student to acquiesce that it was possible that the “real” and “physical” objects she felt in her hand were, in fact, *Reiki* objects composed of energy. Julia and the class did the difficult work of tethering apparent Reiki, in this case sensation in the hands, to the real Reiki. In another class,

One of the women at the front of the room said that her fingers have been feeling “funny.” Julia quickly asked her if it feels like electricity. The woman said “kind of.” Julia in several different ways asks her if the feeling was electric, until the woman started to agree. After the woman agreed that it did feel like electricity, Julia said that she had seen sparks coming out of the woman’s fingertips.

Julia not only tethered this “funny” feeling in the woman’s fingers to Reiki energy, she also provided evidence of Reiki energy. She knew, by describing the sensation as electric, the woman’s experience before the woman could even articulate it. Of course, one might call this “putting words in her mouth” (Pollner and McDonald-Wilker 1985), but the student appeared to authentically accept this interpretation.

During the training, students expected more from Reiki than its effects be objectively identifiable; students expected to consistently witness the positive healing outcomes of the practice. As Becker (1953) noted about the sensations associated with marijuana use, the positive effects of Reiki were not self-evident and had to be learned. As students presented sensations as *caused by Reiki energy*, Julia often tethered this interpretation to the claim that the student needed that sensation and that it was healing some ill. This was easily accomplished when the sensation was a desired one. Julia’s response to Ronald, the only male student in the training, is illustrative. Ronald said that he

felt “super-charged” after a healing session, as he often did after Reiki. For months, Ronald had been napping in the afternoons with his wife, who has terminal cancer. After these Reiki sessions, with this “super-charged” sensation, he didn’t feel the need to rest in the afternoon anymore. He said that he “couldn’t have rested, even if [he had] wanted to.”

While Ronald noted a vague association—the consistency of his practice of Reiki and the feeling of being “super-charged”—Julia reframed it as a more specific one: she responded that Reiki was actively providing students “with what [they] need” and “if we were normally lethargic and listless Reiki would give us energy. If we normally were restless or excitable or anxious Reiki would give us peace and calm.”

During the trainings, Julia frequently described Reiki in these terms and she also suggested, in keeping with her definition of Reiki as a “minded,” active, and agential energy, that the energy would provide for students even if they were unaware of their actual physical or mental ailments and needs.

The initial reluctance to immediately accept the interpretation of sensations within the terms of Reiki eventually gave way to student-initiated interpretations of inner feelings and subjective states. Students began to assert their expertise in identifying the presence of Reiki energy and its consequences. And, as students’ understanding of what constituted Reiki energy solidified and stabilized, Julia began to lose her status as the final arbiter of the energy. For example, after a Reiki session,

Julia asked if we had any questions. [The first author] asked why there was a sensation of heat when [her] hands were slightly lifted off the healee’s body and a colder sensation when [she] was making full contact. Julia said that she did not think this was significant or related to Reiki energy. Sandy quickly protested saying that she has had the same experience and that it certainly felt like Reiki energy. Julia rescinded her comment and asserted that everyone is different and we all experience energy in unique ways, acknowledging that this could be Reiki energy.

This example suggests that Reiki energy was no longer exclusively mediated by Julia; the class increasingly had authority over the identification and definition of Reiki energy. Moreover, Reiki energy was developing a reality independent of any one person and was becoming an autonomous object that resisted questioning. Owens (2007:563) found that in order for objects to become “actors,” one of the criteria is that they must be perceived as “capable of independent action.” Through the embodied identification of apparent Reiki energy, real Reiki solidified and detached from any human agency. The original endeavor to tether sensations directly to Reiki was quite successful, and Reiki energy gradually emerged as an active, nonphysical object that *caused* sensations in students’ bodies.

### Resistances and Redefinitions

So far, we have described the processes through which Julia defined Reiki, the processes by which students perceived Reiki as manifest in the class, and occasions during which students perceived Reiki energy as acting in ways consistent with Julia’s definition of it. In the terms of the training, we have described situations in which Reiki energy appears to students as an active and healing energy that they need only channel. Like the image by M. C. Escher in which the contours of one object (a fish) reveal the shape of another (a bird), stories, ritual, and embodied experiences provided the negative space into which Reiki energy emerged. Students, however, reported encounters with Reiki energy in which the energy acted in ways inconsistent with Julia’s descriptions of it. Such encounters led Julia to introduce new practices to students that would allow them, as healers, to accommodate Reiki energy’s resistances.

In her discussions of Reiki energy and its effects on people, Julia described an array of sensations that could be easily interpreted as negative or undesirable. She, too, seemed to recognize this, as she took pains to reframe those sensations as part of the process by which Reiki energy heals (cf. Davis-Floyd and St. John 1998). For instance, she told students that they would become dehydrated during Reiki, as the Reiki energy “burns up illness.” Because of this, she advised students to drink a considerable amount of water during the training. This, she argued, effectively “detoxes” the body and eventually leaves them energized and refreshed. After students complained of feeling nauseous after giving Reiki, Julia described this experience as consistent with that of detoxing. Here the uncomfortable sensations of dehydration and nausea were reformulated as proof that students were being healed; this reformulation, however, introduced nausea as an unavoidable consequence of the practice.

Julia also attempted to rework students’ worries about the practice in ways that emphasized the productivity of difficult experiences. For instance,

Before we began giving Reiki, Angie asked, sounding worried, “What happens if we have something like an emotional outburst?” Julia quickly replied, “All the better. You should belch, cry, shake, sweat. Whatever you need to get out.”

In fact, shaking, crying, and sweating happened during the Reiki sessions. Julia reformulated these troubling experiences as healthy processes of “getting it out” or as a part of a healing process.

Students in the training reported a range of undesirable sensations after sessions of Reiki, such as body aches, headaches, nightmares, insomnia, and tremors. Frequently, Julia responded to these by introducing additional practices that students, as healers and healees, could employ to avoid them. For instance,

Sarah said that she has felt unreasonably “tired and exhausted and achy” after classes. Julia, seated on top of a table at the front of the room, warned the class, without looking at Sarah, that we should draw energy from the “source” and we should not be giving our energy away.

After several people had noted that their backs were hurting after Reiki, everything from aching pain to sharp pinching sensations, Julia explained that there could be a build-up of energy in the spinal column. Julia then suggested that students should imagine Reiki as a ball rolling up and down the spine in order to clear out this energy.

A woman at the back of the room said that after the last session she felt dizzy and “light in the head.” She wondered if it [Reiki] was lowering her blood sugar. Julia quickly explained, no, rather she needs to “get grounded” before Reiki. She suggested that she stomp her feet on the ground, and she then had the whole class try “getting grounded” by stomping our feet.

Such recommendations contrast, quite strikingly, with Julia’s earlier injunction that the Reiki healer need only be present during a healing session to channel Reiki energy. The energy, which she had previously said would do the work of healing, does not, in students’ encounters with it, live up to that definition of it. Instead, Reiki

healers must take precautions to ground themselves or not give away their own energy; they must, too, engage in visualizations of Reiki energy to help the energy ameliorate pain in their backs.

Nightmares and insomnia also plagued the class from the start of the training to the end. In the second week of classes,

a nurse [Greta] explained that she had nightmares almost every night during the previous week. In her nightmares, she died and, after she died, she would wake up, fall back asleep, and the nightmares would repeat all night long. Greta replied that she's "not prone to this sort of stuff"; she "never" used to have nightmares. Julia excitedly exclaimed that this was "a symbol of rebirth!" Julia went on to explain that this woman must be dealing with emotional toxins, past lives, or other spiritual issues that Reiki is helping her deal with in her dreams. Later in the class, Julia apologized to Greta for the nightmares.

Greta had *tentatively* linked Reiki to the nightmares. Julia attempted to reformulate this negative connection into a positive one of emotional and spiritual healing. However, in doing so, she *solidified* the connection between Reiki and nightmares. In the next class,

Linda, said that she has started having terrible nightmares. Julia turned to Greta, who had nightmares the week prior, and asked if she was still having them. Greta said that they were fewer and less intense. Julia suggested that, perhaps, since Greta and Linda were partners, they were passing nightmares between each other. Julia laughed. No one else did. The class looked tense. . . . Julia then suggested that we "blend with the Reiki symbol of protection [cho ku rei]" by putting a drawing of the symbol under our pillows before we sleep. She says that this form of "osmosis" really works. "Things will happen!" She said that she had a student who, in purple paint, drew the three Reiki symbols on her mattress pad and that the student's sleep was much more consistent and restful.

As she did with students who reported negative physical consequences of their encounters with Reiki energy, Julia introduced a set of new practices—the use of Reiki symbols before sleep—to improve the results of their practice. The following week, Linda and another student, who had not yet discussed nightmares or her problems with sleep, discussed the results of this practice.

Linda said that she actually put an entire packet of Reiki symbols under her pillow and had slept well and had no nightmares. Another student, who had yet to discuss nightmares with the class, spoke up saying that she put the symbol under her pillow and simply could not sleep.

Greta, too, reported sustained sleep problems following her encounters with Reiki, and, again, Julia responded by introducing another practice to address the issue.

Greta said that she has been having nightmares again. Julia advised her to "grid her room"; she explained that you can invoke a "white light of protection" all around the room. Julia told Greta to do this every evening before sleep. Greta lamented to the class that she almost never had nightmares before she started doing Reiki.

In these exchanges, we witness the gradual development of a Reiki practice from one in which the human participant is relatively passive into one in which the human becomes deeply involved. Indeed, the persistence of Greta's nightmares resulted in Julia suggesting a rather elaborate practice—the “gridding” of her room and the invocation of a “white light of protection”—that Greta should do nightly.

In her initial discussion of Linda's and Greta's problems with sleep, Julia also introduced the idea that students' encounters with Reiki energy could result in students “passing” nightmares to each other. This property of Reiki energy concerned students for the duration of the training. In fact, students actively and vocally worried about the possibility that Reiki could transmit an illness or “bad energy” from a healee to the healer, what Brennan (2004) refers to as the “transmission of affect.” For instance:

During a Reiki session, Andrea started to sweat and felt incredibly thirsty; she was concerned that she was taking on the illness of the student that she was healing. Julia, visibly frustrated, huffed that you will almost never take on someone else's energy. In this case, Julia explained to the spiritual seeker, “when we are healing we are also being healed”; the heat is the energy burning off toxins.

Despite Julia's reformulation of the healer's experience, the fear of “taking on” someone else's illness proliferated throughout the course. One student reported getting a stomachache after giving Reiki to another student with a stomachache, and another student said that she had a difficult time sleeping the evening after giving Reiki to a woman with insomnia. Julia often attempted to reject the idea that you can “take on” the “bad energy” of someone else. But as the class became more concerned about this danger in giving Reiki, Julia acquiesced and provided them a solution through testimony. She told a story of a couple sharing energy and how to prevent this sort of exchange:

Julia explained that the woman had knee problems. The husband did Reiki on his wife, and her knee problems went away. However, the next day, and for several days after, the man could not walk. Julia explained that the man is a very empathetic person who wanted to heal his wife so badly that he “took on her pain.” The class was tense; their faces were serious and their bodies rigid. Julia quickly explained that that this is uncommon and not to worry. To defend against this, Julia recommended that students set a very clear intention that they are healing and do not intend to take on energy. Also, she explained, students can invoke a white or gold.

Reiki's tendency to spread pain and disease became so evident to the class that Julia had to provide an intervention, some way for the students to defend themselves against this consequence of their encounters with the Reiki energy. Part of this solution was consistent with how Julia originally defined the practice of Reiki: one sets an intention and then channels the energy. But the practice becomes something else to accommodate the emerging capacity of Reiki to transmit disease. Julia recommended to all students, as she had to Greta about nightmares, that they invoke a protective light. Through a series of intense human-nonhuman interactions, an increasingly complex, dynamic, and involved healing practice emerged.

## CONCLUSION

The processes described in this study represent those of a microreality contained within the walls of the training; as Pollner and McDonald-Wikler (1985:250) observed, small groups can have their “own little world[s]” in which surprising realities can be maintained (on the maintenance of multiple realities, see also Mehan and Wood 1975:14–15). The maintenance of Reiki energy’s reality in the training course provides insights into the processes by which objects become meaningful participants in human interactions. Specifically, we have shown that the emergence of Reiki energy within the classroom involved several processes. The energy was historicized, given a past suggestive of the ontological independence of the energy as well as its healing property. After the attunement of students to the energy, Reiki energy’s qualities and nonphysical contours were further refined. Julia described Reiki energy as an active, guided healing energy that, in Cohen’s (1989) and Owens’s (2007) terms, possesses a mind independent of humans. Importantly, these descriptions rebound back on the practice of Reiki and the capacities necessary to heal with the energy. Given the energy’s mindedness, the Reiki healer need only channel it; as described by Julia, the energy does the rest and, in some cases, heals despite the healer’s ignorance. This understanding of the healer’s role may be generalizable to other practices that employ a divinely guided or “universal” energy (see McGuire 1988).

These definitions of Reiki energy and the healer’s practices were (quite literally) put to the test in students’ bodies. Julia asked the students to pay attention to the sensations that they felt in their bodies during Reiki sessions; these sensations, then, were the “apparent” Reiki energy indicative of the presence of “real” Reiki (Garfinkel et al. 1981). During guided discussions, Julia taught students to interpret these sensations *as caused* by Reiki energy and as having healing effects (Becker 1953). By this process, students came to perceive Reiki energy as a nonphysical object in the world. The independence of Reiki energy from the subjective “control” of people—that fact, that is, that a “mind” is a constitutive feature of the energy—made Reiki energy a powerful interactant in the Reiki training. Importantly, in their discussions of it, students reported experiencing their encounters with Reiki energy as instigating undesirable and anxiety-inducing sensations and experiences; nightmares, nausea, aches, and transmitted illnesses appeared during the training. These encounters with Reiki energy complicated the role given to it and given to healers. The energy, in these cases, seemed dangerous and incapable of producing positive, bodily effects independent of human interventions. Thus Julia proposed a range of practices that the students-as-healers might employ, implying a level of activity by healers that was largely absent from the initial descriptions of that role.

These findings provide empirical support to the work of Cohen (1988) and Owens (2007), both of whom argue that humans “do mind” for objects, rendering them social interactants. That the object involved in Reiki is a nonphysical one also recalls the importance of Blumer’s (1969:10) original definition of an object as “anything

that can be indicated, anything that can be pointed to or referred to—a cloud, a book, a legislator, a banker, a religious doctrine, a ghost and so forth.” Indeed, humans may “do mind” for a range of nonphysical objects, including scientifically “putative” ones, and engage in meaningful social interaction with them. This has broad implications for the study of human-nonhuman interactions. About 80 percent of Americans believe nonhuman, nonphysical objects, such as god(s), deities, and angels, roam among humans and are capable of interacting with them (Cerulo 2009; Orsi 2005). Treating these entities as mere belief misses the active, unanticipated, and complicated exchanges between humans and nonhumans.

Our findings are also suggestive of the social processes necessary to bring nonhuman, nonphysical objects into social interaction. Reiki energy’s “objectivity” was established by historicizing the energy, giving it a presence, that preceded the students’ encounters with it. Julia also put considerable effort into teaching students to identify the “real” Reiki energy in its “apparent” presence in bodily sensations (cf. Garfinkel et al. 1981). Humans never have unmediated access to reality; indeed, humans have access to the visible world only by transforming it through representational practices, including mundane ones such as banging on tables or kicking rocks (Edwards, Ashmore, and Potter 1995). Still, we suspect that the work by which objects such as Reiki energy, which are not immediately available to human senses, become social interactants is more involved than the sorts of objects discussed by Owens (2007), such as hammers and computers, whose objective reality is more frequently taken for granted by humans.

Finally, we have argued that it is necessary to treat the capacities and capabilities of nonhuman actors as emerging over time, through practices, and in ways that may resist initial understandings of them. As opposed to the pacified object implied in Blumer’s (1969) rendering of them, in which objects appear as blank screens onto which humans project meaning, we have found that students’ encounters with Reiki energy during the training confounded Julia’s initial descriptions of the energy, as well as students’ intentions for engaging in the Reiki training. Consistent with Pickering’s (1999) discussion of the “mangle of practice,” we found that the understandings of Reiki energy’s capacities and the practices necessary to accommodate the emerging qualities of the energy developed temporally and in tandem, through dynamic human-nonhuman social interaction.

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## NOTE

1. The name of the city and names of participants are pseudonyms.

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