Seminar:

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Praxiographies: from logos to practices

Date: May 16, 2011 – May 20, 2011
Time: see Time Schedule
Ort: Institut für Höhere Studien, Seminarraum Soziologie, 1. Stock

A recent turn in the social study of science, technology, and medicine takes us from the study of objects – such as bodies – and the practices that surround them, to an understanding of such practices as the loci where bodies are performed. Instead of, for instance, looking at the different medical “interventions in the body,” medical practice becomes a way of “doing bodies.” Annemarie Mol’s now classic text *The Body Multiple* (2002) can be understood as a first step towards this new social theory: the book launches what Mol calls a “praxiography of the body.” In contrast to traditional ethnography, this praxiographic approach takes as its central concern not tribes, nor objects, but, rather, performative practices. This move has epistemic consequences: it assigns ontological status not to humans and objects in themselves, but to subjects/objects as they are enacted in practices. What a person or an object is, depends on how it is done and on what it does. This has immediate and far-reaching consequences for research questions, design, and – if and when appropriate – for resulting policy recommendations. But what are the conditions, the merits, and the implications of this approach?

In this seminar we examine praxiography as a research programme, placing it in the broader discourse of contemporary science and technology studies, and offering participants an opportunity to explore how, and to what effects, this programme might inform or move their own work.
Seminar Practices

The seminar features discussion sessions, each focusing on two central readings, in the mornings, a public lecture on Monday afternoon, and workshops in the afternoons. Participants are expected to come to the discussion sessions prepared, with a working knowledge of the readings and ready to share questions and talking points. The afternoon workshops will be oriented towards group and individual work on participants’ own research projects; these workshops are most productive if you are willing to openly discuss objectives, concerns, and questions pertaining to your dissertation projects. N.B. This is not a lecture series! Though I will of course be situating our texts, providing background and guidance for how to think about them, you will be expected to actively engage with, and share thoughts about, the reading materials and each others’ projects.

This will be a week of intensive, hard work, but it will be immensely rewarding to immerse yourselves in the topic.

By the end of the week, you should have

1. as a result of readings, lectures, and discussions, a working knowledge of current texts in praxiology
2. as a result of your reflections and exchanges, a sense of the strengths and weaknesses of this approach
3. through exposure to the epistemic and methodological features of the approach, an assessment of whether and how your own work might be moved by a praxiological sensibility
4. emerging from our workshop sessions, new insights into your dissertation project
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| Mon. 16.05. | SRS  | 09.30 – 11.00 | 1    | Session 1 *Introductions* of seminar theme, approach and participants  
Please be prepared to give a three-minute introduction to your research project |
|       | SRS  | 11.00 – 12.30 | 1    | Session 2 Topic: *Multiplicities*  
Please read: A. Mol Chapter 2 in *The Body Multiple*  
T. Moreira “Heterogeneity and Controlling Blood Pressure in Neurosurgery” |
|       | SRS  | 16.30 – 18.00 | 1    | Session 3: *Public Lecture. Counting Calories: From Logos to Practices* |
| Tue. 17.05. | SRS  | 09.30 – 11.00 | 1    | Session 4 Topic: *Actors and networks; objects become agents. The classic actor network approach*  
Please read: J. Law “On the Methods of Long Distance Control: Vessels, Navigation and the Portuguese Route to India”  
M. Callon “Some Elements of a Sociology of Translation. Scallops and Fishermen in St. Brieuc’s Bay” |
|       | SRS  | 11.00 – 12.30 | 1    | Session 5 Topic: *Matters and concerns*  
Please read: B. Latour Spinoza lecture 1 *Matters of Concern* |
|       | SRS  | 14.00 – 15.30 | 1    | Session 6 Walking seminar. Topic: *What are the matters of concern in your work?* |
| Wed. 18.05. | SRS  | 09.30 – 11.00 | 1    | Session 7 Topic: *After ANT: Space, travel, materialities*  
Please read: J. Law “Materialities, Spatialities, Globalities”  
M. de Laet “The Travel of Patents” |
|       | SRS  | 11.00 – 12.30 | 1    | Session 8 Topic: *Theory: After ANT. From networks to fluids*  
Please read: J. Law & A. Mol “On Metrics and Fluids: Notes on Otherness”  
A. Mol & J. Law “Fluids, regions, networks”  
Afternoon/evening participants begin short (2-3 page) reflection papers. Topic: how/in what directions does our seminar move your own work? |
| Thu. 19.05. | SRS  | 09.30 – 11.00 | 1    | Session 9 Topic: *Fluid and Other Actors*  
Please read: M. de Laet & A. Mol “The Zimbabwe Bushpump”  
C. Shepherd & M. Gibbs “Stretching the Friendship” |
|       | SRS  | 11.00 – 12.30 | 1    | Session 10 Topic: *Deconstructing the Liberal Actor*  
Please read: S. Hirschauer “The Accomplishment of Strangeness and the Minimization of Presence. An Elevator Trip”  
V. Rabeharisoa & M. Callon “Gino’s lessons on humanity” |
|       | SRS  | 14.00 – 15.30 | 1    | Session 12 Workshop: 5-minute Presentations and wrap  
Afternoon/evening participants finish short (2-3 page) reflection papers and prepare brief presentation. Topic: how/in what directions does our seminar move your own work? |
| Fri. 20.05. | SRS  | 09.30 – 10.30 | 1    | Session 11 Topic: *Multiplicities and material relations*  
A. Mol & M. de Laet “The Gender of the Calorie” (*in press* – will be handed out at the seminar) |

One of the most discussed papers in actor-network theory. This presses 'symmetry' between different entities including fishermen, various technologies, and scallops. Much commented on, much criticised. (See Collins and Yearley (1992))

* Callon, M. & V. Rabeharisoa “Gino's lesson on humanity: genetics, mutual entanglements and the sociologist's role.” *Economy and Society*, Volume 33, Number 1, February 2004 2003, pp. 1-27(27)

An exploration of the implications of interviewing a person with muscular dystrophy for the character of politics and appropriate political participation. Suggests that the interview tends to produce a particular form of violent political participation.


Considers a 'fluid technology', and treats its strength as a function of that fluidity rather than a structured and stable network.


Taking the elevator as a sociological research instrument, the article describes the practice of elevator riding: the turn taking of utterances, moves, and looks, the orders of entrance, placement, gathering, and exit. This practice proves to be an interpenetration of heterogeneous contributions: of human actions, bodily reactions, interactive patterns, and operations of the machine. The 'heteromobile' of the elevator offers specific sociotechnical scripts for interactions: while the human actors work hard at 'doing nothing', the artefact (and the bodies present) take much of their agency. Theoretically, the article focuses on the structural problems of public encounters, condensating in elevators: the problem of body navigation, the problem of avoiding contact, the problem of feigning self-engagements, and the problem of how to stop the automatism by which copresent bodies start interactions. The practical solution to these problems is the establishment of a minimalist social situation, constituted by mutual perception
without reciprocity and by a form of asocial presence. This guarantees that elevator passengers will remain strangers to each other.

* Latour, B. “What is the Style of Matters of Concern” Spinoza Lecture University of Amsterdam


An account of the precarious networks of global domination as these were elaborated by the Portuguese in the 15th and 16th centuries. Draws on and exemplifies Bruno Latour's notion of 'immutable mobile', by examining maritime and navigational technologies.

An empirical study of the topological differences between counting and specificity on the one hand, and uncountable continuities on the other. A study, therefore, of 'Otherness' where matters cannot be drawn together and summarised.


* Mol, A. and M. de Laet “The Gender of the Calorie” In preparation (will be handed out at the seminar)

A topological analysis of the spatial forms performed in the disease 'anaemia', distinguishing between regions, (actor-)networks, and proposing a further topographical form, that of the fluid. Argues that practices are multi-spatial.