Seminar:

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Practices and Large Social Phenomena

Date: May 19, 2014 – May 23, 2014
Time: see Time Schedule
Ort: Institute for Advanced Studies, Vienna, seminar room sociology, 1st floor

This seminar explores the formation and perpetuation of large social phenomena as theorized in contemporary practice theories (especially those of E. Shove et al. and T. Schatzki). The seminar will first locate practice analyses in the wider social ontological landscape. After conceptualizing social phenomena as practices, the seminar will analyze two phenomena that many thinkers today view as crucial to social life at all scales: networks and interactions. In this context, the work of Harrison White will be highlighted. The seminar will then explore different ways that social phenomena qua practices form and remain in existence. Chains of action are central to these processes, and the idea thereof will be illuminated through juxtaposition with similar ideas in R. Collins (ritual chains), B. Latour (chains of mediators), and G. Tarde (imitation rays). The seminar will then consider two distinctions crucial to understanding large phenomena such as markets and educational systems: scale versus emergence and description versus explanation. It will be claimed that explanations of the formation of large phenomena must refer to small phenomena, particular practices, and their features and not to aspects of, or to principles governing, other large or larger phenomena (cf. G. Tarde, A. Garfinkel, M. Foucault, B. Latour, W.H. Walsh). The seminar will then seek to develop concepts adequate to describing (mapping, tracing…..) the dynamics of large phenomena.