Public Lecture

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Practice Theory as Flat Ontology

Date: May 19, 2014
Time: 17:00 - 18:30
Place: Institute for Advanced Studies, seminar room for Sociology, 1st floor

Short summary
Contemporary theories of practice hold that practices form a plenum and that social affairs transpire in this plenum. They thereby promulgate a flat social ontology according to which everything that composes social entities lies on one level of reality. My talk first contrasts practice analyses of social affairs with prima facie similar ones in ethnomethodology and phenomenology that prioritize local situations. It then explains why a plenum of practices composes a single level. Following this, this flat plenum ontology is clarified through criticisms of two competitors: an alternative flat ontology due to Latour and a multilevel ontology developed by the Dutch Multi-Level Perspective (MLP) on sociotechnical development. The concluding section argues that the contrast fundamental to social analysis is not that between micro and macro, local and global, or activity and structure, but that between small and large. A deflating analysis of the micro-macro contrast that dissolves this contrast into myriads of contingent, unsystematic relations is presented.

Short biographical note
Ted Schatzki is Senior Associate Dean (Dean of Faculty) in the College of Arts & Sciences, Professor of Philosophy and Geography, and the former Chair of the Department of Philosophy. He is also the cofounder and former co-director of the University’s Committee on Social Theory, which oversees a multidisciplinary graduate-level teaching and research
program in social thought. Schatzki earned a degree in applied mathematics from Harvard University (1977) and degrees in philosophy from Oxford University (1979) and UC Berkeley (1982, 1986). His research and teaching interests lie in social ontology, theory of action, social theory, the philosophy of social science, and 20th-century continental philosophy. He is the author of four books: Social Practices (1996), The Site of the Social (2002), Martin Heidegger: Theorist of Space (2007) and The Timespace of Human Activity (2010). In addition, he is author of numerous articles on Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and various topics in philosophy of action, social theory, and continental philosophy. Schatzki has been a research fellow of the Fulbright Commission and the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. He has been a visiting professor at the University of Exeter, The Max Planck Institute for the History of Science in Berlin, the Karl-Franzens University in Graz, the Institute of Advanced Studies in Vienna, and The Charles Sturt University in Australia. As Senior Associate Dean of Faculty, Schatzki oversees all matters pertaining to faculty.

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