Bodies of Theory Workshop

1-5 November 2010

Organised by:
Centre for Philosophy & Political Economy, University of Leicester School of Management
DBA Programme, Universiteit voor Humanistiek, NL
Language and Interaction Research Assembly, University of Leicester

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<td>Venue</td>
<td>John Foster Hall</td>
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<td>Ken Edwards 501</td>
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<td>10:00-11:20</td>
<td>Intro</td>
<td>Session 4 – Maria Puig de la Bellacasa</td>
<td>DBA presentations</td>
<td>Methods Workshop – Visual Methods</td>
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<td>11:40-13:00</td>
<td>Session 1 – Steve Brown</td>
<td>Session 5 – Dimitris Papadopoulos</td>
<td>Methods Workshop – Michelle O’Reilly</td>
<td>Session 8 – Ai Ling Lai</td>
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<td>Lunch</td>
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<td>14:00-15:20</td>
<td>Session 2 – Jean-Luc Moriceau</td>
<td>Session 6 – Paul Stenner</td>
<td>DBA presentations</td>
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<td>15:30-17:00</td>
<td>Session 3 – Richard Godfrey</td>
<td>Session 7 – John Cromby</td>
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Sessions:

1. Steve Brown (Leicester) – Michel Serres
2. Jean-Luc Moriceau (Paris) – Performative social science
3. Richard Godfrey (Leicester) – Masculinities
4. Maria Puig de la Bellacasa (Leicester) – Care
5. Dimitris Papadopoulos (Leicester) – The turn to embodiment
6. Paul Stenner (Brighton) – William James
7. John Cromby (Loughborough) – Feeling
8. Ai Ling Lai (Leicester) – Merleau-Ponty

Methods workshops:

- Discourse analysis – Michelle O’Reilly (Leicester)
- Visual methods
- Performative social science
The landmark publication of the historian Thomas Laquer’s *Making sex: The body and gender from the Greeks to Freud* in 1990 marked the moment when a ‘turn to embodiment’ gained momentum in Anglophone social science. Greatly influenced by the English translation of Foucault’s genealogy of technologies of self-care, the turn to embodiment was partly a response to the dominance of discursive and semiotic approaches which had dissolved the knowing subject into a set of positions in language. Following Foucault, authors such as Laquer treated the human body as the nexus through which discursive practices, both formal and informal, were worked out and contested. Any social or historical analysis would then need to begin from the corporeal basis of living and knowing that forms the basis of human experience. For example, in the exhaustive survey of ‘body theory’ presented in the three volume *Fragments for a History of the Human Body* and the successive *Incorporations* published by Zone Books, philosophy, history, anthropology and cultural theory are collided together to demonstrate that the body is the critical mediator between diverse realms of human activity. Economics, for instance, is seen as premised on the cultivation of ‘bio-power’, whilst collectivity itself is regarded as the outcome of ‘bio-social’ identifications between persons. The shared outcome of this widespread analytic concern with embodiment was a loose model of the body as a multiple, provisional arrangement of shifting performances which produce gender, identity and self-knowledge as effects (rather than formal conditions).

Twenty years on seems like a good point to reflect on what has been accomplished and what has been obscured by the turn to embodiment. One the one hand, through the work of Judith Butler (esp. 1992) formalisation and a clear academic location has been delivered to the study of sexuality and gender. Moreover, by emphasising the particularity and specificity of embodied experience and the corresponding local cosmologies that are the corporeal-ecological grounding of our relationship to our own bodies, ‘body theory’ has emphasised the importance of thick philosophical-anthropological description of social science objects over generic structural accounts. Finally, the turn to embodiment has been continuously renewed, with the promotion of Gilles Deleuze to the status of philosopher-of-choice for Anglophone critical social science and in such recent developments as ‘the affective turn’ along with the resurgent interest in emotionality. Yet if the problem with discursive/semiotic approaches was their relentless reduction of experience to language and their fetishistic attachment to tape recording and transcription, then ‘body theory’ similarly appears to demand that social science objects are only meaningful in relation a single (embodied) conceptual dimension. This is often defined in a highly speculative sense, such as with the emphasis on the ‘ineffable’ or ‘virtual’ nature of experience in affect theory. When this is coupled with a very loose understanding of what is at stake in methodology – such as with ‘performative’ or ‘experimental’ modes of empiricism – the outcome can sometimes be work that seems to fall roughly halfway between bad art and bad science.

This workshop will provide the opportunity for exploration and evaluation of the relationship between ‘body theory’ and efforts to methodological and conceptually engage with embodied experience. Themes which will be addressed will include the following:

- The affective turn – can affect be treated as the basis of collectivity?
- Queering theory – what is future of queer theory in social science?
- Organised bodies – is there a clear ‘theory’ of the body at work?
• Bodies of thought – can philosophy be treated as embodied activity?
• Performative social science – where is the critique or emancipatory project?
• Methods after discourse – how can the body be handled methodologically?
• Participating bodies – can we move from ‘subjects’ to ‘bodies’ of research?

The workshop forms part of the doctoral programme for the DBA based at Universiteit voor Humanistiek, Utrecht, Netherlands. It is co-organised by the Centre for Philosophy & Political Economy, University of Leicester and the Language & Interaction Research Assembly, University of Leicester.

Venue:

(Mon-Thurs) Rothley & Oakham Suite, John Foster Hall

  Manor Road, Oadby, Leicester, LE2 2LG
  http://www2.le.ac.uk/maps/accommodation-map

(Fri) Ken Edwards Building 501

  Main Campus, University Road, LE1 7RH
  http://www2.le.ac.uk/maps/campus-map

Morning and afternoon refreshments and lunch provided.