Peripheral Vision

The Sites of Organizations

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Abstract

This essay introduces a new form of social ontology and sketches its bearings on the analysis of organizations. The essay begins by contrasting the two social ontological camps — individualism and societism — into which social theory has been divided since its inception. It then describes the new approach, called site ontology, according to which social life is tied to a context (site) of which it is inherently a part. Examples of such ontologies are presented, as is my own thesis that the site of social life is composed of a nexus of human practices and material arrangements. The bearing of the latter ontology on the character, origin, and perpetuation of organizations is then considered, using an academic department as an example. Contrasts are also drawn with various approaches in organizations theory, including rational organizations, neoinstitutionalism, systems theories, and selection theories. A final section considers the complex psychological structure of organizations, working off Karl Weick and Karlene Robert's notion of collective mind in organizations.

Keywords: social ontology, site ontology, individualism, organizations, human practices, explanations of organizations, theories of organizations, psychological structure of organizations

The Sites of Organizations

Social ontology examines the nature and basic structure of social life and social phenomena. The present essay provides an overview of a new type of social ontology that has emerged in the last three decades. It also details a particular version of that type and discusses its relevance to organizations. The first two sections examine social ontology in general and the aforementioned novel approach. Subsequent sections endeavor to make palpable how the proposed new ontology bears on organizations. Being neither an organizational theorist nor a sociologist or economist, my remarks vis-à-vis organizations necessarily remain general and programmatic.

Organization Studies
26(3): 465–484
ISSN 0170–8406

Dominant Forms of Social Ontology

Since the mid-1800s when the nature of social life became an object of focused thought, social ontology has been divided into two camps: individualists and societists.

DOI: 10.1177/0170840605050876

Ontological individualists maintain that social phenomena are either constructions out of or constructions of individual people and — on some versions — their relations. The first type of individualist, constructionists, hold that social phenomena *consist of* individuals and their relations, for instance, people bound together through interlocking actions (e.g. a market) or individuals who share commonalities and maintain certain interactions (e.g. an ethnicity or a club). Another way of formulating the thrust of constructionism is that what there is in the world to a social phenomenon is a collection of actions and mental states of, as well as relations among, individuals.

Individualists of the second sort, institutionalists, maintain that social phenomena are brought into existence by virtue of people holding certain attitudes and beliefs and performing certain actions: the possession of certain mental states and the performance of certain actions *makes it the case* that certain social facts obtain. For example, the shared belief that these here pieces of metal and paper are money makes it the case that they are money. Similarly, that by virtue of which these here buildings, people, and actions are a university is nothing but the pervasive belief that they are such together with the many actions that are performed on this basis. Whereas constructionists hold that the properties of individuals are the stuff out of which social phenomena are composed, institutionalists claim that it is through these properties that social states of affairs obtain. Over time, above all in England and the US, individualism has become the dominant ontological approach to social life. Its ascendancy is due to the affinity between political and ontological individualism, and to the facts that individualism facilitates mathematical model-building and that American social science has a strong scientistic self-understanding. It also reflects strong prima facie experiential plausibility.

What I call 'individualism' is broader than what is typically dubbed such. Individualists, it is often said, hold that social phenomena can be both decomposed into and explained by properties of individual people. This form of individualism is advocated by, among others, those who maintain that psychology, or, more broadly, a theory of the individual person such as rational choice theory, is the basis of social science. Prominent advocates of this purest individualism have included Max Weber (1972), Frederick Hayek (1952), John Searle (1985), and, within organizational theory, Herbert Simon (1947). What opposes individualism, it is further often said, is the thesis that social phenomena can be adequately analyzed and explained only by reference to facts about and features of *collections* of people (e.g. groups), as opposed to individual people. Examples of such analyses are Ferdinand Tönnies's *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* (1955), Emile Durkheim's social facts (1964), Harold Blumer's joint actions (1969), and Barry Barnes's interactionism (1995). According to this alleged anti-individualism, many features of collected individuals cannot be treated as, or 'reduced' to, sets of features of the particular individuals involved. According to my typology, however, this position is just a more capacious form of individualism. For it shares with its more austere cousin the conviction that all there is, in the end,

to social phenomena are individuals and their relations. All social matters ultimately consist in and are explained by facts about people — either individual people or groups thereof.

The societist camp encompasses greater variety than does the individualist. For about all that ontological societists agree on as a group is that it is *not* true that all social phenomena are constructions of or out of individuals and their relations. Societists strongly disagree among themselves about what, in addition to features of people, individually or collected, is needed to analyze or explain social phenomena. Examples of the extra phenomena are modes of production (Marx 1973), whole societies (Malinowski 1926), abstract structures (Levi-Strauss 1963, Althusser 1970, Bhaskar 1979), discourses (Foucault 1976), and social systems (Parsons 1966, Luhmann 1984). According to societists, none of these phenomena are decomposable into features of individuals, however complex a set of individuals involved. The capitalist mode of production, for instance, is not a feature of the collection of people — the workers, managers, owners, and consumers — who participate in the capitalist economy, let alone a collection of features of the individual people involved. It is, instead, a system of relations among structurally defined positions such as steel worker, stock holder, information technology officer, and clothes purchaser. Flesh and blood individuals occupy these positions, are entangled in these relations, and therewith participate in the capitalist mode of production. In short, societism holds that there are social phenomena, and that analyzing and explaining many social affairs refers to phenomena, that are something other than features of individual people or groups thereof.

Site Ontologies

Recent decades have witnessed the emergence of a new approach to social ontology. This alternative is societist in the sense of denying that all social phenomena are constructions either of or out of individuals and their relations. However, its claims about what beyond individuals is needed to account for social phenomena is sufficiently novel as to warrant describing it as an alternative to the historically prominent forms of societism.

I call this alternative site ontology. Site ontologies maintain that social life, by which I mean human coexistence, is inherently tied to a kind of context in which it transpires. The type of context involved — called 'sites' — comprises contexts of which some of what occurs or exists in them are inherently parts. The thrust of site ontology, consequently, is that human coexistence inherently transpires as part of a context of a particular sort. This thesis, in turn, implies that a certain type of context is central to analyzing and explaining social phenomena. Just what this implication amounts to depends on both the type of social phenomenon in question and a specific account of the site of social life, that is, an account of the context of which human coexistence is inherently a part.

Nothing hangs on the choice of the word 'site' to label this context. Usually, something's site is its place, or location: the site of a building, the site of the UN, the site of a battle. 'Sites,' as I use the term, are arenas or broader sets

of phenomena as part of which something — a building, an institution, an event — exists or occurs. An example of a site is absolute space (assuming, for the sake of argument, that absolute space exists). Absolute space is the site of all spatial locations (e.g. the location of a building or battle) because any spatial location is inherently part of it. Absolute space is not, however, the site of events and entities. Even though at least most events and entities occur in space, even necessarily so, they do not occur *as part of* space; and something's site is that context (if any) of which it is inherently a part.

It is important to emphasize that sites need not be spatial. Elsewhere (1996, chapter three) I have argued that human activities are inherently part of social practices. Recording a student's grade, for example, intrinsically occurs as part of educational grading practices. Along with acts of pondering grades and calculating them, acts of recording grades are moments of these practices. Grading practices, consequently, are the site of these actions. This fact, however, has nothing to do with the spatial properties of practices (e.g. the particular locations in objective space at which their constituent actions occur). Practices are the site, but not the spatial site, of activities. Indeed, activities do not have a spatial site — there is no type of space of which they are inherently part.

A site is a type of context. For present purposes, a context can be loosely understood as an arena or set of phenomena that surrounds or immerses something and enjoys powers of determination with respect to it. Actions, for instance, occur in a spatial context; the objective spaces of the setting of action help determine how and which actions are performed (e.g. whether one reaches to the left or to the right to start the copying machine). Actions likewise transpire in historical contexts, dependent on times, places, traditions, and contemporaneous events. Sites, however, are a particularly interesting sort of context. What makes them interesting is that context and contextualized entity constitute one another: what the entity or event is is tied to the context, just as the nature and identity of the context is tied to the entity or event (among others). A particular episode of grading, for example, is tied to particular grading practices, just as the character of the grading practices is tied to this and the other grading episodes that compose it. In scrutinizing the episode, accordingly, one scrutinizes the practice, and vice versa. A site is inseparable from that of which it is the site.

The distinctiveness of site ontologies can be clarified by considering the types of context that individualist and societist ontologies recognize. According to individualism, social reality is nothing but interrelated individuals. Social phenomena are either instituted in or composed of people's actions, mental states, and relations. A given person's actions, states, and relations, however, often depend on those of others. These features of people thus exist in a context, namely, the context of others' actions, mental states, and relations. Any human life proceeds amid others, and any social phenomenon-instituting or -composing configuration of features of individuals exists in the context of other such configurations.

An individual life, however, is not inherently part of the context of lives amid which it proceeds, nor is a configuration of features of individuals

inherently part of any context of such configurations. In order for X to be inherently part of Y, Y must help constitute the being of X (what it is). Individualists, however, do not believe that the identity of actions, mental states, and relations is intrinsically wedded to an interpersonal context of such items. A person's actions and mental states might be contingently and causally connected to those of others, but not inherently. The only phenomena individualists sometimes countenance as intrinsically determining people's actions and mental states are *further* properties of the particular people involved such as intentions, purposes, perceptions, and other actions. Of only the context composed of a given actor's mental states and actions might particular actions and mental states of his be inherently a part. Hence, the social contexts that individualists recognize are not sites.

Societist ontologies also recognize contexts. According to Marx (1973), for instance, the activities of workers transpire in a mode of production. A mode of production is an encompassing phenomenon that helps determine what occurs within it by subjecting people to certain conditions and outfitting them with particular interests and motivations. More generally, the social phenomena such as modes of production, discourses, abstract structures, and societies that societists argue are inhospitable to individualist analysis, always serve as the context of the actions, mental states, and relations of individuals. In all cases, however, societist contexts are not sites. For the societal phenomena that contextualize the features and relations of individual people are fundamentally different in being from the latter. Indeed, this is the defining mark of societism. So the individualist stuff cannot be *part* of them. People's actions, mental states, and relations might be determined by, and even inseparable from, societal phenomena (in the sense that they would not exist in the context of other social phenomena); but they do not help compose these phenomena.

Site ontologies steer a path between individualism and societism. Like societist ontologies, they immerse the relevant features of individuals in wider, distinctly social settings in the absence of which people with these features would not exist. Like individualist ontologies, however, they deny that the wider contexts in which these features exist fundamentally diverge in character from these features: properties of individuals are ontologically continuous with the distinct social contexts in which they exist.

The Site of the Social

Most site ontologies are inspired by the philosophy of Martin Heidegger (for one drawing on Ludwig Wittgenstein see Collins and Kusch 1998). More specifically, Heidegger's (e.g. 1978) notion of a clearing (*Lichtung*), or open (*Offene*), is central to their account of the site of social life. For Heidegger, the clearing is an open place, prior to all determinateness (things being such and such) and representation, in which anything that is, including human beings, shows up. (Imagine a lit-up expanse on the stage of a darkened theatre, in which people, actions, and entities appear.) The clearing has often been interpreted as a space of intelligibility on the grounds that something's being,

what it is, is equivalent to its intelligibility, as what it is intelligible. Qua figure of intelligibility, the clearing is an open of intelligibility in which whatever is shows up (intelligible) as such and such. It is within such an open, for instance, that this here rock is (intelligible as) a paperweight, that this here entity is (intelligible as) a rock, that (it is intelligible that) here is an entity (i.e., something that is), that the person weighting down papers with a rock used as a paperweight is (intelligible as) a writer, that words such as 'rock,' 'object,' 'intelligible,' and 'is' have meaning, and so on. The clearing is also typically construed as a horizon of *possible* intelligibility, that is, as embracing the totality of as what entities can be (intelligible). It is as a field of possible intelligibility, or meaning, that Heidegger's clearing has infiltrated social theory.

Heideggarian philosophies depict human lives as transpiring within a clearing: a person's actions, mental states, and identities are what they are within a horizon of possible intelligibility/meaning. Social life, human coexistence, is likewise tied to such spaces. For example, the course and identity of people's interactions depend on the space of intelligibility in which these interactions occur; so, too, do other phenomena through which human lives hang together (e.g. chains of action, shared mental states and actions, the material layouts and interconnectedness of settings). A space of intelligibility, however, is not a property or a set of properties of either individual people or a collection thereof. A social ontology that appropriates Heidegger's clearing cannot, therefore, be individualist. Spaces of intelligibility are also, however, quite different from the nonindividualist phenomena hitherto affirmed by societists, for example Hegelian or functionalist wholes, Parsonian systems, Marxist modes of production, or structuralist combinatorial matrices.

Many prominent Heideggarian site ontologies conceptualize the social as nexuses of practices that carry spaces of intelligibility. These ontologies treat practices such as those of politics, cooking, gardening, and education as collective, social arenas of action that are pervaded by a space of meaning in whose terms people live, interact, and coexist intelligibly. (These arenas are 'collective' in embracing multiple people and 'social' in being common to those people.) A good example of such an ontology is embodied in the dictum of the Canadian philosopher and political theorist Charles Taylor (1985) that social reality is practices (see also Spinosa et al. 1997). According to Taylor, the actions, mental states, and language that have previously composed a given practice articulate and hand down a 'semantic space' that establishes the meaningfulness of whatever currently transpires in the practice. Current actions and mental states perpetuate this semantic space, in which future actions and mental states will also be meaningful. Practices, in short, institute spaces of intelligibility in whose terms they themselves proceed. When someone participates in particular practices, her life and relations to coparticipants are beholden to these practices' semantic fields. By virtue of their semantic spaces, practices thus constitute the site of the social: all social life inherently transpires as part of these practices.

The political theorists Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe have developed a different sort of Heideggerian social ontology. Laclau and Mouffe (1985)

analyze social orders as constellations of systematically and interrelatedly meaningful actions, objects, and words. The sum total of social orders that exist at any time — the total state of sociality at that time — subsides in something they call the 'field of discursivity'. This field is an inexhaustible openness of articulable meaningfulness that outruns each and every social order that coalesces out of it. Social orders are inseparable from this field: the formation of any constellation of actions, objects, and words draws on it, and the field's inexhaustibility makes transformations of existing constellations and the formation of new ones possible — and inevitable. All social life transpires as part of social orders, thus on the background of the constitutive field of discursivity. The site of social life is essentially tied to a field of possible meaning.

A final example of a Heideggerian site ontology is the well-known work of the French anthropologist-sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. Central to Bourdieu's (e.g. 1990) account of the social is the notion of a field. A field is a realm of activity in which people pursue certain stakes, drawing on the capitals available to them there, not just economic capital but cultural and symbolic capitals as well (e.g. prestige, credentials). Examples are the fields of education, politics, agriculture, and religion. In any such field, what people do is governed by batteries of dispositions (practical senses) that Bourdieu famously dubbed 'habitus'. People acquire habitus by learning to carry on the practices that transpire in a given field under the objective socioeconomic conditions that reign there. Once acquired, habitus generates actions, and assigns meanings to the actions, events, and settings that people encounter, that perpetuate the field's practices and objective conditions. The range of actions and meanings that habitus generates is limited to those compatible with the objective conditions involved. Consequently, in addition to stakes, capitals, and objective conditions, any field boasts a space of possible actions and meanings. All social life transpires in one or more such fields, hence is subject to the spaces of possible action and meaning that reign in them. The site of the social is these possibility space-carrying fields.

In recent publications (1996, 2002, 2003), I have developed a site ontology similar to those just discussed. I shall not presently defend its superiority over its kin, but instead simply sketch it and then expound some of its implications for organizations. I should point out, however, that the very idea of a site ontology, together with the cataloging of such disparate figures as Taylor, Laclau and Mouffe, and Bourdieu as site theorists, is of my own coining.

On my account, the site of the social is composed of nexuses of practices and material arrangements. This means that social life inherently transpires as part of such nexuses. By practices, I mean organized human activities. Examples are political practices, cooking practices, educational practices, management practices, shop floor practices, and design practices. Any practice is an organized, open-ended spatial-temporal manifold of actions. The set of actions that composes a practice is organized by three phenomena: understandings of how to do things, rules, and teleoaffective structure. By rules I mean explicit formulations that prescribe, require, or instruct that such and such be done, said, or the case; a teleoaffective structure is an array of ends,

projects, uses (of things), and even emotions that are acceptable or prescribed for participants in the practice. The actions that make up North American educational practices, for instance, are organized by (1) understandings of how to grade, teach, mentor, supervise, conduct research, use electronic equipment, perform administration, impress instructors, obtain desirable grades, and the like; (2) instructions, requirements, guidelines, and rules of thumb about these matters such as regulations that govern syllabuses, the timing of exams, or department affairs, rules of thumb about teaching introductory courses or about gender relations, and chair edicts; and (3) a teleoaffective structure that embraces such ends as educating students, learning, receiving good student evaluations, obtaining good grades, gaining academic employment, and enjoying a successful academic career; a wide variety of tasks that can be pursued for these ends; and acceptable uses of such equipment as computers, blackboards, pointers, manila folders, coffee mugs, and telephones. To say that educational actions are organized by these matters is to say that they express the same understandings, observe, contravene, or ignore the same rules, and pursue ends and projects included in the same structure of acceptable and enjoined teleologies.[1]

By material arrangements, meanwhile, I simply mean set-ups of material objects. Whenever someone acts and therewith carries on a practice, she does so in a setting that is composed of material entities. The material arrangements amid which humans carry on embrace four types of entity: human beings, artefacts, other organisms, and things.

The site of the social is a mesh of practices and material arrangements. This implies that human coexistence inherently transpires as part of practice-arrangement bundles. To illustrate this claim, consider two prominent ways that humans coexist, that is, two avenues through which their lives hang together: (1) chains of actions and (2) commonalities in, as well as orchestrations of, their ends, projects, and emotions (two or more such items are orchestrated when they nonindependently determine what different people do). A chain of actions is a sequence of actions, each member of which responds to its predecessor (or to a change in the world the latter instigates). Many of the chains of action through which lives hang together transpire within a given practice. A teacher poses a question, students raise their hands, the teacher calls on one or more of them, answers are ventured, the teacher or other students respond — this chain occurs entirely within education practices. It also transpires as *part* of these practices: the actions involved help compose the practice. Similarly, the ends and projects the teacher and students pursue in performing these actions — teaching, learning, impressing the teacher, demonstrating even-handedness etc. — are contained in the teleoaffective structure of educational practices: to pursue them is ipso facto to be carrying on the practice. Commonalities in and orchestrations of their ends and projects are likewise part of the practice's teleoaffective structure. It is thus *as part of* educational practices that teachers and students coexist via particular chains of action and particular teleological commonalities and orchestrations.

A third general sort of link among human lives is material arrangements that encompass, as well as physical connections (e.g. lines of communication)

among, both specific entities in and the layouts of material settings. For example, teachers and students also coexist by virtue of the layouts of classrooms, email communication networks, and the use of blackboards. Such layouts, networks, and artefacts are arrangements of material entities. Hence, human coexistence transpires as part of, not practices alone, but material arrangements as well.

This example illustrates, further, that the site of the coexistence among teachers and students is not practices, on the one hand, and material arrangements on the other, but a *mesh* of practices and arrangements, a mesh in which educational practices are carried out and determinative of, but also dependent on and altered by, particular arrangements. This fact holds of social life generally: all human coexistence inherently transpires as part of practice-arrangement meshes.

In addition, practices, arrangements, and meshes thereof intrinsically interlace. The practice-arrangement mesh at the classrooms links and overlaps with the mesh at the department office, as with the ones at the college administration offices, the dorms, the bookstore, and the central administration building. In turn, this larger net of practice-arrangement bundles (the university) is tied to the similar nets that are other educational institutions, as well as to those that compose state governments, local city governments, foundations, and industries. This even larger confederation of nets (American education) itself links with other such confederations found in other countries etc. All these meshes, nets, and confederations form one gigantic metamorphosing web of practices and orders, whose fullest reach is coextensive with sociohistorical space-time.

The Social Site and Organizations

All human coexistence transpires as part of this overall practice-order web. Any social phenomenon, accordingly, is a feature or slice of this web.

Organizations are social phenomenon. Reminiscent of other social scientists, however, organizational theorists seem to disagree about what sort of social phenomenon they are. Some theorists lean toward conceptualizing organizations broadly as ensembles of interrelated actions, beginning with dyads (cf. Weick 1979). On this view, social life is replete with organizations of many sizes and characters; indeed, social life is almost nothing but a labyrinth of organizations. Most organizational theorists, however, define organizations less encompassingly. Barnard's (1938) definition of organizations as 'conscious, deliberate, and purposeful' cooperation still covers a lot of sociality, but it no longer focuses on the mere fact of interrelatedness as does Weick's. Many organizational theorists conceptualize organizations even more specifically, for instance as goal-oriented collectivities exhibiting a mix of formal (rational) and informal (organic) structure or as more loosely or tightly functionally integrated and constantly metamorphosing rule-governed collectivities seeking their own survival. Conceived in such ways, organizations are a type of social formation alongside other types such as communities, groups, crowds, markets, systems, and the like. In the following,

I attempt to convey some appreciation for a site analysis of an organization. The organization to be described is an academic department, even though academic departments might not count as organizations on all definitions. For detailed analyses along the following lines of a Shaker medicinal herb industry, day trading on the Nasdaq market, and a day trading firm, see Schatzki (2002).

An academic department is a bundle of practices and material arrangements. The practices it embraces include grading practices, research practices, advising practices, governance practices, administrative practices, meeting practices, community-building practices, and consultation practices. The material arrangements it encompasses include the layouts and material connections among individual offices, meeting rooms, hallways, front offices, lounges, and people's homes (e.g. where evening events occur). Many of these arrangements are contiguous or continuous, some are connected by communication lines, and most are connected to further material arrangements that are not part of the department bundle. Similarly, many of the departments' practices are part of the practice-arrangement bundles that are other academic departments, while also overlapping or conflicting with those constitutive of such formations as the dean's office and central administration.

Each of these practices possesses an organization of the type outlined in the previous section. Typically, moreover, they overlap and connect. Practices overlap, for instance, when particular actions are part of two or more practices or when practices share organizational elements. Practices connect when, among other things, actions from different practices form chains, actions from different practices (e.g. grading and conducting research) are performed in the same places in the department's arrangements (e.g. an office), and actions from one practice are objects of the mental states (e.g. beliefs) of participants in others. The practices involved also rarely conflict in the sense that the perpetuation of one is incompatible with the continuation of the other. The fact that practices overlap and connect, however, does not preclude conflict among people either in a given practice or across practices. Disputes can break out about, among other things, individual grades, grading standards, the practice of grading, between the chair and the instructors, and so on.

According to this site analysis, the college to which the department belongs is a confederation of such practice-material bundles; those of the academic departments, dean's office, communications support team, various college committees, and so on. These bundles overlap and interact. They overlap when elements of practices and orders appear in different bundles. They interact in myriad ways: deans issue directives to departments, department secretaries confer, departments make decisions and draw up proposals that are communicated to committees, faculty coteach classes or conduct joint research, faculty from different departments discuss pedagogical issues, and so on. Many of these interactions are mediated by technological connections such as email, telephones, and blackboards. Since these interactions perpetuate the different departments, the departments cohere. Conflict exists when interactions are such that the bundles are not mutually sustaining (e.g. the dean's office implements a plan to close a department).

Two important questions about any social formation are: How did it originate? and How is it perpetuated? Together, answers to these questions constitute an explanation of the formation.

An academic department arises from a decision by administrators or the founders of an university to open it. Implementing this decision usually involves hiring a chair and maybe also several faculty. These decisions and acts of hiring are components of *already existing* administrative decision-making and hiring practices, subject to these practices organizing structures. The department, in other words, results from existing practices. The hired chair, moreover, likely has experience in academe. In setting up the department, she extends academic practices learned and already carried on elsewhere in new circumstances: curriculum, administration, governance, advising and other practices are reinstituted and carried forward amid new material arrangements with a new cast of humans. (The arrangements also need to be at least partly set up.) Owing to particularities of the new circumstances and the personality of the chair (and new faculty), the practices involved are likely to be altered: understandings might subtly change (consciously or nonconsciously), different rules might be promulgated (by the chair or faculty), ends might be differentially emphasized differently (ad hoc or as part of a plan), and a different array of projects might be deemed acceptable (either intentionally or not). Any of these changes might also result from discussion among members of the department. (Generally speaking, what is acceptable or prescribed in any practice — its teleoaffective structure — is always subject to discursive determination.) The new department's material arrangements are likely also to differ from the previous material arrangements amid which the reinstituted educational practices were carried out. Connections among these practices, and among this practice-arrangement bundle and others (other departments, administration etc.), will also have to be forged by the new personnel, again by drawing on the existing academic practices with which they are familiar.

As for perpetuation, the practice component of a practice-arrangement bundle is perpetuated largely by individuals being incorporated into and carrying them forward. Academic practices vary only so much across the various universities where students learn and graduate students receive training and gain employment. In learning to carry out such practices at one school, graduate students and students are introduced to, or at least provided analogues of, the practices they encounter in their subsequent places of education or employment. Similar remarks apply to arrangements. Carrying on the variant practices requires drawing on acquired know-how, acquiring additional know-how, and becoming familiar with whatever different rules, ends, projects, and equipment are germane to the new practice-arrangement bundle. Of course, practices are not static. They evolve as circumstances change, opportunities and problems arise, personnel changes, new ideas arise, and so on. Changes in practice-arrangement bundles can be intentional or unintentional and known or unbeknownst to participants. Changes are also typically piece-meal and gradual, alterations in any component of a bundle being accompanied by continuity in others. Practices can, however, be

changed more wholesale, when conscious intervention (from the inside or outside) reworks goals, alters rules, and redesigns projects. These comments apply *mutatis mutandis* to a department's material arrangements and to the mesh between its practices and arrangements.

An organization, construed as a practice-arrangement bundle, (1) is a product of actions performed in extant practices, (2) is a mesh that embraces existing, to varying degrees altered, practices (possibly supplemented with new ones) and a mix of new and old material arrangements, and (3) continues in existence via a perpetuation of its practices and a maintenance of its arrangements that accommodates evolution and focused changes in the mesh. Notice that analyzing the origin and perpetuation of an organization differs from analyzing its workings. Analyses of operations examine, inter alia, lines of authority, routines and regular actions, responses to unusual events, how people interact, their ability to work together, and how decisions are made and implemented. Such matters transpire *in* the practice-arrangement bundle that is the organization, subject to the organizations of its practices and tied to its material arrangements and mesh.

This social ontology holds implications for studying organizations. One central task in comprehending an organization is identifying the actions that compose it. A second key task is identifying the practice-arrangement bundle(s) of which these actions are part. In the case of an academic department, as with any organization of appreciable complexity, doing this will involve identifying a net of bundles. The classroom, the front office, the meeting room, the coffee machine, private offices — all these terms are ciphers for different bundles that overlap and interact. Also contained in this second task is discovering whether the bundles cohere or compete. Incidentally, identifying practice-arrangement bundles requires considerable 'participant observation': watching participants' activities, interacting with them (e.g. asking questions), and — at least ideally — attempting to learn their practices. The names participants use for their activities are an important clue for identifying existing practices and bundles, as are also social theoretical considerations.

A third task in studying an organization is identifying other nets of practice-arrangement bundles to which the net composing the organization is closely tied. In the case of an academic department, these include other departments, college administration, and service suppliers. To grasp the ties among these nets is to study, among other things, commonalities and orchestrations in their actions, teleological orders, and rules; chains of action, including harmonious, competitive, and conflictual interactions; material connections among nets; and the desires, beliefs, and other attitudes that participants in one net have toward the other nets. Interactions among academic departments are often harmonious, sometimes competitive, and rarely conflictual. Because, furthermore, human action is the primary source of change in practice-arrangement bundles and nets, investigators interested in change will pay particular attention to the chains of action that link and pass through bundles and nets. Depending on topic of study, relations between the nets involved and confederations that are (1) the university and (2) such extrauniversity formations as

state legislatures, educational boards, local governments, funding agencies, industries, and contractors, might also be of interest.

Often, of course, investigators do not need to track and register the potentially labyrinthine complexity of bundles, nets of bundles, and so on. In many cases, it is desirable and feasible to provide *overviews* of social phenomena and their workings that are couched in terms referring, not to the details of practice-arrangement bundles, but to entire formations and their relations. This is not the place to examine the art of giving overviews and the concepts and methods involved in their provision. The present point is that, at whatever scale and with whatever conceptual apparatus social affairs are studied, social phenomena, ontologically, are aspects or nets of practice-arrangement bundles.

To illustrate this point, consider Herbert Simon's (1947) famous analysis of rational organizations. Simon is an individualist. He portrays organizations as systems of individuals at equilibrium, where equilibrium involves employees and managers so performing their tasks in the organization's functional structure as to ensure its survival. Accordingly, organization analysis à la Simon focuses on the decisions and actions of members. The principal functional structures of an organization are the horizontal and vertical divisions of labour and of decision making. To be part of the division of labour is to be assigned particular tasks, the performance of which subtends the survival of the organization and the achievement of its objectives. To be part of the division of decision making is for decisions, orders, and instructions supplied by the organization to be premises in one's own decision making. These two divisions interknit. The overall functional structure shapes members' expectations of other members' actions. The resulting shared or orchestrated expectations underwrite the considerable coordinated action that organizations exhibit.

Regardless of how true this account might be of this or that organization, it is an abstraction, in the sense of an extraction, from the *fuller* reality that is an organization. Like any organization, a rational organization bundles a variety of practices, including executive board practices, managerial decision-making practices, communication practices between managers and employees, practices of design, construction, supervision, shop-floor activity, advertising, and upkeep, as well as dispersed practices of giving orders, asking questions, and reporting problems. Any decision made, say, by a manager is part of managerial decision-making processes, just as many actions assembly line workers perform are components of shop-floor practices. As such, these decisions and actions reflect not just whatever official strictures the organization's formal structure (rules) places on the manager or worker, but also the know-hows of the manager and worker as well as the various end-project-use combinations that are acceptable for either to carry out. These 'informal' matters are not part of the formal (rational rule-like) structure of the organization. Nor are they values and meanings that develop beyond the formal structure (as the so-called natural conception of organizations has it, c.f. Baum and Rowley 2002). Nor do they compose a sector- or society-wide institutional structure that forms and is taken up in organizations, thereby shaping members'

goals and actions (as neoinstitutionalists would have it, cf. Powell and DiMaggio 1991 and Scott 2001). Rather, these matters of intelligibility, teleology, and normativity are inherent in the practices that are bundled together in the organization, practices that are descendent, sometimes considerably altered versions of practices that were appropriated at the origin of the organization (or subsequently incorporated or initiated). Indeed, all the interactions, coordinated actions, routines, collective activities, formal structures, rules and hierarchies, forms of communication, technologies, organizational 'cultures' (including moral cultures), shifting coalitions of members, and the like that investigators of organizations study are features, often complicated features, of the interconnected practice-arrangement bundles that compose the organization. A rich account of an organization must capture this fuller reality, within which the subject-matter of Simon's account, the actions and decisions of individuals, is contextualized.[2] Accomplishing this task involves identifying manifolds of action, viz, those that compose practices, that differ from those typically studied in social science, for example those composing interactions, routines, or coordinated actions or those associated with roles, positions, subsystems, and other functionally defined units.

A full account of an organization must also consider its material arrangements, the ways humans, artefacts, organisms, and things are ordered in it. This might seem trivial, but Simon's (1947) approach, like Weick's (1979) and Barnard's (1938) definitions of organizations — and one further example, the claim that the structure of an organization is recurrent relations among its members (cf. Donaldson 1996) exemplifies a type of analysis, pervasive throughout the social sciences, that treats social life solely as a matter of interrelated people. These theorists would not, presumably, deny that artefacts and things sometimes subtend organizational activities. They do not, however, adequately acknowledge that nonhumans are active components of practice-arrangement bundles, shaping activity, redirecting practices, and inducing decisions (e.g. Latour 1999, Callon 1991, Law 1994, Pickering 1995). In recent centuries, the active contribution of nonhumans, in particular, artefacts to the perpetuation and transformation of practice-order bundles has only strengthened.

Two prominent contemporary lines of thought that my ontology rejects are systems theories and Darwinian selection theories. To begin with, it denies that social formations, including organizations, as systems in any rigorous sense of the term (e.g. wholes whose workings, and the workings of whose subsystems, are subject to principles that apply to the wholes involved and not their parts).[3] The operations of an organization lie in the complex, sinuous interlocking of its component bundles. This interlocking is sufficiently contingent and ad hoc that understanding the workings of a formation requires delving into the details of its web and not averting to a general theory about systems. Meanwhile, my approach challenges selection theories for reasons having to do with the replication of social formations and the embeddedness of culture within practices (see Schatzki 2001).

On issues of power, this approach is closely allied with Foucault's (1982) idea that power is one person's actions structuring other people's possible

actions. How actions structure others' possibilities depends prominently (but not exclusively) on material layouts and the organizations of and past actions that compose practices. The notion of power thus captures the responsibility that actions bear for the differential access that other people have to the possibilities carried in practice-arrangement bundles. Pace many social theorists, power is not a possession, an ability or resource, the use of which reproduces hierarchical relations of autonomy and dependence that characterize and are defined by such 'institutions' as class, authority, markets, expertise, status, and gender. How actions expand, restrict, and shape what others can do *constitutes* what theorists mean by relations of autonomy and dependence. Generally speaking, the broad structures (e.g. cognitive structures and structures of domination) that theorists attribute to social life are not 'carried by' (Marx 1973), but are instead constituted in and, in fact, *forms taken by*, the web of practice-arrangement bundles. Broad structures and concrete bundles are not two interacting levels of social life.

Many organizational theorists today stress the dependency of an organization's behavior on its environment. On my view, the environment of a social formation is a net of practice-arrangement bundles (regardless of the terms that are used to denote features and slices of this net, for example 'competing firms', 'markets', 'hostile states', and 'NGOs'). An organization's relations to and interdependencies with extra-organizational formations consist of concrete connections and interactions between the bundle that composes the organization and those that compose extra-organizational phenomena. As with the internal workings of an organization, studying an organization's relations with other phenomena requires delving into the details of these connections and interactions and not averting to a theory about the relation between an organization and its 'environment'. Although throughput models, to take just one example, legitimately collate quantitative 'macro' features of organizations, what generates and explains the quantitative values is the contingent, complex interrelatedness among organizational and extra-organizational bundles. This messiness also implies that the boundaries between an organization and its environment are often indefinite and always dynamic.

This site ontology is clearly allied with a variety of micro-oriented approaches to social life, for example, ethnomethodology, symbolic interactionism, and actor-network theory. Like these approaches, it contends that all social orders and formations arise from — in this case are instituted in or constituted by — local phenomena. It also concurs with those micro-approaches that do not deny the existence or efficacy of 'macro' (or 'meso') formations and structures, insisting only that the existence and efficacy of such phenomena be comprehended as and via interrelated practice-arrangement bundles. No macro level of institutions and structures over and beyond interrelated bundles need be reified. This position resembles micro-foundationalism (see Coleman 1990, chapter 1 and Little 1991, chapter 9). Similarly, the phenomena with which organizational theorists populate the environment of organizations, including institutions, surveillance/control mechanisms, and systems of rules, procedures, or symbols, must be conceptualized as aspects of or shapes taken by interrelated practice-arrangement

bundles. Whether this approach countenances any such entity as the 'organizational field' of neoinstitutional theory is a question that cannot be examined here (see Dimaggio and Powell 1983; Scott and Meyer 1991).

Mentality and Sociality

I conclude by considering the psychological dimension of social life. Mental states are often cited for the purpose of explaining actions and social affairs. Individualist social ontologies also make mind partly constitutive of social affairs. My ontology converges with individualism on this point, though with a twist.

Practices are nonindividualist phenomena. It is people, to be sure, that perform the actions that compose a practice. But the organization of a practice is not a collection of properties of individual people. It is a feature of the practice, expressed in the open-ended set of actions that composes the practice. The relation of the practice's organization to its participants is that this organization is differentially incorporated into their minds. Understandings, rules, ends, and tasks are incorporated into participants' minds via their 'mental states'; understandings, for instance, become individual know-how, rules become objects of belief, and ends become objects of desire. Different combinations of a practice's organizing elements are incorporated into different participants' minds due to differences in participants' training, experience, intelligence, powers of observation, and status. In every case, however, the organizational element is distinct from its incorporations: the end of learning that helps organize educational practices is distinct from each individual student's and teacher's goal of learning, and also from the sum of the latter. This organizing end is a feature of the practice that cannot be divided up into the goals of participants; the latter are versions of the former (see Schatzki 2002, 2003).

Practices thus inject a deep dimension of commonality into social life. Participants in a given practice incorporate elements of, and are thereby governed by, a *single*, common structure: the organization of the practice. The perpetuation and workings of a social formation are likewise governed by the sum of organizations of its practices and also by its overall array of arrangements (though different pairs of members are likely governed by different commonalities: no member of an organization usually participates in all its practices and acts amid all its arrangements). This type of commonality grounds social life and helps makes it possible.

In an article titled 'Collective Mind in Organizations', Karl Weick and Karlene Roberts (1993) designate as collective mind something that is inherent in all organizations (though more developed in some than in others): heedful interaction. Heedful interaction occurs when people who think of themselves as a collective and aim to carry out joint actions, carefully, critically, and attentively attend and respond to one another's actions. When people heedfully interact, their actions converge, supplement, assist one another and, together with the states of affairs to which these actions give rise, form an emergent pattern. This pattern reacts to events in the sense of generating results that are

appropriate to events given the joint actions being carried out. This emergent pattern is not under the control of particular individuals or even the collective as a unit. It instead manifests collective mind. It 'shape[s] the actions that produced it, persist[s] despite changes in personnel, and change[s] despite unchanging personnel' (Weick and Roberts 1993: 374).

This account, however perspicuous, overlooks the role that practices play in establishing emergent patterns of activity. Key to actions so converging and connecting that patterns therein arise is the organizations of the practices of which the pattern-forming actions are part along with connections among the practice-arrangement bundles involved (other than chains of action, which help compose the pattern). Weick and Roberts's collective minds are contextualized within the commonalities and interlocking of practices and bundles.

The organization of a practice is an array of understandings, rules, ends, projects, and even emotions. This organization can be described as a normativized array of mental states: a normativized array of understandings, desires, beliefs, expectations, emotions, and so on. As indicated, however, these organizational mental states are not the states of participants. They are features of the practice, expressed in the open-ended totality of actions that compose the practice. They thus constitute a sort of *objective mind*. A practice's objective mind is distinct from the mind of any participant and also from the sum thereof.

As described, in learning to participate in a practice, individuals acquire versions of many, though not all, of the objective mental states that organize it. To the extent that different participants acquire versions of the same objective states, they share mentality. Weick and Roberts's collective minds — that is, people's actions so converging and interlocking that patterns of activity emerge — depend on such shared mentalities. Collective minds also depend on orchestrations of the differential incorporation of the organizations of practices in participants' minds. In turn, these shared and orchestrated mentalities rest on the objective minds that organize the practices implicated in the pattern. Hence, Weick and Roberts's collective minds implicate shared and differential mentalities that themselves rest on objective mind. And, conversely, changes in objective mind and in shared/orchestrated mentalities can depend on or arise from shared/orchestrated mentalities and collective minds. The mental structure of practices, practice-arrangement bundles, and the interactive patterns that emerge in these bundles is complex.[4]

Notes

1 For the sake of simplicity, I skip over the distinction between integrative practices and dispersed practices. The practices described in the text are all integrative practices. A dispersed practice is an open spatial-temporal manifold of actions largely organized by understandings alone. Examples are the practices of describing, explaining, and questioning. Dispersed practices weave through integrative ones and are often colonized by the latter and transformed in character. For discussion, see Schatzki (1996, ch. 3). I also pass over the account of action that accompanies my account of practices. According to this account, practical understanding is central to what people to. This theory draws heavily on Heidegger and Wittgenstein and is kin to the accounts found in Dreyfus (1991) and Bourdieu (1990). This family of accounts is an alternative to both rational actor models of action and the idea that action largely follows taken-for-granted or nonconscious scripts, routines, or schemes.

2 I concur with neoinstitutionalists that symbolic elements, in particular, meaning, norms, and regulations are vital to organizations. As suggested in the text, however, whenever intelligibility, teleology, and normativity pervade organizational fields, entire industries, or societies, they do so by virtue of being features either of many practice-arrangement bundles or of the practices belonging to particularly pervasive ones. Other key differences between my account and neoinstitutionalism concern meaning, which I treat as a phenomenon of action, and normativity, which I treat as a realm of behavioral and teleological acceptability and enjoinment.

3 'Organizational structures are viewed as spontaneously and homeostatically maintained. Changes in organizational patters are considered as the result of cumulative, unplanned, adaptive responses to the equilibrium of the system as a whole' (Gouldner 1959: 405).

4 A version of this essay was presented at the 2004 annual meeting of the British Psychological Society's section on the history and philosophy of psychology. I wish to thank the participants for their invigorating comments.

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