How do our everyday lives change the world? How do the little steps you take from the moment you wake up and brush your teeth, through your walk to work, the ways in which you eat lunch, interact with colleagues, or strangers in the street, before going to home and getting into bed, affect the world and its politics? How do the banal practices of ordinary human beings like you and I change the world?

This course sheds lights on these questions by drawing on theoretical and empirical insights from practice approaches within social theory. Practice approaches are concerned with how little quotidian ‘doings’ – speech writing, methods of crossing roads, types of violence, ways of speaking, bureaucratic procedures, the ways living spaces are designed, and so on – have much broader or ‘macro’ level affects on the structures governing life, politics, and society. Increasingly, practice approaches are at the centre of International Relations (IR) and International Political Sociology (IPS). This course explores these approaches and asks what it means to think of IR through world political practices. It discusses how practice theory has been used in IR and IPS and the directions the field is moving in. In addition, it orients practical theoretical approaches in the broader spectrum of perspectives within IR and IPS, and explores the possible methodologies and methods to be coupled with practice work.

The course is divided into three sections, each exploring a different school of practice theory and its use within IR, as well as concrete empirical case studies of how these approaches shed light on world politics. The first section explores practices of violence including torture, extrajudicial killings, and the targeting of civilians in war and conflict. These phenomena are explored through pragmatist practice approaches (Bruno Latour, Harold Garfinkel and Luc Boltanski). The second approach explores practices of resistance in world politics, including types of protest movements, ‘underground’ counter-cultural movements, and beyond. It explores these practices through ‘critical’ sociologies of practice (Pierre Bourdieu, most prominently, but also Loïc Wacquant, and Marcel Mauss). The third section explores practices of stratification in world politics, including the development of post-colonial core-periphery binaries, the socio-economic stratification of states, and unequal representation within International Organizations. These final topics of interest are unpacked through symbolic interactionist and dramaturgical approaches to studying practice (Goffman, Mead, Blumer).

Biography

General Course Notes

This course is structured thematically, with a focus on practices of violence, resistance, and stratification in world politics. Each of these themes are coupled with a particular ‘school’ of practice thought. However, the sessions are designed to overlap, somewhat, and we will speak between each ‘school’ as we move through the themes. The course will be bookended with an opening discussion of the rise of practice approaches in IR and finally a discussion of their future promise, dilemmas, and directions in the field.

Each session will be structured by way of a combination of short lectures and in-class discussion.

Because of the strong in-class discussion element of the course, it is very important that students read the assigned readings in advance, make notes, and come prepared with questions, discussion points, critiques of the readings, extensions of the readings, and so on.

If you are interested in any of the particular themes in more detail, then additional readings are best found in the bibliographies of the piece that drew you to that particular interest. If you would like more specific guidance on this please do not hesitate to contact me.

Any questions are most welcome at jonathan.austin@graduateinstitute.ch.
Detailed Course Outline

This course will be divided into three one-day sections, as outlined below. Aside from these main components of the course, Section 1 will be prefaced by a broader introduction to practice theory within IR, IPS, and social theory, while Section 3 will conclude by exploring some of the future trajectories of the approach within IR, as well as wrapping up the discussions of the earlier sections. Students will gain a good working knowledge of the key social theorists listed below, as well as some of the key concepts that orient these theoretical perspectives, and their past, current, and future applications by scholars within IR. The empirical focus of each section will ground all our discussions.

Session 1: Breaching the World

*Violence and Pragmatist Sociologies of Practice*

11th December 2017, 09:30 – 18:00

How is violence assembled into being? How does it become possible? How do children come to point rifles at adults? How do young men come to torture other young men? How do groups of people come to engage in genocide? How do gangs ensure their members carry out violent acts? How do leaders turn a blind eye to abuse? How does much of the world come to be made up of pain, suffering, and evil?

Key Social Theorists: Harold Garfinkel; Bruno Latour; Harvey Sacks; Annemarie Mol; Isabelle Stengers; Gilles Deleuze.

Key Concepts: Symmetry; Actants; Networks; Assemblages; Material-Semiotics; Post-humanism; Translation; Order; Black-boxing; following.

**Session Structure:**

1. **Course Introduction:** Practice Theory and International Relations (10:00-11:00)
   
   Break

2. **Everyday Life and the International:** (11:15-12:30)
   
   Why does it matter what people do and how they do it?
   
   Lunch

3. **The Local Ontologies of Global Violence** (13:30-15:00)
   
   How are political violences ‘assembled’ through everyday practices?

**Readings:**


Session 2: Resisting the Flow

Critical Sociologies of Practice

How do people – individually and collectively – step outside the normal order of things? How do ordinary people change the world, in small or big ways? How do people gain the bravery to join protests in authoritarian societies? How do those protests alter political order? How do some practices in peoples everyday lives – the jokes they make, the ways they work less than they might, the ways they use clothing and other symbols – undermine and even overthrow political regimes?

Key Social Theorists: Pierre Bourdieu; Loïc Wacquant; Marcel Mauss.

Key Concepts: Field; Habitus; Capital; Doxa; Social Illusion; Power; Symbolic Violence; Reflexivity.

Session Structure:

1. Critical Sociologies of Practice in IR
   Pierre Bourdieu and Beyond (10:00-11:00)
   Break
2. Fields of World Political Resistance (11:15-13:00)
   How is resistance socially structured through practice?

Readings:


Session 3: Stratifying the International

Interactionist Sociologies of Practice

How is the world ordered unequally? How do powerful states maintain their position? How are weak states maintained in their weakness? How do the powerful stigmatize the powerless? How do the powerful ‘cleanse’ away their crimes? Why aren’t George W. Bush and Tony Blair on trial at the Hague for war crimes? Why isn’t the Swiss banking system shut down for aiding tax evasion and terrorist funding networks? Why are most of the practice theorists in this course male and Euro-American in origin? Why am I writing this English? Why is this course taught in English?

Key Social Theorists: Erving Gofman; Herbert Mead; Herbert Blumer.


Readings:


Session Structure:

1. Interactionist Sociologies in IR
   - The Presentation of the Self
   - Break

2. Stigma and Hierarchy in World Politics #1
   - How do practices structure the world in unequal ways?
   - Lunch

3. Stigma and Hierarchy in World Politics #2
   - How are political violences ‘assembled’ through everyday practices?
   - Break

4. The Future of Practice Approaches in IR
   - (14:45-15:30)