Call for Papers

Matter Matters: The Social Sciences Beyond the Linguistic Turn

A symposium to be held at the Faculty of the Social Sciences
Lund University, October 15-16, 2012

Keynote speakers

Diana Coole, Birkbeck College, University of London
Samantha Frost, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Graham Harman, American University in Cairo
Hans Ruin, Södertörn University College
Nick Srnicek, London School of Economics

According to the main mantra of the linguistic turn, sociopolitical reality is linguistically constituted. For all their differences, theoretical orientations such as constructivism, deconstruction, discourse analysis, and conceptual history share the underlying assumption that the study of linguistic entities holds the key to knowledge of the sociopolitical world. Yet there is a growing concern that the linguistic turn has unduly limited the domain of inquiry, and now has exhausted most of its potential. In the ensuing efforts to escape the prison of language, many scholars have been tempted to speak of an ongoing material turn or new materialism within the social sciences, inspired by a similar reorientation within continental philosophy. Yet exactly what is at stake in this reorientation, and what this will imply for the social sciences in more general terms remains unclear. Hence this symposium aims at critically assessing the material turn and its implications for the social sciences, by addressing the following questions:

• Is it possible to speak of a material turn or new materialism within the social sciences, and to what extent is such a turn cohesive, ontologically as well as epistemologically?
• What are the main objects of inquiry identified, and how do they differ from those of older forms of materialism?
• What are the main theoretical challenges posed by the material turn for the social sciences, and how do these affect their relationship to the natural sciences?

The symposium will take place at Lund University and involve leading scholars from the social sciences and humanities. Please contact Jens Bartelson (jens.bartelson@svet.lu.se) for further information.