



“Speeding Train (Treno in corsa),” Ivo Pannaggi (1922)

ENGL 561A-921: Topics in Science and Technology
Assemblage and Other Fluid Materialisms
1 Summer 2017
SYLLABUS

Dr. Judith Paltin
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BuTo 623 Office hours: TTh 9 am-9:55, and by appointment
Office phone: 604-822-4080 (email preferred)

Course meets **Tue & Thu 10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.**
in [BUTO 597](#)

Course Rationale:

Over the past decade, theory has shifted from a concern with discourse and language analysis to interpretive systems which incorporate the vibrant material, actant object, and articulate nonhuman. For example, assemblage theory, drawing from Deleuze and Guattari, Foucault, Latour, DeLanda, and others, claims to offer a new frame for articulating contingent, ephemeral, and complex dynamic schemata, functions, or exchanges, transcending a unitary realm of totality and difference. At the same time, some ideations which predate (and perhaps prefigure) the current period seem to have successfully transferred to the new context. Judith Butler's performativity, once conceived as discursive (e.g., "citational"), now in her recent book (*Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, HUP 2015) approaches an emergent *agencement* self-organized from within heterogeneous groupings. As well, Karen Barad has theorized that through an "agential realist account, all bodies, not merely human bodies, come to matter through the world's performativity—its iterative intra-activity" (*Qui Parle* 19.2, 125). Here she examines phenomena such as the "nonlocal communication" between ground and lightning and the queerness of atoms' materializing entanglements.

This course explores recent work in new materialisms, with a focus on those which are distinctively fluid, relational, or performative. It queries the matterings, discontinuities and contradictions among a new generation of theorists who aim to understand a more lively version of materiality. This rich competition among materializing systems accounts opens wide critical spaces around questions of coding and territoriality, assembly, expression, and scale.

Required Texts

Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*

Judith Butler, *Notes toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*

Mel Chen, *Animacies*

Manuel DeLanda, *Assemblage Theory*

Other texts available on Connect Library Course Reserves

Also Helpful

Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman, Nomadic Subjects, Patterns of Dissonance*

Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*

Claire Colebrook, *Sex After Life : Essays on Extinction, Vol. 2*

Manuel DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society*

Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy, Bergsonism*

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*

Elizabeth Grosz, *The Nick of Time: Politics, Evolution, and the Untimely*

Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social*

Brian Massumi, *Parable for the Virtual*

Requirements and Grading

40% -- Participation. Come to class having done the readings, and participate thoughtfully in discussion. Always have the texts with you in an accessible format at class meetings. Our compressed summer schedule does not give one much leeway for catching up. Your holistic participation grade includes 1) attending class meetings and making contributions to the seminar

conversation that are informed by the assigned readings, 2) making one oral presentation (~20 minutes) which analyzes and develops important features of an assigned reading and places it within a pertinent scholarly debate, and 3) submitting 2 critical interventions of 500-1000 words in response to material you select from assigned or suggested readings. These can be incorporated into your paper. Your presentation should include a handout which summarizes the issues of your presentation, lists key points, and offers one or two specific examples. You are welcome to introduce ideas, research, or cultural productions which we have not studied, but which will add to our discussions.

60% -- conference-length paper of 8-11 pp due on June 22.

Kindly enclose a word count in brackets at the end of the main body of your writing. Use MLA or Chicago style for citations. For information on graduate academic concession and deferred standing, see <https://www.grad.ubc.ca/faculty-staff/policies-procedures/academic-concession>.

I am available in office hours or by appointment for individual conferences about your coursework, research, or other profession-related matters as you may wish.

COURSE SCHEDULE:

Books appear in the schedule on the dates we will be talking about pre-announced chapters, and some chapters will be optional.

Week 1, Scale.

May 16. Course Introduction.

May 18. Braidotti, "Critical Posthuman Knowledges." Latour, "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam?"

Week 2, Matter.

May 23. Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*

May 25. *Vibrant Matter*. Marx, "The Commodity." Grosz, "The Thing."

Week 3, Emergence.

May 30. Butler, *Notes toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*

June 1. *Notes*. Massumi, "Introduction: Concrete Is as Concrete Doesn't." Alaimo, "Trans-Corporeal Feminisms and the Ethical Space of Nature."

Week 4, Event.

June 6. Badiou, "The Event as Trans-Being." Chen, *Animacies*.

June 8. *Animacies*. Barad, "Nature's Queer Performativity," "Posthuman Performativity."

Week 5, System.

June 13. DeLanda. *Assemblage Theory*

June 15. *Assemblage Theory*. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, Ch. 6: "How Do You Become a Body without Organs?" Grosz, "Prosthetic Objects."

Week 6, Fluid.

June 20. Raley, “Speculative Capital.” Colebrook, “On Not Becoming Man: The Materialist Politics of Unactualized Potential.”

June 22. Mini-conference and course wrap-up.

Please also know:

I am a resource person with UBC’s Positive Space Campaign. As its website announces, “the Positive Space Campaign is an initiative intended to help make UBC more receptive to and welcoming of its lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans* (transgender, transsexual, trans-identified), two-spirit, queer, questioning, intersex and asexual (LGBT*TQIA+) communities, individuals and issues of sexual and gender diversity on campus.” If you would like more information about this campaign, or to be put in touch with campus resources, please feel free to talk to me, or to contact the Equity and Inclusion Office in Brock Hall, tel. 604.822.6353.