

What is new in new materialism?: Marxisms, new materialisms and the nature/culture divide

4th March 2016, Westminster Forum, 5th Floor, Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Westminster, 32-38 Wells Street, London, W1T 3UW

12 – 2 Plenary panel: David Chandler, Felicity Colman, Nicholas Kiersey, Phoebe Moore.

2.30 – 5.30 Speakers: Helen Palmer, Paul Rekret, Daniela Tepe–Belfrage, Michiel van Ingen.
Discussant: Christian Fuchs

In response to a perceived prioritization of ‘mind over matter or culture over nature’ in the humanities and cultural studies, contemporary philosophers Braidotti and DeLanda separately named a shift in research that brings attention to the body or corporeal and explores immanence over transcendence in ontology as new materialism (or neo-materialism) in the 1990s. Since then, feminist, poststructuralist, historical materialist, science and technology, geography and critical realist researchers have begun to explore what it means to move away from the confines of discourse analysis and research that is limited to analysis of the cognitive, introducing research on human subjectivity as embodied, denying quantification of the affective field, rethinking categories of agency and causality and taking seriously questions around what it means to be human. New materialism is a critical ontological position that transcends thought traditions and advances studies that transgress mind-body dualism from the side of the mind and rejects research that eliminates possibilities for lived experiences except as efficient, rational, managed subjects.

The workshop ‘What is new in new materialism?: Marxisms, new materialisms and the nature/culture divide’ serves partly as an introduction to new materialism and partly as a space to critique and develop nascent work in this emerging area. We will ask, what is the difference between immanent, transcendental approaches and materialist ontology? Where do historical materialists stand on questions of nature and culture? What new questions of the human can we pose and what is the promise of the posthuman? Is this arena one where Marxist and poststructuralist agendas harmonise? What is the difference between mechanical materialism, historical materialism and new materialism? And, what is at stake in the connection between the human and materialism?

Co-organised with the Materialisms Reading Group run by David Chandler and & the CSE South Group run by Phoebe Moore and Martin Upchurch. (Capital & Class is the CSE journal.)