

How (not) to think in/corporeal feminisms and environmental post/humanisms

Workshop with Prof. Claire Colebrook (Penn State University)

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What are we talking about when we talk about matter, sexual difference, the body and in/corporeality in feminist theory? What role does environmentalism play for posthumanisms and the environment for the post/human? In what ways do and don't posthumanisms and new materialisms tie in with trajectories of feminist theory? We seek to explore these and further related questions through engaging with the work of Claire Colebrook.

Colebrook makes an instructive contribution to feminist (new) materialisms by developing a genealogy that does not build on a critique of representationalist accounts of materiality. Instead, she discusses the early writings of Rosi Braidotti, Elizabeth Grosz and Luce Irigaray. Colebrook highlights that it is already in their theories of 'sexual difference' that they theorize matter and representation non-dualistically. While affirming the new materialist critique of phenomenology and poststructuralism, for Colebrook, the main issue with the de-corporealization of the body and matter is not a textualist, linguistic, postmodern and constructivist tradition of feminism. She rather develops a concept of matter as a positive, in/corporeal event that is neither 'the other' of representation, nor a negated origin.

In her more recent work, Colebrook develops a critical account of posthumanisms in the Anthropocene. She argues that the biopolitical management of life posthumanist theories criticize and the ecological redemption they advocate are two sides of the same coin. Colebrook argues that insofar as finding the culprit for ecological threats and extinction – be it the Anthropos or Capitalism – entails the promise of a better humanity; the human becomes destroyer and preserver at once. According to her, posthumanisms promise to extinguish (the humanist idea of) Man through a turn to an ecological notion of life that reconciles the human with his environment. However, projections of survival based on this understanding are always anthropomorphic modes of existence that (re)enact (the humanist notion of) the human.

These two strains of theory in Colebrook's work will be explored by engaging with key texts that present and discuss the respective arguments during two sessions of a one-day-workshop. Our discussions will be guided by the participants' particular interests in Colebrook's thinking, as it becomes relevant in their own research. The workshop is rounded off with a concluding reflection that traces the intriguing manner of thinking that runs through Colebrook's engagement with both thematical complexes.

Claire Colebrook is Edwin Erle Sparks Professor of English, Philosophy, and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Penn State University (Pennsylvania, USA). She wrote numerous articles and books on the philosophy of feminist new materialisms and Gilles Deleuze, sexual difference, feminist ethics and representation as well as more recently on extinction, time and futures. Currently, she is completing a book on the fragility of the species, the archive, and the earth.

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