

Call for Papers

Cultural Studies and the Nonhuman Turn

Workshop, TU Dresden, 01-02 July 2022

In recent years, there has been a pronounced (re-)turn to questions of ontology, matter and realism in the humanities and social sciences. While theoretical formations such as actor-network theory, object-oriented ontology, the various manifestations of speculative realism or varieties of new materialism should by no means be conflated, what they have in common – and what they share with other, sometimes related, intellectual developments like affect theory, animal and plant studies or digital media theory – is their profound challenge to human exceptionalism. Taken together, these approaches have productively been described as constituting a ‘nonhuman turn’ which “is engaged in decentering the human in favor of a turn toward and concern for the nonhuman, understood variously in terms of animals, affectivity, bodies, organic and geophysical systems, materiality, or technologies” (Richard Grusin). How do these important theoretical developments affect cultural studies as an intellectual and political practice? And how does cultural studies relate to them in turn? More specifically, where are possible points of interconnection or cross-fertilization, and what does the necessary work of articulation entail? What novel questions or fields of investigation and intervention can be opened up for cultural studies? Which new concepts, ideas and arguments promise to be fruitful? How do the respective genealogies of cultural studies and the approaches associated with the nonhuman turn relate to one another; what parallels, affinities or entanglements can be identified? What are sources of friction, contradiction or antagonism?

It is questions such as these that we want to address with our workshop. Our goal will be to create and explore encounters, dialogues, and contact zones between cultural studies on the one hand and the more recent intellectual trends and movements on the other, and to investigate the (theoretical, methodological, political) potentials and opportunities as well as tensions and conflicts connected with this. We thus invite contributions that focus on theoretical and methodological issues rather than, say, readings of cultural artifacts (or if the latter are featured, they should mainly be used for the purpose of tackling the former). We envision a gathering of a rather informal, productive and creative atmosphere (more ‘workshop’ than ‘conference’) and hence welcome papers that need not necessarily be fully ‘rounded’ and ‘finished’ scientific pieces, but can very well be of a fragmentary, ‘work/thought-in-progress’ type. If desired, other formats besides the traditional 20-minute slots will be possible as well (shorter ‘impulse talks’, thematic discussion forums, ...).

We heartily welcome anyone interested in participating in the debate! To register, please send an email to the organizer (florian.cord@tu-dresden.de) by **15 May** (there will be no fee). If you want to share your thoughts in a talk or another form of contribution, please send a few lines indicating what you will be talking about to the same email-address by **9 May**.