



You are invited to a Research Symposium

**New Materialism and the Sociology of Inequality.
Class, Capital and Capacities.**

Monday 25 February 2019; 2 - 4 p.m.

*Western Sydney University
Parramatta South EA.2.13 (LT02)*

Class Matters: A New Materialist Approach.
Peta Hinton (Heinrich-Heine University, Germany).
Re-materialising Social Class.
Nick J Fox (University of Sheffield, UK).

In this seminar the speakers re-assess how sociology has explored social inequality. They argue for a new materialist perspective that addresses the part non-human matter plays in social divisions.

Abstracts

Class Matters: A New Materialist Approach

Peta Hinton

The material turn that has been gathering steam in the social and cultural sciences in recent years is distinguished by its signature approach to materiality as emergent, indeterminate, self-organising or *sui generis*: a dynamic participant in social meanings and processes that extends political analysis to more-than-human agencies. The challenges to a traditional humanism that these approaches offer, as well as the way they are positioned to engage with eco-social concerns of the 21st century, shows the promise of their interventions. However, it is precisely this reconfigured materiality that critics find inadequate to the task of providing real agendas for social change, on the grounds that they sidestep questions of specificity or remain unable to take account of material constraints and conditions, making it difficult to identify the systematic reproduction of inequalities. In many ways, the new materialisms are considered to be askance with the concerns of historical materialist or critical realist analyses because they elide questions of structure, which leaves out a robust analysis of capital and class. Against the grain of these critiques I will argue for a new materialist understanding of stratification and inequality that draws on a notion of performativity as a materialising of political economies of class and gender. This approach, drawn from the work of Karen Barad, goes beyond performativity theories focusing on the human-social realm, without forfeiting this dimension of critical analysis. In Leela Fernandes' study of gendered and class relations on a shop floor of a Calcutta jute mill, Barad finds an example of the material-discursive apparatuses in which bodies, machinery, and capital are all produced in and through relations of power. Following from Diana Coole, this suggests that new materialism can offer a renewed critical theory that closes the gap of class and gender considered to be ideological forces separate from material economic practices, and accounts for the local production – the *how* – of political asymmetries that at the same time contributes towards a macro analysis of social class.

Peta Hinton currently lectures in the media and cultural studies program at Heinrich-Heine-University in Düsseldorf and is a recent fellowship recipient and Affiliated Fellow with the ICI Berlin Institute for Cultural Inquiry. Her research focuses upon feminist political theory and the new materialisms as they work to challenge 'normative' iterations of 'politics', 'ethics', and 'time' that underscore how we understand difference, and craft interventions for social justice and change through examples and materials that accede to less familiar legislations of presence, consumption, production, relation, and life.

Re-materialising Social Class

Nick J Fox

In this paper I outline a new materialist perspective on social class, and contrast this with existing approaches. Marx's materialist analysis of social class explored two flows of matter: of human bodies and of economic capital. However, both historical materialism and subsequent sociological approaches to social class have sidelined the part human and non-human materialities play in producing and reproducing social inequalities, emphasising instead social, cultural and other 'symbolic' forces. Furthermore, sociological models of social class are individualist and essentialist, based on assumptions that bodies possess inherent attributes that define a stable class position. Finally these theories artificially aggregate dissimilar human individuals within deductive or inductive classifications based upon sociological constructs and judgements, obscuring rather than revealing the material and affective processes that produce and reproduce a range of pervasive and pernicious social divisions.

I explore the wide range of vital materialities that produce and reproduce *capacities* associated with 'social class' (as well as gender, culture and race) in bodies and collectivities. Unlike notions of social, cultural and other *capitals* in recent class theories, these capacities are not essential attributes of individuals, but are relational and contextual. Some material forces have the same effects on multiple bodies, producing similar capacities. In this way, individuals are aggregated into social groups, at the same time generating social divisions and social inequality. However, many other affective interactions between human and non-human matter challenge these aggregations and open up body capacities. I illustrate this approach to social divisions with a re-analysis of Paul Willis's classic study of the social reproduction of class: *Learning to Labour* (1977).

Nick J. Fox is professor of sociology at the University of Huddersfield, UK, honorary professor of sociology at the University of Sheffield, UK, and currently a visiting fellow at the University of Melbourne. He has researched and written widely on new materialist and posthuman social theory as applied to sexualities, health, environment, creativity, emotions and research methodology, and is currently working on issues in political sociology including citizenship, governance and policy. His most recent book (with Pam Alldred) is *Sociology and the New Materialism* (Sage, 2017).

Live Internet Feed

For those unable to attend in person, you will be able to connect to a live feed of this event on Facebook and other platforms on the day. These details will be released shortly.

For more information about the event, e-mail n.j.fox@sheffield.ac.uk