Advanced Workshop on Social Theory 2
“Assemblages and Social Theory”

Resource Person:

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Session 1: Introduction to assemblage theory

What are the origins of assemblage theory? It first came to attention via the work of Deleuze and Guattari but its conceptual origins can be traced to earlier work in the natural sciences, particularly animal behaviour studies (ethology), experimental physics (complexity theory) and information sciences (network theory). However it is important to remember that these are only jumping off points. The difference between assemblage theory as it has developed over the last 30 years and its beginnings in animal behaviour studies and information science can be seen by unpacking the original French term for assemblage, namely agencement, which makes clear that there are several complicated questions to do with agency that need to be asked.

Session 2: Assemblage theory and its others

As is well known in philosophy, to understand what something is it is often best to start by asking what it isn’t. Drawing on the work of Deleuze and his contemporaries Foucault, Sartre, and Luhmann as well as later commentators like Agamben and Latour we will approach the assemblage by way of 4 key comparisons:

1. Bricolage v assemblage
2. Apparatus v assemblage
3. Organism v assemblage
4. System v assemblage

By highlighting the differences between assemblage and these 4 cognate terms we will be better placed to understand the finer points of differences between the competing versions of assemblage theory.

Session 3: Assemblage theory as methodology

The most sophisticated attempt to develop assemblage theory as a methodology for social and cultural analysis remains Bruno Latour’s actor network theory
(ANT). However it is important to recognise that Latour departs quite significantly from Deleuze and Guattari’s thinking. This seminar will trace the path of ANT to see what might have been had it been developed more in line with Deleuze and Guattari’s thought.

**Session 4: Assemblage theory and new materialism**

In philosophy today it is the new materialist movement that has done the most to advance the cause of assemblage theory. However it often seems as though they have thrown out the baby with the bathwater because it is unwilling or unable to deal with complex questions to do with subjectivity, motivation and agency. This session will examine in detail Connolly, Bennett and DeLanda’s reworkings of Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the assemblage.