



## The stuff of politics: technoscience, democracy and public life University of Oxford, 7th - 10th December 2006

**Organisers:** Sarah Whatmore (School of Geography, Oxford University Centre for the Environment) and Bruce Braun (Department of Geography, University of Minnesota)

This workshop brings together science studies scholars and political theorists in an effort to draw questions of science and technology more fully into political theory, and to bring political theory to bear more consistently on our understanding of scientific practices and technological objects. It is premised on the belief that recent developments in science studies and political theory have resulted in their convergence around some pressing common questions but that, while they have much to offer each other, neither field (with a few notable exceptions) has engaged in sustained ways with the insights and challenges posed by the other. The objective of the Workshop, then, is to sketch out *more fully materialist theories of politics*.

Stated as a series of questions, the workshop seeks answers to the following:

- ❖ How is the more-than-human company involved in the re-assembly of social and political life to be addressed in theory? How do we register the affectivity of nonhumans, including technoscientific objects, in political life?
- ❖ How is that which becomes included or excluded from collectivities determined? What sorts of institutional forms and political practices might be imagined to bring science and technology into democracy?
- ❖ How is technology part of the art of government? Conversely, how should we think about governing technology?
- ❖ What is the relation between technoscience and its publics? Does the traffic between them only move from the laboratory into public life, or are publics active in the making of science and technology? If so, how and with what consequences for the politics of knowledge?
- ❖ What theoretical and philosophical traditions best provide intellectual resources for thinking the composition of common worlds?

### Format:

The Workshop is hosted by the *Oxford University Centre for the Environment* and will be held from 7th-10th December 2006, at Worcester College, University of Oxford. Papers from ten participants will be pre-circulated for discussion, led by two commentators, in five working sessions. Each session will pair a paper by a science studies scholar with one by a political theorist. A keynote address by a prominent scholar in the field will begin and end the workshop. A panel will also be convened on the last day to draw together major themes that have emerged during the workshop. A short bibliography consisting of key texts that have informed debates in both fields will be circulated prior to the meeting. Conference proceedings will be published with the University of Minnesota Press.

### Schedule:

Opening Keynote Address – Andrew Barry

#### **Paired Papers**

Session 1. - Jane Bennett and Karen Barad  
Session 2. - Bill Connolly and Isabelle Stengers  
Session 3. - Andrew Lakoff and Noortje Marres  
Session 4. - Mark Brown and Rosalyn Diprose  
Session 5. - Lisa Disch and Annemarie Mol

#### **Commentators**

Lois McNay and Chris Gosden  
Steve Hinchliffe and Gay Hawkins  
Gail Davies and Derek McCormack  
Paul Giles and Valérie November  
Beth Greenhough and Dan Hicks

Closing Keynote Address – Nigel Thrift

## Participant affiliations and paper titles

- Karen Barad** (Feminist Studies and Philosophy, University of California - Santa Cruz)  
- Queer Causation: the nature of change, the space of agency and the matter of time
- Andrew Barry** (School of Geography, Oxford University Centre for the Environment) - *Opening Speaker*  
- Events that Matter
- Jane Bennett** (Department of Political Science, Johns Hopkins)  
- Vital force, materiality and stem-cells
- Mark Brown** (Department of Government, University of California - Sacramento)  
- Democratic politics and the co-production of scientific and political representation
- William Connolly** (Department of Political Science, Johns Hopkins)  
- Circuits of perception
- Rosalyn Diprose** (School of Philosophy, University of New South Wales - Sydney)  
- The political technology of RU486
- Lisa Disch** (Department of Political Science, University of Minnesota)  
- 'Faitiche-izing' the people: what Radical Democracy might learn from Science Studies
- Andrew Lakoff** (Department of Sociology, University of California - San Diego)  
- The political techniques of preparedness
- Noortje Marres** (Department of Philosophy, University of Amsterdam)  
- Front-staging non-humans: beyond a clandestine politics of things & the challenges of discursification
- Annemarie Mol** (Department of Political Theory, University of Twente)  
- Bodies in theory: political actors of various physical kinds
- Isabelle Stengers** (Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres, Université Libre de Bruxelles)  
- Including non-humans: opening Pandora's box?
- Nigel Thrift** (Vice-Chancellor, University of Warwick) - *Closing Speaker*  
- Making room in the world for new political forms

## Session Commentators

- Gail Davies**, Department of Geography, University College London  
**Paul Giles**, Rothermere Institute, University of Oxford  
**Chris Gosden**, Pitt-Rivers Museum, University of Oxford  
**Beth Greenhough**, Department of Geography, Queen Mary, University of London  
**Gay Hawkins**, School of Media, Communications and Cultural Studies, University of New South Wales  
**Dan Hicks**, Department of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Bristol  
**Steve Hinchliffe**, Faculty of Social Sciences, Open University  
**Derek McCormack**, School of Geography, Oxford University Centre for the Environment  
**Lois McNay**, Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Oxford  
**Valérie November**, Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Lausanne

## Organisers

**Bruce Braun** is Associate Professor in Geography at the University of Minnesota. He is the author of *The intemperate rainforest: nature, culture and power on Canada's west coast* (Minnesota) and co-editor of *Remaking reality: nature at the millennium* (Routledge). He is currently working on a book on emerging scientific and political practices around biosecurity, entitled *Molecular geographies: configurations of the human and the animal in an age of biosecurity*.

**Sarah Whatmore** is Professor of Environment and Public Policy at the School of Geography, Oxford University Centre for the Environment. She is the author of *Hybrid geographies: natures cultures spaces* (Sage) and co-editor of *Using social theory: thinking through research* (Sage). She is currently leading an interdisciplinary research project on *Environmental knowledge controversies: science, democracy and expertise* looking at the socio-political articulations of flood modeling, and writing a book entitled *Eloquent materials: the witness of matter in science and law*.

Webpage: <http://www.ouce.ox.ac.uk/research/technologies/>

