

BODIES: ORGANIC, INORGANIC, TECHNOLOGICAL

ORGANIZERS

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THREE YEAR STRUCTURE

We are organizing the Cluster around the following three interconnected areas. We recognize, however, that Research Clusters are experimental and dynamic, and that the shape of the Cluster may change depending on the research concerns of student and faculty participants.

Year 1: Cosmotronics and bodily assemblages: The premise of year 1 is to challenge the tripartite system of colonialism, modernity and capitalism as it has grown to assert a monotecnologism aiming on absolute control and domination over organic and inorganic bodies. It does so by focusing on forgotten, ignored and discarded technologies, with particular attention to indigenous and women's technologies. It invites participants to explore the cosmotechnics (Yuk Hui) – the articulation of technical processes with cosmological and ethical values, which transform technologies into bodily and heavenly communication (John Durham Peters) – that emerge from these alternatives and potentials. In particular, participants will investigate two key aspects of the assembling of organic, inorganic and technological bodies, entities and energies: the dynamics of extraction and transformation (Heidegger), and the logics of abstraction and materialization as effects at distance (Deleuze and Guattari). Participants will be introduced to sensorial ethnographies and participant observation from decolonial and feminist perspectives.

Year 2: Bodies in Translation: The field of Science and Technology Studies (especially with the work of scholars such as Bruno Latour and Donna Haraway) has sought to destabilize the boundaries between humans and non-humans, nature and society, subject and object. Important as the work of these scholars has been, they have left unquestioned the specificity and the role of the human in these assemblages composed of humans and non-humans (whether networks in the case of Latour or cyborgs in the case of Haraway). We will explore how the flesh and blood body is experienced and constituted through, with, and by others, machines, humans and animals (Mialet). We will investigate how cognitive competences are delegated within complex environments of humans, artifacts and machines (Hutchins, Norman); however, we will not limit ourselves to the notion of cognition in thinking about the human being, for we also will attempt to take into account the importance of senses, sensations, and feelings (Myers); notions of attachment (Hennion), and sensibility (Debaise). In this regard, we will explore the possibility of thinking about senses, affect as also being distributed in the environment. We will complement these approaches by extending our ethnographic gaze beyond humans and machines to animals as entities to which competencies are delegated. Throughout the course we will question different forms and practices of embodiment or ways of being translated into other beings, forms or practices. By doing so, we will explore and expand other studies in anthropology which importantly critique the modernist assumptions about 'a universal material body' by showing how bodies are made through interactions with environmental, social and political and technical variables.

Year 3: The third year of the Cluster will explore how experimental and technological practices and reasonings remake bodies. The instrumentalization of inquiries into organic and inorganic bodies is often cast as producing an objectification of the world for the use and the corresponding enframing of human subjects (Adorno, Heidegger, Schaffer). Yet technological innovations can also act as medial tools and techniques for expanding our engagements with the world and for embedding human senses, cognition and imagination in extended assemblages of organic, inorganic and technological bodies (Haraway, Pearce, Landecker, Jain). As a result, the boundary between the artificial and the natural becomes blurred. The epistemic, ethical and cultural implications of the medial relationships between different kinds of bodies will be explored through various cases studies and theoretical approaches.

POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS

The Research Cluster will be of interest to a number of students and faculty in Science and Technology Studies. The Cluster will also attract graduate students from Communication and Culture, Disability Studies, Gender, Feminist and Women Studies, Humanities, Social and Political Thought, AMPD and FEUC.