

# ***Decolonizing Material and Virtual Culture***

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Sociology 634B1 Material and Virtual Culture. Tory 6-4 Thursdays 2:00-4:50 (Winter Term)  
Office Hours: Tory 4-14, Wednesday 1-2pm or by appointment.

This is an interdisciplinary theory workshop about the *materiality* and *intangible* aspects of both objects in social use, and *social objects* such as community. The course argues that this material and *virtual* quality extends to categories such as *class, race and gender* as well as entities such as *bodies*. *Practices* align material, virtual and relational aspects of things in *ecologies*, places and through time to create *topologies* of things, bodies and *experiences*. Practices are subject to *control* and topological *strategies* but are an irremediable wellspring of creative renewal and *counterpower*.

The virtuality of material things arises from their performative qualities, relations with with other entities, and their changeability over time. To study this, we will read authors such as:

- Daniel Miller – matter and materiality
- Tim Ingold – practice and matter
- Judith Butler – performativity and bodies
- Elizabeth Barad – virtuality
- J. Gibson – affordances and capacities
- Gilles Deleuze – difference and self-differentiation; assemblages; societies of control
- Felix Guattari – the ecological
- Rob Shields – the virtual; time-space topologies; walking practices
- Madres de Plaza de Cinco de Mayo – practice, resistance and counterpower
- Stulzwerk and Benasayag; power and counterpower
- N. Katherine Hayles – virtuality
- Walter Benjamin – experience, topology and imperialism
- Brian Massumi – virtual, affect, creativity
- Gilbert Simondon – individualization and system
- Rosie Braidotti – gender and body
- Eve Tuck and others – colonialism and place

The course leads to two publications or outputs: a book review and your project as well as the self-recognition of a personal intellectual practice. The course is designed to accommodate the interests of graduate students from diverse disciplines and specifically from social sciences. Arts-based and practice-based approaches are welcome. This seminar can also be treated as an opportunity to work through conceptual and writing issues for projects or publications that participants may be developing, including papers for publication. The scholarly editing

process, peer review, the role of new media, and the dynamics of academic publishing will be discussed as part of the historical and academic context of theory production. Students are invited to test and develop their own theoretical reflections and develop a platform of intellectual practice with and against these ideas. The final direction of readings evolves in relation to the preoccupations of the group. My focus is material culture and social forms that are not 'in our heads' or simply 'subjective' but cannot be accounted in nominalist or positivist ontologies. This is of particular relevance to areas such as design, social institutions, values, culture and cross-cultural interaction, media, environmental quality and online experience. For example:

Material	-	Virtual
Object	-	Style
Substance	-	Form
Identity	-	Representation
Population	-	Community
Element	-	Set
Assembly	-	Commons

Consider memory, which is an experience rather than a thing, but which is at the centre of issues of understanding and history. This virtuality is essential for the experience economy, nationalism and even reconciliation.

Contemporary theorists' offer strategies for approaching complex issues and problems that combine qualitative and quantitative, tangible and intangible aspects. This course considers both the work of key writers and current social issues. However, it is up to students to focus these approaches through their own projects or interests.

**Prerequisites:** Graduate status or permission of the instructor. A background in sociology or in social science is *not* necessary. An interest in engaging with theoretical texts is essential.

**Readings:** will be assigned about 2 weeks ahead of each seminar. All assigned readings for seminar presentations are required. The distribution of articles that are part of readings must be organized and coordinated by students. See Outline.

**Texts:** Generally available online or in the library. The expected reading load is about 150 pages per week. This class can be used to gain a knowledge of frequently discussed theorists including: Jane Bennet, Karen Barad, Jean Baudrillard, Rosi Braidotti, Judith Butler, Deleuze and Guattari, NK. Hayles, John Law, Bruno Latour, Brian Massumi, Simendon, et al.

**Relevant books by the instructor:**

Shields, Rob (2013) *Spatial Questions* London: Sage.

Shields, Rob (2003) *The Virtual*. London: Routledge.

**Books developed in this course in previous years:**

Davidson, T., Park, O. & Shields, R. (eds). (2011). *Ecologies of Affect*. Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press.

Vallee, M. & Shields, R (eds) (2013). *Demystifying Deleuze*. Ottawa: Red Quill Press.

**Meetings:** I expect to meet with each student at least *twice* to discuss their Projects 1 and 2. The readings for this course are both extensive and difficult. Expect to do 1 or 2 presentations (see below): an ‘intervention’ and handout on an agreed topic, a presentation on your own work-in-progress for the course (with a hand out). You will be required to comment on other students’ work. Attendance at all seminars is mandatory.

**Deliverables and Evaluation**

**Written Handout(s) for your seminar presentation(s)** Students are responsible for helping organize material for seminar(s) in consultation with the instructor. This may take the form of a brief book review/precis of a relevant text published in the last 12 months.

-Presentations are graded on a written handout: approx 3 pages or equivalent in another format (e.g. online/multimedia) **Due in your seminar 20%**

**Project 1: Short Book Review:**

A book review of a book (2018 or later) or a discussion of a resource (an exhibition, event or movement) which is relevant to your project as you imagine it at an early stage. Graded on the basis of the analysis of key issues, statement of why the text or resource is relevant and important, a written bibliography. Students will be encouraged to revise and submit for publication on SpaceandCulture.com

-2 page single spaced text or an online page (e.g. website or blog) **Feb. 6 20%**

**Meet with Instructor in Feb. or March.**

**Project 2: Essay or Project**, Arts-based or Practice-based project--must be agreed with the instructor. Based on Project 1. Essay 10-12 pages single-spaced or equivalent. Draft reviewed in the seminar and presented in the Symposium (below). Graded on the basis of design, originality, relevance.

**Draft or Demo** 6 pgs. For discussion with students and instructor. **Mar. 12 20%**  
**Symposium Presentation.**

Graded on the basis of handout, PowerPoint etc. **Apr. 2 10%**

**Final Hand-in** **due last day of exam period 30%**

-Final Paper or arts-based or practice-based project submitted as:

-documentation of work, an event, installation or curated exhibition.

-Online material or other format as agreed with instructor, e.g. 4 main webpages with images and a minimum of 4 250-word, point form supporting webpages including relevant sources).

**Deadlines:** are firm. Essays or projects are due on the last day of term as I will be away. Choose a project that can be completed in stages and submitted on time. Late papers will be penalized 1 grade point. Final Grades will be consistent with GFC graduate marking guidelines.

## Writing

Academic writing is, at heart, public writing. You are encouraged to consider the possibility of creating peer writing groups and to circulate your work for proofreading and feedback before handing in.

**Centre for Writers** offers tutorials and organized writing groups (<https://www.ualberta.ca/current-students/centre-for-writers>)

**The Economist Style Guide** based on George Orwell's principles for clear writing offers a well-reasoned approach to professional writing and tips for essay construction.

## Required Notes

“Policy about course outlines can be found in Section 23.4(2) of the University Calendar.”

**Accommodations:** Student Accessibility Services authorizes accommodations for disabilities and illness.

**Academic Integrity:** “The University of Alberta is committed to the highest standards of academic integrity and honesty. Students are expected to be familiar with these standards regarding academic honesty and to uphold the policies of the University in this respect. Students are particularly urged to familiarize themselves with the provisions of the Code of Student Behaviour (online at <http://www.governance.ualberta.ca/en/CodesofConductandResidenceCommunityStandards/CodeofStudentBehaviour.aspx>) and avoid any behaviour that could potentially result in suspicions of cheating, plagiarism, misrepresentation of facts and/or participation in an offence. Academic dishonesty is a serious offence and can result in suspension or expulsion from the University.”

**Learning and working environment:** The Faculty of Arts is committed to ensuring that all students, faculty and staff are able to work and study in an environment that is safe and free from discrimination and harassment. It does not tolerate behaviour that undermines that environment. The department urges anyone who feels that this policy is being violated to:

- Discuss the matter with the person whose behaviour is causing concern; or
- If that discussion is unsatisfactory, or there is concern that direct discussion is inappropriate or threatening, discuss it with the Chair of the Department.

For additional advice or assistance regarding this policy you may contact the studentombudservice: (<http://www.ombudservice.ualberta.ca/> ). Information about the

University of Alberta Discrimination and Harassment Policy and Procedures is described in UAPPOL at <https://policiesonline.ualberta.ca/PoliciesProcedures/Pages/DispPol.aspx?PID=110>

**Academic Honesty:** All students should consult the information provided by the Office of Judicial Affairs regarding avoiding cheating and plagiarism in particular and academic dishonesty in general (see the Academic Integrity Undergraduate Handbook and Information for Students). If in doubt about what is permitted in this class, ask the instructor. Students involved in language courses and translation courses should be aware that online “translation engines” produce very dubious and unreliable “translations.”

## Course Topics and Outline with Indicative Texts

- Week 1. 9 Jan Overview: The Heart Beats: Materiality, Immateriality  
*Înmaritu: Carne e Arena*
- Week 2. 16 Jan Material Culture in the Social Sciences. Readings by Miller, Ingold, Kristeva, Bennet, Bradotii
- Week 3. 23 Jan Immaterial or Virtualities: Social Spatialisations, Media, Community. Readings by Lyotard, Cambre, Shields, Guattari, Ulmer
- Week 4. 30 Jan Place and Locative Media. Readings by Lemos, Lury, Parrisi and Terranova, Connor, Deleuze
- Week 5. 6 Feb Reconciliation materialities. Readings by Coulthard, Turk, Deloria
- Week 6. 13 Feb Practice, Capacities and Ethics: Affect, Phronesis and Aesthesis. Readings by Guattari, Shields, Decerteau, Marres, Barad, Bissel, Parikka
- 20 Feb Reading Week
- Week 7. 27 Feb Time and Space Cultural Topologies and Settler-Colonial Memory. Readings by Xin Wei Sha, Barad, Hoffmant and Thatcher, Anderson
- Week 8. 5 Mar Media Virtualities. Readings by Ulmer, Vallee, Massumi, Jansson and Lagerqvist, Ernst
- Week 9. 12 Mar Social Virtualities and new topologies. Readings by Deleuze, Guattari, Connor, Bryand and Pollock
- Week 10. 19 Mar Identities and bodies: representation, virtuality and materialities. Readings by Brown and Middleton, Clough, Butler, Ahmed, Bellacasa
- Week 11. 26 Mar Collective topologies of race, nation and sexualities. Readings by Saldanha, Ahmed
- Week 12. 2 Apr Symposium

Last day of exams: last date for hand-in of revised Project 2 in required format.