JPM717: Presentation Handout

Presenting Student’s Name: Karolína Vejmolová

Reading’s Title: The 'New Materialism' and the Fragility of Things [William E. Connolly]

**1. Summary of the Reading**

*What is the reading about? What is the author’s main thesis and conclusions?*

The author begins with ten tenets that constitute the basis of the new materialism. Firstly, Connolly identifies protean monism, which is concerned with the question of how life and mind evolve from non-life. Secondly, the concept of matter is based on an evolutionary model in which vitality is incorporated in energy. Thirdly, the idea of post-metaphysics is replaced by a contested metaphysics and cosmology that underlines the dynamic, temporal and procedural nature of both systems and things. In other words, various periods of stability, being and relative equilibrium are recognized within this perspective, along with periods of disequilibrium and becoming as a consequence. Likewise, another significant aspect of the new materialism are variable degrees of subjectivity which means that it is neither about restricting it completely to man and/or God nor erasing the human subject. This implies that humans are not only capable of thinking deeply about mortality or about the universe, but also, at the same time, of contemplating the complex relationships between the human estate and a number of non-human processes. Furthermore, Connolly comments the ethic of cultivation which is about the contingency of caring for this world filled with constant change. Additionally, the new materialism oppose the thesis of the sufficiency of cultural internalism. In the light of the above, we are supposed to act when the problem requires it, for instance politics is an example of so-called experimental action. Finally, Connolly points out the fact that elements of ontological uncertainty change constantly, techno-artistic tactics in terms of conceptions of reasoning and pays attention to regional and global politics and the various planetary forces that influence them.

Connolly classifies three areas of degrees of self-organizing force – cultural processes, non-human force fields and nature/culture imbrications. Moreover Connolly's critique of neoliberalism consists in breaking the link between impersonal rationality and self-organisation and in denying the uniqueness of self-organisation of market systems because the universe is composed of many systems with diverse degrees of self-organization.

Speaking of the politics of the event Connolly defines the event as an occurance that happens quickly initiating from an apparent uncertainty and generating chaos. Undeniably, there is a certain amount of real creativity in those events as a new response to past condition provokes novel result.

Regarding the nonhuman eventalization, we inhabit a universe comprised of heterogeneous force fields that mutually interact and go through longer or shorter periods of equilibrium. Creative cosmic events frequently arise via accelerated reverberations there and back between different interdependent fields or between different elements in the same field.

Finally, Connolly explores the fragility of things that is grounded in exchanges with inhuman force fields, we should therefore intensify creative activity on several levels.

**2. Critical Analysis**

*What are the strong and weak points of the argument?*

The first thing that needs to be said is that strong points of the argument predominate.

It can be argued that a certain degree of creativity cannot be abstracted from uncertain events. Some level of uncertainty and confusion with respect to the future prevents us from predicting the course of future events.

We cannot overlook another strong point of the argument that is the idea of complexity, which is reflected in the need to create an interface between work across different fields. This thesis is supported by Whitehead/Kauffman synthesis, as the creative development, corresponds with its complexity.

Nevertheless, the author did not specify the moments of desequilibrium, he only mentioned relevant concepts such as criticality, asymmetric rhythm, unclear intensity, teleodynamism, etc.

**3. Relation to the Main Reading**

*How does the argument relate to, and/or expand the argument of the main reading to which it is linked in the syllabus?*

The argument is related to the argument of the main reading in many ways. One is a common interest in epistemology and research, challenging conventional notions of subjectivity. In addition to that, structural or macro-level forces are emphasised in both articles. A consensus can also be noted regarding the idea of the world, which the new materialists see as uneven, arising in unpredictable ways around events in general.

When it comes to expansion the argument, the main reading provides different analysis of research methodology in comparison with the argument.