



Lecture Series: New Developments in Theory

MATTER AGAINST MATERIALISM?

BRUNO LATOUR AND THE PROBLEM OF ABSTRACTION

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Abstract

I want to examine the turn to the work of Bruno Latour in contemporary literary studies as a symptomatic moment. Latour's analysis of actor-network theory and his recent examination of metaphysical questions rests on a posing of matter against materialism. Strongly opposed to Marxist currents, Latour instead turns to the density and complexity of the world. While attractive I dispute this turn due to its failure to consider the problem raised by Marxist 'materialism' concerning the forms and operation of value. I focus this problem through a reading of Gordon Lish's fiercely experimental novel *Peru* (1986), which interweaves forms of abstraction and materiality. My intervention aims to turn again to materialism against the current valorization of matter.

Benjamin Noys is Professor of Critical Theory at the University of Chichester. He is the author of *Georges Bataille: A Critical Introduction* (2000), *The Culture of Death* (2005), *The Persistence of the Negative: A Critique of Contemporary Theory* (2010), *Malign Velocities: Accelerationism & Capitalism* (2014), and editor of *Communization and Its Discontents* (2011). He is currently writing a critique of vitalism in contemporary theory.