

Psychoanalysis and Performativity Theory: Assembling the Anthropocene in a Climate of Hysterical Scepticism

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ABSTRACT: The work of Latour has captured the attention of many in the social sciences and the hearts of many of my colleagues in the Community Economies Collective. His concept of assemblage redistributes agency across the human/non-human divide, blurring efficacy in an effort to understand complex systems from climates to markets. This redistribution of agency represents the anthropocene as an era where, while humans are the dominant climate system driver, climate change itself affects the viability and distribution of human societies. At same time Latour's work recasts research, academic or otherwise, as a performative engagement which experiments with and transforms the reality it takes measure of in both natural and social sciences. For many readers, Latour's concept of the assemblage is imagined to cohere as a concept only when one rejects the subject vs. object dichotomy full stop. The reason we must do away with formulations of subjects with agency and objects that are inert is in order to let go of natural science concerned with mute facts and social sciences built on the shifting sands of constructivism. This formulation would have us believe that Latour's performative work must be positioned against other theoretical traditions such as psychoanalysis in which the subject is a central concern. This seemingly places the assemblage at odds with psychoanalysis and its subject. However, many psychoanalytic concepts anticipate Latour's assemblage: psychic drives located in bodily thresholds, fantasy set in a topological space of that folds society into individuals and individuals into society, a subject that is empty (open to specification) rather than non-existent. In relation to major issues like climate change, what psychoanalysis adds to performativity theory is an explanation for the resentment, paranoid fantasy, scepticism, and hysteria that figure so prominently popular discussions of climate change. In my view it is important to understand the psychic dimensions that surround climate change—the resistance it provokes in subjects even as they accommodate its reality. Indeed psychoanalytic insights may be crucial in creating/allowing people to become receptive to the new capacities required of us as we assemble the anthropocene.

BIO: Stephen Healy is currently a fellow at the Centre for Citizenship and Public Policy at the University of Western Sydney and is an Assistant professor of economic geography at Worcester State University. His research focuses on using the insights from Marxian and Psychoanalytic theory to develop participatory, cooperative and democratic approaches to sustainable economic development. He has published in *Professional Geographer*, *Gender Place and Culture*, and *Rethinking Marxism*. Currently he is engaged in the collective authorship of *Take Back the Economy, Any Time Any Place* with Jenny Cameron and J.K. Gibson-Graham.