



Pour toute correspondance :

camille.lonchampt@edf.fr

SEMINAIRE DU GRETS

Mardi 22 septembre 2009 de 9h30 à 12h30

*Maison des Sciences de l'Homme - 54, bd Raspail - Paris 6^{ème}
Salle 015*

Le coût de l'engagement public : expériences de vie à bas carbone

Noortje Marres,
Université d'Oxford - Institute for Science, Innovation and Society

Le mardi 22 septembre 2009, le séminaire du GRETS recevra Noortje Marres, chercheuse à l'Université d'Oxford, au sein du « Institute for Science, Innovation and Society » de la Saïd Business School. Noortje Marres présentera ses travaux en cours pour repenser la frontière du public et du privé à partir des cas de l'habitat écologique, du bilan carbone personnel et du calcul de l'empreinte écologique. Ces pratiques font aujourd'hui l'objet d'une médiatisation importante en Grande-Bretagne, autour de leur adoption par des personnes qui se veulent exemplaires. Elles obligent à revenir sur les distinctions classiques de la consommation et de la citoyenneté, de l'implication et de l'engagement, de la publicité et de la construction des publics (voir la présentation détaillée en anglais ci-dessous).

La présentation aura lieu en anglais, la discussion aura lieu en français et en anglais. Les supports de présentation seront traduits.

Publications récentes:

Marres, Noortje. "The Making of Climate Publics: Eco-homes as Material Devices of Publicity." *Distinktion: Scandinavian Journal of Social Theory*, no. 16 (2008): 27-45.

---. "Testing Powers of Engagement: Green Living Experiments, the Ontological Turn and the Undoability of Involvement." *European Journal of Social Theory* 12, no. 1 (February 1, 2009): 117-133.

---. "Front-staging non-humans: publicity as a constraint on the politics of things." In *The Stuff of Politics*, edited by Bruce Braun and Sarah Whatmore. (forthcoming, 2009). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

The Cost of Public Involvement: Experiments with Carbon-based Living and the Problem of Relevance

Noortje Marres, University of Oxford

Over the last years, a sizeable publicity machine has been set up by governments, energy companies, and environmental organisations to promote reductions in domestic energy consumption as a way for people to help “combat global warming.” These initiatives have been criticized on various grounds, not in the least because of the lack of credibility of their hyperbolic claims, such as the assurance that fixing energy-efficient light bulbs or routinely unplugging one’s mobile telephone charger “helps repair the planet”. Perhaps most importantly, social critics have charged these media campaigns with trivializing the ideals of citizenship and public participation. Thus, it has been pointed out that because of their focus on basic household interventions, as a way of making it “do-able” to do one’s share for the climate, these campaigns in effect redefine civic involvement as an atomized, isolated, and individualistic activity. They are then seen as “privatizing” citizenship, to the point that effective intervention on the part of the public actually becomes less rather than more feasible.

Interestingly, however, publicity campaigns seeking to “green” the home are equally vulnerable to almost the opposite criticism, namely to the charge that they promote the invasion of private places by public authorities, and thus amount to a “de-privatization” of the home. There is certainly no lack of concrete examples to support such a claim, such as the “DIY Repairs” communications initiative of the Mayor of London, launched in June 2007, which offers free house visits by a “green homes concierge service” to provide practical advice on how to make your home more energy efficient, and yes, to help “save the planet.” Around the same time, the department store M & S announced that its textiles will soon carry a new label: “Think Climate – Wash 30 C.” Considering the ubiquity of such attempts to insert environmental considerations into the fabric of everyday life, it is important to be able to draw on critical repertoires that allow us to question the intrusion of public authorities into intimate places. However, it seems equally important to recognize that such campaigns problematise the understanding of citizenship, and the distinction between the public and the private domain, on which critical repertoires often rely.

In this paper, I turn to experiments surrounding the introduction of “personal carbon accounts” in everyday life recently conducted in the UK to explore the forms of public engagement enacted here by empirical means. I discuss how these experiments deploy cost-based understandings of public participation, as they measure involvement in terms of people’s ‘willingness to make an effort,’ and present the visualisation of environmental and monetary costs as critical to bringing it about. However, a pragmatist reading of experiments in ‘carbon-based living’ highlights that engagement also involves the establishment of “relations of relevance” by material means. The paper thus considers whether and how material practices of engagement here involve attempts to make disparate entities relevant to another, such as boiling the kettle and Renewable Energy Obligations. In doing so, it draws on feminist studies of science and technology, and asks how these domestic enactments of involvement result in the proliferation of “hidden costs”, whereby some actors end up doing more work than others, and some run substantial risks of deception. In this respect, I argue, experiments in low-carbon living turn public engagement with the

environment into a problem: they disrupts certain preconceptions of the public and the private, but in productive ways.

Bio

Noortje Marres is Research Fellow in the Institute for Science, Innovation and Society at the University of Oxford, and in her work investigates various intersections between technology, environment and publics. Her recent research is concerned with everyday forms of participation in relation to climate change, and the emergence of object-centred forms of publicity and citizenship. Noortje was trained in sociology and philosophy, and did her doctoral research at the University of Amsterdam and the Ecole des Mines, Paris, writing a thesis on neo-pragmatist theories of democracy in a technological society. She was a member of govcom.org, the Amsterdam-based group that developed web-based tools and methods for network analysis, most notably the Issue Crawler. She is currently working on a book that brings technology studies in conversation with political theory around the topic of environmental publics (Palgrave, forthcoming), and she co-edits a special issue for *Economy and Society* on materiality and publicity, which builds on an international symposium that she organised at Goldsmiths, University of London, in June 2008. She is an editor of the Dutch cultural journal *De Gids*.

Latest Publications

Marres, Noortje. "The Making of Climate Publics: Eco-homes as Material Devices of Publicity." *Distinktion: Scandinavian Journal of Social Theory*, no. 16 (2008): 27-45.

---. "Testing Powers of Engagement: Green Living Experiments, the Ontological Turn and the Undoability of Involvement." *European Journal of Social Theory* 12, no. 1 (February 1, 2009): 117-133.

---. "Front-staging non-humans: publicity as a constraint on the politics of things." In *The Stuff of Politics*, edited by Bruce Braun and Sarah Whatmore. (forthcoming, 2009). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.