



Lecture 14 | Materialism: Old and New

WEEK 5 | Design Thinking and Material Practices

Coexistent Perspectives (ADAA7000)

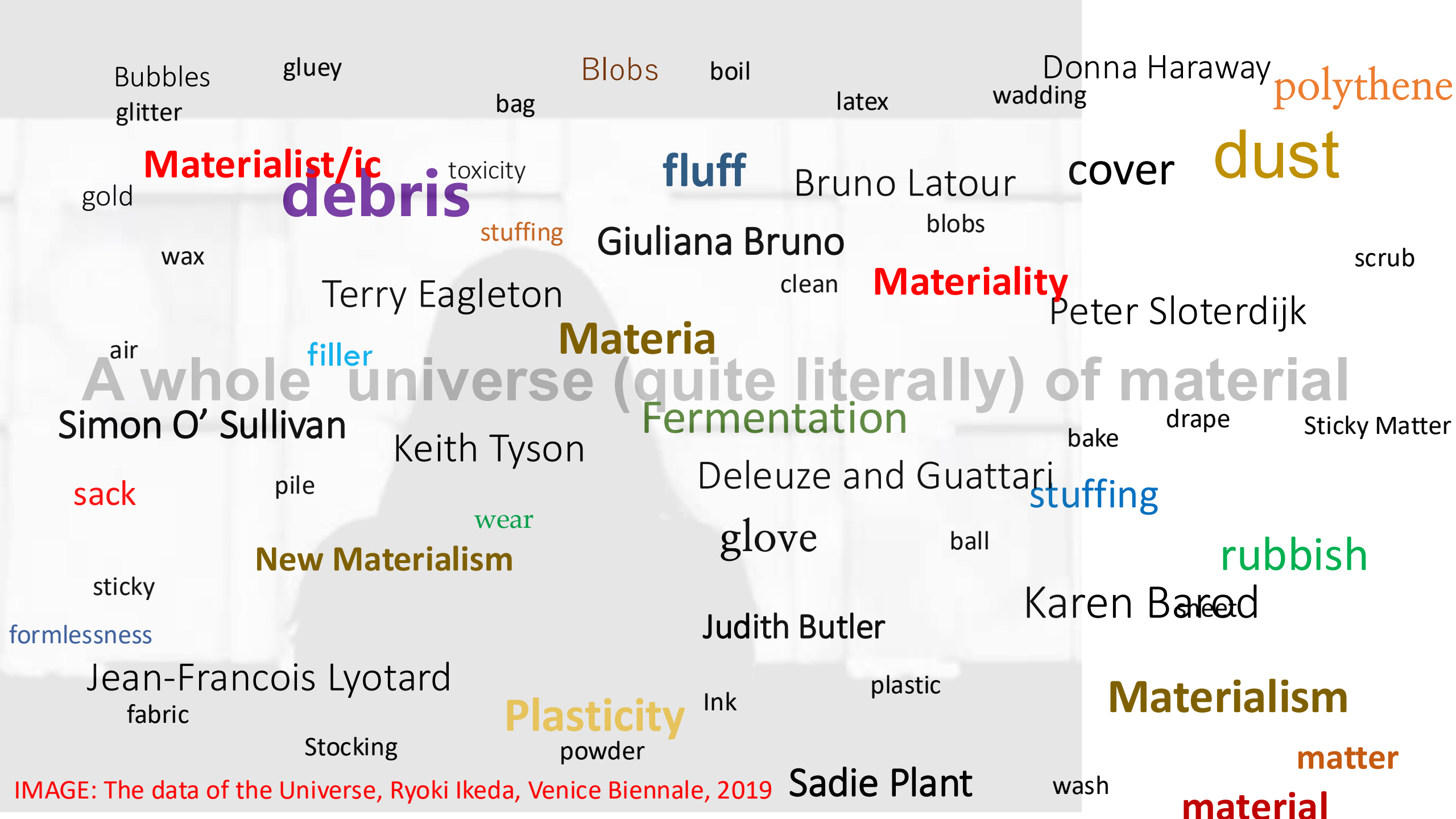


IMAGE: The data of the Universe, Ryoki Ikeda, Venice Biennale, 2019

The Return of Materialism

The past two decades in contemporary philosophy have been marked by **a turn toward materialism**, taking place after a long period of dominance by **phenomenology, hermeneutics, and the logical analysis of language**. As a result of this turn, the old debate between **idealism and materialism** has become history: it is as if **idealism** has completely vanished and everyone has become a **materialist**. But this debate between **idealism** and **materialism** has not been abolished, but **has merely relocated to within materialism itself**. This new debate has, first and foremost, **two materialist philosophies** as its participants: **materialist dialectic and neovitalism (new materialism)**.



Plato
IDEALIST
IDEAL FORM

Aristotle
MATERIALIST
REAL FORM

Epicurus
Atomist materialist
(Democritus, Lucretius)
CLINAMEN ('swerve')

Idealism vs Materialism

Idealism

Idealism is a philosophy that is credited to **Plato**. The central feature of this philosophy is the assertion that reality is nothing but what is constructed by our mind for us. **Idealism** accords prime importance to human consciousness and makes it clear that it is a make believe world and reality is what our mind makes us believe. To understand the cause and effect relationship between sociological events, the state of mind of the people in the society is the best tool in hand according to idealism. It is the premise of an idealist that the human mind precedes everything else, including matter or materialism, when one starts to think about sociological process and events.

Materialism

Lucretius, was of the view that matter that made up everything in the universe was of prime importance and that matter shaped not just human beings but even their consciousness and thought processes. Materialism can be traced back to as old as 5th century BC when philosophers like **Leucippus and Democritus** believed that everything happened because of necessity, and there was nothing by chance. Even the sensations and emotions of human beings are a result of atoms impinging upon each other. However, even materialists concede that humans have a free will and always seek happiness (which remains the primary goal of all of us).

Materialism — it is the material world that begets the immaterial world

Idealism — it is the immaterial world that begets the material world

materialism

English

(wikipedia materialism)

Noun

- Constant concern over material possessions and wealth; a great or excessive regard for worldly concerns.
- * Buckminster

The irregular fears of a future state had been supplanted by the **materialism** of Epicurus.

- (philosophy) The philosophical belief that nothing exists beyond what is physical.
- (obsolete, rare) Material substances in the aggregate; matter.

Synonyms

* (philosophy) physicalism * (philosophy) philosophical materialism

Antonyms

* (philosophy) idealism

materiality

English

Noun

(materialities)

- The quality of being material; having a physical existence.
- (legal) The quality of being of consequence to a legal decision.

Antonyms

*immateriality *ethereality

As nouns the difference between **materiality** and **materialism** is that **materiality** is the quality of being material; having a physical existence while **materialism** is constant concern over material possessions and wealth; a great or excessive regard for worldly concerns.

Materialistic ?

“Advertising has us chasing cars and clothes, working jobs we hate so we can buy shit we don’t need.”

Tyler Durden, Fight Club (1999), Chuck Palahniuk

“It is the preoccupation with possessions, more than anything else, that prevents us from living freely and nobly.”

Bertrand Russell

Materialism

Materialism is a philosophical view of being (ontology) that says Matter is the fundamental substance of the cosmos, and everything, including consciousness and spirituality, is (a product of this) Matter.

The advance of science has modified notions of what Matter really is. Albert Einstein showed **matter and energy are inter-convertible** with his famous formula $E=mc^2$. Matter, in all its various forms, is energy.

This is in opposition to the Idealist position that says a person's **Ideas or Concepts** are the only phenomenon that person can be certain of – the perception of a Material world may be a dream.

When rationalism brought Enlightenment to the West, **Descartes and Kant described the perspective of Idealism**, which sees the material world as a phenomenon of consciousness. But **Spinoza rejected this 'idealist' position, instead describing the cosmos as consisted of only 'one single substance which possesses both the attribute of thought and the attribute of extension. The mind and body ... do not belong in different worlds ... they are inseparable.'**

There are a variety of outcomes to Materialism as a perspective. In popular use, 'materialist' refers to a person who values material possessions highly, eg compared to environmentalism or spirituality.

Materialism is also the basis for Empiricism, the epistemology behind science, which requires that all knowledge must be proved by repeatable observation of the material world, that can be validated by others.

immanence

Dialectic/Historical Materialism

Karl Marx's the dialectical method developed by Hegel to analyse history from a Materialist perspective. He argued that material conditions determine human action, human labour modifies the world, accumulation of property defines social relations, leads to the inequalities of capitalism, and to inevitable revolution, when the history of competitive struggle would end and a utopian socialism would dawn.

The Materialist perspective allowed Marx to reject the Idealist notion of a natural order of transcendent spirit, God, monarchy, aristocracy and the class system.

But Materialism does not necessarily lead to socialist utopia. History showed a different outcome, when the Marxist government of the Soviet Union collapsed and many people accepted benevolent free market capitalism (known as neo-liberalism) as the only workable economic system.

HEGEL

Mind over Matter

idealism

materialism

MARX

Matter over Mind

dialectical materliasm

Historical/Dialectical (“Old”) Materialism

Marx relocates matter into history: material conditions and labour relations shape consciousness and social order. Matter appears largely as substrate for human production; change arrives via class struggle and praxis. Time is teleological: contradictions precipitate transformation. This lens powers critique of ideology and capital and grounds movements that foreground labour and means of production.

From **Old** Materialism to **New** Materialism

If **dialectical materialism** gave us a world shaped through human labour and history, **new materialism** asks what happens when matter itself begins to labour—when it acts, resists, invents. It inherits immanence from Marx but redistributes agency across more-than-human systems. Where Marx sought emancipation through praxis, new materialism cultivates attunement and care within entangled ecologies. Practically, this pivots making from production to participation, from control to orchestration.

"truth to materials"

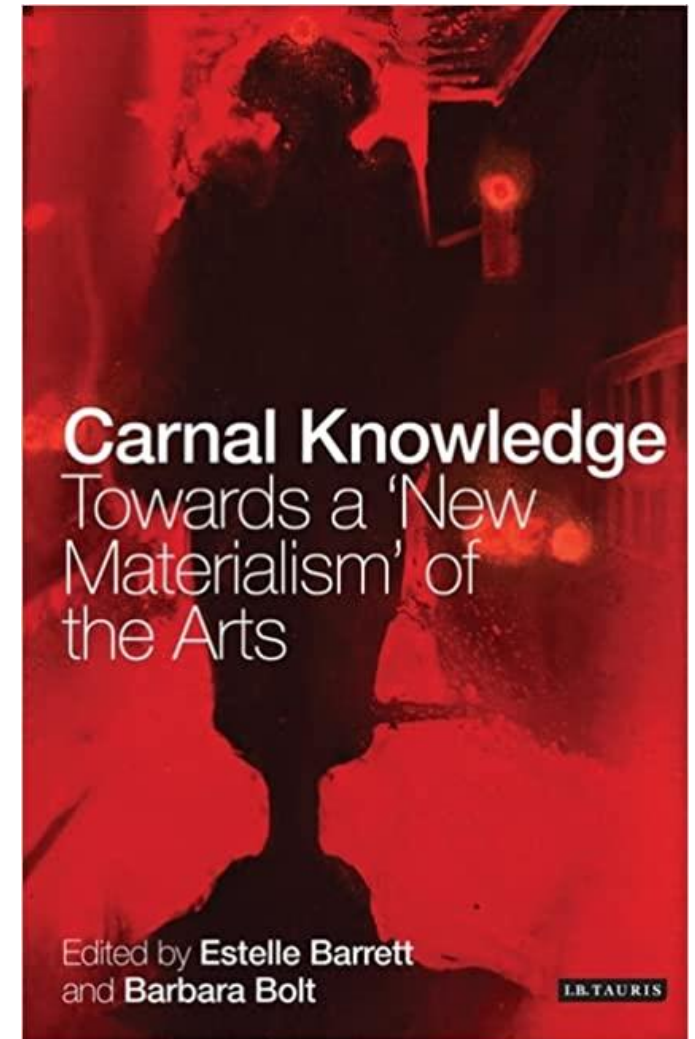
What then are the stakes for **art** in invoking the **material turn**?

In the 1980s and 1990s the influence of cultural theory spread beyond the boundaries of social and political theories and came to infect the arts and **leach "matter" out of art**. However, this influence needs to be understood within the context of the history of **modernism**, its assumptions and the fact that artistic relationship embodies a **materialist dialectic**.

Whilst each artistic form has a unique relation to the matter of things, the humanist view of relationship of matter to form was codified in modernism's notion **"truth to materials"**.

The framing of art as a "cultural production". Art like identity was no longer a given, but was produced through social discursive practices. Thus, through the colonization of the arts by cultural theory, arts' very materiality has disappeared into the textual, the linguistic and the discursive. According to this conception, art is constructed in and through language. There is nothing outside of discourse and language is its vehicle.

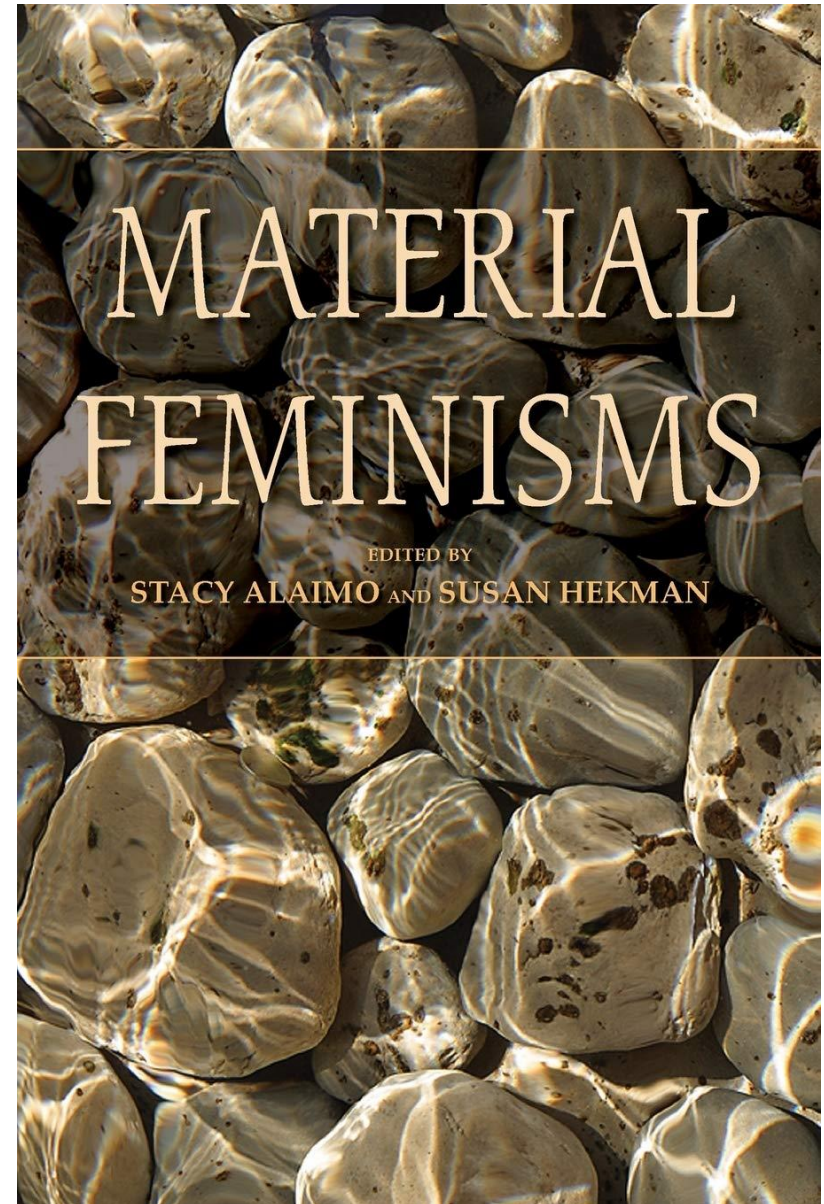
Whilst **materialist feminist theory** has struggled to **disentangle matter from discourses on matter**, it may be argued **that art is a material practice and that materiality of matter lies at the core of creative practice**.



Material Feminisms

"to bring the material, specifically the materiality of the human body and the natural world, into the forefront of feminist theory and practice" (**Alaimo and Hekman 2008: 1**)

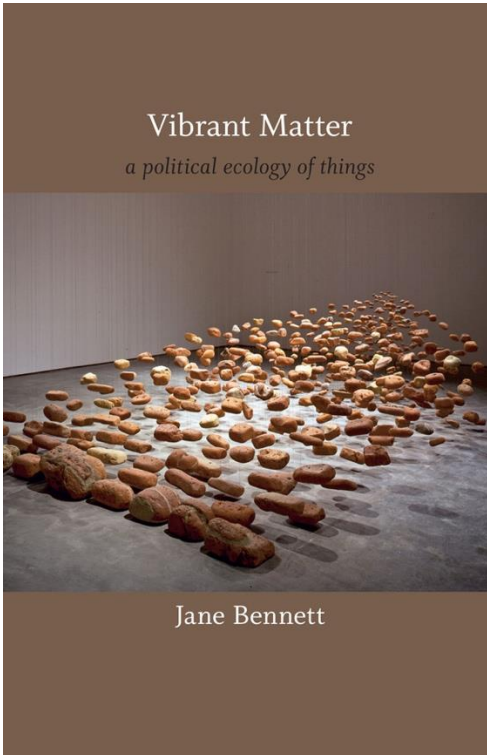
In the humanities and social sciences, particularly in feminist theory, the new materialism involved a reaction against the cultural turn that defined cultural and political theory in the late twentieth century. Exponents of the new materialism argue that where social constructivist theories thrive, matter becomes mute. New materialism aims to return to matter, the vivacity denied by social constructivist theories that posit all social processes and, indeed reality itself, as socially and ideologically constituted



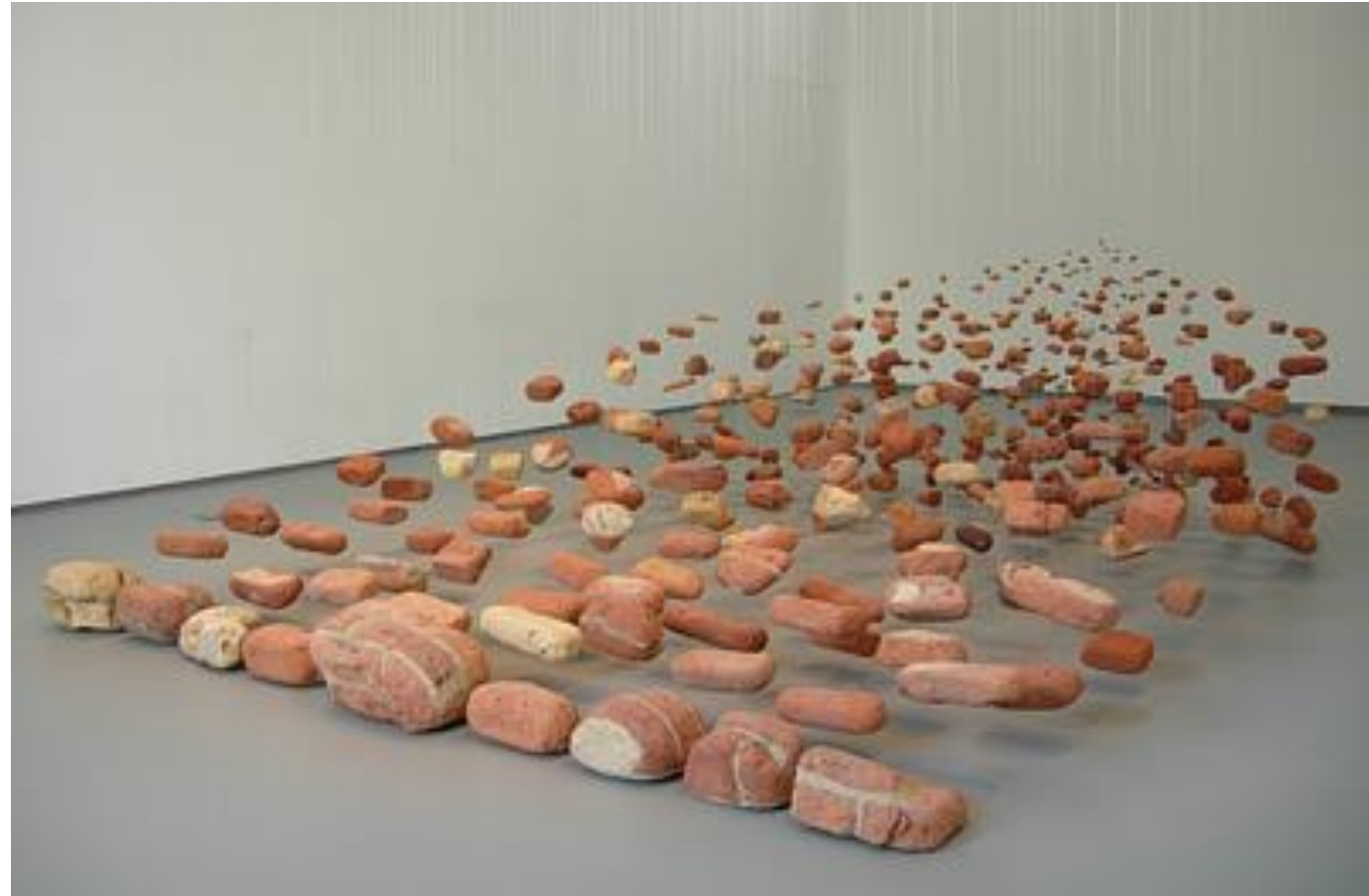
The "I" of new materialism is no longer the sovereign human subject, but is conceived of as a **material-semiotic actor**, an articulation that, according to **Donna Haraway (1991)** encompasses the human and the non-human, the social and physical, and the material and immaterial. **Susan Hekman**, drawing on **Andrew Pickering's notion of the mangle**, proposes that **"the 'I' is a mangle composed of multiple elements"** (Hekman 2010: 100).

This reconfiguration of human/non-human relationships has emerged around a **vital materiality** where it is not just humans who do things (**Bennett 2010**). In these new configurations the material and the discursive **mingle and mangle**.

New Materialism



“Vibrant Matter”

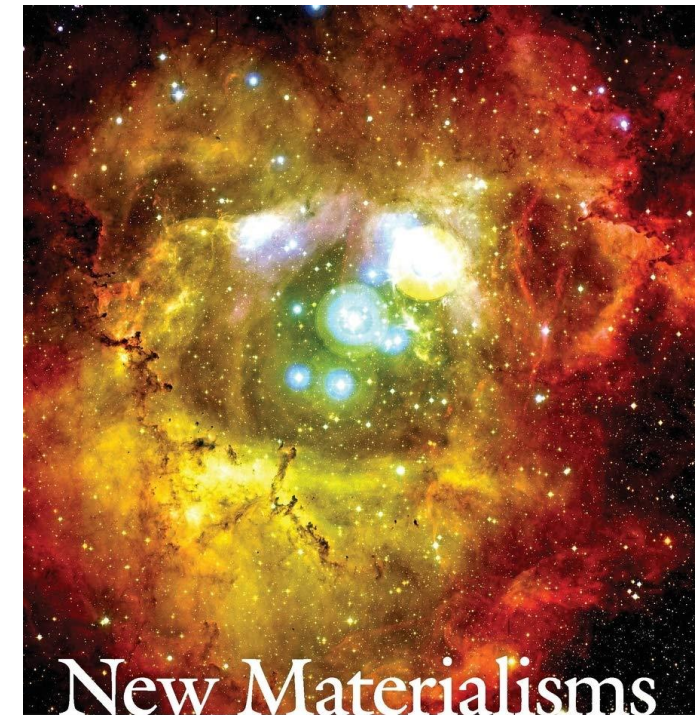


Neither From Nor Towards (1992) – Cornelia Parker

New Materialism is an emerging trend in 21st century thought in several fields of inquiry, including philosophy, cultural theory, feminism, science studies, and the visual arts.

For materiality is always something more than “mere” matter: an excess, force, vitality, relationality, or difference that renders matter active, self-creative, productive, unpredictable. In sum, new materialists are rediscovering a materiality that materializes, evincing immanent modes of self-transformation that compel us to think of causation in far more complex terms; to recognize that phenomena are caught in a multitude of interlocking systems and focus and to consider anew the location and nature of capacities for agency.

Diana Coole and Samantha Frost



New Materialisms

Ontology, Agency, and Politics

EDITED BY DIANA COOLE AND SAMANTHA FROST

New Materialism



EDITED BY DIANA COOLE AND SAMANTHA FROST

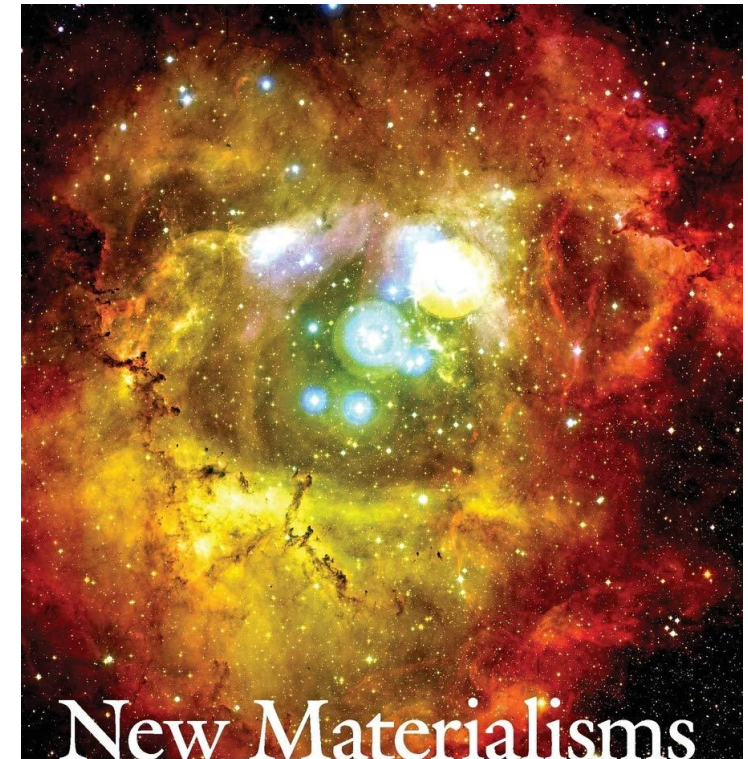
'How matter comes to matter'



The increasing prominence of “new materialism” signals a growing cross-disciplinary effort to challenge longstanding assumptions about humans and the non- or other-than- human material world.

Particularly remarkable **Diana Coole and Samantha Frost**' statements at the core of the theories around the New Materialisms:

*As critically engaged theorists, we find ourselves compelled to explore the significance of complex issues such as climate change of global capital and population flows, the biotechnological engineering of genetically modified organisms, or the saturation of our intimate and physical lives by digital, wireless, and virtual technologies. From our understanding of the boundary between life and death and our everyday work practices to the way we feed ourselves and recreate or procreate, we are finding our environment materially and conceptually reconstituted in ways that pose profound and unprecedented normative questions. In addressing them we unavoidably find ourselves **having to think in new ways about the nature of matter and the matter of nature; about the elements of life, the resilience of the planet, and the distinction of the human.***



EDITED BY DIANA COOLE AND SAMANTHA FROST

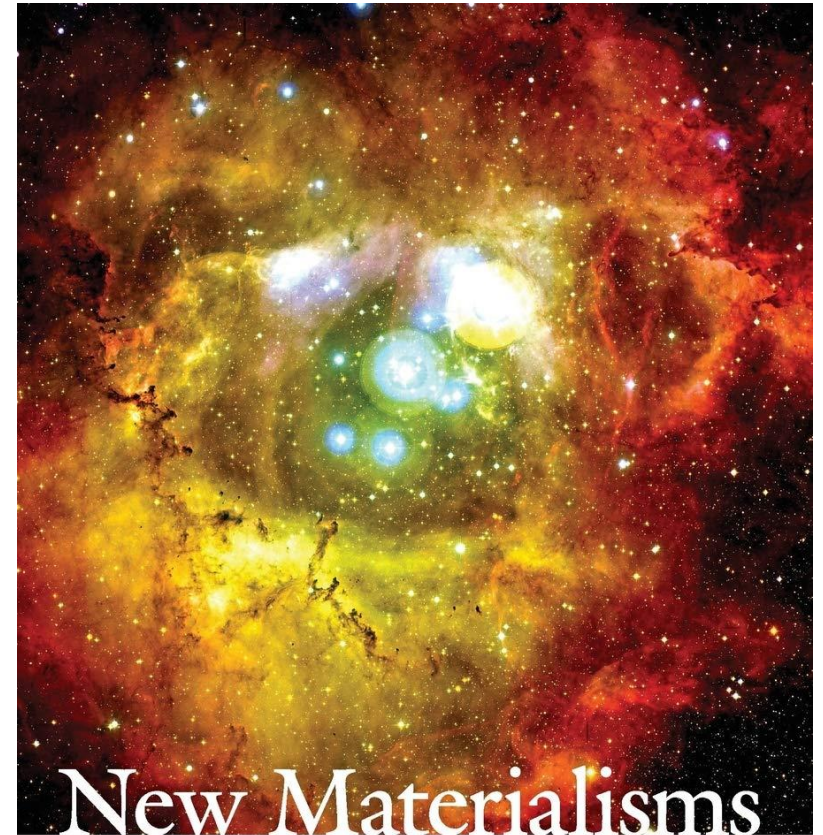
Key elements of new materialism

So what unites new materialism(s)?

In *New Materialisms* (2010), Diana Coole and Samantha Frost offer three “interrelated but distinct themes or directions in new materialist scholarship” to structure their collection. These themes reveal the key concerns of new materialism:

1. The conception of “matter itself as lively or as exhibiting agency” (2010).
2. An interest in “biopolitical and bioethical issues concerning the status of life and the human” (2010).
3. A critical re-interpretation of political economy and the relationship between the “material details of everyday life and broader geopolitical and socioeconomic structures” (2010).

These themes reveal how new materialism both **zooms in** to examine matter itself and **zooms out** to map large webs of influence. Interdisciplinary in its interests and methods, new materialism embraces questions and approaches from biology, chemistry, physics, ethics, politics, economics, international relations, the social sciences, and more.



Ontology, Agency, and Politics

EDITED BY DIANA COOLE AND SAMANTHA FROST

objects and things

(object-oriented ontology)

THE MATERIALITIES OF GREEK TRAGEDY

Objects and Affect in Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides

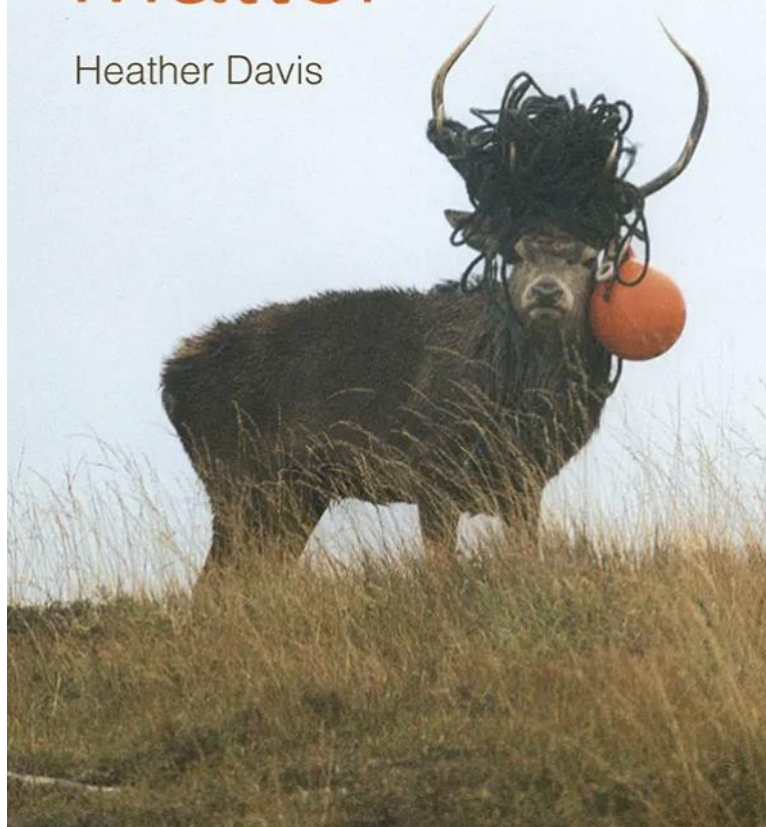


Edited by Mario Telò & Melissa Mueller

BLOOMSBURY

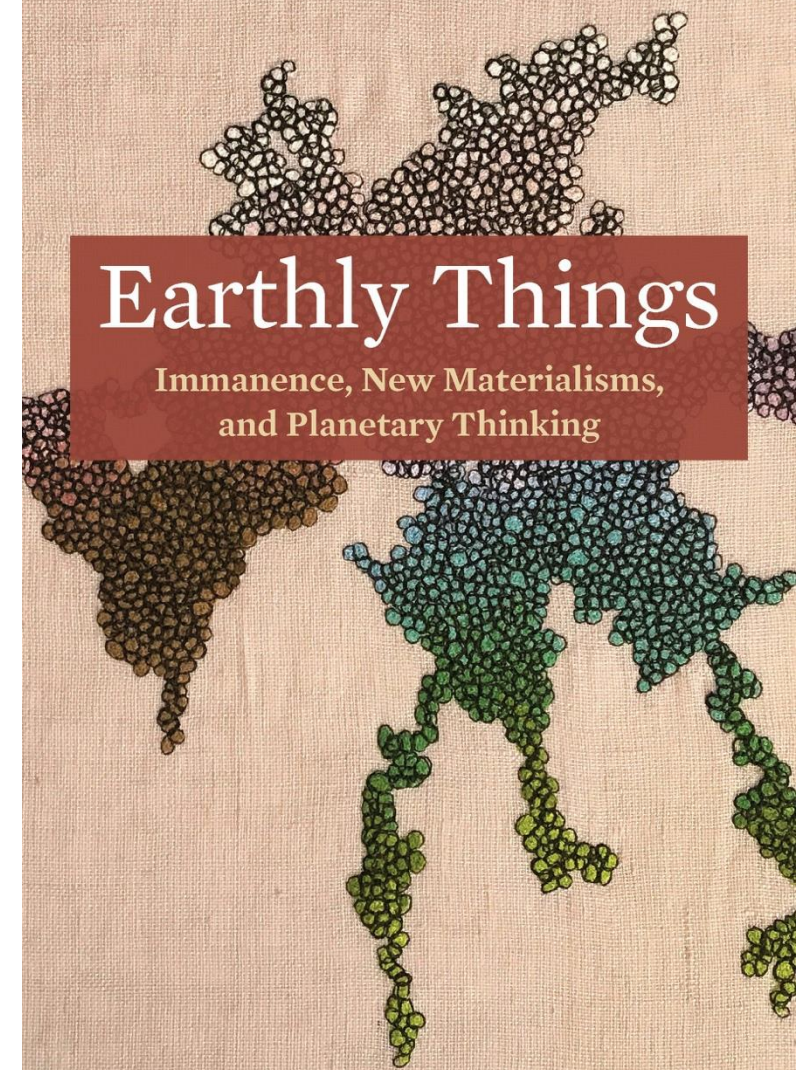
Plastic Matter

Heather Davis

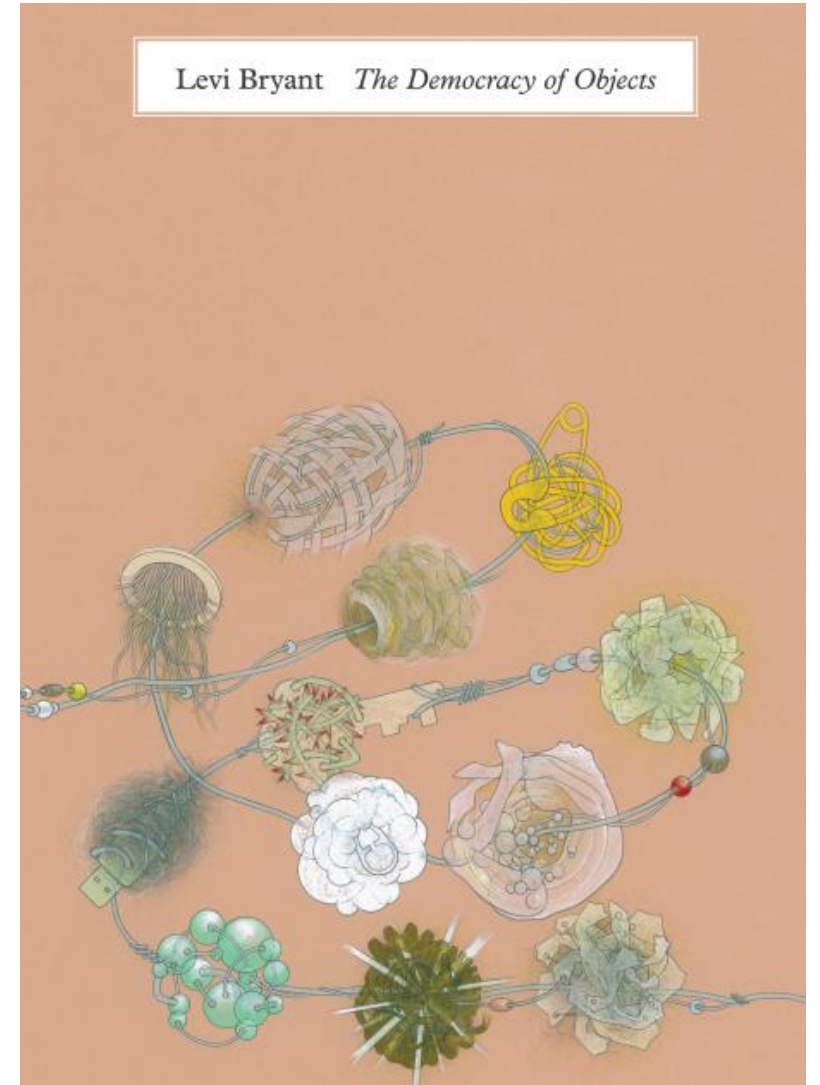
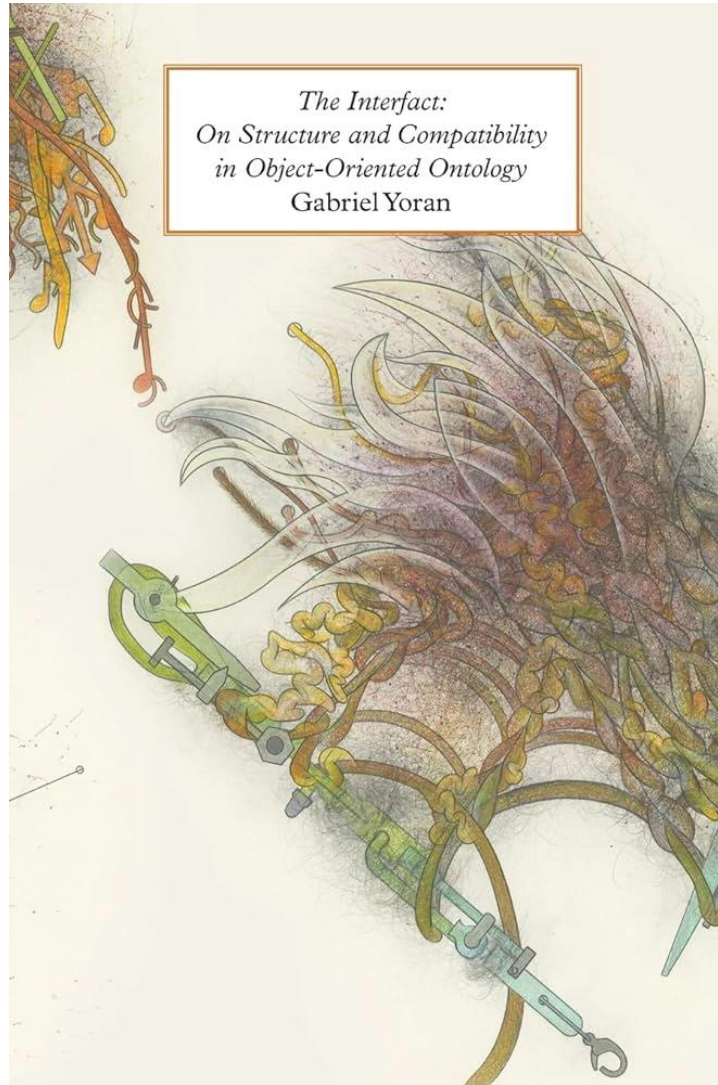
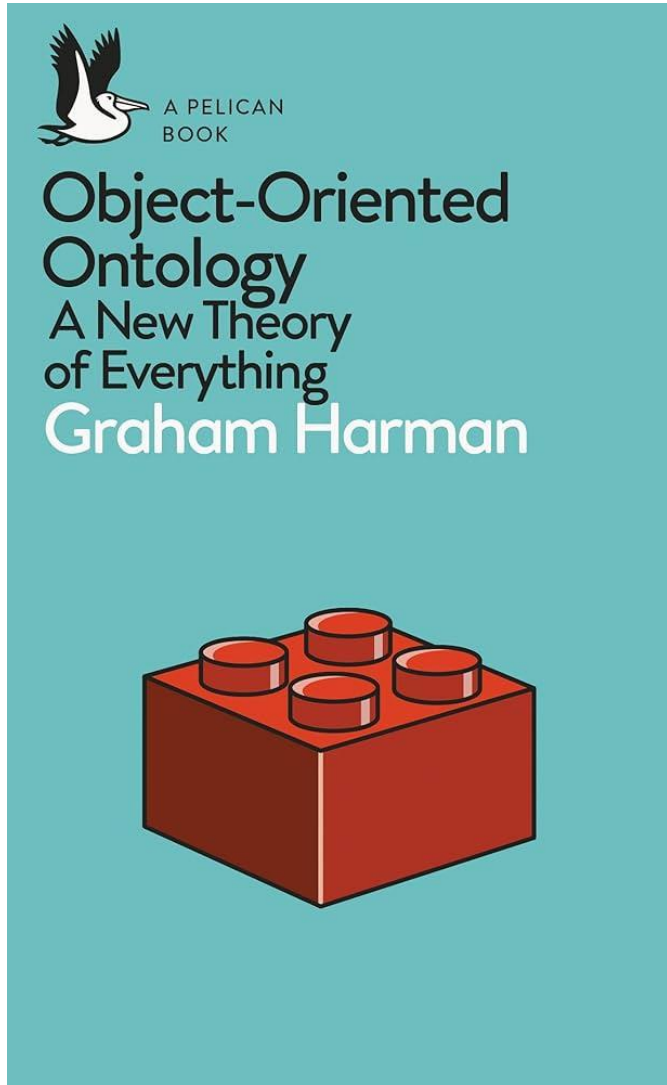


Earthly Things

Immanence, New Materialisms,
and Planetary Thinking



Karen Bray, Heather Eaton, Whitney Bauman EDITORS

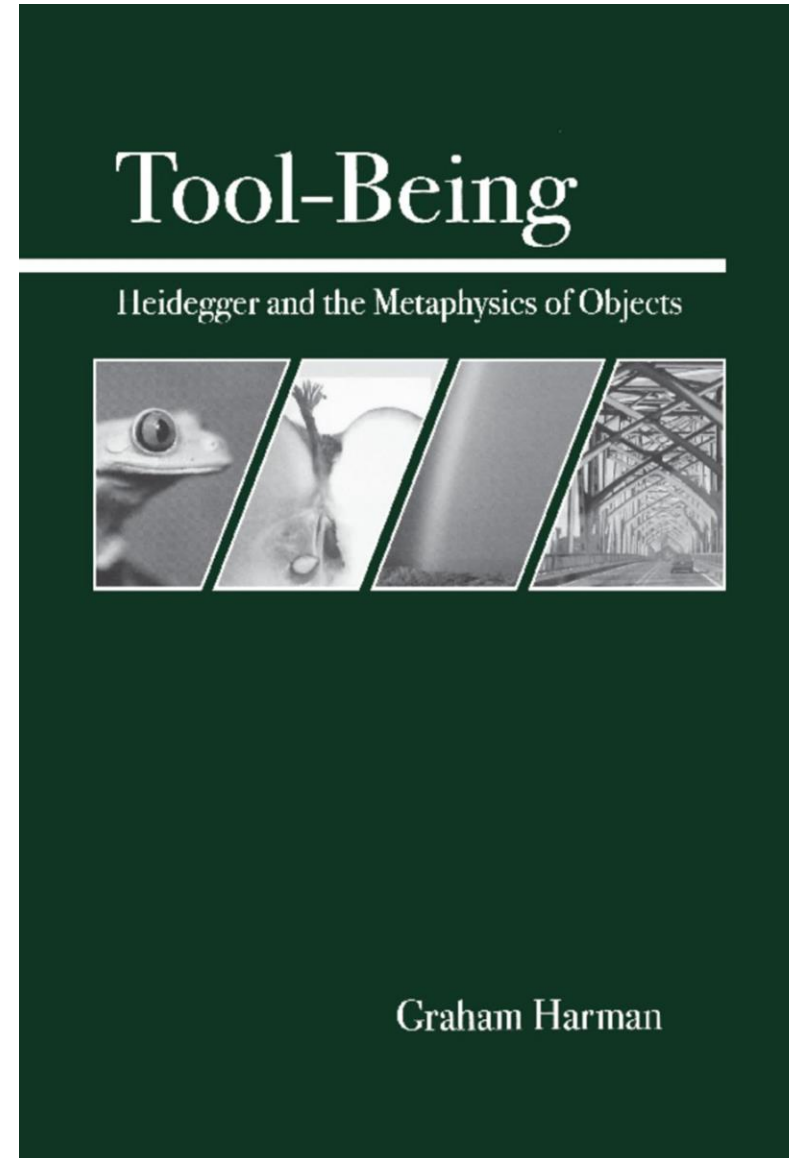


In metaphysics, object-oriented ontology (OOO) is a 21st-century Heidegger-influenced school of thought that rejects the privileging of human existence over the existence of nonhuman objects.

Heidegger's 'Ready-to-Hand' as Tool-Being

The theory is based on Heideggerian object-oriented research, and it aims to expand the scope of philosophy to include things other than human perception and consciousness.

The title 'tool-being' is Harman's reconceptualising of Heidegger's '**ready to hand**' as the ontologically primary point of meaning of objects



Smart Objects

Internet of Things and Object-Orientated Ontology



Amazon buys crowdfunded breakthrough after Backers pledge a pretty penny for Polly - the world's first truly smart kettle

The eCommerce Giant Who Came To Tea

Integration, cohesion, infusion - the long-sought-after seamless Internet of Things experience may finally become a reality thanks to Amazon's first ever acquisition and takeover of rapidly growing crowdfunded project.

Having not only secured its Indiegogo funding target but a plethora of stretch goals in record time, Polly is now set to go into production as the world's first *truly* smart kettle thanks to an *Amazon IoT* investment. Lovingly designed from the ground up, combining classic looks with the latest materials and tech make Polly everyone's cup of tea – and public interest has reached boiling point.

Editors Notes >>

- Intelligent notification system learns about users and their habits allowing Polly to offer entirely tailored prompts and personalised features.
- Seamlessly syncs with social media profiles, lifestyle tracking apps and *Nearby Friends™*.
- UnPap 4 guarantees automatic integration with all modern smart hubs.
- Automatic security updates enabled by default.
- Smart Threat Detection Auto Cutoff: Patent pending killswitch system that disables all networking functionality as soon as a threat is detected on the network.
- Platinum Grade OfIoT accreditation.
- In trials, energy usage for the average user was reduced by 40%.
- **£7.99 per month or £5.99 for Amazon Prime™ customers**
- Available from Amazon and selected retailers.

Polly Put the Kettle On...



Polly the Smart Kettle

agency

(agential realism)

Karen Barad

Meeting the Universe Halfway

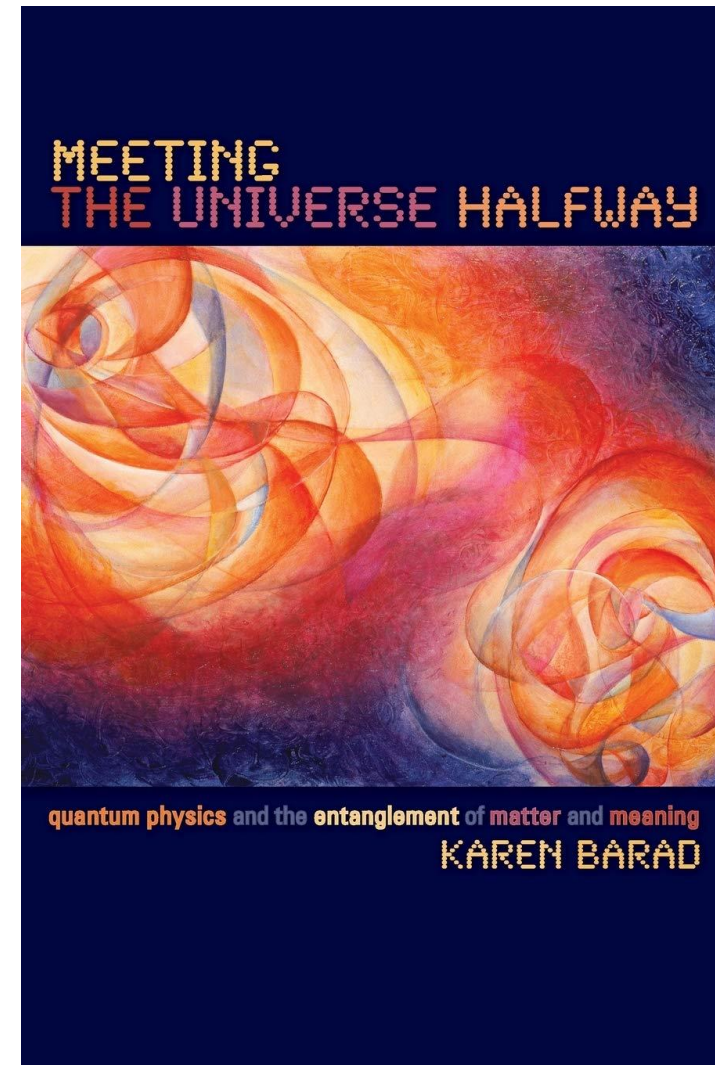
Entanglements that Matter

Diffractions and Differences

Agential Realism

“The very nature of materiality is an
entanglement...”

“Matter feels, converses, suffers, desires,
yearns and remembers”



Brittle Star

the nonhuman turn

emerging philosophies seeking to
decentre the human – emphasising the
agency of the nonhuman world

The brittlestar is an animal without a brain. It
does not suffer the Cartesian doubts of an
alleged mind/body split. Knowing is
entangled with its mode of being. Brittlestars
don't *have* eyes. They *are* eyes.

That is, it is not merely the case that its visual
system is embodied. Its very being is a
visualizing apparatus. Its morphology – its
intertwined skeletal and diffuse nervous
systems, its very structure and form – forms
a visualizing system.



Brittle Star (ophiura ophiura)

Anicka Yi

nonhuman ecologies and
embodied machines



Anicka Yi, Biologizing the Machine (tentacular trouble) (2019)

Anicka Yi

Biologizing the Machine (terra incognita), 2019.

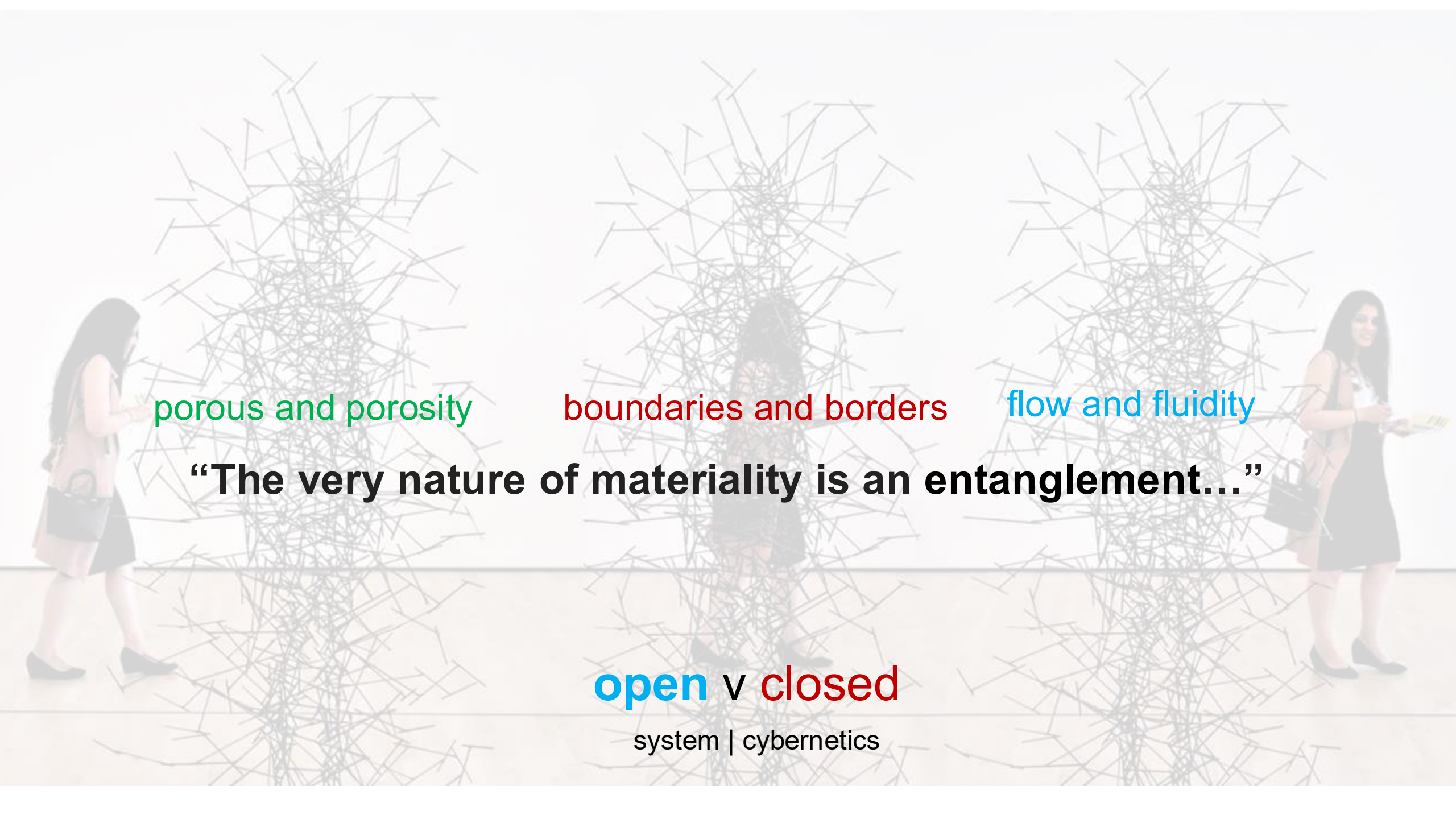
By integrating biological and technological materials, Yi demonstrates that both **organic and synthetic components possess agency**, influencing one another and producing an evolving, self-sustaining system. This entangled network reflects **New Materialist** ideas of **distributed agency**, **relationality**, and the **intrinsic vitality of matter**, **challenging human-centred views of agency and control** and inviting viewers to consider a world where life and machine co-exist as active, interdependent agents.



Biologizing the Machine (terra incognita), Anicka Yi, Biennale 2019

entanglement

the porous co-constitution of beings and things



porous and porosity

boundaries and borders

flow and fluidity

“The very nature of materiality is an entanglement...”

open v closed

system | cybernetics

Agnieszka Kurant

Agnieszka Kurant's complex conceptual practice can be described in many ways: as research into the invisible, as a study of algorithmic futurity and digital capitalism, an exploration of living and non-living actants, and the emergence of hybrid geological and biological forms. At the most general level though, Kurant's practice deals with an expansion of what is traditionally considered the human realm, by highlighting the agency of various nonhuman actors such as data, minerals, insects, bacteria, and collective and artificial intelligence. What is considered human expands through coexistence and collaboration with, other species, microbes, viruses, machines, minerals, and geological processes.



Chemical Garden (2021) *Agnieszka Kurant* | Silicate of sodium, copper, nickel, iron, zinc



Works such as A.A.I. (2015-2017) are built by entire societies — in that case societies of termites. I grow them like geological formations. Each of these natural-artificial mound forms consists of millions of grains of colorful sand, gold, and crystals, amalgamated together by millions of living organisms, and the final form is a product of this collective intelligence.

Technological bodies, distributed agency, and the porous self

The Internet of Bodies

The Internet of Bodies points to a future in which we inter-connect ourselves to others through a networked “multi-self,” enabled by hyper-enhancement of the senses and a deeper tele-intuitive understanding of the virtual self.

“Our living body is by far the most important element in the future Internet... body > data > space.” — Ghislaine Boddington

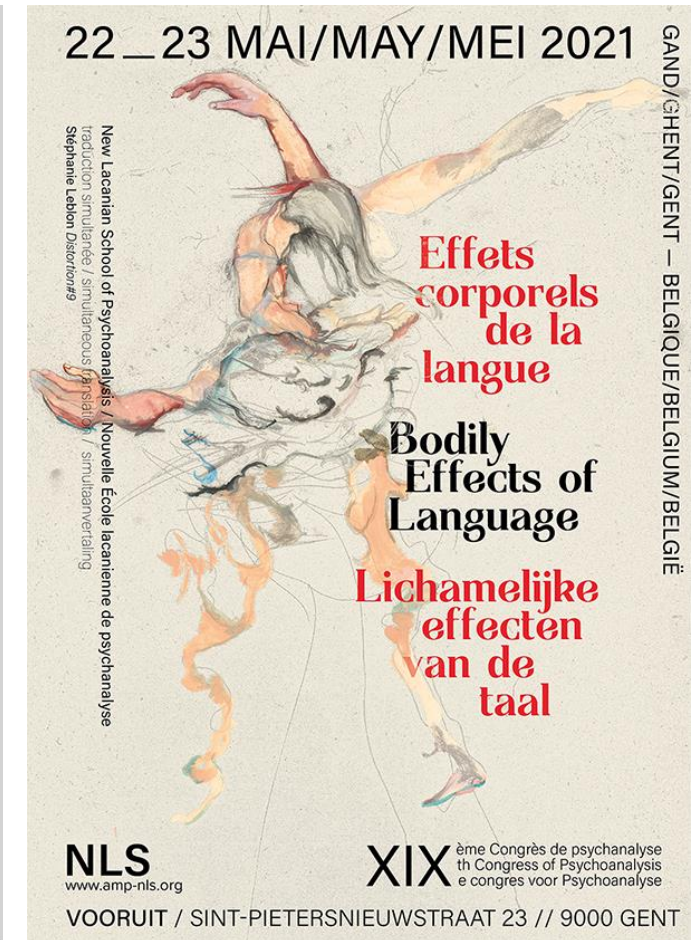
Body as Material

Self is a self-portrait of the artist, but one that literally uses his body as material since the cast of Quinn's head, immersed in frozen silicone.

Self is rooted in an incarnational approach which embodies the **immaterial** in the material.



Marc Quinn ('Self') by Marc Quinn
blood (artist's), liquid silicone, stainless steel, glass,
perspex and refrigeration equipment, 2006
80 3/4 in. x 25 5/8 in. 25 5/8 in. (2050 mm x 650 mm x
650mm)

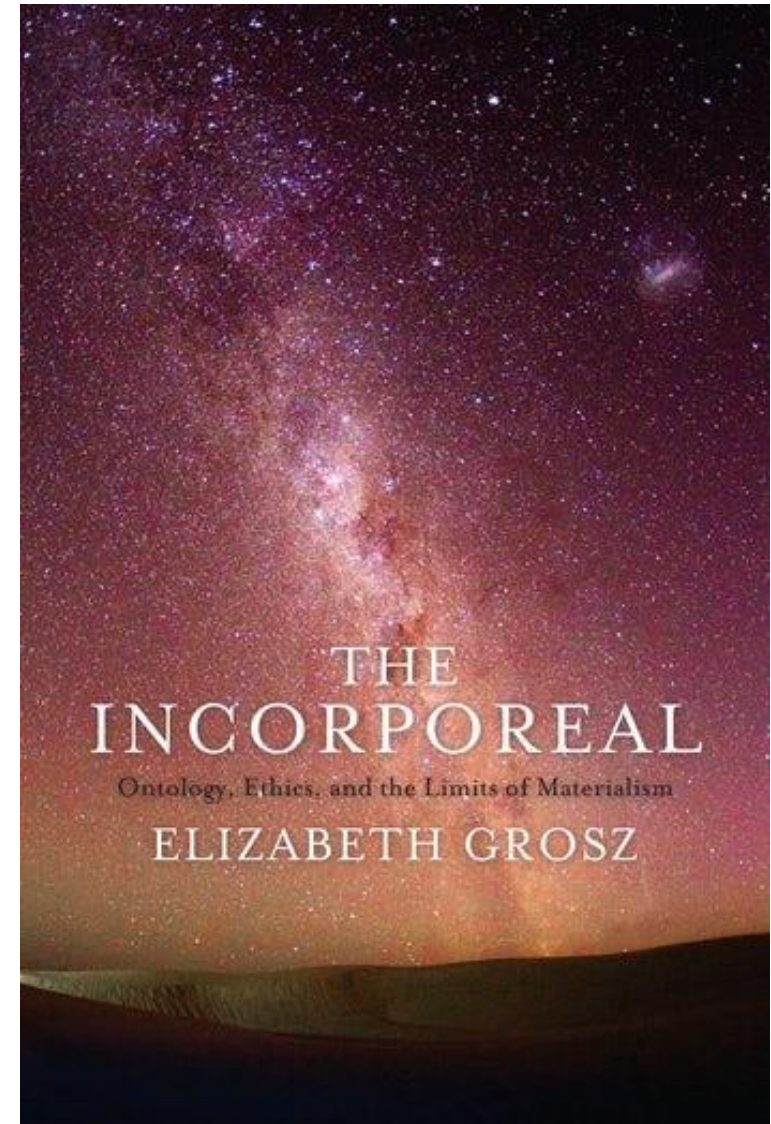


The Lacanian concept of the **"speaking voice"** and the **material-discursive concept in New Materialism** both challenge the **mind-body dualism** inherited from Descartes, but they approach this challenge in distinct ways, with each exploring how language, materiality, and embodiment interact.

The Incorporeal

Philosophy has inherited a powerful impulse to embrace either **dualism or a reductive monism**—either **a radical separation of mind and body** or the **reduction of mind to body**. But from its origins in the writings of the **Stoics**, the first thoroughgoing materialists, another view has acknowledged that no forms of materialism can be completely self-inclusive—space, time, the void, and sense are the incorporeal conditions of all that is corporeal or material.

In *The Incorporeal* Elizabeth Grosz argues that **the ideal is inherent in the material and the material in the ideal**, and, by tracing its development over time, she makes the case that this same idea reasserts itself in different intellectual contexts. Grosz shows that not only are **idealism and materialism** inextricably linked but that this "belonging together" of the entirety of ideality and the entirety of materiality is not mediated or created by human consciousness. Instead, it is an ontological condition for the development of human consciousness. Grosz draws from Spinoza's material and ideal concept of substance, Nietzsche's *amor fati*, Deleuze and Guattari's plane of immanence...

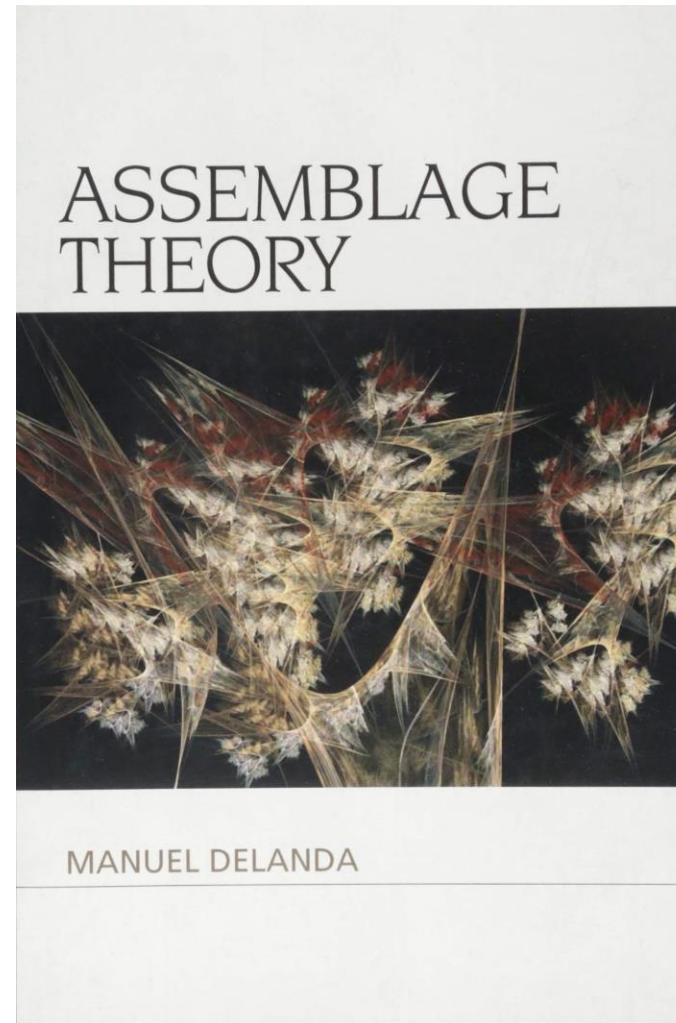


assemblage

Manuel DeLanda

Like Deleuze and Guattari, DeLanda suggests that the social does not lose its reality, nor its materiality, through its complexity.

In this way, assemblages are effective in their practicality; assemblages, though fluid, are nevertheless part of historically significant processes.



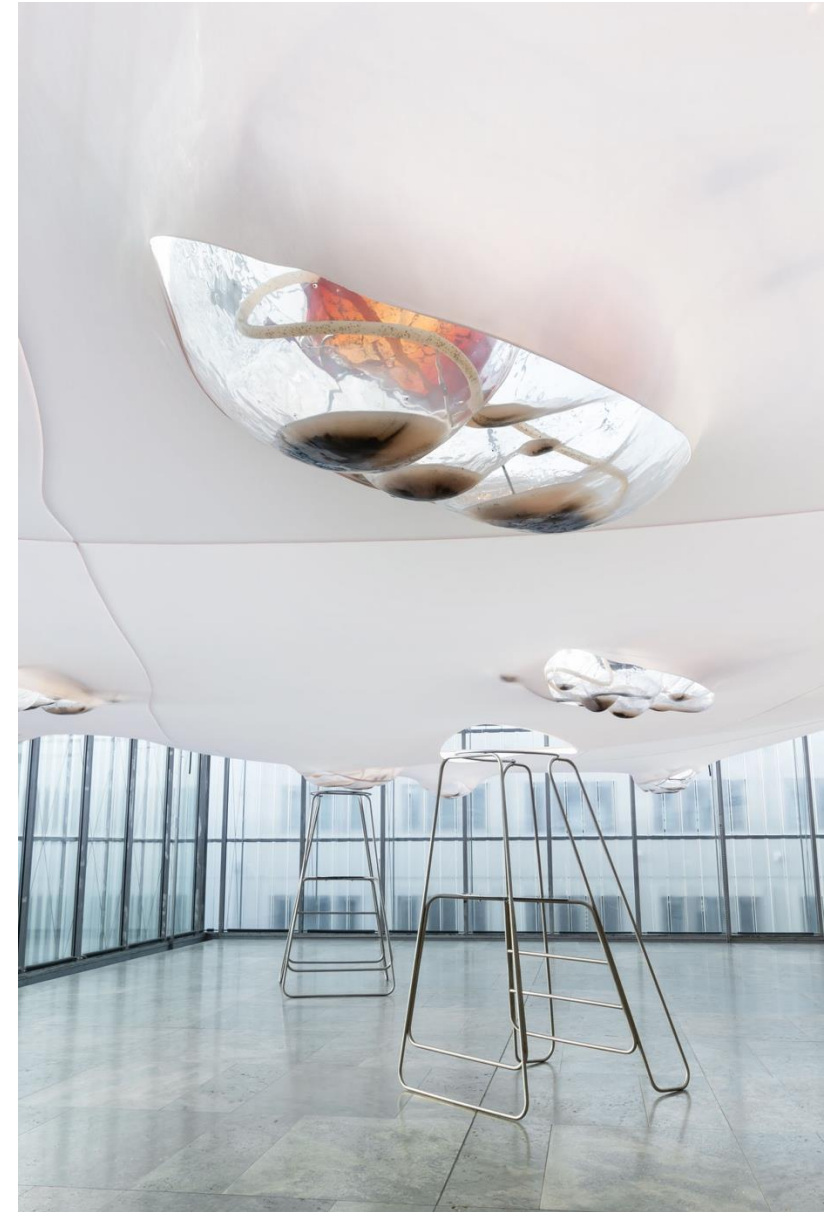
Pakui Hardware

Neringa Černiauskaitė and Ugnius Gelguda



From the Creatures of Habit Series, 2017

The anthropomorphical, Technological, Cybernetic, sculptural, plasticity, instillation, transformative, pulsating, fluid, bodily





Creatures of Habit Series (2017) | Pakui Hardware

Body Without Organs

For D&G the body without organs is an evolving concept. In *Anti-Oedipus* it is introduced in relation to the body of the 'Schizo' that resists the habitual organisation of the body.... Physical labour, bearing children, sitting up straight in class; all have an orderly place for their organs. The (schizoid) body without organs defies the social code and deliberately 'scrambles all the codes' (D&G 1972: 15) (Patricia Pisters: 74, Posthuman Glossary)



Hence the reference to Artaud, who in all his delirious and artistic expression points out that underneath the traditionally coded body with an assigned place and its role in society, **underneath the organs there is a chaotic, messy world full of intensive potentiality**. Men, woman, children; all have their place in social hierarchy.

Uncanny Bodies – Body-Without-Limbs

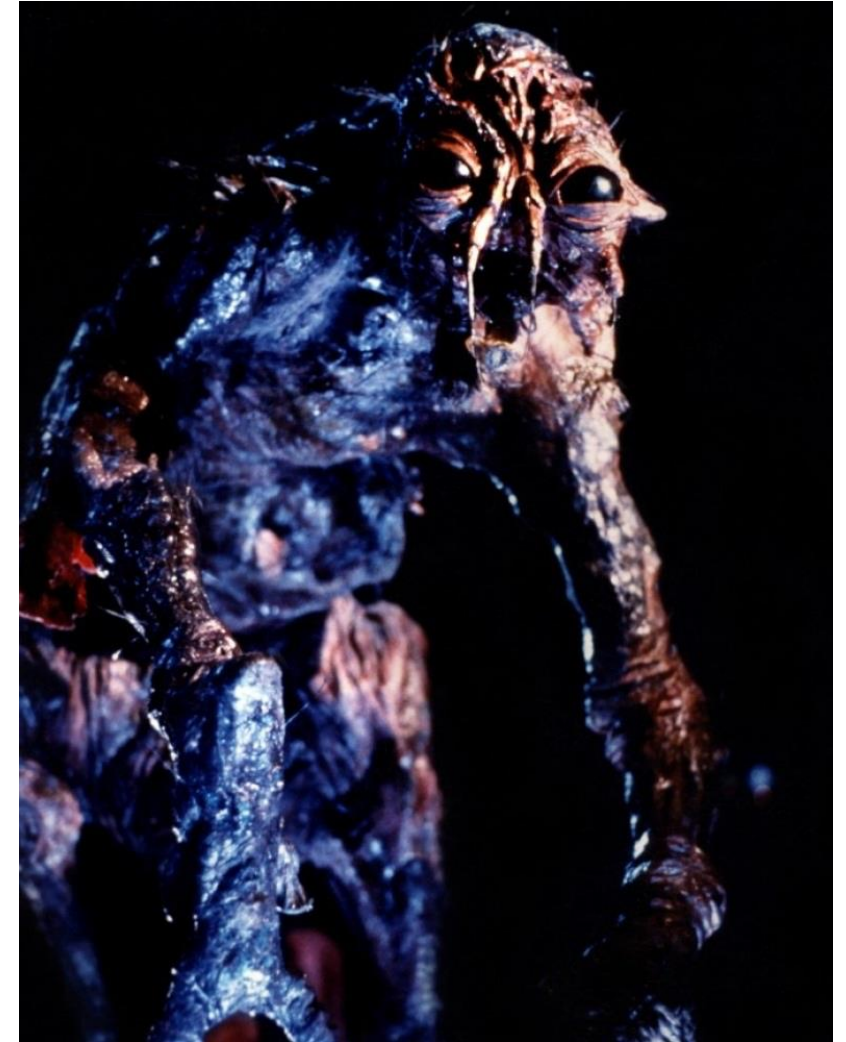


Mari Katayama, (b. 1987), On the way home, 2016

Becoming Anomalous

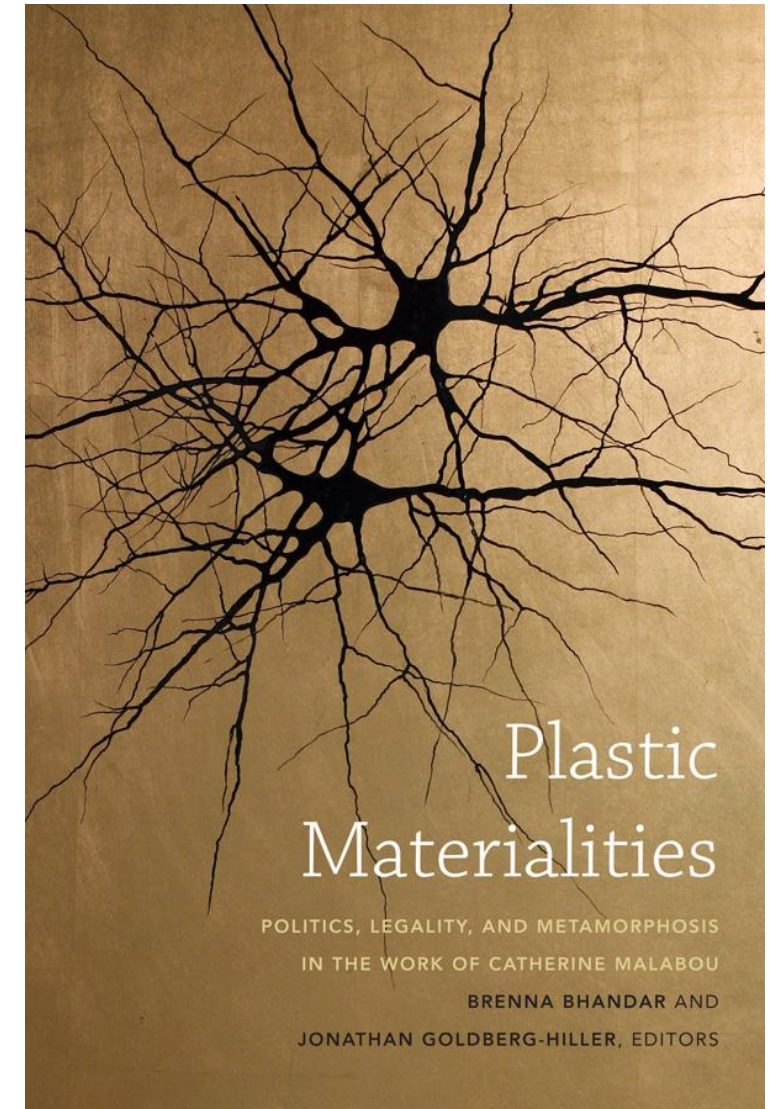
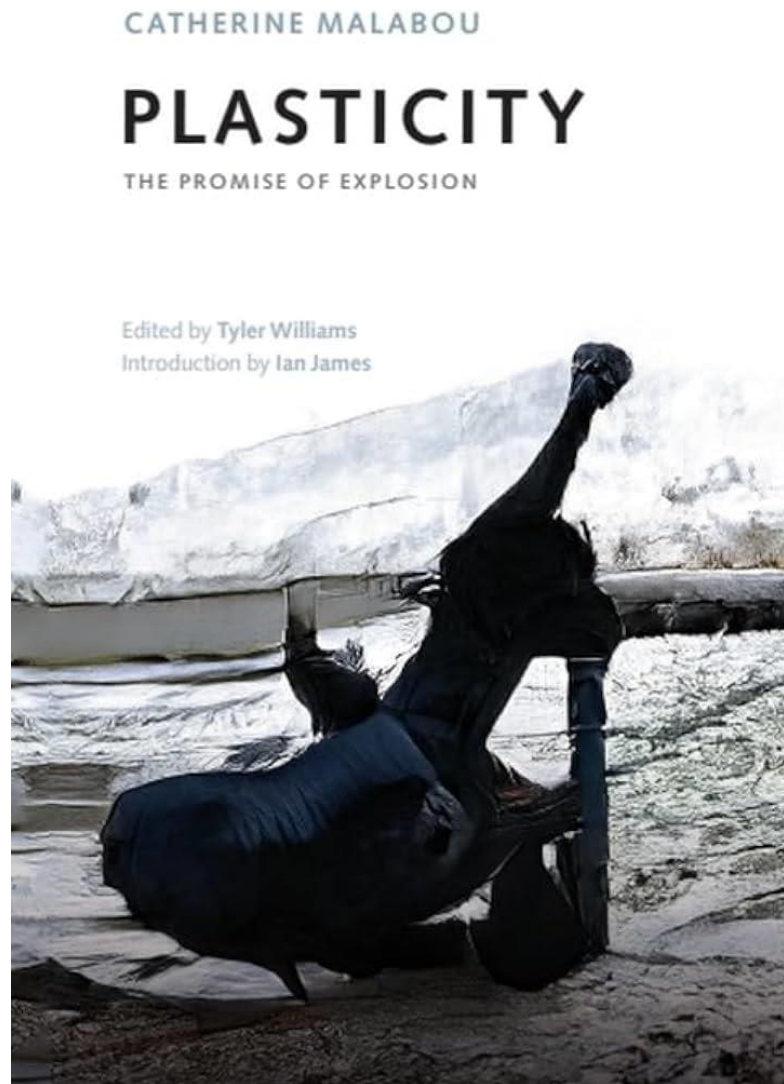
“Becomings are incongruous, bizarre and repulsive, like the genetic hybrid of man and insect, ‘Brundlefly’, in David Cronenberg's *The Fly*, produced when a housefly is accidentally trapped in a teleporter.” (Anna Powell, *Becoming Anomalous and the Body-Without-Organs*)

The transformation from human to fly/human mutation in *The Fly* (1986) can indeed be interpreted through Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the **Body Without Organs (BwO)**, as it presents a body undergoing radical changes that defy typical organization and fixed identity. Seth Brundle's metamorphosis into “Brundlefly” disrupts conventional bodily structures, blending human and non-human attributes in a way that mirrors the BwO's resistance to stable forms, fixed functions, and normative organization.



plasticity

Catherine Malabou



Plasticity denotes both the capacity to “take form (as in the plasticity of clay) and to give form (as in the plastic arts and plastic surgery)”. [1] Originally, Catherine Malabou introduced this concept through an analysis of Hegel's work on which she wrote her thesis, under the supervision of Jacques Derrida.

The Politics of Rot

Decaying matter is an essential component of our built environment. From compost in our gardens, to lichen and fungi in our brick and stone walls and tile roofs, to bacteria on our skin, our environment grows thanks to and along with non-human decay. However, we neglect these non-human agents and, now more than ever, we fear them as they also include viruses and the surfaces where viruses inhabit.



Simon Starling, Island for weeds, 2003



Wolfgang Tillmans, Weed, 2014

New (Normal) Materialist Decay Series

We wash our hands with antibacterial soaps, interact with the world through gloves, masks, scrubs, glasses and screens. We now sterilise our built environment more than ever, thus polluting it with toxic antibacterial matter.

To ignore decaying matter and the waste of our new material mediations (as well as their destinies and trajectories) also means to neglect the human workforce that physically deals with decay and the organisms that support it.

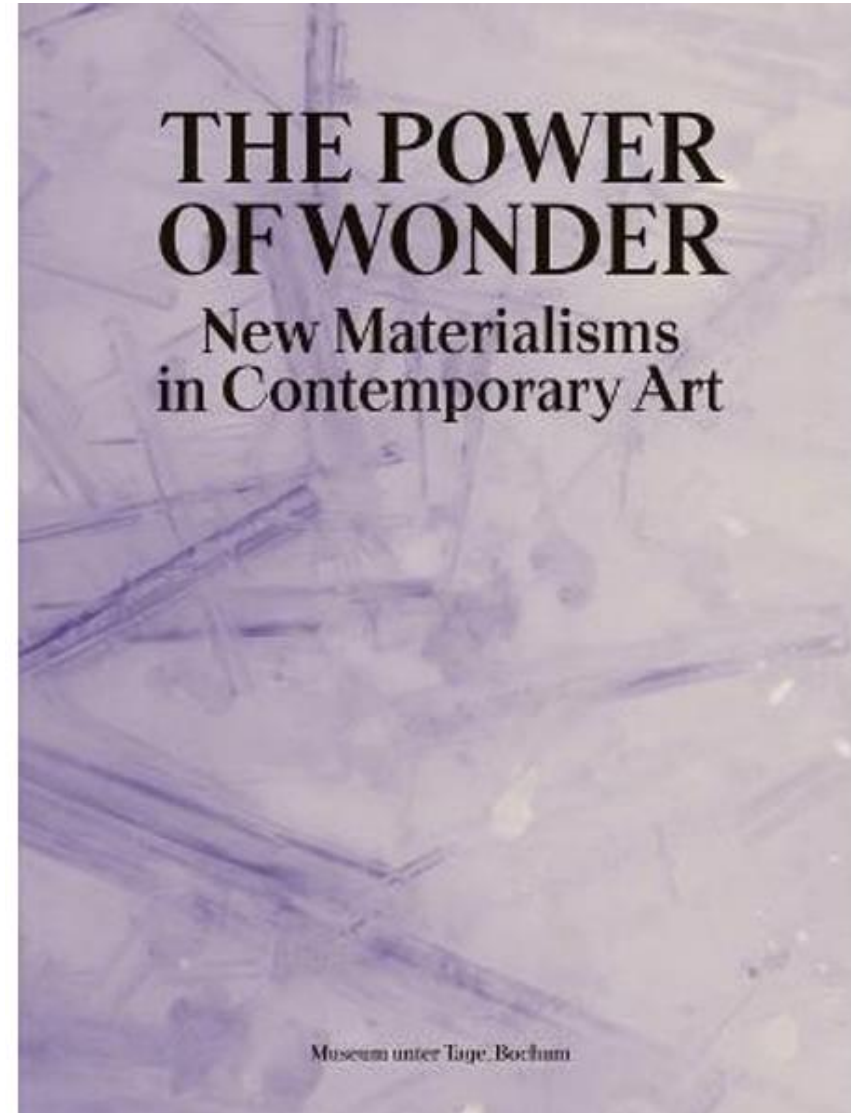


The Power of Wonder

New Materialisms in Contemporary Art

For the longest time, physical matter was seen as no more than a passive and lifeless object. Since the early years of the twenty-first century, however, visual artists and scientists alike have initiated a change of thinking, conceiving matter as active, unruly, and autonomous. The **ethnologist Hans Peter Hahn** has called it the "**willfulness of things**," while the Belgian **philosopher Isabelle Stengers** has underscored the "**power of wonder**"-the bracing sense of marvel and surprise instilled by a material world that sometimes defies the attempt to put it into words.

This pioneering publication features six selected artistic positions that **highlight the New Materialism's significance for contemporary art**. The artists employ materials that are millions of years old such as rocks from an open-pit mine as well as classic inorganic staples like ceramics and cutting-edge materials like digital products transformed in high-tech procedures into hitherto unseen hybrid objects. Their work lends art a powerful voice in contemporary debates around man's position vis-a-vis his environment, around sustainability, participation, and justice.



Ilana Halperin

Ilana Halperin's art reflects a special affinity between humans and their environment. With the work *Self Portrait as a Lava Bomb*, she declares the Icelandic volcano Eldfell, which first erupted only a few weeks before the artist was born, to be her twin.

On milestone birthdays, Halperin travels to Iceland and celebrates together with Eldfell. The coloring of her large woven wall works, in turn, reference the textiles created by her mother, Gayle Portnow Halperin, a New York-based designer, in the 1970s. The layered structure of the fabric is reminiscent of geological processes such as the deposition of sediments.

With the *The Rock Cycle*, Halperin appears as co-author in collaboration with the forces of the excessively calcareous water of the French stalactite cave Fontaines Pétrifiantes de Saint-Nectaire. Over months, the water has coated the ancient terracotta bricks she collected with a solid crust of sinter, giving the objects their actual character.



Self Portrait as a Lava Bomb. Installation view at The Hunterian, 2019

Agata Ingarden

Agata Ingarden's artistic approach is related to methods of behavioral research. However, in contrast to biology, she does not investigate living actors, but rather **explores the actions and reactions of predominantly inorganic substances**. In doing so, her curiosity is directed toward activities such as **flowing, decaying, mirroring, growing together, or hardening**. She evaluates materials according to their capacities, i.e., their capabilities. Towards what does a substance tend? With what could it combine? What could it trigger?

The large-scale work ***Like Mushrooms After Rain*** formulates this interest of Ingarden's within a sculptural framework. Typical here is the behavior of the caramel balls, which repeatedly change their aggregate state over time: In contact with the warm air of the exhibition space, their consistency changes from solid to liquid, while they quickly solidify again as the temperature drops



Like Mushrooms After Rain, 2018 Agata Ingarden
Metal, foam, salt, sugar, oyster shells, mirror

SUPERFLEX

All That We Know consists of six large-scale sculptures of common fruits and vegetables that, for many generations, have been said to have healing properties. With this work, SUPERFLEX makes a connection between traditional medicine and official science, aiming to highlight our ever-shifting relationship to both knowledge and nature.

SUPERFLEX put real fruits and vegetables through an MRI scanner, and used the resulting images to design the sculptures. Today we use complex technology to study their interior structures, chemical components, and potential healing properties.

Over time, our ideas of nature have been slowly transformed by scientific investigations; once perceived as a divine force, today nature is often considered subordinate to humanity. We have placed ourselves in a narrative in which we separate ourselves from nature and strive to defy its limits.

Yet we have always sought treatments and cures in the realm of nature. The mythical benefits of fruits and vegetables were once discussed in prominent medical publications; today, these ideas are still passed down in communities and families, and information about home remedies is disseminated widely on the internet. In the past and the present, storytelling and folk medicine have turned out to be complements to science.

As medical beliefs have shifted, mythical beliefs have transformed into scientific knowledge and vice versa. Our relationship to nature continuously changes based on all that we don't know – and all that we know.



All That We Know, 2021. Broccoli. Photo: SUPERFLEX

SUPERFLEX

In their film *Western Rampart*, the Danish artist collective SUPERFLEX creates a realistic and at the same time surreal world in which viewers can completely immerse themselves. During the fifteen minutes of the film, contradictions are staged in manifold ways. For example, the shots are razor sharp, while the voices have been heavily distorted.

The plot is fantastic. A fly agaric mushroom enters into an argument with the titular *Western Rampart*, the long abandoned, late-nineteenth-century fortification of the city of Copenhagen. Here, the two participants in the conversation not only personify themselves but also take on human traits.

This happens, for example, when a drop of water runs down the rampart wall like a tear, or when the human-sized fly agaric mushroom suddenly moves its arms. In these moments, the wall represents human civilization, the foundation of which is threatened by the fungus.

A strange, fragile network becomes visible, in which the roles are allocated, but the boundaries flow and ultimately elude all control.



Western Rampart (2018) , the Danish artist collective SUPERFLEX

Something in the world forces us to think. This something is an object not of recognition but of a fundamental **encounter**. (Gilles Deleuze)

Mapping the Agency of Trash

*A New Materialist Re-Reading of
Contemporary Indian Art*

New materialism bypasses the common-sense notion that artists shape the material to create a work of art; instead, it focuses on how materials exert agency and become co-actors in art.

Each encounter with a work of art, from both the artist's and the viewer's side, is influenced by context, mood, circumstance, location, state of mind and innumerable other internal and external factors. The material manifestation of works of art, though, provides the most essential aspect of art's function and meaning. (Christina Murdoch Mills)



Trash as Metaphor and/or Symbol: Foregrounding the Complex Intra-actions in the Process of Art

Prominent theorists like **Manuel deLanda**, **Tim Ingold**, **Bruno Latour**, **Karen Barad** and **Rosi Braidotti**, among many others, reject the dichotomised understanding of commonly held binaries such as nature– culture, human– non-human, mind– matter in a multitude of ways and argue that their constituent parts are inseparable and shape each other in the creative process of becoming.



Arunkumar HG, *The Damn*, 2015,
discarded plastic bottle caps, steel filaments, collection of the artist



Mithu Sen, *MOU (Museum of Unbelongings)*, 2011–2018,
found objects in glass vitrine, collection of the artist

Old vs New Materialism – From Production to Participation

From Marx's matter of labour to Barad's matter that labours

Old Materialism (Dialectical / Historical) New Materialism (Ontological / Vital / Posthuman)

- Human-centred – Matter gains meaning through labour and production.
- Matter as passive substance; world as resource to be shaped.
- Dialectics & contradiction; progressive, teleological time.
- Praxis as knowledge; ethics of revolution.
- Key thinkers: Marx, Engels, Brecht, Constructivists, Arte Povera.
- Key metaphor: Matter as *stage* of history.
- Distributed agency – Humans, materials, technologies co-act.
- Matter as active process; self-organising and responsive.
- Entanglement & intra-action; non-linear temporalities.
- Relation as knowledge; ethics of care.
- Key thinkers: Barad, Bennett, Braidotti, Haraway, Yi, Kuran, Oxman.
- Key metaphor: Matter as *actor* in history.

Continuities and Tensions – Old and New Materialisms in Dialogue

New Materialism widens Marx's field of actors and actions

Continuities:

- Immanence over transcendence – both reject idealism.
- Critique of abstraction – distrust pure ideas detached from practice.
 - Emphasis on process and becoming.
- Resistance to idealism; focus on collective life.
- Ethical concern with material conditions.

Tensions / Departures:

- From social → ontological – New Materialism explains being itself.
- From praxis → participation – agency extended beyond human.
- From production → emergence – open-ended processes.
- From determination → indeterminacy – contingency embraced.
- From revolution → care – ethics of maintenance and coexistence.

Bridge to Contemporary Practice – Matter in Action

From matter as resource to matter as relation – the artist as facilitator of material thought.

Philosophical Shift → Artistic / Design Practice → Key Example(s)

- Production → Participation – Matter as collaborator; co-authored processes → **Anicka Yi (Biologizing the Machine, 2019).**
- Human Agency → Distributed Agency – Shared authorship with systems → **Agnieszka Kurant (A.A.I., 2015–17).**
- Dialectic → Entanglement – Making as relational intra-action → Barad-inspired installations.
- Labour → Metabolism – Design as ecological metabolism → **Neri Oxman (Silk Pavilion, 2013); SUPERFLEX (Sea Chair, 2011).**
- Revolution → Care – Ethics of maintenance and coexistence → **Ilana Halperin (Self Portrait as a Lava Bomb, 2019).**

From Old to ...New Materialism

New materialism is a term used in contemporary philosophy and cultural studies to describe a theoretical framework that challenges traditional and dualistic ways of thinking about the relationship between the material world and human perception, consciousness, and culture. It is characterized by a shift away from purely human-centric or idealist perspectives and a renewed emphasis on the agency and significance of the material world.



- **Emphasis on Material Agency:** New materialism emphasises the active role of non-human entities, materials, and processes in shaping the world and human experiences. It rejects the idea that only humans have agency or significance and acknowledges the influence of non-human entities.
- **Post-Humanism:** New materialism often aligns with post-humanist thinking, which challenges anthropocentrism and the idea of a clear boundary between humans and the non-human world. It encourages a more inclusive perspective that recognizes the entanglement of human and non-human entities.
- **Focus on Materiality:** New materialism emphasises the materiality of the world, exploring the ways in which matter, objects, and the physical environment affect and shape human existence. It questions the longstanding division between the mental and the material.
- **Interdisciplinary Approach:** New materialism tends to be interdisciplinary, drawing on a wide range of fields, including philosophy, science studies, environmental studies, cultural studies, and more. It encourages collaboration and dialogue across these domains.
- **Political Implications:** New materialism often has political implications, especially in discussions related to ecology, feminism, and social justice. It can inform and inspire new ways of thinking about environmental issues, human rights, and social equality.
- **Deconstruction of Dualisms:** New materialism challenges dualistic thinking, such as the mind/matter, nature/culture, and human/non-human divides. It seeks to break down these dualisms to create a more holistic understanding of the world.

Prominent figures associated with new materialism include **Karen Barad, Jane Bennett, Manuel DeLanda, and Donna Haraway**, among others. While new materialism is a complex and evolving field, it represents a significant shift in philosophical and theoretical perspectives towards a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of the relationships between humans and the material world.