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Book Review: Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin, *New Materialism: Interviews & Cartographies* (Ann Arbor, MI: Open Humanities Press, 2012), 197 pp.



Although half a decade has passed since its publication, this collection of *Interviews & Cartographies* remains useful, tracing the blossoming and thickening of *New Materialism's* initial years: from continental philosophy and identity politics to the more recent posthumanist- and media and technology-focused outgrowths. In their brief introduction, two veteran new materialist scholars—Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin—note that new materialist publications have been increasing steadily over the last 15 years or so, and especially as it has become more familiar outside of continental academia (in U.K. and U.S.). This trend has, of course, continued unabated. The book's project is to map out a metaphysics for the new materialism which goes beyond the inherited materialist critiques of Marx by French Marxists such as Althusser. Their goal in doing this is to help catalyze a reorientation of all thought, rather than to add new theories of critique based on ever more categories of difference. If this sounds grandiose, their mission is to be understood less as a totalizing effort and more as a positioning of their work at the ground level, born of a desire to rebuild the basis for academic thought around a new materialist paradigm: matter both distant from and entangled in the representational aesthetics or meaning post-structuralist cultural theorists hold so dear.

As one may have discerned from their title, this volume is concerned with mapping a *cartography* of the field both with and through *interviews* with key scholars in this emergent field. These interviews are not meant to be “representative,” but are rather to serve as *sites* of material-discursive entanglement in their own right, having drawn their work from the core philosophical predecessors of new materialism, as well as being *transversally* in conversation with each other's work, and their work of other colleges and disciplines. The essays which follow these interviews provide additional conceptual explanation and extended genealogical information about the history and directions the new materialism has taken and continues to take, but I will take the lead of Dolphijn and van der Tuin's methodological and philosophical directive and focus my own review on the more creative part of the project: the interviews themselves.

This “transversal” relation between chapters mirrors the subjective and ontological emphasis of new materialism itself (14). Part of their project of

creating a book that charts a landscape that cannot be (efficiently) consumed, is to open up the possibilities of the field, rather than enclose it within finite parameters. That the essay-style chapters refer back to the interviews through both resonances and dissonances, as the interviews did among themselves, manifests the practice of what one of the interviewees, Karen Barad, calls—via Donna Haraway—“diffractive” reading, which is central to many new materialist methodologies. What is most unique about this book, therefore, is the opportunity it provides for the reader to become immersed (dare I say entangled?) in the philosophical practice of the text – with all the difficulties that come from starting *in medias res*. Akin to the Heideggerian *Dasein* which is defined by its “thrownness” (though all of these theorists depart from Heideggerian phenomenology), readers are asked to follow into what for most will be partially uncharted territories (as the book does not claim to provide new information such as a new directions of new materialism volume might, and therefore presupposes an audience less familiar to the area, though necessarily familiar enough with post-structuralist and other continental philosophical traditions). Our understanding of new terms is built up through a networking and accrual of meaning which mimics the entanglement of matter and meaning at the core of new materialist philosophies.

Dolphijn and van der Tuin’s interview of Rosi Braidotti circulates around cultivating a genealogy for a feminist brand of new materialism, which she argues is always already situated in matter, but needs to move away from a sole emphasis on critique towards a dual approach including the production of visionary alternatives and more effective critique of sexual difference, which implies loosening the hegemony of gender as a privileged paradigmatic marker. This combination of creation and critique is what, according to Braidotti, makes feminist new materialism a radical ethical response to the failures of post-structuralist and postmodernist critiques and identity politics. Braidotti closes by reminding us that while it is important to critique our situation, “creativity is unimaginable without some visionary fuel.” To create change in our present, we must therefore think the future in a way that “honours our obligations to the generations to come” (36). Though Braidotti’s work focuses on ethics and identity, she illuminates several key points about temporality that will be picked up by others—particularly Karen Barad.

Dolphijn and van der Tuin ask Manuel DeLanda how he incorporates a notion of the geologic beyond language in addressing the morphogenetic changes of the real (38). For DeLanda, it is important to underscore the existence of the material world, which seems to have been neglected by post-structuralists. In his new materialist approach, he takes this real work to be created by synthesis through historical processes of consolidation. Despite the turn away from linguistic hegemony, as they call it, this geology works as well with the accrual of linguistic or other semiotic material (39). His work strives to save new materialism from

becoming *a priori*, while simultaneously evoking and problematizing Marx, as others do as well (40), removing its anthropocentric bent, i.e. its emphasis on human labor as the only source of value (41).

DeLanda is the only interviewee who directly engages with ecology, which is, in this reviewer's opinion, the materialist process par excellence. DeLanda believes that an ecology-based philosophy can help critics move beyond the limitations of a Marxist political economy insofar as it accounts for a spectrum of values beyond the humanist focus on market value. His approach pivots on the notion of "assemblage theory" wherein "movement makes emergent wholes" that are not unified *a priori* (42), and emphasizes the irreducible social complexity of the world. Assemblages allow scholars to resist the dualisms of traditional philosophy (a core project of all iterations of new materialism), creating a new ontology which imagines non-linear forms of causality (42). Like the overlap which Braidotti introduced in the intersectional embodiment of a subject—social, symbolic, and physical—DeLanda hones in on this important site as a more accurate delineation of subjectivity. He cites that gender norms and sexual binaries overlap statistically (in what I would call the demographic version of an ecotone), and modernist dualities come from ignoring these zones of overlap and reifying the averages (45). The (Kantian) privileging of conceptually structured human experience dehistoricizes the human species which was social without language longer than with it. Stating that critique is never enough, and that we also need to offer viable alternatives, DeLanda echoes Braidotti. He calls for a Humeian subjectivity composed of sensual "intensities" "structured" by "habitual action" (46).

Karen Barad's materialist thread is termed "agential realism," which she has described as an "immanent enfolding of matter and meaning," arising out of her reading together of cultural theory and quantum physics to recuperate the material-discursive and performative nature of intra-actions (48-9). Similar to Braidotti and DeLanda, Barad says we no longer need just critique, adding it is not ethical enough. In pushing materialism beyond critique, she focuses on an implicitly linguistic or even literary dynamic—that of reading.

Returning again to temporalities, we find that Barad wants to recuperate a form of "causality" through intra-action (as opposed to interaction, which presupposes separate entities) wherein agency would be coterminous with response-ability, ability to respond, multiple because its location is not fixed (55). Responsibility does not posit a distance such as scientism asserts in its definition of objectivity. Diffractive methodology asks scholars to relate to texts neither by negating nor by affirming them, but by "intra-acting" with them, creating resonances and dissonances (57). (It is safe to say that this book can itself be regarded as an exemplary application of a diffractive methodology.) Her non-representationalist take on "sexual difference" assumes there is "desire" before the individuated subject, and hence that the subject is not *a priori* gendered because

“matter and meaning are always already immanently enfolded and transitional” (58). Furthermore, materiality is always already a “desiring dynamism,” a “reiterative reconfiguration,” “enlivening and enlivened,” and in this sense oriented towards the future (59). The “future is not what will happen” but “past and future are intra-actively reconfigured and enfolded,” “marking time through the world’s ongoing intra-activity” (56). According to Barad’s conception of causality, time is, therefore, “articulated and re-synchronized” through “various material practices” (56). She calls this emergent concept “spacetimemattering,” and asks us to replace the distance and fixity implied by the interstitial placement of objective relations with what she calls “relata,” positing an ethics of how *matter comes to matter* (68-9). Matter matters because it constitutes and mediates subjects’ ways of thinking and being in the world with regards to such idenitarian concepts as gender, race, and so on—both of the self and of perceived others.

In the final interview, Quentin Meillassoux defends what he calls “speculative materialism.” Brushing aside all forms of social constructionism, linguistic idealism, or identity politics, Meillassoux proposes that we focus on the very contingency of nature itself with/in the limitlessness of thought. His focus is on a “correlationism” that implies the foundational building bloc of reality be neither subjective nor objective but rather emerging from the “correlate of subject-object” within which the subject, in contradistinction to Kant, does not possess an existence *a priori* to the world of objects it apprehends (72). In a break with many of his fellow new materialists—a fact underscored by the interview subjects included here—Meillassoux asserts that Deleuze cannot be considered truly materialist because he accords “absolute primacy” to the “unseparated.” In isolating or absolutizing “Life,” Deleuze makes the subject radically independent of the human or individual way of relating to the world (73). In essence, Meillassoux believes that Deleuze advocates a sort of universalism which, although it foregrounds entanglement, reduces the possibility of multiplicity, and therefore undercuts the mathematical enumeration of entanglements which his own notion of correlates as the core of a speculative materialism allows for and even invites. Subjectivity is defined in two competing discourses which contribute to the correlate of speculative materialism: for correlationists, being is thinkable, and for subjectivists being is ontological existence (73).

A correlationist new materialism is a “materialism [wherein] Being is separate and independent of thought [and] Thought can think Being [for] non-thinking actually precedes, or at least may in right precede thought, and exists outside of it” (79). Though it seems paradoxical, it is only in the paradoxical correlation of opposites that Meillassoux feels we can move beyond the strictures placed on us by modernity—a move towards which many theories strive but which all, according to him, have failed to achieve. He chooses instead to develop a “vectorial subject” through the “virtuality” of “Superchaos,” as opposed to the “potentiality” of the “determined world” (80). Expanding his notion of the

contingency of nature to subjects (in a way resembling DeLanda's finite assemblages), he concludes that while nature seems to care about Life, inorganic matter, which is part of our world, does not, so "matter is not identifiable with 'nature'"; rather, it is "a primordial ontological order: it is the fact that there must be something and not nothing—contingent beings as such" (81).

It may already have become apparent that a common denominator of the different versions of new materialism discussed in this book is heightened concern with ethics, counteracting what the authors feel has been lost in the abstractions of a late capitalist, critique-oriented version of Marxist materialism. I would say that this is the primary draw of this book, for scholars feeling disheartened by their lack of efficacy as activists and public intellectuals, and for students who despair over the impossibility of positive change and an ethical existence in this world. If we can situate ourselves in this new materialist landscape—and this invitation is extended to all disciplines and theoretical persuasions—there is hope for real change to be wrought. This seems to offer an effective answer to Hardt and Negri's warning that poststructuralism and the identity politics of the 21<sup>st</sup> century's opening decade were actually playing right into the hands of capital—reinforcing structures of oppression *through* critique, not in spite of it.

Since this volume has been made available, scholars from across a wide variety of fields have taken up the mantle of new materialism. A thoroughly interdisciplinary endeavor, recent new materialist work emerges at the nexus of such once disparate discourses as politics, art, sociology, new media, economics, technology, medicine, literature, philosophy, and ecology. Especially within the emergent field of the environmental humanities, new materialist approaches are in the ascendancy, signaled by the work of scholars such as Jeffrey Cohen, Stephanie LeMenager, Stacy Alaimo, Serpil Opperman, Serenella Iovino, or Claire Colebrook, who, each in their own way, have continued Braidotti and Barad's work on feminist new materialism. What this volume offers is an exceptionally stimulating synopsis of the philosophical, ethical, and political concerns which set this remarkable development into motion, presented in a dialogic, "call and response" form which, although the interview continues to be ranked below the monograph or the scholarly essay, is uniquely suited to the style of thought which the new materialists wish to advance. It will surely remain a touchstone for new materialist scholarship.