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The Nonhuman Turn

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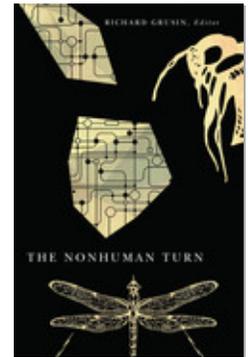
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Form / Matter / Chora

Object-Oriented Ontology and Feminist New Materialism

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THE FIRST DECADES of the twenty-first century have seen a number of challenges to the centrality of epistemology in literary and cultural theory, from the rise of neuroaesthetics and machine reading to the return of phenomenology and affect theory. Despite their diversity, these new paradigms reflect an ambient dissatisfaction with the ascription of causality at the root of the theoretical enterprise by putting pressure on the equation between apt description and social change. In their own ways, each questions the importance of representation, often through an implicit argument that the distinction between reality and its mediation is out of sync with the direct intervention into material life characteristic of current practices in science and technology. Taken together, these schools of thought represent a newly emergent realism in the humanities.

Within this broad and interdisciplinary movement, two methods have attained particular visibility: speculative realism, especially object-oriented ontology (OOO), and new materialism, especially feminist new materialism. Indeed, their concurrent ascendancy and their shared critique of representation have made it easy to understand them as versions of each other. As I endeavor to explain, however, this is a misapprehension. I look first at object-oriented ontology's famous rejection of "correlationism" before turning to the very different history that animates feminist new materialism.¹

The term *correlationism* derives from Quentin Meillassoux's *After Finitude*, in which he defines it as "the idea according to which we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and

being, and never to either term considered apart from the other,” a characterization that Meillassoux applies to all philosophical approaches since Kant.² For object-oriented ontologists, the effect of correlationism has been to dramatically limit the range of theoretical speculations to things that fall within human knowledge systems. As Ian Bogost explains in the introductory section of *Alien Phenomenology*:

We’ve been living in a tiny prison of our own devising, one in which all that concerns us are the fleshy beings that are our kindred and the stuffs with which we stuff ourselves. Culture, cuisine, experience, expression, politics, polemic: all existence is drawn through the sieve of humanity, the rich world of things discarded like chaff so thoroughly, so immediately, so efficiently that we don’t even notice.³

This critique of correlation—the “sieve of humanity” in Bogost’s terms—gives object-oriented ontology its grounding; however, its most characteristic gesture is not Meillassoux’s critique of correlation but Graham Harman’s notion of object withdrawal. The two work hand in hand, for OOO does not just turn our attention toward the nonhuman, it does so in order to postulate an emphatically anti-relational ontology in which objects recline at a distance from each other and from the networks in which they are embedded, very much including but not limited to human cultural practices. Profoundly thresholded, Harman’s objects stand at a remove even from themselves: internal organs are no less bounded objects than the bodies that house them, which are themselves distinct from what Timothy Morton calls “hyper-objects,” like climate.⁴ As Morton epigrammatically renders this point, it’s objects all the way down.⁵

This antipathy to relations in favor of the things themselves makes object-oriented ontology difficult to square with existing critical orientations considered broadly, but its relationship with feminism has been particularly rancorous—a push-me-pull-you of accusation and desire for affiliation that has generated both a new subfield, object-oriented feminism, and numerous heated denunciations, including the injunction apocryphally attributed to Isabelle

Stenger's keynote speech at the 2010 Claremont Whitehead Conference, to stop talking about object-oriented ontology.⁶

The antagonism between these two fields is in some ways easily understood. After all, feminism is historically constituted around human subjectivity, sexed specificity, and the sculpting effects of culture. Add to that the origin of feminists' engagement with the sciences in a critique of scientific neutrality—a critique that argues quite precisely for the intercalation of culture between things and our experiences of them—and it becomes clear why the two fields have been wary of each other.

A glance at more recent scholarship, however, suggests that this agon reflects as much a set of overlaps as it does divergences. Feminist new materialism in particular has moved away from the critique of neutrality and toward the recognition of the wholly non-discursive agency of other-than-human forces. As Myra Hird and Celia Roberts explain in "Feminism Theorises the Nonhuman," their introduction to their special issue of *Feminist Theory*, one important function of the "nonhuman" as an umbrella term to cover these new realisms is the way it calls attention to the myriad ecological, biological, and physical processes that have no truck with human epistemological categories whatsoever. "The majority of Earth's living inhabitants are nonhuman," they write, "and non-human characterises the deep nonliving recesses of the Earth, the biosphere and space's vast expanse." The world these nonhumans occupy "exists for itself, rather than for 'us.'"⁷ For Hird and Roberts, this recognition prompts a critical modesty from out of which they seek to generate a realistic ethics attentive to the impact of human culture *and also* to the vivacity, vulnerability, and sometimes the surly intransigence of nature.

The distance between object-oriented ontology and feminist new materialism, therefore, is not a function of the ostensible anthropocentrism of a feminism grounded in identity politics, as it might initially appear. Rather, I argue that their differences result from the radically different ways in which these two fields treat human knowledge systems. For as much as they both contribute to the critique of epistemology, the *causal effects* assignable to knowledge-making practices continue to be prominent in their divergent understandings of the role and form of scholarship. For

object-oriented ontology, epistemology is epiphenomenal, a second-order representation whose range of effects is limited to human knowers. For feminist new materialism, by contrast, epistemology is an agent with directly material consequences. This account of epistemology is captured by the consistent use of doubly articulated phrases in feminist theory, such as Donna Haraway's nature-cultures and Karen Barad's material-discursive intra-actions, phrases designed to collapse hierarchical dualisms and insist on the materializing force of broadly circulating ideas.⁸ This perspective is emphatically *relational*. It begins from the assumption that ideas and things do not occupy separate ontological orders but instead are co-constituents in the production of the real.

It is possible, but mistaken, to read this conjunctive articulation as correlationist. Epistemology in these descriptions is not a sieve filtering out the material world and leaving only our relation to ourselves; rather, epistemology directly acts on material liveliness. For this reason, the term of art is *matter*. From Luciana Parisi's abstract matter to Jane Bennett's vibrant matter, feminist new materialism sees objects as a concrescence or intensive infolding of an extensive continuum. Matter draws together what appears separate and makes the totality subject to mutation and emergence.⁹

The ontological status of epistemology thus becomes legible as the result of the structuring privilege accorded to *form* in object-oriented ontology and *matter* in feminist new materialism. In this sense, the visibility and volatility of these two fields recapitulates the hoariest of philosophical binaries: the form/matter distinction. But this distinction is not only ancient. It is also central to philosophy's own sex/gender system, a system that feminist philosophy set out to reveal, disrupt, and overturn. In militating against the excesses of correlationism, object-oriented ontology and feminist new materialism restage an old antinomy—the being/becoming problem in Plato and Aristotle.

My aim for this chapter is to force a confrontation between these fields. More specifically, I use the challenge of object-oriented ontology and its privileging of form as an opportunity to reconsider the fidelity to matter in new materialism. If this is a confrontation, however, it is less to argue for one side over the other—though I suspect my leanings will be clear—than to wrest from their jagged

edges and odd overlaps a concept both sides have neglected despite its centrality to the form/matter binary they both invoke. I mean the *chora*, that uneasy third term that Plato, in his cosmogony the *Timaeus*, can neither smoothly systematize nor quite go without.¹⁰

To get there, I first turn back to an earlier moment in feminism and its texturing of body, nature, and science in order to come forward again, and through this rehearsal to underscore and swerve a vector that cuts from feminist science to the contested status of matter and process in current thought.¹¹

Feminist Epistemology

In “The Promise of Monsters,” her contribution to the 1992 field-mapping anthology *Cultural Studies*, Donna Haraway proposes as the first principle of a feminist cultural study of science the mutual constitution and discursive construction of science, nature, and culture. “I take as self-evident,” she writes, “the premise that ‘science is culture.’” She continues, “Nature is . . . a tropos, a trope. It is a figure, construction, artifact, movement, displacement. Nature cannot pre-exist its construction. This construction is based on a particular kind of move—a tropos or ‘turn.’”¹²

Nature cannot preexist its construction. This declaration might be taken as the motto for a particularly strong attractor in thought. As a method, its power comes from the way it affects an ontological-epistemological overturning. Where once we took nature as primary, the active partner whose inflexible laws order human social relations equally as much as they do the development of organs in a body or the rate of change of a falling object, now we reject this presupposition. We unmask it as performative ideology perpetuating what it claims merely to describe. We debunk it by finding contravening instances of internal differentiation. We neutralize it with historical variation. We trace it back to the archive and discover its ignominious origins. Against the racism, classism, sexism, and homophobia justified through recourse to an authorizing and law-giving nature, we do the good work of unveiling its construction. We learn to say “allegedly,” as in: the *allegedly* biological pettiness of women, the *allegedly* contra-naturam of homosexuality, the *alleged* unfitnes of those sterilized for being

feeble minded or nymphomaniacal or born with a tendency toward criminality. Against all this we say, There is no law of nature. Nature is a construction.

Underlying this anti-natural, anti-biological orientation is a theory of representation, one that makes a particularly compelling sort of sense for professional readers of texts. Like the epistemology-ontology reversal that social construction effects, the characteristic gesture of this theory of representation is to invert common sense ideas about the operation of the senses. Thus Valerie Hartouni writes, "Seeing is a set of learned practices, a set of densely structured and structuring interpretive practices, that engages us in (re)producing the world we seem only to passively apprehend and, through such engagement, facilitates the automatic, *if incomplete*, operation of power."¹³ In this passage, Hartouni urges us to complicate the naming theory of representation, that is, the notion that what representation represents precedes its representation, for which language merely provides a label. Or to put that more simply, she argues that what we think we know structures what we see, and not the reverse.

Samuel R. Delany makes a congruent point using Leonardo da Vinci's anatomical etchings of the child in womb. In "Rhetoric of Sex/Discourse of Desire," the first essay in his collection *Shorter Views*, Delany relates to the reader descriptions of three anatomical drawings from da Vinci's notebooks, one of a heart, one of the male urogenital system, and one of a fetus in a womb. Though these drawings have all of the characteristics of accuracy—"carefully observed, detailed, and rich in layerings" in Delany's words—what they depict does not correspond with contemporary anatomical understandings. Instead of mirroring the real, they import specific, culturally circulating ideas about how that anatomy should look. In the example of the womb, what we now see as shaped like an upside-down pear shows up in da Vinci's drawing as a sphere, corresponding to the "womb's presumed perfect, Renaissance sphericity."¹⁴

Delany takes this disparity as evidence of the distorting influence of culture, in terms highly reminiscent of the ones Hartouni uses in the passage above. Indeed, in the passage that closes this section of the essay, Delany makes clear that the purpose of this

anecdote is to provide a definition of discourse: “It is the til-now-in-our-tale unnamed structuring and structuring force that can go by no better name than ‘discourse,’” he writes, “and that force seems strong enough to contour what is apparent to the eye of some of the greatest direct observers of our world.”¹⁵ As this suggests, discourse isn’t simply speech, but the syntax of assumptions that “contour” perception through their self-evidence—precisely for the way they appear identical to nature. For literary theorists, the resulting privilege was awarded less to knowledge-making practices per se—for it isn’t really knowledge that causes us to see an apple-shaped womb where none exists—than it was to the sort of emotionally inflected, repetitive logic or structure generated by stories.

This kind of storytelling is not limited to fiction. One of the most important moves in feminist epistemology was the assertion made by feminist philosophers and scholars of science that notions of gender adhered in and were circulated by fields whose content was ostensibly distant from gender, or whose inclusion of gendered metaphors was merely coincidental or ornamental and therefore unnecessary to the substance or import of the theory. Thus in *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Luce Irigaray critically mimes—reveals through repetition and forced conjunction—the philosophical systems of Plato and Freud in an effort to show how central gender always already was to their allegedly neutral rational systems.¹⁶ And not just the center but also the circumference, suspended in what Giorgio Agamben would later adumbrate as the constitutive exclusion, or what Irigaray diagnosis as the mute, passive substrate of a discourse that constitutes itself on women’s exclusion.¹⁷ It is no mistake, Irigaray contends, that women are caught up in relations of metaphor with the Earth, figured as the exploitable source of nurturance, with the womb as the origin from which manly activity proceeds, with nature as unruly, irrational primitive abundance, and with matter sculpted and stamped by transcendent form.¹⁸ Far from accidental, these gendered topologies provide the coherence of these philosophical systems and coordinate a fungible chain of analogies and metonymies.

Thus the rhetoric of nature was held in suspicion not only for the way it was used to justify disenfranchisement and oppression. The dream of nature’s unmediated transparency, itself a version

of what Haraway calls the “paradise myth,” was also the antagonist in the hard-won recognition that representations of ostensibly empirical phenomena tell us more about ourselves than they do about the things they putatively passively reflect. And it is here that the critical enterprise staked its ground in a refrain that is still prevalent amongst humanists and social scientists working today: change the story, change the reality—a task that begins with the drama of exposure.¹⁹ In the wake of women’s long reduction to earth, matter, nature, and origin, the foundational exposure was of culture behind the curtain of the concept of nature itself.

The Feminist Critique of Correlationism: Matter

Between these various examples, a problem develops. For it is one thing to say, as Hartouni does, that experience emerges out of structures of knowledge, or that ideation is founded on and perpetuates norms of sex and gender, as Irigaray does, and altogether another to say that the real is there under our distortions, waiting for the scales to fall from our eyes. Doing so pictures a Manichean split between an obscured real and a tendentious, deluded realm of human subjectivity. That we have no access to the real then forces us to confine our interventions to the level of culture and in so doing repeats the distinction between the activity of culture and the mute inscrutability of nature, a distinction whose consequences for women’s lives feminist philosophers have made palpably apparent.

It is this version of cultural theory, often called *social construction*, that Meillassoux’s “correlationist codicil” (*AF*, 13) accurately describes. As Meillassoux sees it, the problem with correlationism is that it can never affirm the independent existence of the real world. For the correlationist, no technology of empiricism—from logical argumentation to the techno-scientific apparatus—emerges without having the distorting influence of cultural assumptions built into its design. For this reason, the correlationist relates everything back to human knowledge systems. This is the famous “ancestrality” problem:

Consider the following ancestral statement: “Event Y occurred x number of years before the emergence of humans.”

The correlationist philosopher will in no way intervene in the content of this statement. . . . She will simply add . . . something like a simple codicil . . . : event Y occurred x number of years before the emergence of humans—for humans (or even, for *the human scientist*). . . . Accordingly, when confronted with an ancestral statement, correlationism postulates that there are at least two levels of meaning in such a statement: the immediate, or realist meaning; and the more originary correlationist meaning, activated by the codicil. (*AF*, 13–14)

As I have endeavored to demonstrate, this “shifting holistic world of interrelated significances” is precisely the prophylactic that social construction set up against the imperialism of natural law.²⁰

Working alongside the social constructionist understanding of discourse as a veil obscuring the brute reality of material stuff, however, is a different tradition. Karen Barad in her “Posthumanist Performativity” starkly frames feminism’s own internal critique: “Language,” she writes, “has been given too much power.”²¹ In its bifurcation of a representational regime to which we have access and a material reality that regime both reflects and occludes, linguistically based approaches share a structure of belief with the positivism they sought to overturn through the shared conviction in the inherent properties possessed by the stuff of this world. Significantly, Barad’s alternative is not to return to naïve realism but rather to bring forward the crucial and hard-won link feminist science studies scholars forged between epistemology and materiality by asking after the materializing effects of discourse. Barad aligns what she calls “agential realism” with performativity. Using the work of physicist Neils Bohr, she offers an account of performativity that highlights its material reality: “Apparatuses are not static arrangements in the world that embody particular concepts to the exclusion of others; rather, apparatuses are specific material practices through which local semantic and ontological determinacy are intra-actively enacted.”²² For Barad, in other words, matters and discourses are co-constituting, and so asking what knowledge does is always a matter of asking after its ongoing entanglements.²³ Indebted to Foucault’s account of disciplinary apparatuses and

to Bruno Latour's actor-network theory as well as the physics on which she bases her analysis, agential realism insists that properties are the products of local intra-actions between actants of many kinds. Or, to put it epigrammatically, for Barad relations precede relata, which then alter relations. And properties, which we commonly understand as the possessions of individuals, are instead emergent features of entangled phenomena.

The point here is that intra-actions are live. Barad coins the term *intra-action* to undo the implicit understanding of interaction as the meeting of two already-formed objects. Rather, intra-actions instantiate boundaries anew. This has been a particularly productive approach for a feminist reading of science attentive to the fine-grained plasticity of bodies and the weird ontologies of physics. For example, in her *The Body Multiple*, Annamarie Mol urges us to move away from the question of how medicine knows the body to ask instead how medical practice *enacts* the body. She looks at the treatment of heart disease and the distance between a reductionist discourse of illness and the actual practice of stimulating, containing, molding, and redirecting entities: "Which entity? A slightly different one each time."²⁴ In *The Origins of Sociable Life*, Myra Hird gives this same interest in subindividual liveliness the name *microontologies* and uses it to examine the intra-active instantiations of bacteria, sex, and human sociality.²⁵ Stacy Alaimo's term is *transcorporeality*, a term that she uses in *Bodily Natures* to consider the constitutive openness that enables the systemic complexity of the environment to produce system-wide catastrophe.²⁶ That epistemology and ontology are linked—that what we know sculpts how we act—is our legacy from social construction. That matter also acts and in sometimes unexpected ways is the contribution of feminist new materialism and its difference from correlationism.

For feminist new materialism, the solution to the problem of women's historical assimilation with nature, matter, earth, and origin—the problem that led social constructionist feminism to culture—is to sidestep the essentially ideological use of these terms.²⁷ The world they find in its stead is rich, strange, and as transformative for our understandings of sex and gender as it is for our conception of time, space, matter, and individuality. It is perhaps tendentious but nonetheless true that these works were

published—and certainly discussed and circulated—in the same period as, if not prior to, Meillassoux's *After Finitude*, Harman's *Tool-Being*, and the collectively edited *Speculative Turn* book in whose introduction Levi Bryant, Nick Srnicek, and Harman assimilate all contemporary thought as anti-realist: "In this respect," they write, "phenomenology, structuralism, post-structuralism, deconstruction, and postmodernism have all been perfect exemplars of the anti-realist trend in continental thought."²⁸ They continue:

The first wave of twentieth century continental thought in the Anglophone world was dominated by phenomenology, with Martin Heidegger generally the most influential figure of the group. By the late 1970s, the influence of Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault had started to gain the upper hand, reaching its zenith a decade or so later. It was towards the mid-1990s that Gilles Deleuze entered the ascendant, shortly before his death in 1995, and his star remains perfectly visible today. But since the beginning of the twenty-first century, a more chaotic and in some ways more promising situation has taken shape. While it is difficult to find a single adequate name to cover all of these trends, we propose "The Speculative Turn" as a deliberate counterpoint to the now tiresome "Linguistic Turn."²⁹

The absence of women from this story of succession is remarkable both for its casual and apparently unwitting embrace of patrilineation, but also, and more incisively, for the distortions it relies on to produce such a clean line of descent.³⁰ For the production of a monolithic and homogeneous "linguistic turn" in the humanities is only possible through a constitutive misreading of Derrida, Foucault, and Deleuze and from the strategic exclusion of the work done in feminist science studies for the past two decades. As I hope to have demonstrated, it is in fact difficult to find a moment in feminist science studies when questions of embodiment, nature, science, realism, and referentiality were not explicitly at stake.

This then is the true intervention of object-oriented ontology: the way it forces new materialism together with social construction under the heading of correlationism. The assimilation

of these fields—understood by their own practitioners as critical *antipodes*—has generated a sharp shock to criticism that has in turn allowed the middle ground and its array of objects to stand forth. And yet, against this critical tide, it is my contention that matter has not yet been given full rein to generate new methodologies for critical theory. The assimilation of feminist theories of matter with cultural construction elides the way that matter functioned as an *internal* critique of cultural construction, one that sought to retain the link between epistemology and materiality while also arguing for the autonomy and wayward agency of the extra-discursive world—or rather, their discontinuous co-modulations. Assimilating matter as the reverse side of cultural construction through the auspices of the correlationist’s “co-” obscures the ways in which feminist new materialists have sought to inhabit the concept of matter as a site in which to build a materialist account of complex causality within open systems—one that adheres neither at the level of a closed totality nor from the perspective of the atomized individual but rather as a trans-individual assemblage whose motions are greater than the sum of its parts.

The Object-Oriented Critique of Correlationism: Form

It is no mistake, I am arguing, that the *Speculative Turn* volume in mapping the terrain from which object-oriented ontology emerged wrote out the history of feminist inquiry or that under the auspices of Mellaissoux’s correlationism the critical antipodes of feminist new materialism on the one hand and social constructionism on the other, a particularly knotty and long-winded debate within feminism itself, get collapsed.³¹ This collapse, I contend, is a way of confining the energy of those concerns, the propulsion that they produced for thinking the nonhuman, to a discredited discourse whose energy it can then usurp. OOO has been so provocative for feminist theorists because of its cannily unknowing usurpation of the energies of feminist thought and its relegation of that history to footnotes within its own autobiography.

This, however, would not rise much above the level of rhetoric were it not the case that the process of usurpation and confinement is also characteristic of OOO’s objects, which gain their

weird vitality by siphoning off and rendering sterile the plenum of non-object-bound energies. For as much as both fields have been hailed under the heading of materialism, OOO is as antimaterialist as it is anticorrelationist. In fact, Harman explicitly defines object-oriented ontology as “the first materialism in history to deny the existence of matter” (*TB*, 293), and its denigration of matter is foundational and pervasive. Tim Morton calls philosophies that favor concepts of flux, flow, process, pattern, and contingency over notions of stability, essence, solidity, interiority, and permanence “lava lamp materialism.”³² Bruno Latour, writing in his “Compositionist’s Manifesto,” cites Alfred North Whitehead’s argument that matter is an Enlightenment idealization.³³

The problem with matter for object-oriented ontology is that it allows us to skip over objects by seeing through them to the substratum that bears them, a process Harman calls “undermining” as opposed to what he calls the “overmining” of objects through historical contextualization or epistemological reading. The account of the object that animates object-oriented ontology sees the object as an eternal form, which can neither be sculpted by discourse nor obscured by representation because it is vacuum-sealed against these realms. What object-oriented ontology offers is the thing in itself—not the historical conditions of its emergence, not the meanings it circulates, but the object and its qualities in their tensile interrelations. But it is not a naïve object that they offer. For Harman, the object’s resistance is a consequence of its general withdrawal from relations, including human perception. The object in OOO’s sense is a “black box, black hole, or internal combustion engine releasing its power and exhaust fumes into the world.”³⁴ Those fumes, or “plasma” as he refers to them in another instance, are the object’s qualities, which are always limited, partial, multifarious, and brought into meaning-systems differently in different periods and cultures.³⁵ Despite this, the object retains its unity in the dignity of its seclusion. Its being does not bear on its meaning nor vice versa. “Objects,” he writes, “are autonomous from all the features and relations that typify them, but on the other hand they are not completely autonomous.”³⁶ He calls on us to give an account of this ambivalent, semi-detached object.

An example might help to clarify this matter-less ontology. In a

thought experiment from his 2002 *Tool-Being*, Harman asks where we should look to find matter. He takes as his privileged instance a children's amusement park ride, the Ferris wheel. It is worth noting that this form of exemplification is typical of Harman's prose. He is less interested in the workings of a particular sphere—quantum physics in Barad's case, symbiogenesis in Hird's—than in using objects to adumbrate the workings of his philosophical system. The Ferris wheel, he argues, can be broken down into "numerous bolts, beams, and gears in its mechanism" (*TB*, 293). These pieces that *were* the Ferris wheel are now something different—bolts, beams, and gears. If they are recomposed in the production of a piece of public art, for example, they will once again be subsumed. But there is never a moment of indeterminacy between these positions when the bolts, beams, and gears return to a primordial state of undifferentiated matter. "Above all else," he concludes, "the 'parts' in question here are *form*, not matter. . . . What is real in the cosmos are forms wrapped inside of forms" (*TB*, 293). For Harman, even the relation between parts is a form, the pulley-and-lever system of the Ferris wheel forming a little machine whose functioning is separable from and in excess of the withdrawn objects (bolts, beams, and gears) that compose it. Because they are withdrawn, their potentiality is not exhausted. They can go on to take part in the machine of public art, or the assemblage called the dump. Wherever they wind up, they are still productive because they are still withdrawn. In contradistinction to materialism, he calls this "formalism" (*TB*, 293).

The Ferris wheel argument has the force of common sense. As Harman reminds us, we rarely think of the atoms of iron that compose an amusement park ride before we get on it, still less if our aim is to dismantle the ride and haul it off to the junkyard. Even if we were to get down to the infinitesimally small, however, we would still find forms that are separable from the totality that they compose, little machine atoms whose relations never exhaust the capacities of the individual entities that compose them to engender other relations. The torque on a bolt may distort its shape and strip its thread, weather may rust its metal—qualia, in other words, may change—but the bolt-qua-bolt remains unperturbed even when it is little more than a piece of broken, rusty metal. "If an entity always holds something in reserve," Harman writes, "and if this reserve

also cannot be located in any of these relations, then it must exist somewhere else" (*TB*, 230). That somewhere else is in the unapproachable "molten core" at the center of the withdrawn object.³⁷

For Steven Shaviro, the withdrawn quality of objects makes object-oriented ontology a version of substantialism, a claim that Levi Bryant embraces in his *Democracy of Objects*.³⁸ Drawing from Aristotle's account of substance, Bryant underscores Harman's essentially dualistic notion of the object as composed of virtual proper beings (or substance) and local manifestations separate from that substance.³⁹ Consolidated inside of the object, substance maintains its perforations whatever permutations its properties might exhibit; no cut or entanglement ever penetrates deeply enough. Rather than Aristotle's view of substance, then, I suggest that object-oriented ontology's split object recalls Plato's account of form and his foundational distinction between that which "always is and has no becoming" and that which "comes to be and never is" (*Timaeus*, 58C). For Plato of the *Timaeus* as for Harman, the substance of an object never changes, subsisting always in a self-same condition of being, while its accidental qualia and exogenous relations are alone capable of becoming and perishing away again.

And much as it did for *Timaeus*, this division between "that *in which* [a form] comes to be, and that *from which* what comes to be sprouts as something copied" (emphasis in original, 50D) requires a disruptive third term—the receptacle, chora, or womb, neither in the realm of being or becoming—whose evident deployment of sexed metaphors is very much to the point. Yet rather than retreat from the chora and its troubling sexual politics, I follow Judith Butler's lead in pushing the notion of the chora beyond the bounds of the systems that contains it. This potentiality, I argue, is generated from the stalled antinomy of object-oriented ontology and feminist new materialism—immanent in them both, but fully pursued by neither. The next section explores some of the limitations of matter in feminist new materialism.

The Persistence of Things

Harman's repudiation of matter reveals a surprisingly similar tendency in feminist new materialism. The examples we have reviewed

of the performative co-constitution of bodies and discourses make rigorously concrete the way meaning matters. However, their very specificity privileges the demonstrable. As we saw in the Ferris wheel example, matter requires a willingness to entertain that which escapes the procedures of demonstration. For Harman, the very inability to put one's finger on matter proves its inexistence. But the recession of matter in demonstration afflicts feminist new materialism as well. I want to turn now to an example given to us by the political philosopher Jane Bennett in her *Vibrant Matter*, because in using matter to think about politics, Bennett's work exhibits its brilliance and also underscores its limitations.⁴⁰

Bennett calls her approach a "vital materialism" and defines it as an attempt to "dissipate the onto-theological binaries of life/matter, human/animal, will/determination and organic/inorganic" (*VM*, x) in order "to enhance receptivity to the impersonal life that surrounds us and infuses us" (*VM*, 4). To exhibit the value of this approach, she takes up the example of the 2003 North American Blackout. "To the vital materialist," she writes, "the electrical grid is better understood as a volatile mix of coal, sweat, electromagnetic fields, computer programs, electron streams, profit motives, heat, lifestyles, nuclear fuel, plastic, fantasies of mastery, static, legislation, water, economic theory, wire and wood" (*VM*, 25). Together, this assemblage of actants produces something else—literally volatility—through the mattering of power, or rather through the production of its failure. Irritable, jittery, tending toward change: this vision provides a clear and recognizable example of how fantasies of mastery solicit the excitability of electricity. Unlike social construction, the emphasis here is on the agency of power as it succumbs to and exceeds human management systems. No longer Delany's spherical womb and its emphasis on what the eye can see, it is because bodies are restive, not at all quiescent, that they can be bound and shaped to particular forms.

At the same time, however, Bennett's actants remain visually distinct on the page, both preceding and succeeding the relations that brought on the power failure, in a visual echo of the trademark listing style of OOO. These lists stand in metonymically for the randomness of the object world. Indeed, Bogost built his

famous Latour Litanizer specifically to generate discontinuous sets of things.⁴¹ Although Bennett's list is oriented toward relationality since her point is that each piece is entangled in an emergent phenomena with all the others, the list form itself highlights the separability of the objects it houses. What is missing from her list is the volatility as a quality of relations rather than of objects. Bennett wants to argue that the power failure, like Nietzsche's famous discussion of lightning in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, is not the product of the grid but instead one of its potential expressions. Yet it is exactly that emergent property that slips the noose of the list, operating in the gaps between its actants.

Bennett and Barad both insist that there is life in the interstices, an inorganic life that moves as vigorously through the biological as through the machinic and the ideational. My purpose in this very brief critique has been to show how easily the apprehension of that life recedes under the requirements of demonstration to be replaced by a network of discrete parts. Through the analytic of the network, Bennett can present the North American Blackout as a seamed whole rather than as a unified totality and thus avoid the pitfalls of essentialism. That very presentation, however, obscures what Hasana Sharp characterizes as the "supersaturation" of any system with "energetic force that is composing and recomposing in new forms, in response to new tensions, at all times."⁴² More pointedly, the absence of a lexicon for apprehending that supersaturation then impoverishes our inquiry into its modes of composition and conceals the ways in which we enter into that composition.

The question, then, is not just of forms and matters, but of the space that holds them both. The persistence of things in feminist new materialism reveals the enduring difficulty of articulating a space or *plenum* that is also a *dunamis*. The more we see the former, the more obscured the latter becomes and vice versa. As Eugene Thacker writes, the contradiction between "an immanence that is placid, expansive, and silent, and a vitalism that is always folding, creating, and producing" appears irresolvable.⁴³ In rejecting materialism, what object-oriented ontology refuses is the possibility of a dynamized space between objects. By the same token, the persistence of things in feminist new materialism indicates a

hesitancy to fully name and defend such a potentially irresolvable problematic. Yet this problem also reveals an enduring desire to collapse the distinction between plenum and dunamis.

Indeed, the language of spaces and forces evident in Sharp's "supersaturation" runs like a minor chord through the critical enterprise, subtending even apparently epistemological or linguistic accounts. It is evident, for example, in Foucault's discussion of his method in *History of Sexuality*, volume 1, where he writes:

It seems to me that power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system.⁴⁴

Foucault's injunction can be and very often has been understood through the logic of the *dispositif*—the meeting of powers converging on each other via molar organizations, regulatory apparatuses, legal frameworks, discursive networks, and their various idioms and appurtenances—and for good reason.⁴⁵ Paying attention to the nodes that make up the "chain or system" operating within a sphere, as the *dispositif* model holds, however, has the effect of equating relations of force with exertions of power, collapsing effect into cause and writing out the concussive meetings between nodes. What it means for "a multiplicity of force relations" to "constitute their own organization," in other words, changes substantially if we take "force relations" on a physical rather than a sociological model.⁴⁶ In such a model, relations of force cannot be reduced to the actions of entities. In Manuel De Landa's account, the force relations of complex systems are the attractors and bifurcations that are both intrinsic features of dynamic systems and yet that "have no independent existence" and therefore cannot be understood as products of molar objects in any straightforward sense.⁴⁷ It is for this reason that Gilles Deleuze calls Foucault's thesis on power a "physics of action."⁴⁸ Yet even in De Landa's alternative conceptualization of a "single phylogenetic line cutting through all matter,

‘living’ or ‘nonliving,’” the presence of terminology from evolution indicates the ease with which *dunamis* can become reconsolidated as a property of bodies that recline in the passive plenum of space.⁴⁹

The Chora

I propose the chora as a way to grasp this dynamized space. The chora comes to us from Plato’s *Timaeus*, which tells the story of how the temporal world arose from the eternal.⁵⁰ As this implies, much of the text concerns the split between the eternal world of forms—unchanging, apprehensible by the intellect but without sensuous equivalent—and the world to which we have access. *Timaeus*’s account of the chora comes in the middle, breaking into the smooth flow of its narrative line. *Timaeus* finds that he can no longer make do with the two kinds—the realm of being and the realm of becoming—that have until this point satisfied. He runs into the necessity for that which should not be necessary, the product of “bastard reasoning . . . hardly to be trusted, the very thing we look to when we dream and affirm that it’s necessary somehow for everything that *is*” (emphasis in the original, 52A).

The problem is this: To move into the temporal world of becoming, the transcendent form must have “birth and visibility” (50D). Eternal models must become imitations of themselves. If this is so, then the form must have something into which it descends, something separate from the copies that it will generate and that make up the temporal world. Since eternal forms cannot enter the realm of becoming, yet must put its impress into substance, then there must be a third realm. Form must be housed *somewhere* in *something* while it undergoes its transformation. To correct this difficulty, *Timaeus* conjures up a third kind, neither a model nor a copy, neither being nor becoming: the chora or the space of generation. Explicitly framed in hetero-reproductive terms, the chora is “mother,” “womb,” “wet-nurse,” and “receptacle” (48C–50E) to the fathering form. The eternal form enters into the chora but takes nothing of her nature. She serves wholly as the space of transmission. Yet it is not for nothing that the chora is introduced late: it is both necessary and inassimilable, disrupting the distinction between being and becoming by taking part in both but being faithful

to neither. Where, after all, did this third realm come from? Part of neither kingdom, the chora is the “wandering cause” (48C) that holds together and disrupts the movement from potentiality to actuality, swerves the smooth transition from model to copy and offers a notion of systemic agency that operates in the interstices between objects.

In her reading of these passages, Judith Butler highlights the passivity and shapelessness Plato assigns to the chora and that marks its difference from the active shaping of the “father” or the eternal form and the degraded, inauthentic activity of the copy in the world of becoming. As wandering cause, the chora holds the potential for uncontrolled generation, for dynamic change that is neither a product of the eternal form nor its diminution in the realm of becoming. While giving place to the spontaneous generation of new orders, the *Timaeus*’s family romance thus represents an attempt at domestication in what Butler calls a “topographic suppression”: from matrix to place, from chora to plenum, from wandering cause to wet-nurse.⁵¹ This topographic suppression is precisely Harman’s move. He consolidates relationality and potentiality to the interior of the object. In so doing, he brings the chora into the object, providing each real sensible thing with its own internal generator, “the molten inner core of objects.”⁵² This, I suggest, represents a new kind of domesticization of the chora. No longer passive midwife of sensible form, dynamism is now locked in as the engine of form, vitalizing its limits and thresholds.

What would it look like to release the chora from this topographic suppression? At one point, Butler toys with the idea of what she calls an “irruptive chora” but ultimately rejects it as a false escape.⁵³ And yet this irruptive chora, it seems to me, is just what Plato’s domestication sought to avoid and yet could not quite do without. As such, it offers an opportunity to imagine an autonomous, dynamic, temporalized space through which subindividual matters, vibratory intensities, and affects might cross and *be altered through that crossing*. This is the crucial point. The irruptive chora enables us to apprehend with what frequency the plenum or spatium is posed as passive, even in new materialist writing. My description of the chora, for example, is mostly consonant with Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of the body without organs. In light

of the irruptive chora, however, their description of “the unformed, unorganized, nonstratified or destratified body . . . [that] causes intensities to pass” seems strangely passive.⁵⁴ The contradiction between plenum and dunamis appears logical precisely because it begins from an originary cut between the given and the immutable and the contingent and mutational. A resurgent, vitalized understanding of the “sphere,” the “support,” the “chain or . . . system,” “the moving substrate” in Foucault; the “spatium” in Deleuze and Guatari; begins to suggest a way back to the chora in its activity, to inhuman reproductions, to an irruptive chora that exerts its own autonomous force.

What I am proposing bears resemblance to what Pheng Cheah, in a discussion of Deleuzian virtuality, introduces as a double articulation between the virtual “speeds and intensities” that generate an actual object and the object itself. This causality goes in both directions: “On the one hand,” Cheah writes, “the actual object is the accomplished absorption and destruction of the virtuals that surround it. On the other hand, the actual object also emits or creates the virtual since the process of actualization brings the object back into relation with the field of differential relations in which it can always be dissolved and become actualized otherwise.”⁵⁵ The dualism Cheah proposes between the actual object and its virtualities creates a separation between the background of speeds and intensities that get captured by the drag of organization and sedimented into an actual object whose constrained vibratory intensity then ripples back across the field of force relations.

Such an analytic could then ground a physics of force and a method that accounts for its operations. Taken in its most robust form, this revived chora generates an ontology of material-affective circulation. As a *tertium quid*, the “third thing” that transmits and transforms dynamic form, the chora both enables and distorts the autopoiesis of apparently incorporeal matters like thought. As Brian Massumi writes, “No longer beholden to the empirical order of the senses, thought, at the limit, throws off the shackles of reenaction. It becomes directly *enactive*—of virtual events.”⁵⁶ Thinking of representational media within the terms enabled by this analysis of the chora gives them autonomy from their human reception: they are autonomously mobile, subject to the same patterned movements as

those that characterize physical and biological systems, and they are autonomously causal, interacting with each other to engender new vanishing points. In the final section I point to some ways of thinking the practice of choratic reading.

Practicing Choratic Reading

“Something’s doing”: the opening words of Massumi’s *Semblance and Event* capture the premise of choratic reading and its point of intervention. Two decades of critical scholarship in feminist materialism and science studies have made it possible to say “There’s happening doing” and to indicate by that phrase the agency of human and nonhuman bodies, organic and nonorganic vitalities, discourses and the specific material apparatuses those discourses are.⁵⁷ This critical posture has also begun to redound on the practice of scholarship itself. From Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s largely conceptual call for a greater scholarly embrace of the sensual and reparative to object-oriented ontology’s desire to “go outside and dig in the dirt,” the questions of scholarship’s own affective and material basis have started to receive serious treatment.⁵⁸ In *How We Think*, for example, N. Katherine Hayles argues for a “practice-based research” that would employ embodied interactions with other-than-verbal materials to generate unexpected kinesthetic and temporal experiences.⁵⁹ In similar fashion, Erin Manning and her collaborators run the SenseLab as a center for research creation by emphasizing what they call “the active passage between research and creation” in real-time and asynchronous collaborations.⁶⁰ Each of these examples widens and diversifies the modes in which scholarship gets made. By arguing that how we make things affects the things we make, Hayles, Manning, and Bogost demonstrate that the study of matter, affect, and embodiment need not and should not take place primarily through the study of texts but can instead be theorized through and as practice.

This laboratory model of criticism incisively shifts the scene of production. Operating on the other side of this relationship, scholars working in the digital humanities and in rhetoric have begun to develop alternatives to the linear essay. However, with notable exceptions, these emergent models—such as data visualization and

other forms of machine reading—retain demonstrative argumentation as their primary goal.⁶¹ Although machine reading allows us to find patterns at scales otherwise impossible, the questions and conclusions we bring to bear on these patterns have remained largely congruent with close reading's persuasive demonstration. By contrast, if choric reading can be said to have an argument, it is that new concepts arise as much through affective engagement as through rational demonstration.

As one of the forces behind this shift, it would seem reasonable to assume that object-oriented ontology would proffer a new way to navigate the relations between cultural production, aesthetic form, and subject formation. Indeed, OOO has been called on to perform just such an analysis and Harman has duly responded. In his "Well-Wrought Broken Hammer" article published in *New Literary History*, Harman reviews examples of new criticism, new historicism, and deconstruction before positing his own "object-oriented method" (WWBH, 200). What he finds in his review is that each school of criticism fails in the same way that he understands pre-OOO philosophy to have failed. By "dissolving a text upward into its readings or downward into its cultural elements" (WWBH, 200) criticism never lands on the text itself.⁶² Instead of these two procedures, Harman urges literary critics to work toward discovering qualities that make works of literature themselves. "Instead of just writing about *Moby Dick*," he writes, "why not try shortening it to various degrees in order to discover the point at which it ceases to sound like *Moby Dick*? Why not imagine it lengthened even further, or told by a third-person narrator rather than Ishmael, or involving a cruise in the opposite direction around the globe?" (WWBH, 202). The purpose of rendering such permutations is to discover what in the text is accidental—the qualia of the work—and what makes up its molten interior. As a method, then, its mode is primarily taxonomic, a categorizing enterprise with the added capacity to discriminate between the features of a work that allow it to "withstand the earthquakes of the centuries" (WWBH, 201) and those that prove irrelevant to its essential haecceity. Harman thinks of the new critics as having come closest to this goal in their focus on the individual work, and indeed such a method goes quite a ways toward weeding out of literary studies the very assertions that

have made it a radical and generative field since the new critics: that texts speak more than they know, that the devil is in the weave of its details, that repetitions across texts are meaningful and therefore interpretable. None of this is really very surprising, of course.⁶³

Yet several aspects of this method do surprise. It is first of all surprisingly epistemological. As we have seen, one of the defining features of object-oriented ontology's divided objects is their inaccessible interiors that repel "all forms of causal or cognitive mastery" (WWBH, 188). Starting from this definition, it is not at all clear that any amount of cutting or rearranging will bring the inner core of *Moby Dick* into relief. Nor is it clear what beside "causal or cognitive mastery" this act would contribute. Moreover, for a field that trumpets the democracy of objects, Harman's object-oriented method is singularly unimpressed by the force of criticism. Cutting into the text and recording the results frames the work of literature as primary and the work of criticism as merely adjunct reportage. Finally, and ironically, the examples Harman provides all focus on the text as *narrative plot*. The text's formal composition, its "structure of meanings" (WWBH, 190) is excluded from the outset as a clearly false prejudice of new criticism. With no relations inside or outside, object-oriented method reveals the immobility generated by interiorizing dynamism within a sterilized plenum. What object-oriented method cannot see is the material force of literature as it enters into composition with other vibrant matters.

Choratic reading, by contrast, begins from the assertion that acts of literature—very much including scholarly readings—are performed in material composition with the affordances of their media, the sensorium of their audiences, and the deformations of dissemination as they transduce across and are deformed by the irruptions of the choratic plane. In this sense, books and their readers form zones of intensity in composition with the interstitial field of already-circulating energies and the attractors and bifurcations of the choratic plane. The political purpose of interpretation informs the form of the reading as well as its content. Sedgwick has written at length about the unacknowledged affective register of hermeneutics. Rather than restricting the import of this affection to readers, choratic reading practices opens scholarly affect to flows of all kinds. By matching the affective milieu of its object,

choratic scholarship can underscore, extend, thin out, modulate, or swerve its circulation.

Such a reading protocol transforms our angle of inquiry from the text as representational symptom to the dynamic form of the media object. To effect this transformation, I propose a lexicon of terms: *composition* highlights the interrelations between parts; *movement* refers to the characteristic circuiting of energy through that form; *sound* to the layers or tonal stacks striating it; *rhythm* to the vibratory milieu created by it; and, finally, *gesture* looks to the capacities for connection and the production of potentialities. Together, these properties illustrate the internal workings of a form and its relations to the aesthetico-political milieu. Employing this method of analysis allows us to pose questions about texts that concern their effects as form. In this context, we can ask what shape the text creates and how that shape circulates affective force, how it moves across time and how it forms relationships: from explosive forms meant to blast apart overly strong captures to shapes bristling with receptors or catalyzing shapes meant to actualize potentiality in encounters. Reading in this way emphasizes design and so alters the formal distinctions between creative and critical compositions.

“What does this have to do with science?” Elizabeth Grosz asks in the course of her little monograph *Chaos, Territory, Art*. As I hope I have demonstrated, feminist science studies has traced an arc through the question of representation, moving from the urgent and necessary epistemological task of untangling science’s encoding of and complicity with sexed, gendered, raced, and anthropocentric assumptions through the hard-won and hard-maintained insistence on the ontological co-constitution of matters and discourses to the recognition of the wholly non-discursive agency of other than human forces. The question of representation, of the relations between things in the world and the stories we tell about those things, continues to animate feminist science studies. But we haven’t yet asked what might happen to our sense of scholarship—of meaning, of concept, of learning—if we repose the question of representation, but this time to ourselves? What might we find if we begin from the premise that there is a material connection between the artifact of scholarship, its producers,

and its audience? What might emerge if we invite our scholarship to inhabit other forms and allow those forms to emerge through the compositional process? What if we stop taking it for granted that we understand how ideas are transmitted? In answer to the question posed at the start of this paragraph, Grosz writes, “The material plane of forces, energies, and effects that art requires in order to create moments of sensation that are artworks are shared in common with science. Science, like art, plunges itself into the materiality of the universe.”⁶⁴ Choratic reading is one attempt at the becoming-imperceptible of art, science, and criticism.

Notes

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1. Although this holds in general, it is worth noting that one of the key differences between speculative realism (SR) and object-oriented ontology concerns how they understand the consequences of correlationism. Graham Harman explains in “The Well-Wrought Broken Hammer: Object Oriented Literary Criticism,” *New Literary History* 43, no. 2 (Spring 2012): 183–203, that where SR affirms the descriptive accuracy of mathematical statements about the world, OOO denies absolute knowledge. Hereafter, the article is abbreviated as WWBH in parenthetical citations in the text.

2. Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency* (London: Continuum, 2010), 5. Hereafter cited as *AF* in parenthetical citations within the text.

3. Ian Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology, or What It's Like to Be a Thing* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 3.

4. Timothy Morton, “They Are Here: My Nonhuman Turn Talk,” *Ecology without Nature* blog, May 4, 2012, <http://ecologywithoutnature.blogspot.com/>.

5. Timothy Morton, “Here Comes Everything: The Promise of Object-Oriented Ontology,” *Qui Parle* 19, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 2011): 163–90.

6. I am aware of the irony involved here.

7. Myra Hird and Celia Roberts, "Feminism Theorises the Nonhuman," *Feminist Theory*, 12, no. 2 (August 2011): 111.

8. See Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003); and Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2007).

9. In this sense feminist new materialism brings together the emphasis on the productivity of discourse in Michel Foucault's account of power with Baruch Spinoza's cosmogony.

10. Plato, *Timaeus*, ed. Oskar Piest, trans. Francis Cornford (New York: Macmillan, 1959).

11. I am keenly aware of the problem with enacting lineages. My effort here is less to posit the differences between moments in feminist inquiry than to show their continuities. However, I do think that some delineation is required in the wake of OOO's collapse of distinction, as I explain following.

12. Donna Haraway, "The Promise of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics of Inappropriate/d Others," in *Cultural Studies*, ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula A. Treichler (New York: Routledge, 1992), 296, 297.

13. Valerie Hartouni, *Cultural Conceptions: On Reproductive Technologies and the Remaking of Life* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 8.

14. Samuel Delany, "Rhetoric of Sex/Discourse of Desire," in *Shorter Views: Queer Thoughts and the Politics of the Paraliterary* (Hanover, N.H.: Wesleyan University Press, 1999), 3, 4.

15. *Ibid.*, 5.

16. Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985).

17. See Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1995).

18. This point is also made extensively by ecofeminists; see in particular Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (New York: Harper and Row, 1980).

19. On the "drama of exposure," see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's biting and bravura essay "Paranoid Reading, Reparative Reading, or You're So Paranoid You Probably Think This Essay Is about You," in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003), 123–52.

20. Graham Harman, *Guerilla Metaphysics: Phenomenology and the Carpentry of Things* (Peru, Ill.: Open Court Press, 2005), 113.

21. Karen Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28, no.3 (2003): 801.

22. *Ibid.*, 820.

23. For the physics behind this oversimplified summary, see Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2007), especially chapter 7.

24. Annamarie Mol, *The Body Multiple: Ontology in Medical Practice* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002), vii.

25. Myra Hird, *The Origins of Sociable Life: Evolution after Science Studies* (New York: Palgrave, 2009).

26. Stacy Alaimo, *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).

27. In this sense, feminist new materialism picks up on Simone de Beauvoir's tact in *The Second Sex* of responding to the nature argument by looking directly at nature.

28. Graham Harman, *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects* (Peru, Ill.: Open Court Press, 2002), hereafter abbreviated as *TB* in parenthetical citations in the text. Levi Bryant, Graham Harman, and Nick Srnicek, eds., *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism* (Melbourne: re.press, 2011), 3.

29. Bryant et al., *Speculative Turn*, 1.

30. Blog commentary tends to point out that only one woman—Isabelle Stengers—was included in the collection. Though this is a relevant point, my argument is less concerned with inclusion per se than with the logic that drives the absence in the first place. For a good example, see "some background on Harman and Speculative Realism (and cool new book series)," *New APPS: Art, Politics, Philosophy, Science* blog, February 15, 2011, www.newappsblog.com/. It's worth noting that the commenter in question is Melinda Cooper whose work in *Life as Surplus: Biotechnology and Capitalism in the Neoliberal Era* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008) well exemplifies feminist new materialist approaches.

31. This is less an interpretation than a restatement of Harman's own explicit position on the twin techniques of undermining and overmining in his "On the Undermining of Objects: Grant, Bruno, and Radical Philosophy," in Bryant et al., *The Speculative Turn*.

32. Timothy Morton, "Of Lava Lamps and Firehouses," *Ecology without Nature* blog, November 14, 2012, <http://ecologywithoutnature.blogspot.com/>.

33. Bruno Latour, "An Attempt at Writing a Composer's Manifesto," *New Literary History* 41, no. 3 (Summer 2010): 471–90.

34. Harman, *Guerilla Metaphysics*, 95.

35. *Ibid.*, 106.

36. Harman, "Undermining," 24.

37. Graham Harman, *Toward Speculative Realism* (New York: Zero Books, 2010), 133.

38. Levi Bryant, *Democracy of Objects* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Open Humanities Press, 2011). Though I cannot fully discuss it here, staging Shaviro's chapter, "The Actual Volcano: Whitehead, Harman, and the Problem of Relations" in Bryant et al., *The Speculative Turn*, next to Eugene Thacker's *After Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010) and its rereading of Neoplatonism and scholasticism would be profitable.

39. Bryant is at pains to separate this notion of a substance that subtends qualities from the account of matter we have seen in feminist new materialism. His version, however, is also quite different than Harman's. For Bryant substance is "an absolutely individual system or organization of powers" (*Democracy*, 89) internal to the object. Referring to his blue mug, Bryant argues that this view of substance makes an object's qualities the effect or event of the object's own endo-relationships. For him "the mug blues" is a more accurate description of events. Though I don't have the space to elaborate on this point here, Bryant's notion of virtual proper being is far more relational than Harman's.

40. Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010); hereafter cited as *VM* in parenthetical citations within the text. I call on Bennett because her work, like Barad's, has been cited as "forerunner" to object-oriented ontology. This assimilation, I am arguing, reveals something about the persistence of things in feminist new materialism.

41. The Latour Litanizer uses Wikipedia to generate random lists. For a fuller explanation, see Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology*, esp. 95–96. The Litanizer is accessible from his website, www.bogost.com.

42. Hasana Sharp, *Spinoza and the Politics of Renaturalization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 36.

43. Thacker, *After Life*, 208. Also see *After Life* for an elaboration of these terms.

44. Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 92.

45. On the *dispositif*, see Michel Foucault, "The Confessions of the Flesh," in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Vintage, 1980), especially pages 194–225. On molar versus molecular entities see, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), esp. 31–36.

46. Foucault, *History of Sexuality* 1, 92.

47. Manuel De Landa, "Nonorganic Life," in *Incorporations*, ed. Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 138.

48. Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, trans. Seán Hand (London: Continuum Books, 1999), 60.

49. De Landa, "Nonorganic," 138.

50. For a related account of the chora and feminist theory, see Emanuela Bianchi, "The Interruptive Feminine: Aleatory Time and Feminist Politics," in *Undutiful Daughters: New Directions in Feminist Thought and Practice*, eds. Henriette Gunkle, Chrysanthi Nigianni, and Fanny Soderback (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

51. Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 42.

52. Harman, *Toward Speculative Realism*, 133.

53. Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 48.

54. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 43.

55. Pheng Cheah, "Non-Dialectical Materialisms," in *New Materialism: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*, eds. Diana Coole and Samantha Frost (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010), 86.

56. Brian Massumi, *Semblance and Event: Activist Philosophy and the Occurrent Arts* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2011), 122.

57. *Ibid.*, 1.

58. Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology*, 133.

59. N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Think: Digital Media and Contemporary Technogenesis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

60. "About" page, *Senselab*, www.senselab.ca/wp2/about/.

61. For distance and machine reading, see Franco Moretti's Literary Lab at Stanford University. For a compelling alternative, see the University of Victoria's Maker Lab and its Kits for Culture project.

62. It is worth noting that this parallel between philosophy and literary criticism suggests that the same episteme subtends them both, contrary to Harman's assertion at the start of the essay that "the various districts of human knowledge have relative disciplinary autonomy" (WWBH, 183).

63. For a far more interesting version of speculative reading see Eileen A. Joy, "Weird Reading," *Speculations: A Journal of Speculative Realism* 4 (2013): 28–34.

64. Elizabeth Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 61.