



OLD AND NEW MATTERS

Thomas Clément Mercier¹

ANID FONDECYT, Universidad Adolfo Ibáñez

ABSTRACT

This article constitutes a substantial introduction to the thematic issue “Matters.” After introducing briefly the scattered constellation described by some as “new materialism” or “the material turn,” as well as its main concepts and methods, I offer a deconstructive reflection on “the turn” by challenging a series of theoretical gestures meant to coalesce the turn to materiality in contemporary continental philosophy—starting with the exclusion of the much maligned “linguistic turn” and the opposition to an “old” concept of matter presented as passive, inert, and mechanistic. I analyze how these two exclusions—precarious as they may be—allow for a relative coalescence of the new “scene” while betraying its essential heterogeneity and self-inadequacy. I thus interrogate the conditions that make the position of a “new” materialism possible, giving it force and necessity, while questioning what the production of this so-called novelty potentially obfuscates. After raising a series of questions related to new materialism’s conceptuality, I introduce the contributions that make up the thematic issue. I also provide a substantial bibliography to help the reader navigate the material turn as well as its various critiques from the perspectives of philosophical history, object-oriented ontology, social and ethico-political theory, deconstruction, critical race studies, or other perspectives on materialist theory.

Keywords: New Materialism; Immanence; Material Turn; Deconstruction; Ontology; Posthumanism.

¹ thomas.mercier@edu.uai.cl

The ubiquitous puns on “matter” do not, alas, mark a rethinking of the key concepts (materiality and signification) and the relationship between them. [...] Language matters. Discourse matters. Culture matters. There is an important sense in which the only thing that does not seem to matter anymore is matter.

(Barad 2003, 801)

Why continue to call “matter” a concept that will no longer be the metaphysical concept of matter? Why not choose an entirely other name? And if the link between the old name and the new name is not absolutely conventional, what is the necessity of that link? In other words, what type of link remains between the conceptual signified “matter” of metaphysics and the one that remains to be constituted? What of “materialist philosophy”?

(Derrida 1970–1971, session 1, 4)

Matter is all the rage again. Any respectable philosopher today begins by presenting themselves as a materialist. This attention to matter is perceived as an unquestionably *good* thing; it is imbued with positive values: realism, groundedness and commitment to the world, against abstraction, ethereality, idealism and ideological thinking. However, beyond the undeniable cachet that this label or claim—“I am a materialist”—seems to confer to one’s philosophical endeavor, the question remains to know what the “turn” to “matter” or “mattering” covers, what it allows and makes possible, what it privileges and, perhaps, what it tends to obfuscate.

Even though there is no clear consensus about what “matter” or, indeed, “materialism” refer to in the current philosophical landscape, one thing seems more or less certain: the current “turn” to materiality is presented as a reaction to the so-called “linguistic turn.”² Alas, there is no clear consensus about the definition of the latter “turn” either. In the context of continental philosophy, the “linguistic turn” is usually construed as includ-

² See for instance Barad 2003, 801–802; Latour 2004; Alaimo and Hekman 2008; Coole and Frost 2010, 6 and 25; Bryant, Srnicek and Harman 2011, 1–2; Dolphijn and van der Tuin 2012, 91 and 110.

ing poststructuralist thinkers interested in matters of language and discursivity, such as Michel Foucault, Julia Kristeva, Jacques Lacan, Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Luce Irigaray, and the authors they inspired, such as Edward Said, Paul de Man, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Judith Butler. Given the obvious fact that none of these authors can be described as anti-materialist in any conceivable way, the question remains of the nature of the recent “turn” towards “matter” in philosophy, science and technology studies, feminist theory, political and decolonial thought. Is it just a matter of emphasis? Of “style,” perhaps? But, were it the case, why do these differences in style *matter* so much? What are the force and the necessity that come from *turning* to “matter”?

These questions are all the more important because most thinkers associated with the current “material turn” do not simply reject matters of language, discourses, and everything that is associated with “the symbolic.” However, it is true that they tend to consider them from the standpoint of an inclusive and limitless thinking of materiality, most times predicated on a monist ontology presupposing radical immanence and ontological univocity.³ Matter is understood as univocal and all-encompassing, although it is also conceived of as differential, mobile, becoming, and transformative. In this way, the predicate of ontological immanence seems to be one of the most common and unifying traits of current approaches to matter and materiality, whether they present themselves as vitalist materialism, feminist materialism, decolonial materialism, materialism of the encounter, performative materialism, plastic materialism, posthumanist materialism, speculative materialism, transcendental materialism, processual materialism, relational materialism, vibrant materialism, materialist ontologies, and so on and so forth.

In these various instances, matter is no longer conceived of as inert and passive;⁴ it is understood as active or agential, imbued with a certain force,

³ See for instance Dolphijn and van der Tuin (2012, 85). See also Rosi Braidotti in the same volume, p. 28, or DeLanda (2016).

⁴ Time and time again, authors associated with “new materialism” reject a conception of “matter” as “passive” and “mechanistic.” They postulate “the opposition between a passive and static vision of matter (which new materialism attributes to old materialism) and an active and dynamic vision of matter (which new materialism claims for itself)” (Wolfe 2017, 216). But Charles T. Wolfe shows very well that this distinction between “old” and “new” conceptions of matter is based on rather cursory readings of the history of materialism in Western philosophy—readings that must ignore the multiplicities and contradictions of “old” materialisms, as well as the specificities and singularities of materialist or materialist-adjacent authors such as Democritus, Lucretius, Cavendish, La Mettrie, Diderot, Engels, and so on and so forth: “my first general point is that the passive-active opposition is an impoverished and out of date vision of early modernity (or, which amounts to much the same in the end, that such an opposition was already active then). [...] if we examine the

vitality, or agentivity through which the human and the nonhuman or posthuman (or other-than-human) are irreducibly entangled:

According to the new materialisms, if everything is material inasmuch as it is composed of physicochemical processes, nothing is reducible to such processes, at least as conventionally understood. 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 forces and to consider anew the location and nature of capacities for agency. (Coole and Frost 2010, 9)

This singular immanentist thinking of matter or mattering would thus contribute to challenge the anthropocentric and humanist ontological privilege—hence the critique of traditional understandings of “human” language as separated from “reality” or “the world.” Incidentally, this critique of humanism and linguisticism would perhaps constitute a point of convergence between these “new” materialists and many representatives of the “old” “linguistic turn”—at least the ones listed above.

This is why the question of novelty—the adjective “new,” here, is at least as important as the noun “materialism”—cannot and should not be ignored. How does one produce “the new”? And, perhaps more importantly, where does “the new” find the resources for asserting its force and its necessity, the force and necessity of a so-called “turn”?⁵ An easy answer would be to consider the contemporary diffusion of “new materialism,” its rampant dissemination in the form of a so-called “material turn,” simply as a trend, as a phenomenon of fashion. That would certainly be true, to an extent, and not that shocking. The intellectual field, just like any other field, is prone to certain forms of “trending,” as long as “the new” can help sell books or secure

reality of early modern materialism a bit more closely, the concept of mechanistic materialism falls apart, as does the pertinence of a new materialism opposed to this purportedly static and mechanistic older model, at least as regards its attempt to articulate an opposition between ‘old’ and ‘new,’ passive and active, inert and dynamic (recall the claim that new materialist ontologies are abandoning any notion of matter as inert and causally determined, in favour of chaos, dynamism and emergence; here, a dose of [Lucretius’s] *De rerum natura* might be in order)” (Wolfe 2017, 217).

⁵ What follows mimics an argument (on the production of “novelty” in the intellectual field) made by Derrida (1990) and Basile (2018). See also Mercier (2019b).

positions within academia. But, surely, this type of explanation—“new materialism is just a fad, a fashion”—would be limited, and limiting. First, there is nothing wrong with fashion *per se*. Second, explaining and dismissing a scholarly trend by reducing it to a “phenomenon of fashion” does not in fact explain anything; it does nothing to help us understand the force and the necessity of what is happening *today*. On this subject, it might be worth recalling what Derrida wrote in 1963, in “Force and signification,” about the so-called “fashion” of structuralism:

To grasp the profound necessity hidden beneath the incontestable phenomenon of fashion, it is first necessary to operate negatively: the choice of a word is first an ensemble—a structural ensemble, of course—of exclusions. To know why one says “structure” is to know why one no longer wishes to say *eidōs*, “essence,” form, *Gestalt*, “ensemble,” “composition,” “complex,” “construction,” “correlation,” “totality,” “Idea,” “organism,” “state,” “system,” etc. One must understand not only why each of these words showed itself to be insufficient but also why the notion of structure continues to borrow some implicit signification from them and to be inhabited by them. (Derrida 1978, 379–80)

If one wanted to describe the current “material turn” as “phenomenon of fashion,” one would have to explain what’s behind this phenomenon—or, as Derrida explains in the same essay, one would have to identify the “force” behind the phenomenon (Derrida 1978, 31). For example, one could argue that the “phenomenon of fashion” of “new materialism” is merely a production of the ideological field, an ideological reflection of current, material forces of production, of their real, concrete, material relationships and contradictions, one propelled by the economic and symbolic capital of powerful academic structures and comforted by decisive actors in the publishing industry. Again, this would certainly be true to some extent. But—and this is why Derrida’s above statement on “fashion” can be helpful even today, first of all because it encourages us *to take fashion seriously*—such explanation relies on interpretative models, operative categories, and conceptual oppositions that authors associated with “new materialism” and the “material turn” have precisely tried to undo or to complicate. So that, it is necessary not only to inspect the “phenomenon of fashion” critically, to analyze the structures of continuity and discontinuity on which “the new” is dependent, but also to try to understand the type of effects that contemporary materialism produces on the so-called “new” scene it has built for itself. This is where Derrida’s injunction “to operate negatively” can help us: What does the “new” scene purport to *exclude*?

As hinted above, the erection of the scene—here, the scene of “the new”—supposes indeed a number of exclusions, starting with the exclusion of the so-called “linguistic turn” and of a certain “mechanistic” conception of “matter” associated with “old” materialism. But these exclusions can only function because they *fail*. These exclusions fail at least *twice*—*first*, because they produce gross caricatures of the past, homogenizing stereotypes that will inevitably be contested, nuanced, and reclaimed in their complexity and heterogeneity; and, *second* (but this is a direct consequence of the first point), because these exclusions are themselves permeable to what they exclude, contaminated by what they attempt to exclude, which was never homogeneous *enough*, and always heterogeneous from the outset, so that an impermeable exclusion or isolation was in fact impossible to start with.⁶ And it is only natural that after a series of manifesto-like books or collections of essays celebrating a new “turn,” a new scene,⁷ *another* series of articles, books, or volumes now come to interrogate the so-called “turn,” to assess its

⁶ Hence the difficult necessity to provide a filiation for a “new” scene that must *also* claim for itself a certain genealogy of ancestors. This difficulty is made even more acute by the fact that the materiality that new materialism speaks about is usually conceived of as self-excessive, virtual, “material-semiotic,” sometimes even “immaterial,” so that authors associated with new materialism can claim for themselves ancestors that did not call themselves “materialist” and can hardly be described as “materialist” in any conceivable sense of the term—such as Spinoza or Bergson for Elizabeth Grosz (2017), or Whitehead for Donna Haraway (2008, but also 2016, p. 43, where Haraway describes herself, Latour and Stengers as “thoroughgoing materialists”). As Charles T. Wolfe puts it: “An interesting sub-issue I shall not explore here concerns the gray area between old materialism and new materialism: Democritus and Hobbes definitely belong to the former while Rosi Braidotti and Elizabeth Grosz belong to the latter, but what about Bergson or Whitehead? They are not really materialists but could be coopted into the virtual-friendly new materialism” (Wolfe 2017, 219). Note that authors such as Spinoza, Bergson, and Whitehead were all important influences for Deleuze (and Guattari) (1994), so that the question of new materialists’ Deleuzian filter in their reading of “matter” and “materiality” remains, I believe, an important locus of interrogation if we want to understand current investments in the so-called “material turn.” Here more than ever, the question of the *names* “matter” and “materialism,” of their apparent force and necessity, of their capacity to magnetize desires and investments, remains problematic and enigmatic and, as such, perhaps calls for further deconstruction. See for instance Derrida’s quotation placed as epigraph to this introduction. See also Kamuf (2015) and Cross and Mangat (2015).

⁷ See for instance Barad (2007), Meillassoux (2009), Bennett (2010), or the essays collected in Alaimo and Hekman (2008); Coole and Frost (2010); Bryant, Srnicek and Harman (2011); Dolphijn and van der Tuin (2012).

novelty, or to map its shortcomings—be it from the perspective of philosophical history,⁸ object-oriented ontology,⁹ social and ethico-political theory,¹⁰ deconstruction,¹¹ critical race theory and Black studies,¹² or from a differential perspective on materialist theory.¹³ The wheel keeps on turning. But with each turn, the wheel has moved, something has changed—and, each time unique, those changes express the force of a desire, the drives of specific libidinal investments, the affirmative powers and limitations of singular frustrations, perhaps the movements, convulsions, or trepidations of generative contradictions, ideological and/or material transformations that one could analyze as symptoms, signs, traces, in any case as somewhat productive failures in the field of intellectual production. And, each time unique, the question remains: What is happening today? Which is another way of asking: What fails to happen today?

The idea and impetus behind this thematic issue of *Síntesis. Revista de Filosofía* —“Matters”—was thus to take fashion seriously, so to speak, and to analyze critically the force and the necessity of a “turn,” of a “turn” that can never be quite a “turn,” one that attempts to mobilize heterogeneous motifs and investments and to coalesce impossible valences, names, and capitals—old and new matters—a “turn” that can still be *read* despite, or perhaps because of, its structural self-inadequacy and dissemination. With this general problematic in mind, this thematic issue of *Síntesis. Revista de Filosofía* invited essays engaging with “old” and “new” materialisms—from Ajita Kesakambali, Democritus, Epicurus, Lucretius, Ibn Tufail, Hobbes, Spinoza, Gassendi, La Mettrie, Diderot, Destutt de Tracy, Marx, Lenin, Merleau-Ponty, Althusser, Deleuze, Derrida, de Man, Laruelle, or Badiou, to contemporary thinkers associated with the neo-materialist and ontological turns, or whose work has contributed to reassessing our conceptions of materiality and materialism, such as Donna J. Haraway, Karen Barad, Elizabeth Grosz, Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, Bruno Latour, Arturo Escobar, Gayle Salamon, Slavoj Žižek, Vanessa Watts, Rosi Braidotti, Isabelle Stengers, Quentin Meillassoux, Vicki Kirby, Manuel DeLanda, Thomas Nail, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, Zoe Todd, Jane Bennett, and Catherine Malabou among many others.

⁸ See for instance Wolfe (2017; 2020).

⁹ See notably the essays responding to “A Questionnaire on Materialisms,” and collected in the Winter 2016 volume of *October* (Joselit, Lambert-Beatty and Foster 2016).

¹⁰ See for example Rekret (2016), or more recently Chandler and Reid (2020).

¹¹ See Szendy (2015), Lezra (2017; 2018), Kirby (2018), Kirby, Shrader and Timár (2018), Mercier (2019a; 2019b), Timár (2019), Basile (2019; 2020), Goldgaber (2021).

¹² See for example Jackson (2015; 2020) or Leong (2016).

¹³ See notably Grosz 2017.

As I designed this thematic issue of *Síntesis. Revista de Filosofía*, I initially proposed six possible lines of inquiry, with the understanding that other perspectives could be envisaged. These questions (or series of questions) were meant to inspire, to provoke, to orient or disorient potential contributors:

1. Matter, ontology, and immanence: How and why are these notions so closely interrelated in the current turn to materialism?¹⁴ What are the force and the necessity of this move? Is the thinking of matter necessarily indexed on a discourse on and of being? Are there non-ontological variations of matter and materiality?

2. Life and matter: What are the connections between these two concepts? Should materialism avoid, or on the contrary encourage, vitalism?¹⁵ How has the question become transformed by recent explorations of matter, with or without concern for “animism” or “animality”¹⁶? How does materialism affect the questions of *anima*, of human or posthuman life, of living presence? Can or should we avoid a certain mechanistic conception of matter? Is there a materiality specific to nonlife, to the machinic, to death?

3. Text and matter, literature, language and materiality: How can a materialist thought account for questions of language, text, and

¹⁴ For an illustration of the overlappings and potential divergences between the neo-material turn and the ontological turn in relation to the so-called “plane of immanence,” see Bryant, Srnicek and Harman (2011) and Joselit, Lambert-Beatty and Foster (2016). Wolfe (2017) is rather suspicious—not without reasons—of a certain “ontophanic” gesture present in many authors associated with new materialism, notably Bennett (2010): “Again, theoretical inventivity need not be constrained by some rule-book. If one thinks ‘thingly power’ is liberating, perhaps it can be liberating for some. But the reason I became interested in materialism in the first case [...] was not to find out that the material was the virtual, and that Bergsonism was the deepest form of this philosophy! This late 20th–early 21st century move to ontology is not without problems, or costs at least: on the one hand, a kind of foundationalist problem (who gets to say the Real?) and on the other hand, an immanentist problem: if everything is real, on a flat plane of ontology, boarding passes and chewing gum and chimichurri and soft power and ghosts, then what?” (Wolfe 2017, 223). In a gesture that would be perhaps more deconstructive and less historical than Wolfe’s fascinating reading of new materialism, one could deconstruct the limits of that thing called “matter” or “materiality” in a way that at once refuses dualism and monism, in order to interrogate and dislocate the apparently necessary connection between materialism and ontology in relation to immanence and presence—a gesture performed by several contributors to this issue.

¹⁵ On these questions, see notably Grosz (2011) and Kirby (2011). See also Kirby, Shrader and Timár (2018), and Vitale (2019).

¹⁶ On the problem of animism and materialism, see for example Viveiros de Castro, who writes: “Animism is the only *sensible* version of materialism” (quoted in Haraway 2016, 165). For a deconstructive critique of new materialism’s and the ontological turn’s often unproblematized tendencies towards animism and fetishism, see Lezra (2018).

literature, without folding back into an anthropocentric representation of language, or into a linguisticism? Is this risk avoidable? Should it be avoided, or on the contrary acknowledged? How does matter make “sense”? How do new materialisms rethink the articulation between ontology and epistemology? Is there a significability—even, perhaps, a literariness—intrinsic to materiality?

4. Sex that matters: How has new materialism displaced questions of gender, sexual difference, desire, embodiment, feminist and transfeminist thought?¹⁷ How does materialism account for, or perhaps consciously avoid, problems related to performativity, discursivity, normativity, and so on? How do these questions find themselves dislocated and relocated?

5. What are the ethics and politics of materialisms? How can the focus on immanence claimed by most contemporary materialisms be translated into an ethics or a politics of the “should” and “should not”—without reclaiming a discourse of transcendence and/or a politics of representation? How does materialism account for structures of political legitimation, ideological struggles and power relations, systemic oppression, economic inequalities, racism and colonial violence, political resistance, intercultural transfers, and so on? Can new materialisms provide the tools for a decolonial rearticulation of these notions, before or beyond Western categories of thought?¹⁸ What would be a neo-materialistic conception of history, enmeshed or entangled with the thinking of eco-technological environments or pluriversal worldings, and what would be its ethico-political implications?

6. New materialisms and psychoanalysis: How do materialisms account for notions such as the unconscious, the phantasm, the *Unheimlich*?¹⁹ Are those strictly material, and in what sense? Is there room in materialism for the immaterial? And what of the other(s) of matter—that which, perhaps, doesn’t ever *seem* to really matter?

Without claiming to provide definite answers to any of those questions, the six essays and the interview that make up this thematic issue of

¹⁷ On these questions, see notably Hird (2004), Grosz (2005), Alaimo and Hekman (2008), Salamon (2010), Wilson (2015), Stephano (2019b).

¹⁸ For potential responses to this challenge, see notably de la Cadena (2015), Haraway (2016), or Escobar (2017).

¹⁹ For a critical analysis of the materiality of the phantasm in Catherine Malabou’s plastic materialism in contrast to psychoanalysis and deconstruction, see Mercier (2021).

Síntesis. Revista de Filosofía offer, each in their own way, thematic and performative interventions that can help us make sense of (some of) the lines of inquiry opened up by “new materialism” and the “material turn,” while developing often adventurous lines of thought that may reconfigure representations of matter, materiality, and materialism in the contemporary landscape.

A common trait between all the interventions included in this thematic issue “Matters” is that they take the “turn” as a problem or as a question rather than as self-evident factum. But they do so in a way that is never simply dismissive of the current mobilization of materialism. Sure, some of the contributors question the novelty of “new” materialism—either in a historicopolitical fashion, as is the case with Warren Montag’s essay on Althusser, or from a more deconstructive perspective, such as Vicki Kirby’s reflection on subjectivity and humanicity—and many notice the obfuscating effects of the “turn” when it tends to present itself as univocal and homogeneous. But what is perhaps most striking is that most if not all the contributors critically interrogate neo-materialist presuppositions in the name of a certain faithfulness towards the very principles of new materialism, or of materialism *tout court*: heterogeneity, plurality, empiricity, and a certain refusal of oppositional dualisms and idealist or ideological naïvetés. Warren Montag, Oli Stephano, Jonathan Basile, Rocío Zambrana, Vicki Kirby, Jacques Lezra, and Elizabeth Grosz all share a commitment towards a thinking of “materiality” that leaves no stone unturned, be it through a thinking of the very materiality of ideology, language, and philosophy (Montag *qua* Althusser), a thinking of radical immanence as differentiation before and beyond matter “as such” (Stephano *qua* Spinoza and Deleuze), a thinking of an impossible gift (life-death) exceeding ontological reductions of symbiotic life and matter (Basile *qua* Derrida), a thinking of the materiality of raciality transforming materialist preconceptions on “material conditions” and on the material-ideological divide (Zambrana *qua* Wynter), a thinking of nature as writing and humanicity that refuses the inside/outside topological dualism still inhabited by posthumanists and new materialists (Kirby *qua* Derrida and Nancy), a thinking of text and reading as “encounter” raising the stakes for thinking materialism beyond ontology (Lezra *qua* Derrida-Epicurus-Lucretius-Nietzsche), and a thinking of incorporeality understood as the internal excess of matter itself, “the unconscious of materialism,” matter’s immaterial becoming (Grosz *qua* Freud, Nietzsche, and Deleuze).

The issue begins with Warren Montag’s contribution, which offers a reflection on “Materialism, Matter and Materiality in the Work of Althusser.” In light of the renewed importance of the question of matter today, Montag

shows how Althusser's materialism seems to prefigure many of the concerns raised by new materialisms.²⁰ Not only does Althusser propose an expansive thinking of materiality that includes idealities and ideologies—based on his peculiar reading of Spinoza, an important influence on several neo-materialist authors—but his materialism in fact deconstructs in advance some of the tenets of new materialisms, at least their most metaphysical aspects or their reliance on an unproblematized ontology. One salient aspect of Montag's essay is to emphasize the materiality of language, of words (starting with Althusser's own words), and to highlight their antagonistic bearing and strategic implications within a historical-theoretical field that is nothing less than the class struggle, or struggles. By pointing to the irreducibility of this antagonistic dimension—inseparably theoretical *and* political—Montag offers a thinking of Althusser's materialism which goes against contemporary materialisms' tendency to deprivilege "matters" of language (resulting from their claim to have exceeded "the linguistic turn")—a tendency that often leads them to neutralize the situatedness of their own discourse and to obfuscate their own strategic position within the field of antagonistic and polemological forces in which "theory" inevitably partakes.

In "Immanence and Differentiation in Spinoza," Oli Stephano argues that the thinking of immanence (in Spinoza and beyond) should not be reduced to substance monism, and should involve a conception of immanence *as* differentiation. This is done through the exploration of five interrelated "nodes" which, taken together, give a very clear picture of Spinoza's philosophy of immanence, of its decisive influence on Deleuzian thought, and of its importance to understand what is at stake in today's "new" materialisms' reliance on immanentist thinking. The essay provides a detailed depiction of how in Spinoza "substance becomes not a term of totalization but rather one of ongoing production of diversity," which allows Stephano to lay the theoretical ground for a relational ethics of life and materiality now understood as creative powers of differentiation and becoming—a relational ethics that Stephano explored in previous essays in relation to more-than-human ecological thinking (Stephano 2017; 2019a) and (trans) sexual difference (2019b).

In his essay "Symbioautothanatos: Science as Symbiont in the Work of Lynn Margulis," Jonathan Basile explores the motif of symbiosis and the way this concept has influenced many strands of new materialism and posthumanist theory in their definitions of life and matter. Through readings of Margulis and Myra Hird, but also with an eye towards the works of Donna

²⁰ For readings of Althusser in relation to new materialisms, see Coole and Frost (2010, 33–36), as well as Rey Chow's essay in the same volume. See also Malabou (2015).

Haraway and Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, Basile offers a deconstructive analysis of the logics of economy and exchange presupposed by the symbiotic structure—understood both as an analytical model for scientific method and as an ethical-political and economic representation of life. Basile demonstrates the types of theoretical gestures performed by Margulis in order to break away from older (Darwinian or neo-Darwinian) models of life and evolution—that she described as “mechanistic life science worldview”—while indicating the irreducible impurity of this demarcating gesture. In turn, this logic of impurity—predicated on Derrida’s deconstruction of the gift’s structure—affects neo-materialist discourses that make use of Margulis’s analytical models in order to differentiate their representations of life and matter from modern representations thereof (described as mechanistic, linear, formalist, and so on and so forth). The deconstructive logic of the gift, which both requires and excludes the economy of modelization, makes it impossible that something like “symbiosis” be conceived otherwise than as “symbi-oautothanatos,” or life-death.

Rocío Zambrana’s contribution, “The Plantation Complex in the Colony of Puerto Rico: On Material Conditions,” addresses the theoretical question of “material conditions” (understood from a modified Marxist heritage) through a historical reflection on the “plantation complex”—especially its deployment and evolution in the Puerto Rican context. Through this blending of theoretical and historical analyses, Zambrana demonstrates that an analysis of “material conditions” from this perspective not only challenges several philosophical and historical preconceptions attached to Marxist materialism—with respect to the matter-ideology divide or to the infrastructure-superstructure analytical frame, to the historical periodization of capitalism, and to the status of slavery, race, and gender in this history—but also contributes to show that the plantation complex must be understood as an evolving matrix, constantly updating and actualizing gender and racial norms—predicated on antiblackness—through its altered afterlives in *contratación*. Based on readings of Édouard Glissant, Sylvia Wynter, Saidiya Hartman, Frank Wilderson III, and Zakiyyah Iman Jackson among many others, Zambrana highlights the importance of the racial order and of its ongoing actualization to understand what we call “material conditions”—not because the racial norm would constitute an ideological, *a posteriori* justification for the material structures of modern capitalism, but rather because the racial order and antiblack ideology must themselves be understood as *infra-structural conditions* of material life as we know it. This supposes that their alteration is a *sine qua non* condition for resisting and potentially transforming “material conditions.”

In a wide-ranging essay that defies summarization, Vicki Kirby offers a comprehensive reflection on the state of theory today. Her question—“Who Comes after the Anthropocene?”—mirrors Jean-Luc Nancy’s 1991 “Who Comes after the Subject?,” and builds on it to interrogate the inside-outside topology, the oppositional approach to nature-culture, and the persisting fetish of human exceptionalism that are still traceable in many works associated with new materialism, speculative realism, and posthumanism. While rethinking the place of “the human” and the status of textual agency in the current planetary crisis known as “the Anthropocene,” Kirby proposes to rework Derrida’s “originary writing” in the form of “originary humanicity,” involving a new sense of environmental awareness and a deep-ecological co-implication beyond the tired opposition between anthropocentrism and posthumanism. Indexed on Derrida’s thinking of text, trace, and *différance* in relation to life and nature—notably in his 1975–1976 seminar *Life Death* (Derrida 2020)—“originary humanicity” supposes the deconstruction (or, better, the self-deconstruction) of the anthropocentric machine and of subjectivity, without however claiming to be done with them entirely. As Kirby puts it, “human identity configured through ‘originary humanicity’ is instead fractured and dispersed through the same systemic dynamic that renders its appearance seemingly coherent.” “Originary humanicity” thus speaks to an ecological-textual, systemic but differential co-implication that dislocates traditional oppositions such as interiority and exteriority, subject and object, agency and inertia, human and other-than-human, culture and nature, or life and matter.

The last article of this issue, Jacques Lezra’s “Regarding Death, That Nothing-for-Us: Derrida-Epicurus”—“Du rien-pour-nous que la mort: Derrida Épicure”—is a position piece offering a singular reading of Derrida’s 1975–1976 seminar *Life Death* in relation to matter, materiality, and materialism. Despite the absence of explicit references to Epicurus in the seminar, Lezra hypothesizes that it can be read as prefiguring later essays in which Derrida offered a series of *rapprochements* (or encounters, chance encounters, in the quasi-Althusserian sense of an “aleatory materialism of the encounter”) between deconstruction and ancient materialism—and this, notably, thanks to a number of developments on Nietzsche, in the seminar, that could be *read as traces* echoing Nietzschean encounters with Epicurus and Lucretius on the topic of life and death, on the inevitability and nothingness of death beyond being, or life-death. Lezra’s text thus seems to perform a play of tracing and reading that could itself be interpreted as mirroring the deconstructive—non-substantial, non-ontological—materialism put to work by Derrida: a trace-materiality that does not refer to anything present,

but that remains to be read, entrusted to the other. Read, by the other, despite or thanks to death, entrusted to a chance encounter that may always not take place. Hence the inseparability between this thinking of trace-materiality and death, death and survival, life-death. It follows that the matter or materiality we're talking about here supposes a non-substantial, non-ontological and non-ontologizable thinking of materiality, one that could be likened to what Derrida, in a later reading of Paul de Man, calls a "materiality without matter," understood as the other's event, life-death as "force of resistance" (Derrida 2002, 151). As Derrida puts it, as Peggy Kamuf later reflects on it, "*materiality* becomes a very useful generic name for all that resists appropriation" (Derrida 2002, 154; Kamuf 2015)—and another name for that resistance, for that resisting "last instance," could be *text* or *reading*.²¹ In Lezra's reading, this resistance signifies first and foremost a resistance against the institution, against philosophy as institution.

Finally, this thematic issue "Matters" closes with "Immaterial Matters, or the Unconscious of Materialism: A conversation with Elizabeth Grosz." In this exceptional interview which took place across several months in the year 2021, I had the opportunity to ask Elizabeth Grosz about the ongoing global pandemic and about the importance of materialism in the current climate. The interview was the occasion for me to hear her speak about the broad constellation of new materialisms, and for her to describe her stance with respect to neo-materialist philosophy in the wake of the publication of her book *The Incorporeal* (Grosz 2017). She and I agreed to follow roughly the six lines of inquiry described above in this introduction—which we more or less did despite a few escapades here and there. All through the conversation, Elizabeth Grosz emphasizes the necessity of materialist thought, but also stresses the equal importance of what she calls "the incorporeal": an excess in and of matter, materiality's heterogeneous virtuality, differentiality and becoming-other. She describes the incorporeal as mutually co-implicated with materiality in a way that eschews both monism and dualism—or, in more psychoanalytical terms, as "the unconscious of materialism itself, its 'repression' of its own incorporeal conditions and frame." In the course of the conversation, Elizabeth Grosz discusses the works of Jacques Derrida, Donna Haraway, Sigmund Freud, Luce Irigaray, Karen Barad, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Gilles Deleuze among many others.

I want to thank everyone who made this thematic issue possible. First, the contributors, of course, but also all anonymous reviewers, and the editors of *Síntesis. Revista de Filosofía*, starting with Mauro Senatore and José

²¹ I've also proposed a reflection on this essay by Derrida, "Typewriter Ribbon," in relation to resistance and materiality, in my article "Resisting the Present" (Mercier 2019b).

Antonio Valdivia. I cannot thank them enough for their trust, their helpfulness, and their vigilance. I also thank my colleagues at Universidad Adolfo Ibáñez, notably Pedro Moscoso, Diego Melo, Miriam Jerade, Diego Rossello, and Facundo Vega, as well as ANID FONDECYT for their support.²² I also want to thank the many friends and colleagues who shared ideas and texts with me in the course of the elaboration of this issue, notably Eszter Timár, Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, Vicente Montenegro, Ronald Mendoza-de Jesús, Sergio Villalobos-Ruminott, Matías Bascuñan, Peggy Kamuf, and Jean-Luc Nancy. I dedicate this issue to the memory of Jean-Luc Nancy.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alaimo, Stacey and Susan Hekman, eds. 2008. *Material Feminisms*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Barad, Karen. 2003. "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28 (3): 801–831.
- Barad, Karen. 2007. *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Basile, Jonathan. 2018. "The New Novelty: Corralation as Quarantine in Speculative Realism and New Materialism." *Derrida Today* 11 (2): 211–229.
- Basile, Jonathan. 2019. "Life/Force: Novelty and New Materialism in Jane Bennett's Vibrant Matter." *SubStance* 48 (2): 3–22.
- Basile, Jonathan. 2020. "Other Matters: Karen Barad's Two Materialisms and the Science of Undecidability." *Angelaki* 25 (5): 3–18.
- Bennett, Jane. 2010. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Bryant, Levi, Nick Srnicek, and Graham Harman, eds. 2011. *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism*. Melbourne: Re-press.
- Coole, Diana, and Samantha Frost, eds. 2010. *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- de la Cadena, Marisol. 2015. *Earth Beings: Ecologies of Practice across Andean Worlds*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Chandler, David and Julian Reid. 2020. "Becoming Indigenous: The 'Speculative Turn' in Anthropology and the (Re)Colonisation of Indigeneity." *Postcolonial Studies* 23 (4): 485–504.

²² I elaborated this issue with the help of ANID FONDECYT/ POSTDOCTORADO/ N° 3200401.

- Cross, Donald, and Ajitpaul Mangat. 2015. "Derrida: Matters." *theory@buffalo* 18: 1–7.
- DeLanda, Manuel. 2016. *Assemblage Theory*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. 1994. *What is Philosophy?* Translated by Graham Burchell and Hugh Tomlinson. London: Verso.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1970–1971. "Théorie du discours philosophique (II). La forme du texte philosophique: les conditions d'inscription du texte de philosophie politique (l'exemple du matérialisme)." Seminar Notes. Unpublished. IMEC, 219 DRR 223.6.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1978. *Writing and Difference*. Translated by Alan Bass. London and New York: Routledge.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1990. "Some Statements and Truisms About Neo-logisms, Newisms, Postisms, Parasitisms, and Other Small Seismisms." Translated by Anne Tomiche. In *The States of "Theory,"* edited by David Carroll, 63–94. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Derrida, Jacques. 2002. *Without Alibi*. Edited and translated by Peggy Kamuf. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Derrida, Jacques. 2020. *Life Death*. Edited by Pascale-Anne Brault and Peggy Kamuf. Translated by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas. Chicago: University of Chicago.
- Dolphijn, Rick and Iris van der Tuin, eds. 2012. *New Materialism: Interviews & Cartographies*. Ann Arbor, MI: Open Humanities Press.
- Escobar, Arturo. 2017. *Designs for the Pluriverse: Radical Interdependence, Autonomy, and the Making of Worlds*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Goldgaber, Deborah. 2021. *Speculative Grammatology: Deconstruction and the New Materialism*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Grosz, Elizabeth. 2005. *Time Travels: Feminism, Nature, Power*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Grosz, Elizabeth. 2011. *Becoming Undone: Darwinian Reflections of Life, Politics, and Art*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Grosz, Elizabeth. 2017. *The Incorporal: Ontology, Ethics, and the Limits of Materialism*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Haraway, Donna. 2008. *When Species Meet*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Haraway, Donna. 2016. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Hird, Myra. 2004. "Feminist Matters: New Materialist Considerations of Sexual Difference." *Feminist Theory* 5 (2): 223–232.
- Jackson, Zakiyyah Iman. 2015. "Outer Worlds: The Persistence of Race in Movement 'Beyond the Human'" *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 21 (2-3): 215-218.

- Jackson, Zakiyyah Iman. 2020. *Becoming Human: Matter and Meaning in an Antiblack World*. New York: New York University Press.
- Joselit, David, Carrie Lambert-Beatty, and Hal Foster, eds. 2016. "A Questionnaire on Materialisms." *October* 155: 3–110.
- Kamuf, Peggy. 2015. "Ma." *theory@buffalo* 18: 78–90.
- Kirby, Vicki. 2011. *Quantum Anthropologies: Life at Large*. Durham N.C.: Duke University Press.
- Kirby, Vicki. 2018. "Originary Humanicity: Locating *Anthropos*." *philosophIA: A Journal of Continental Feminism* 8 (1): 43–60.
- Kirby, Vicki, Astrid Shrader and Eszter Timár. 2018. "How Do We Do Biodeconstruction?" *Postmodern Culture* 28 (3).
- Latour, Bruno. 2004. "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern." *Critical Inquiry* 30: 225–248.
- Leong, Diana. 2016. "The Mattering of Black Lives: Octavia Butler's Hyperempathy and the Promise of the New Materialisms." *Catalyst: Feminism, Theory, Technoscience* 2 (2): 1–35.
- Lezra, Jacques. 2017. "Uncountable Matter." *The Oxford Literary Review* 39 (1): 17–41.
- Lezra, Jacques. 2018. *On the Nature of Marx's Things: Translation as Necrophilology*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Lezra, Jacques. 2020. *República salvaje: De la naturaleza de las cosas*. Santiago: Ediciones Macul.
- Malabou, Catherine. 2015. "Whither Materialism? Althusser/Darwin." In *Plastic Materialities: Politics, Legality, and Metamorphosis in the Work of Catherine Malabou*, edited by Brenna Bhandar and Jonathan Goldberg-Hiller, 47–60. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Meillassoux, Quentin. 2009. *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*. Translated by Ray Brassier. New York: Continuum.
- Mercier, Thomas Clément. 2019a. "Uses of 'the Pluriverse': Cosmos, Interrupted—or the Others of Humanities." *Ostium* 15 (2): 1–15.
- Mercier, Thomas Clément. 2019b. "Resisting the Present: Biopower in the Face of the Event (Some Notes on Monstrous Lives)." *CR: The New Centennial Review* 19 (3): 99–128.
- Mercier, Thomas Clément. 2021. "Plastic Events, Spectral Events: Literature and the 'Real of the Phantasm,' between Malabou and Derrida." In *Literature and Event: Twenty-First Century Reformulations*, edited by Mantra Mukim and Derek Attridge, 164–179. London and New York: Routledge.
- Montag, Warren, and Ted Stolze, eds. 1997. *The New Spinoza*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Rekret, Paul. 2016. "A Critique of New Materialism: Ethics and Ontology." *Subjectivity* 9: 225–245.

- Salamon, Gayle. 2010. *Assuming a Body: Transgender and Rhetorics of Materiality*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Stephano, Oli. 2017. "Spinoza, Ecology, and Immanent Ethics: Beside Moral Considerability." *Environmental Philosophy* 14 (2): 317–338.
- Stephano, Oli. 2019a. "Human Power and Ecological Flourishing: Refiguring Right and Advantage with Spinoza." *SubStance* 48 (2): 81–101.
- Stephano, Oli. 2019b. "Irreducibility and (Trans) Sexual Difference". *Hypatia* 34 (1): 141–154.
- Szendy, Peter. 2015. *Apocalypse-Cinema: 2012 and Other Ends of the World*. Translated by Will Bishop. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Timár, Eszter. 2019. "The Body of Shame in Affect Theory and Deconstruction." *Parallax* 25 (2): 197–211.
- Vitale, Francesco. 2019. "What (Bio)deconstruction Is Not." *CR: The New Centennial Review* 19 (3): 1–12.
- Wilson, Elizabeth A. 2015. *Gut Feminism*. Durham, NC.: Duke University Press.
- Wolfe, Charles T. 2017. "Materialism New and Old." *Antropología Experimental* 17: 215–224.
- Wolfe, Charles T. 2020. *Lire le matérialisme*. Paris: ENS Éditions.