Speculative Realities

BLOWUP

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THE EXHIBITION

Blowup is a series of events and exhibitions that explore contemporary questions from multiple viewpoints. Blowup zooms in on ideas, bringing into focus clear pictures of how art, design, philosophy, and technology are transforming our lives – or reinforcing the status quo.

Introduction:
Speculative Realities

BY MICHELLE KASPRZAK

This eBook, the sixth in the series of Blowup Readers released by V2_, explores the significance of the recent philosophic movements known as Object-Oriented Ontology and Speculative Realism for the visual and media arts.

About V2_:

V2_, Institute for the Unstable Media, founded in 1981, is an interdisciplinary center for art and media technology in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. V2_ conducts research at the interface of art, technology and society. V2_ presents, produces, archives and publishes about art made with new technologies and encourages the debate on these issues. V2_ offers a platform where artists, scientists, developers of software and hardware, researchers and theorists from various disciplines can share their findings. Art and culture play an essential role in the social embedding of and attitude towards technological developments, and V2_ creates a context in which technological issues are explored through critical reflection and practice-oriented research.

About Blowup:

Blowup, launched in 2011, is a series of events and exhibitions that explore contemporary questions from multiple viewpoints. Blowup zooms in on ideas, bringing into focus clear pictures of how art, design, philosophy, and technology are transforming our lives – or reinforcing the status quo.

Each Blowup event will provide a deeper understanding of a theme relevant to this moment in time. Some events will ask you to be hands-on, and some will involve just listening or looking. No two events will be the same: Blowup events mix artists and theoreticians; mix formats; challenge assumptions; and take risks. Investigating topics ranging from art for animals to speculative designs for future objects, each Blowup will surprise and inform.

Alongside each event, a Blowup Reader exploring the theme with texts from a wide range of sources will be released in eBook format. Blowup is curated by Michelle Kasprzak.

Blowup
Speculative Realities

Two artists and one collaborative duo were commissioned to make new artworks reflecting broadly on concepts within Object-Oriented Ontology and Speculative Realism. The artists were Tuur van Balen & Revital Cohen, Cheryl Field, and Karolina Sobecka.

To supplement the descriptions of the works and brief interviews with the artists in this eBook, three new interviews were also commissioned. Sven Lütticken was interviewed by Rachel O'Reilly, Jussi Parikka was interviewed by Michael Dieter, and Rick Dolphijn was interviewed by Michelle Kasprzak.

The exhibition took place from December 8, 2012 until January 11, 2013 at Roodkapje, Meent 133, Rotterdam. Photographs of the exhibition are available at http://v2.nl

Curatorial Statement:

The way that thought, as it is expressed through language, intersects with thought as it is expressed through material forms is a central curatorial concern of mine. Particularly today, when artists collaborate with and are influenced by such a wide variety of actors, including philosophers and scientists, understanding this intersection and creating productive frameworks where these worlds meet is arguably one of the key functions of a curator.

In the case of the exhibition and eBook developed as Blowup: **Speculative Realities**, I was intrigued by the recent continental philosophical turn towards materialism and the object. Concepts put forward by Object-Oriented Ontology and Speculative Realism seem to hold great potential for spurring a conversation about how philosophical thought can be in dialogue with, or provide additional insights into and context for, contemporary modes of art production.

What brought me to the point of considering this particular interaction between philosophy and art was the experience of co-curating the anchor exhibition of the Dutch Electronic Art Festival 2012, which was themed **The Power of Things**. The exhibition was an overt investigation of materialism and objecthood, and was influenced by Jane Bennett's **Vibrant Matter**, vitalist philosophies, and the idea of 'vital beauty' as described by John Ruskin. For an exhibition that still might be classified as a 'media art' or 'electronic art' exhibition (indeed we still use the term 'Electronic Art' within

the name of the festival itself) it was remarkably lacking in glowing screens and interactive experiences that required triggering sensors. Instead, the exhibition hall was mostly filled with objects: a ball made up of all the naturally-occurring elements on earth (**Terrestrial Ball** by Kianoosh Motallebi), a sculpture made of salt and ice that changed over time (**Sealed** by Jessica de Boer), a pool of water with dazzling reflections (**Notion Motion** by Olafur Eliasson), a nano-engineered artwork composed of the 'blackest black' (**Hostage Pt. 1** by Frederik de Wilde), and numerous other examples.

Following the construction of this exhibition, containing such a range of materialities and posing different questions and challenges to the viewer, it struck me as an obligation to examine the questions that were raised by this exhibition further. And so I began to eavesdrop on the international conversation that has been taking place, significantly also through online media, about Speculative Realism and Object-Oriented Ontology. The significance of these turns in philosophy are clear just from the secondary signs: debate is heated; production of writing and speaking events on the topics is prolific. Something about the return of the **thing** and thinking beyond the human realm is capturing imaginations beyond the halls of philosophy where these ideas tend to reside. The draw of such thought to the arts is also pronounced. As art critic Rahma Khazam observed: 'Although SR [Speculative Realism] 's counter–intuitive theses and dismissive attitude towards humanity in general have their detractors, [but] for its supporters in the art world, the mental gymnastics it imposes are part of its appeal.' (Khazam 2012).

Certainly for me, the allure does lie in a fundamental shift of curatorial thinking, to reconsider relationships between material and immaterial processes, and between 'matter' and 'what matters,' presciently. Art critic Diedrich Diederichsen writing on the phenomenon of Speculative Realism describes the inevitability of this desire for thinghood as a result of de-reification and post-capitalist packaging of self. He suggests: 'We might conclude that the contemporary tendency in a wide range of fields to declare things to be (ghostly) beings and to call for their emancipation is a response to a contemporary capitalism of self-optimization, with its imperative to produce a perfect self as a perfect thing' (Diederichsen 2012). Although Diederichsen doesn't reference it directly, one easily calls to mind the art market's spiralling developments along these lines. From Uncle Andy's factory (and the shambles of 'verification'of which objects were actually fashioned by the artist or his deputy) to Damien Hirst's hundreds of assistants that push processes of commodity production and reification to its most eccentric limits, we have observed how in step the art

market is with broader processes of globalisation. It is worth bearing in mind then, that despite our radical impulses in some fringes of the art world, we too are subject to the same forces, and tasked with critical imperatives.

My curatorial process involved close conversations with a range of artists who were already looking at notions of non-human-centredness, or materialism, or a democracy of things in their work. In the end, I narrowed down to focus on the conversations with the artists whose work appeared in the V2_ exhibition component of **Speculative Realities**. Four new commissions from two individual artists and one collaborative duo were produced. Throughout the commissioning process, I dialogued with the artists (Tuur van Balen & Revital Cohen, Cheryl Field, and Karolina Sobecka) and gave them texts (in particular, each artist received a PDF of Levi Bryant's **The Democracy of Things**) and I waited some time before revealing the identity of the other artists to any particular artist. In this way, the works were developed autonomously, without any collaborative dialogue around the actual production process or outcome, with the understanding that the results would be both heterogeneous and unexpected.

The final exhibited four works, while substantially different (and described and pictured in another section of this eBook) also had several points of convergence. A fundamental return to and concern with nature became apparent; mountains, clouds, and living plants figured strongly in the group of works. Interestingly, a wry sense of humour can also be perceived in each work: the absurdity in Cheryl Field's disembodied fingers and tongues; the chance interactions with random landowners in Karolina Sobecka's Cloud Maker experiments; the sheer stretch of the imagination involved in Tuur van Balen and Revital Cohen's night garden for communication between hares and the moon.

Finally, it is worth noting that while we laboured on producing this exhibition and the interviews for this eBook, interest in the wider world in this philosophical turn manifested into other exhibitions simultaneously: **Resonance and Repetition**, curated by Rivet in New York; **Things' Matter**, curated by Klara Manhal in Vancouver; and **The Return of the Object**, curated by Stefanie Hessler in Berlin. What this simultaneity suggests in anyone's guess, but to me it signals that grappling with the concepts and consequences of these philosophical movements has been assumed as a priority for art of this moment.

This eBook has two functions: as a catalogue of the Blowup: **Speculative Realities** exhibition, and as a platform for further thoughts on the intersections between the

philosophical movements known as Speculative Realism and Object-Oriented Ontology and visual and media art. The texts in this reader consist mainly of interviews, with thinkers on the forefront of art criticism, media theory, philosophy and art practice, that speak to and far beyond the exhibition itself. It is my hope that even if you were not able to experience the exhibition as it manifested in Rotterdam in 2012–13, this reader will illuminate different ways of thinking and approaching the Speculative Realism and Object-Oriented Ontology in a broad sense.

Michelle Kasprzak
Curator, V2_ Institute for the Unstable Media
Rotterdam, 11/01/2013

References

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Diederichsen, Diedrich. **Animation, De-reification, and the New Charm of the Inanimate. E-flux. Journal #36, 07/2012.**

Acknowledgements

List of Works

BLOWUP: SPECULATIVE REALITIES
Curated by: Michelle Kasprzak
Works commissioned by: V2_ Institute for the Unstable Media
Exhibited at: Roodkapje, Meent 121 – 133, Rotterdam, The Netherlands
December 8 2012 – January 11 2013

EXHIBITION INFORMATION

This edition of V2_'s **Blowup** series of events and exhibitions will examine the how and the why of speculative realism, object-oriented ontology and artistic practice. Four new art commissions examine different aspects of Object-oriented ontology (OOO), such as a non-human-centered view of the world, and the limits of knowledge. An e-book of interviews with artists and thinkers, released with a short talk at the exhibition finissage, will round out the programme and provide insights into the relationship between this exciting turn in philosophy and contemporary art and design. Artists being commissioned include Tuur van Balen & Revital Cohen (BE/UK), Cheryl Field (UK), and Karolina Sobecka (US).

BACKGROUND

The term 'speculative realism' was coined at a conference at Goldsmiths in 2007 chaired by Alberto Toscano that included the philosophers Ray Brassier, Iain Hamilton Grant, Graham Harman and Quentin Meillassoux. Since then the term has split into factions like object-oriented ontology (OOO), spawned a number of journals (Speculations and O-Zone), book series and several other conferences and debates. The theme can be taken as part of a current philosophical interest in rethinking **correlationism** (an act of division between human and world), and is broadly congruent with existing discussions of the nonhuman, more-than-human and other frameworks of new materialism. Many key points of these conceptual trends are also pertinent to current trends in artistic practice: a non-anthropocentric worldview; an interest in modes of **ontological** levelling (a democracy of things); a consideration of aggregate forces like climate through categories of autonomy.

ABOUT THE WORKS

Nephology 1: Cloud Maker (2012)
by Karolina Sobecka

Nephology 1: Cloud Maker attempts to construct knowledge of clouds through investigating how the clouds encounter the world around them. Making a cloud is a little like making a wave in the ocean -- a gesture that seems Sisyphian in its futility and its absurdity. But if we consider the cloud as an object-for-itself, apart from its utility or its meaning for us humans, then the effort gains a different dimension. To make a cloud one has to understand it, and understand the forces that shape it. One has to ask oneself 'what does the world has to be like for the cloud to exist?'

Constructing knowledge is, as Levi Bryant writes 'like what takes place in building a house. Part of building a house will involve conceptual elements such as ideas found in engineering and architecture, part will involve social and political elements such as laws and cultural traditions in architecture, part will be real materials used such as the tools, the wood, nails, etc., and part the techniques or practices that construction workers have learned.'Nephologies similarly attempts to weave together conceptual, social, material and phenomenological threads through a cloud's particular point of view on the world.

Materials: custom misting system, styrofoam, weather balloon, video projection, C-print

The Others (2012)
by Tuur van Balen & Revital Cohen

A system for a hare to listen to the surface of the moon, supported and directed by the lunar movements of a moonflower. Based on the natural tendencies of the plant, an artificial symbiotic relationship is initiated between a nocturnal animal with mysterious behaviour, a psychedelic nightshade and Earth's natural satellite.

By designing a poetic interaction between plant and animal, the idea of unmediated perception of nature is examined, where phenomena are perceived within the realms of miracle or spectacle. Once nature is interpreted and explained (by humans), the 'filter' of knowledge can no longer be removed, and fauna / flora behaviours are subsequently experienced through a factual mindset.

It is this interpretation or 'attribution of meaning' that takes the primal elation out of the physical perception of non-human-mediated phenomena. Rather than meaning, this contraption emulates presence - a moment in which biology is repositioned in the supernatural territories of the unknown, the enchanting and the unspoken.


Materials: Moonflower, aluminum, nylon, solar panels, electronics

(C8H8)n, CSi, KAI2(AlSi3O10)(F,OH)2, C, C, CaSO4, Fe3C, SiH3(OSiH2)nOSiH3 (2012)
by Cheryl Field

Cheryl Field writes about the work: 'For me, there is something uncanny about sensory and sensual organs (i.e. fingers and tongues) being dislocated from the body. Both the finger and the tongue are also fundamental to our sense of humanness and to some extent they are symbolic of our evolution i.e. the opposable finger and thumb and the power of speech and language have given us the dominant position on this planet. I want to take that wholly anthropocentric or teleological position and play with it. Specifically, this work is an opposition of objects – a reclassification of ordered structures if you will. On one side it is a simulacrum of a human tongue, cast from life in pink rubber. On the other side is a miniature mountainscape crafted from elementary chemicals such as silicon carbide, carbon (in both its graphite and diamond states) and mica. What links this miniature geology and with - surely the most democratic position of all; we, the planet and e-v-e-r-y-t-h-i-n-g come from stardust alone.'
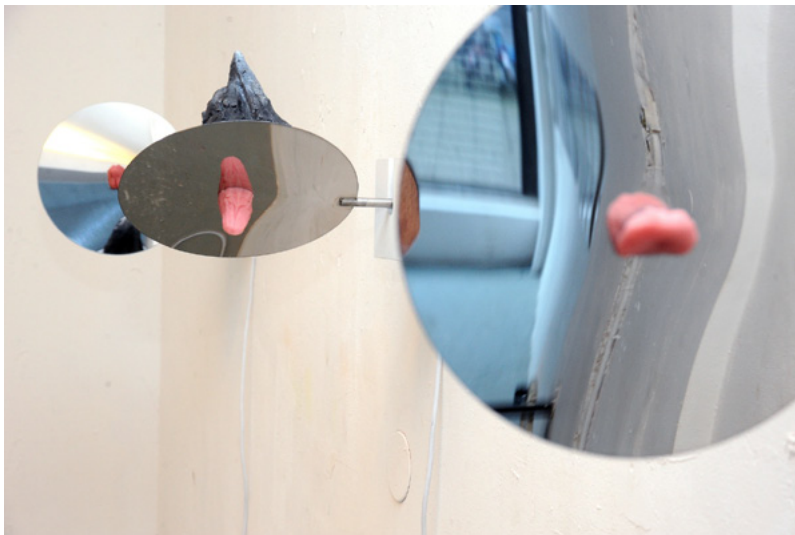
Materials: EPS, Silicon carbide, Mica, Diamond powder, Graphite, Plaster, Steel, Silicone, Electric motor

Neither Ready Nor Present To Hand (2012)
by Cheryl Field

Part prop, part fictional-function, part biology, part whimsy; by dislocating something as human as a finger it shifts the Heideggerian tool-state of the object from being 'present-to-hand' to 'ready-to-hand' which for a finger is, frankly, next-to-useless.

After all we'd need more fingers in order to activate (and wind-up) the tool-finger. It is a tool no more, but an object never-the-less. By liberating it, it withdraws from us and leads a life independent of our anthropocentric perception.
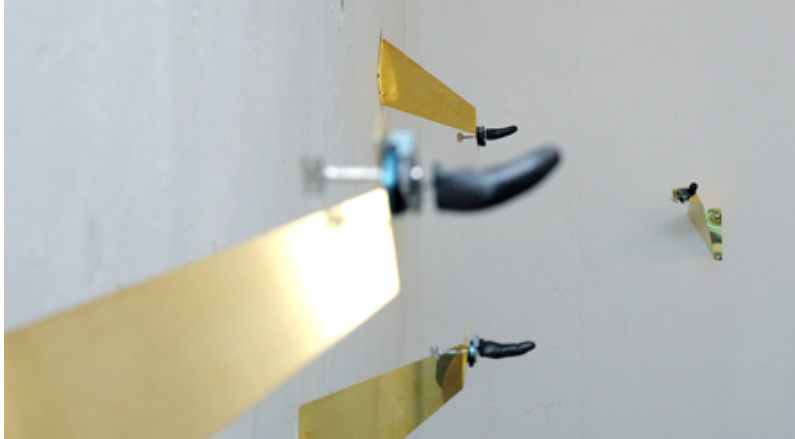
Materials: Jesmonite, Plaster, Brass, Clockwork, Graphite

ARTIST BIOS

Cohen Van Balen (UK) develops critical design works.

Revital Cohen and Tuur Van Balen run a London based experimental practice operating on the border between art and design. Inspired by designer species, composed wilderness and mechanical organs, they produce fictional objects, photographs and videos exploring the juxtaposition of the natural with the artificial. They often involve bioethicists, animal breeders and other scientists in the development of the work in order to push the boundaries of material and process.

Since graduating from the Design Interactions department at the Royal College of Art in 2008, they have been exhibiting and lecturing internationally. Recent exhibitions and talks took place at MoMa, Tate Britain, National Museum of China, Cooper-Hewitt, Z33 House for Contemporary Art, London Design Museum, FACT, V2 Institute for Unstable Media, Natural History Museum of Vienna and Design Indaba, amongst others.

Cohen Van Balen are the recipients of several awards and commissions, including the Science Museum's Emerging Artist Commission, two Wellcome Trust Arts Awards and an Award of Distinction at Prix Ars Electronica.

Cheryl Field (UK) is an artist.

After forays into the realms of Molecular Biology, Parasitology and Management Consultancy, Cheryl Field studied BA (Hons) Sculpture & Environmental Art at The Glasgow School of Art, graduating in 2007. She went on to study for her Master of Fine Art at Goldsmiths College, graduating in 2012.

Her first solo exhibition was in 2008 and she has continued to exhibit her work widely. Recent exhibitions include 'Ten Days in Summer' at The Queens Park Railway Club, Glasgow. 'Resident 11' The Royal Scottish Academy of Art & Architecture, Edinburgh. 'Submit2Gravity' at The Old Vic Tunnels, London and 'Vestiges Park' at Glasgow International 2010.

Karolina Sobecka (US) is a media artist, designer and animator.

Karolina Sobecka works with animation, design, interactivity, computer games and other media and formats. Her artwork often engages public space and explores the way we interact with the world we create and imagine. It often takes forms of interactive installations, urban interventions or design objects. It has been shown internationally, including at the V&A, MOMA, Beall Center for Art + Technology and ISEA, and has received several awards, including from Creative Capital, Rhizome, NYFA, Princess Grace Foundation, Vida Art and Artificial Life Awards and Japan Media Arts Festival.

CURATOR BIO

Michelle Kasprzak is a Canadian curator and writer based in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. She has appeared in Wired UK, on radio and TV broadcasts by the BBC and CBC, and lectured at PICNIC. She founded one of the world's leading art curating blogs, Curating.info. She has written critical essays for Volume, C Magazine, Rhizome, CV Photo, Mute, Spacing, and many other media outlets.

In 2006, she was awarded a curatorial research residency at the Nordic Institute for Contemporary Art in Helsinki, Finland, in 2010 she attended the Summer Seminars for Art Curators in Yerevan, Armenia, and in 2011 was a guest of the BAM International Visitor's Programme in Flanders. She has a BFA in New Media (Ryerson University, 2000) and MA in Visual and Media Arts (Université du Québec à Montréal, 2006).

The results of her curatorial work have appeared in venues worldwide. Most recently, she was part of the curatorial team for the 2012 ZER01 Biennial in San Jose, California. She is currently a Curator at V2_ Institute for the Unstable Media.

Interview with the commissioned artists

BY MICHELLE KASPRZAK

Michelle Kasprzak (MK): When I first approached you with this brief, what were your first thoughts on how OOO & SR was already situated within your practice?

Revital Cohen of Cohen Van Balen (RC): We have been working around designs for animals, animal designs and design of animals for a while now. Therefore, object-oriented-ontology's (OOO) ideas of things that are beyond (or perhaps around) human perception are relevant to our practice. We're interested in nonhuman presence and interactions, in processes that are beyond human control. We approach these processes and situations from a speculative point of view, not always concerned with reality, rather with fields of possibility.

Cheryl Field (CF): The thing that appeals to me most about OOO/speculative realism (SR) is the egalitarian position these philosophies adopt. They offer a democratic stance that is perhaps at odds with our natural impulses. It's a very human quality to harbour an anthropocentric and an anthropomorphic view of the universe. For example, children will agree with statements such as 'rocks are jagged so animals can scratch themselves' and 'birds exist to make nice music.' These kinds of teleological statements make intuitive sense to us; they are the kinds of explanations that come naturally to human minds. Science on the other hand requires the kind of abstract thought that doesn't sit so easily. And I think that is where my work (which as you know is heavily influenced by my background as a molecular biologist) and OOO/SR start to find common ground – there's a striking resemblance between these philosophical positions and the universe as described by science. Neither of the pieces of work I made are meant to be diagrammatic of OOO / SR (there are better ways to do that than though art-objects I'm sure).

Karolina Sobecka (KS): My work hasn't explicitly referenced OOO or SR ideas, but it was following a few related tangents. The most prominent might have been the nonhu-

man perspective, as a lot of my work has to do with creating relationship between the viewer and interactive agency, represented often by animals or objects. I have been interested in Jakob von Uexküll's writings. Uexküll made deductions about how a particular animal experiences the world or what he calls its **umwelt**, for example, inferring the bee world from, among other things, the structure of their eyes and their behaviours. This is kind of an early version of the exploration of multiplicity of nonhuman perspectives that OOO encourages.

I was also thinking a lot about objects and how they represent cultural moments that they were created in. **The Amateur Human** project is meant to be a kind of inverse archaeology – looking at man-made objects and deciphering from them the beliefs, desires and knowledge of people who created them – except in this case the objects would be created to embody this information, rather than excavated. The project was designed to reflect on our relationship to environment in the moment of environmental crisis.

MK: Can you tell a little more about the works you created for the exhibition, beyond what we can learn from reading the short descriptions of them?

RC: We were interested in the specific visual language of nature documentaries following nocturnal animals, attempting to look into a nonhuman territory of night-shades and creatures guided by their ears and noses instead of their eyes. Night images of places and behaviours not meant to be seen appealed to us as they take biology out of the realm of 'data' and hold it within forgotten territories of wonder and mystery.

We wanted to develop a work that will reposition biology in the supernatural territories of the unknown, the enchanting and the unspoken. Especially looking into animal-plant symbiotic relationships, where one of the most beautiful and intriguing aspects is the operation of very complex systems without human intervention or inclusion. Organically altering the design of biotopes and self-engineering biodiversity, these interactions are like theatre that takes place only when there is no audience. We wanted to build a 'set' or scaffold for a poetic interaction between animal and plant where the exchanges can never be fully interpreted.

CF: I created two pieces of work for the exhibition – the first was a series of clock-work fingers titled **Neither ready nor present to hand**. The fingers were cast from life

and mounted on brass brackets. The fingers and brackets wobbly wildly, in a wholly un-human way, when they are wound up by the clockwork mechanism. The second piece was titled **(C8H8)n, CSi, KAl2(AlSi3O10)(F,OH)2, C, C, CaSO4, Fe3C, SiH3(OSiH2) nOSiH3** and consisted of three turning steel plates, on one face of each was a cast, pink, rubber tongue and on the other face was a miniature mountain. There is something uncanny about sensory and sensual organs (i.e. fingers and tongues) being dislocated from the body. Both the finger and the tongue are also fundamental to our sense of humanness and to some extent they are symbolic of our evolution i.e. the opposable finger and thumb and the power of speech and language have given us the dominant position on this planet. With both commissioned works, I wanted to take that wholly anthropocentric position and play with it. The fingers are part prop, part fictional-function, part biology, part whimsy. Similarly, the tongue/mountains are another means of reclassifying ordered structures, if you will.

KS: This project was conceived as a set of objects and installations that explored what a cloud is through many sets of lenses – from their physical appearance to their symbolic use as an aid in myths, philosophies and representations. OOO describes each object as 'withdrawn' or unknowable, because any object (for example a tree) is a completely different thing in an ant's experience, in my experience, a cloud's experience, or its own. Nephologies aimed to explore cloud-ness from several similarly different perspectives.

For the exhibition, I created one object, the **CloudMaker** (though I still plan to develop some of the other **Nephologies**). The **CloudMaker** is also part of the **Amateur Human** project and is a personal device for weather modification. It consists of cloud-making gear sent up into the atmosphere in a weather-balloon payload. As it reaches specific altitudes it disperses Cloud Condensation Nuclei (CCN), heat and water vapour. Moisture in the air condenses into cloud droplets around the CCN, forming into small clouds. This method is inspired by a geo-engineering technique proposed to create brighter, more reflective clouds which shield earth from sun's radiation, and thus partly counteract the climate change.

The **CloudMaker** as a continuation of the **Amateur human** project is focused on human understanding of 'nature' and our place in it, or as Timothy Morton would put it, on developing our ecological awareness. It centres on engaging people in endeavours and conversations that might seem borderline absurd and thus revealing of particulars of one's actions in the world.

The 'meta-story' of the **CloudMaker** developed in a really interesting way as I was working on it. Each cloud launch is accompanied by a story of its trajectory in the atmosphere and of the actual cloud-making, but also, and increasingly more in-terestingly, by a story of its landing in someone's backyard and provoking a quite varied spectrum of opinions from random (or at least not self-selected) part of the population. For example, the first launch landed the cloud-maker in a clump of trees on the border between an environmentally protected wetland and someone's yard. The property owner was quite suspicious of me and of the CloudMaker, and would only let me on his property after I have been cleared by the local police. Interesting conversations ensued, with the police, the property owner, and the local tree service, bringing up such issues as legality of cloud-making, social and personal responsibil-ity, privacy, and lawful enforcement of environmental protection.

MK: When confronted with the main tenets of OOO & SR (rethinking correlationism (an act of division between human and world); a non-anthropocentric worldview; an interest in modes of ontological levelling (a democracy of things); a consideration of aggregate forces like climate through categories of autonomy), how do you broadly see these as relevant to current visual & media arts practice?

RC: Ontologically, our practice has occasionally been described as part of visual & media arts practice; in the midst of it, caught up in the turmoil. It doesn't give us the best perspective to speak of the area in broad terms, neither to situate its tenets. We leave that to the others.

CF: Unlike the scientific process, which is designed, wherever possible, to remove the human from the equation, the same is clearly not true for visual art. The work any artist makes can only ever really be a reflection of their personal experience of the times in which they live. How then does that reconcile with the notion in SR that 'the real' must be thought of independently of its connection to mind or human action? I'm not sure it can. We can try and stand outside of our own experience and noodle about ecology; pre- and post-human universes; inter- and intra-species parity, but ultimately we are tightly tethered to the inside of our own heads, to the most com-plex material in the known universe – our brains – and therein lies the rub.

KS: I think OOO and SR are really inspiring theoretical discourses. The terminology they introduce alone is a kind of bombastic naming statement that forces rethinking and reorganizing our assumptions. It was really interesting to delve deeper into this

thinking when working on this project. New ways of thinking about issues such as global warming or relationship with and between the non-humans (including things as well as animals) are really revitalizing them. It's even more interesting that those thoughts emerge 'as we speak,' and the philosophies are still shaped and formed in the online forum postings, comments and the networked discourse, which as probably contributed to its embrace by new media art community in particular. As Levi Bryant (2012) put it, talking about the proliferation of OOO and SR: 'its growing presence in academic debates has not so much been the result of presenting persuasive arguments – though hopefully it does that too – but the result of how it has unfolded in the material domain of social communications technologies and open-access publishing. In other words, there's a sense in which, as McLuhan put it, 'the medium is the message.'

MK: Can you tell us a little more about the play with OOO thought in each of your works? Maybe Cheryl, you can elaborate on the role of Heideggerian thought for you?

RC: The piece is the piece: an interface for a hare to listen to signals that have been bounced off the moon. The noise in these signals is caused by irregularities in the surface of the moon. A moonflower is part of the design of the antenna. The moonflower is a nightshade that corresponds to the moon, aiming as an antenna. The moonflower is a psychedelic plant. Hares eat all plants and flowers. Because of its violent mating rituals, the hare has historically been perceived as a lunatic. 'As crazy as the March Hare.' Lunacy is the attribution of mental illness to the moon. Eastern cultures tell stories of a hare living on the moon, engaged in sacred practices that are beyond our understanding.

CF: My most obvious nod to Heideggerian thought is in **Neither ready nor present to hand.** It tickles me that by taking a human finger or thumb and removing it from the body and activating it by mechanical means instead of biological means, it irrevocably shifts the Heideggerian tool-state of that finger from being 'present-to-hand' to 'ready-to-hand' which for a finger is, frankly, next-to-useless. After all, we need more fingers in order to activate (and wind-up) the tool-finger. It is a tool no more, but an object never-the-less. By liberating it from the shackles of the hand, it withdraws from us and leads a life independent of our anthropocentric perception.

KS: Clouds are barely objects at all and so, being a kind of edge condition, seemed fitting for exploration of object-hood. Clouds have been historically used as philosophi-

cal aids including by Descartes, who was convinced that if he could explain clouds, he could explain everything, since they epitomize the ungraspable.

Trying to make a tiny cloud in the atmosphere is kind of like trying to make a wave on the ocean, and some OOO discussion is related to the long conversation regarding such poetic/humorous gestures of absurdity and futility (Robert Barry's **Inert gas series** for example, in which he released neon, helium and other inert gases into an atmosphere). From the OOO standpoint, removing considerations of what meaning or utility these gestures might have for humans, we can see them and their products as truly 'democratic,' 'objects-for-themselves,' rather than 'for the gaze of a subject, representation, or a cultural discourse' (Bryant 2011: 19). Like Latour's 'galloping freedom of the zebras,' they 'lack nothing' without our gaze (49). Their invisibility to humans doesn't take away from their object-hood.

The absurdity of trying to make a cloud is instead of linked to the fact that clouds are just tiny 'footprints' – temporary local manifestations – of the giant 'hyper-object,' the climate, so massively distributed in time and space that it is invisible to us, yet whose shadow looms into our world everywhere, and whose reality, according to Timothy Morton, is more real than the 'wet stuff under your boots' (2010). It towers above human comprehension and makes attempts such as commercial or military weather modification either laughable or horrible.

The invisibility of matter in this project is also partly related not only to the ephemeral nature of the object (potentially) created, but also to the kind of mediation that usually takes place in portraying phenomena that are beyond our immediate experience. Such 'instrumentally detected reality' is inferred from blips on measuring or viewing devices and presented to us in an enhanced, illustrative version.

MK: Looking at the show as a whole, do you have any comments on the most significant synergies and connections between the works?

CF: Two things come to mind – purpose and humor. What struck me about the exhibition was that each of the artists built seemingly functional objects, i.e. objects that looked like they should fulfill a purpose. Whether that was a fictional, a philosophical, a poetic or a practical purpose (or indeed many purposes simultaneously) was for the audience to decide. Also I have to admit that I found the works in exhibition really funny. There is something slightly unhinged (I mean that in a good way!) about

the works in the show; the hilarious journal that accompanies Karolina Sobecka's tremendously serious cloud machine and Tuur van Balen & Revital Cohen bonkers system for a hare to listen to the surface of the moon... these are funny, functional/non-functional objects. These works are about ideas become matter, and matter insinuating its way back into thought. Perhaps, in the end, this is the only way we can tackle a subject like SR?

KS: All the projects are very different approaches, and I think maybe thanks to those differences they complement each other, especially when considered through OOO concepts.

One unifying characteristic might be their uncanny-ness: Cheryl's tongues, mountains and fingers mix their familiarity with strangeness, putting the viewer really in the bottom of the uncanny valley. The moon garden for the hare and the giant antenna that communicates with the moon (and the carrots and the mountains and the clouds and everything else) is a really wonderful story and a way of imagining the interconnectedness of things, evoking Tim Morton's idea of 'strange strangers' (2010). The **Nephologies** project also points to Morton's understanding of uncanny valley – where the more we come to know about something the stranger it becomes.

MK: Do any of you have future plans for your work(s)?

KS: I'm planning to take the **CloudMaker** to places where it might find new resonance. Wyoming, North Dakota, Texas, Utah, Colorado and Nevada have now or had in the past state's weather modification programs, so they seem a promising launching ground. I will also take the **CloudMaker** abroad to launch it in different cultural, environmental and legal settings.

Each of the launches stories adds to the Launch Log – the experimental documentary I am making around the stories of each **Amateur human** object, which I'll be working on for the next few months. Eventually I also plan to develop other **Nephology** and **Amateur human** projects.

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New Materialism and Non-Humanisation

AN INTERVIEW WITH JUSSI PARIKKA
BY MICHAEL DIETER

Michael Dieter (MD): Is there a 'materialist', 'realist' or 'nonhuman' turn in contemporary thought? If so, how would you position your work in relation to these trends and what is at stake with such terms?

Jussi Parikka (JP): This is definitely the claim that has been strongly voiced from a range of different directions over the past few years. We have various testimonies of such an emphasis in theory discussions, from conferences such as the recent one in Milwaukee organized by the The Center for 21st Century Studies (The Nonhuman Turn, in May 2012) to publications, blog posts and books. New Materialism is having its fourth conference this year – first one in 2010 at Anglia Ruskin University in Cambridge, and now this year in Turku Finland. Object-oriented perspectives are being mentioned in so many events and forums continuously.

Indeed, the nonhuman has now received a voice – several voices – that is articulated across a range of platforms, and with different factions even to the extent that there is something Monty Pythonesque about it. I am thinking here of the film **Life of Brian**, and the confusing quarrels between Judean People's Front with the People's Front of Judea, and other groups. In terms of the various Fronts for materialism, realism and non-humans, what they seem to agree on is that the politics of the symbolic, representation and signification have ended up in a dead-end situation, being able to talk of humans and of nature/Ecology/non-humans only as far as they are incorporated into the symbolic/power structures of human interests. Indeed, one can find this idea in object-oriented-ontology (OOO), leaning towards the philosophies of Quentin Meillassoux, the wider speculative realism project, the new materialist philosophies that widely articulate in as diverse ideas as Manuel Delanda's, Rosi Braidotti's and more. Philosophers such as Catherine Malabou have articulated ontological coordinates for 'new materialism' too in relation to neurosciences as a challenge to theory discourse. Kared Barad has been instrumental in relating quantum theory to feminist materialism, as well as pitching an exciting way of understanding the entangled materialities in which we know the ontologically nonhuman. But one could also nod towards early cultural studies discussions between Stuart Hall and Lawrence Grossberg – a discussion that has not

been considered much in recent years despite the useful theoretical ideas Grossberg promoted as 'spatial materialism' (see Wiley 2005). Already since the 1980s there have been such strong theoretical positions that offered critiques of epistemological and empirical bases of cultural and media studies. These have even happened inside those disciplines, a fact often forgotten nowadays. And critical theorists in general have investigated messy materialities and their implications for methods, actor-networks, human-animal-relations. The same thing applies to media theory that was vocally opposed to, for instance, a hermeneutical emphasis on (human) meanings. The last point relates, of course, to German media theory and, for example, Friedrich Kittler, whose project since the 1980s at least was to drive out the 'human' from humanities.

In other words, we need to be able to historicize the recent enthusiasm for materiality in much stronger terms than we have done so far. It's not all new and recent by any means, even if there might be something new about how we approach some of the topics now. I appreciate Braidotti's work and way of writing in this sense. For instance, in her recent interview in the book on **New Materialism** by Rick Dolphjin and Iris van der Tuin she importantly reminds the reader that the poststructuralist generation had their own discussions of materiality, and demands that we need to deal with the Marxist legacy, partly redefining it (the neo-materialism of Foucault) and partly trying to figure out a way to account for the 'materiality of the sign,' like Barthes and Lacan did. It was already Braidotti, moreover, who early on made the important point that a lot of the early debates around materiality were embedded in a 'theoretico-political consensus' (to use her words) that made this materialism of signifying practices was 'both a necessity and a banality for some poststructuralists' (Dolphijn and van der Tuin, 2012: 20). Two important points then: we need to be able to investigate the long histories of materiality as a term, and also the long legacies of nonhuman thought that definitely did not begin in the past couple of years despite the trend.

For me, the question of materiality is related to that of the nonhuman and this is a significant point of my theoretical interests. I am not sure if I am myself comfortable with using the term 'realism' even if I do agree with various points its defenders make: there definitely is a world out there! However, I work less as a philosopher than as a media theorist/analyst, where I want to investigate the concrete temporal and historical existence of nonhumans. This means a double articulation in terms of firstly how do we establish knowledge about nonhumans as significant – in other words, what are the conditions of existence for our knowledge and theories of the

nonhuman – and secondly, that the nonhuman is not reducible to our knowledge of it. These two points are completely related, and it does not take away any of the reality of the nonhuman to investigate the epistemological-technological forces which give it shape in relation to social processes. Articulations concerning animals, ecology, technologies, genes, viruses, rocks, minerals, durations of the earth, cosmic phenomena and more have their historical status as objects within political and economic interests, while remaining irreducible to such configurations. Furthermore, what I am interested in are the scientific-technological formations which them-selves are nonhuman and yet give the human coordinates for understanding the nonhuman. Let me explain a bit more: for instance, visualisations or sonifications of let's say microscopic phenomena or ecological durations are themselves part and parcel of such epistemologies that could not take place without being afforded by advanced technologies, that work in such ways that are irreducible to human phono-logical worlds. Advanced technologies see and sense in very different ways, just like our 'normal' computers do already. The knowledge of, for instance, such intensively nonhuman temporalities as climate change – a truly weird epistemological 'object' indeed – is completely reliant on supercomputer and computer-based modelling, as scholars such as Wendy Chun (2011) have pointed out.

In my writings, I have tried to mobilize nonhuman agencies, such as viruses and insects, as ways to investigate the material. However, I have been keen to analyse such dimensions of epistemology and ontology historically; a media archaeology of viruses, as well as insects, for instance. In **What is Media Archaeology?** (2012), I wanted to acknowledge the existence of various materialities in current theory debates. Indeed, what I am interested in is the entanglement of political theories that speak of affects and nonhumans in relation to, for example, labour and neolib-eralism, but where we should also acknowledge the existence of ecological concerns as well. The big question is how could we crossbreed such traditions of political materialism as a redeveloped post-Fordist inquiry, alongside the ontological projects concerned with animals and nature. Some smart philosophers like Braidotti do this – by pointing to the massive exploitation of animals in the same sentence as women in current global economies.

MD: In your own recent work, you have signaled a need to confront 'dirty matter' (pollution, waste, ecological destruction) in a gesture to Spinozan ethics. What are some of the difficulties in elaborating a politics at the intersection of media, materi-alism and ecology?

JP: I agree with a lot of recent theorists of the nonhuman, including the OOO-group, that there is a certain dead-end feeling to the trump card of 'politics.' I felt this same problem during my PhD period (working on software culture, viruses, technological accidents) when trying to articulate my own position in relation to representational critique in cultural and media studies: how to commit to a politics of gender, race, and other constitutive inequalities that structure the social, without using these categories as a trump card? I remember this also from some of the comments I got early on regarding my work on the agency of software: 'So where is gender, where is race?' These questions were posed without following cultural studies' important emphasis on situated methods – you cannot use them as pre-set templates or stamps of 'Critique,' but you need to investigate immanently the 'matters of concern' (to use Latour's concept) and primarily ask what is the relevant question specifically in relation to different materialities and social processes. This does not dismiss at all questions of gender, which I feel reluctant to leave behind. I am adamantly a feminist theorist in the wake of the expanded materialism of Elizabeth Grosz, Braidotti and, for instance, Barad, and exactly because of that I feel the need to find an immanent relation to politics. Their approaches are fantastic in that they constantly push questions of gender, sexuality and inequality into such transversal connections which links women's studies to animal studies, ecology, capitalism, and so on.

In terms of thinking about politics, I believe a comparable stance was voiced recently by McKenzie Wark. Beyond a fantasy of politics, there are issues that demand some sort of a response that cannot just be hidden behind a vague term like 'politics.' Wark reminds us that such things as capitalism, exploitation, oppression, inequality and climate crises exist, but that we need to be ready to 'invent new practices, drawing on past experiences, which might help, but without invoking the protective fantasy of politics, which is no more real than God' (2012).

For me, this relates to specific practices that also elaborate the ugly side of matter. Exploitation and exhaustion are one – bodies are finite, easily worn out, depressed, and dynamics of matter can be rather slow. I find Bifo's notes on this aspect of neoliberal capitalism important. It is an ecological stance towards materialism, where the abstract materialism of global capitalism – whether that of trade routes, shipping containers or, for instance, fibre optic cables, satellites and other signal-based materialities – has a relation to other scales of materiality, for example, that of the psycho-pharmaceutical modulation of moods: the use of anti-depressants and other chemicals as an integral part of the management of the network culture subject (Berardi 2009).

And then, nonhuman things can also be 'bad.' Toxic, polluting and hazardous materials are something that need attention as well – a dirty materialism that resonates with Jane Bennett's 'vibrant matter,' but also kills things. By this I mean that the dynamic agency of matter, its refreshing agency that inspires theorists, has also this reality to it that we need to be aware of. The materialism of media technologies includes also – besides the nonhuman frequencies, speeds and mathematical complexity of, for instance, computers – chemicals and hazardous materials that leak into nature after being abandoned. Underpaid workers are employed in conditions that are directly hazardous to their health. Kittler (1990) produced his theory of media materialism and the so-called human being on the figure of Dr Schreber, the nervously ill high court judge who hallucinated what for Kittler were the emerging late 19th century technical media that inscribe themselves on our flesh and notate our most minute actions and thoughts. This defining body of modern technical media might now need to be replaced with a different sort of paradigmatic body: that of the underpaid Chinese worker or the dead media salvager in Nigeria, whose bodies are more vulnerable to the toxic matter of media. Their bodies very materially, in their organic tissue, register what media are made of: lead, cadmium, copper, mercury, barium, and so on. The non-conscious hallucinations of Schreber are replaced in this suggestion with the non-conscious, non-voluntary bodily layers of tissue on which materiality is registered.

MD: How has humanism been conceived by these new paradigms after 'the human'? Despite the constant emphasis on things, objects, matter and the nonhuman, for instance, it often seems that many so-called new materialist theories resolve into specific worldviews.

JP: Indeed, the question is: how do we coordinate the questioning of the human and the nonhuman in relation to our theoretical interest in materiality, reality, things and processes. I argue that one of the key issues we need to constantly remind ourselves of has to do with how the human itself is completely nonhuman. The human is an idealisation, and the Humanities, for sure, has been one very effective expression as such. This nonhuman of the human(ities) relates to a very empirical observation regarding the amount of 'things' that the human consists of as a very dirty, messy and weirdly still functional thing: the bacteria that sustain us; the exoskeletons of technology that Bernard Stiegler in his way talks about; the externalisation of our defining characteristics, like memory. As Kittler (1999) reminded us with his witty

little term: we should talk of the 'so-called human being.' Or then, take Simondon. As Muriel Combes articulates in the recently translated book **Gilbert Simondon and the Philosophy of the Transindividual**, perhaps Simondon must be seen as articulating a "humanism after the death of man' and without the human to be built on the ruins of anthropology' (2012: 50). She continues: 'A humanism substituting the Kantian question 'What is man?' with the question 'How much potential does a human have to go beyond itself?' and also 'What can a human do insofar as she is not alone?'" (50). Those are beautiful, important questions that also connect exactly to the interests of our empirical inquiries.

I was early on a fan of the idea of Latour's that we have never been humans, which we should now investigate in relation to our theoretical discourses: who then actually was 'for' the purely human world, and can we so adamantly claim to be only theorists of the nonhuman? How much of the current theory debates are targeted against straw (wo)men?

One of the important things we need to be conscious of is not to get stuck with internal theory debates. The discussion concerning realism, materialism and the nonhuman was supposed to be a way to get out of the stuffy academic seminar rooms – in the same manner that Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari wanted to transport us away from the stuffy psychoanalyst therapy room and couch to the outdoors – and really talk about **things**. We still need to ask ourselves how to avoid theory becoming a branding exercise that expresses something of the current university crisis. How can theory become more self-reflective of the position in which it speaks of nonhumans? If humanism escorted the birth of the university system in Early Modern Europe, is nonhuman(ism) something that is escorting our current changes in university systems worldwide? I am here overplaying its significance, and I am definitely not saying it is causing this big change, but just that one has to be aware of some of the discussions around theory as indexical, symptomatic of wider changes in terms of our political economy of universities. Having said that, the true symptom of the change of the global change relates to the managerialism of universities. I am referring not only to the changes in internal structures and procedures of universities – and obviously I am speaking mostly from my experiences of the past five years in the UK – but also discipline-wise, the growing centrality of management and business courses.

This broadly, we do need to consider non-humanisation as an economic and management strategy. Besides celebrating the theoretical importance of the nonhuman,

I believe we need to be quite observant of how people are pushed into mental and physical exhaustion as part of the management of work, both in the so-called cognitive capitalism of the developed digital economy, as well as in the physical processes of labour exploitation on which our life often depends: outsourced factories in China and other places of cheap labour with hazardous and demeaning working conditions, exploitation of various kinds from sexual to just sheer exhaustion. The nonhuman is also a grim management strategy, a methodology of exploitation. By this, I do not mean that nonhuman theories contribute to this, or neglect this aspect – just that on the agenda of the nonhuman there should be a lot of humans too.

MD: Artistic practice was always central to new media studies; you have also explored practitioner-led aspects of media archaeology. As a theorist, how do you engage with and conceptualize artistic work? Does this involve, for instance, questions of method?

JP: The symbiotic relationship of the new media theorist and artist is a bizarre one and other people are better in tracking the genealogy of this specific constellation of knowledge. 'You do great stuff, so I can write about them, and you can then do more stuff under the umbrella of critical practice that employs my theories.' But seriously, artistic work is a good vector for thought; and in relation to the nonhuman and new materialism, I find a lot of practitioners more interesting 'theorists' than the ones who write books. For me, the question of new materialism has to do with sensitivity towards working with/in matter: biological media, dirty hardware practices such as Microresearch Lab (Berlin/London), the Algorhythmics project of Shintaro Miyazaki, Weise 7-studio and the Critical Engineering-bunch, different sorts of art projects that deal with, for instance, the climate, as well as what could be called psychogeophysics – a range of phenomena outside human temporality. For me personally, some of the best projects I have worked with have been collaborative ideas with artists. I want to mention especially the work with Garnet Hertz (2012) that produced the Zombie Media text, but which itself was a shift in the way I understand design and art practice and their relation to ecology. It opened up a new agenda in my head concerning media materialism that was then catalysed, of course, by such theorists as Sean Cubitt, already having worked on ecomedia-related themes.

I am interested in rather material artistic methodologies that through rough methods take a stance in relation to, for instance, hardware. Several media archaeologi-

cal artists work like that. Paul Demarinis is to me just such an experimenter with the material affordances of things. Erkki Huhtamo once coined him as a 'thinkerer,' a mix of thinking and tinkering. For me, the important bit is the preservation of the tinkering spirit that offers a more important way to approach digital economy than the idealised – and now in the UK hegemonic – emphasis on (proprietary) software at the core of the innovation jargon that fills us through management and business schools, but also is creeping inside humanities and art schools too.

It is in a way difficult to conceptualise artistic work, and I am not sure if it always needs it. This does not mean that these artistic methods should be left just to do their stuff, with us respecting their autonomous nature. I think the symbiosis is great, and is a sort of metabolism: an exchange of ideas, influences, directions. It just works in a different sort of expression than us doing it with words. Key aesthetic arguments, for instance, Jacques Rancière's notions of policing the sensible and the politics of the aesthetic as a primary allocation of what is, are what are anyway already mobilized in terms of aesthetic practice. I see various software and hardware projects investigating the conditions of the visual and more broadly, the sensible, but through very concrete ways. For instance, how do network technologies govern the affective and sensible orientations of humans in urban settings? Or what is the relation of the algorithmic to the human sensible?

MD: Matthew Fuller has written on art for animals – a notion that you have extended in terms of insect life. How can art specifically be defined in relation to new materialism? How does this differ from post-Kantian aesthetics or twentieth century media theory?

JP: You are quite right to propose that my 'insect media' idea is basically an aesthico-materialist notion that approaches aesthetics through embodiment. Think of it as an academic, media-theoretical continuation of a passage from Guillaume Apollinaire's **Bestiary**:

Look at this lousy crowd,
A thousand feet, a hundred eyes:
Rotifers and insects, mites
And microbes – all more wonderful
Than the seven wonders of the world
Or even Rosemonde's palace!   (Apollinaire, 1911/1980: 22)

This involves a fascination with such wonders of alternative embodiment, which does not solely take such worlds of microbes and mites as its object, but tries to think what it means to occupy such a position for theory and media archaeology. Fuller's (2005) media ecological perspective grounds a nonhuman aesthetic angle through which a certain Deleuzian notion of 'becoming-animal' becomes mobilized in art practices. It achieves a strong sense of methodological value. My insect media-approach is piggybacking on this (Parikka 2011). Insect media is a way to think of the nonhuman-centred ways of sensation. Indeed, it is aesthetics rather less in the Enlightenment considerations of art, but has to do with modes of sensation, perception, memory, embodiment that are not focused on the priority of beings with two legs, two eyes, two ears. This does not mean coming up with art/design practices that would be completely alien to the human being, but developing a sensitivity to the ways in which surfaces, sounds, visuals provide affordances for our sensation. Besides discussing such important figures of post-Kantian aesthetics and media theory as Jakob von Uexküll, I find Simondon so helpful for providing ideas for this way of thinking: he gives us a vocabulary of individuation, collectives and milieus that are all interrelated and co-constituting. In other words, Simondon presents the force of the relation in such a way that already begs the question of the mediatic – not only because of the seemingly direct connection of relation-medium, but because of the mediatic, media technologies as one such milieu in which individuation happens. Of course, Stiegler has additionally made important advances in relation to such ideas.

In any case, twentieth century media theory has already an interesting relation to the biological. It is not my invention; it just has to be discovered. Geoffrey-Winthrop Young among others has been interested in this aspect. Such figures as, for instance, von Uexküll are now being rethought in relation to our wider media theory and aesthetic debates. Matteo Pasquinelli does great work on a media theory geneaology of biopolitics, including discussions of Ernst Haeckel and Kurt Goldstein, but also of non-human 'thought' of, for instance, yeast!

Germans have been ahead of the curve in some ways with their meticulous research into the 19th century post-Kantian wave of aesthetics – but through very physiologically grounded approaches. Experimental psychology and physiology already early on offered material, empirical ways of understanding humans and other animals - laboratory-based measurements of what exactly happens when we sense the world. Even if we might deem this reductionist as an aesthetic theory, we need to understand what it brings to a mediatic understanding of the world. At times, this means

that media theory must find a common tune with science and technology studies, and through such partnerships of methodological and theoretical inquiry, offer understandings of aesthetics in new historical, mediatic ways. Henning Schmidgen's book on Hermann von Helmholtz Die Helmholtz-Kurven: **Auf der Spur der verlorenen Zeit** (2010) is a great example of such an angle.

MD: Debates on speculative realism, object-orientated-ontology (OOO) and new materialism have a notable presence on social media platforms, blogs and open access journals. In your experience, what possibilities and potential issues concerning the production of knowledge exist here, especially for the figure of the intellectual?

JP: Such trends are a good recognition of the fact that theory does not happen only inside universities and classrooms. It needs to be articulated on platforms and forums that are themselves forcing us to think of how and where we write as theorists. For sure, open access journals are instrumental in trying to keep theoretical and academic research alive, but that is not enough. The bigger question has to do with the wider recognition system and political economy of universities and publishing. This aspect is at times neglected in the enthusiasm for open publishing. For sure, it is great that new journals that are open to wider publics are popping up. But this does not necessarily have much effect on academia as a working environment and one place for cultural techniques of theory. In the UK, one of the biggest bottlenecks is the Research Evaluation Framework (REF), which has a tendency to valorize more established publishers and journals. This is how REF submissions work: by being conservative in their nature, and promoting the certain, already set political economy of publishing that is geared towards the big American university presses and then the journal publishers that are making quite the profit from their status. Launching a new open access journal is not an automatic solution. If you are an early career academic – or even established researcher for that matter – you are not encouraged to publish in such venues. This is not only the case of REF, but of various other national academic publishing recognition systems, including Finland and, for instance, Turkey. Such frameworks are fundamentally a policing (again in Rancière's terms) of the academic world: an allocation of positions of power, a management perspective to knowledge, as well as a creation of a certain commonness as a horizon for measurement of academia so that it can be indeed allocated and monetised.

For sure, it is not the fault of theory that this happens, but whether we still have

found the right strategies and tools to deal with this political economy of academia in the neoliberal age is another question. Social media is a great platform for the articulation of shared problems, resources and lines of thought. And yet, it also consolidates certain behavioural patterns that have a resonance with the change in the status of higher education institutions. As for the figure of the intellectual, or let's use a less grand term 'academic,' I think one interesting and not always unproblematic development is the demand for self-branding. This is not the fault of blogs, but social media does play its part in this. At the same time as universities are increasingly adapting the role of a corporation for which part of its business model has to do with a publicity status, academics are encouraged to increase their visibility to the outside world. Nothing wrong with that, but it does also feed towards a certain brand culture where social media platforms are also platforms of performance – also for critical theory. The real life of a queer theorist feeds the street-cred of his or her theory, and the witty tweets of a critical theorist are nice extensions of the just recently published book. The model of TED-talks, which frighteningly are so often misperceived as the idealised core of academia, are exemplary of this dream subject of current new academia: more public-facing, more performative, more entertaining, better jokes and content digestible in short formats. Down to the gestures, the style, the mediatised nature of TED-talks, the culture of PR and consultancy is penetrating expectations concerning the academic too. Even students are guided to expect that. Funnier lecturers do get better feedback scoring, which the management loves to see.

MD: Speaking of these performance measures and these new contexts of knowledge and concept work, after exploring computer viruses, insect media and media archaeology in general, your latest work is concerned with **cognitive capitalism** and Bernhard Siegert's concept of cultural techniques. Can you elaborate on these concerns and what specifically drives this new line of inquiry?

JP: I have made an informal promise to myself that I would not use the term 'media archaeology' anymore – at least not in any of my future books' titles! I have written about viruses (Parikka, 2007), insects and only recently of the theory and methodology of media archaeology, but noticed that I have used the term a lot. I am currently working with Geoff Winthrop-Young and Ilinca Iurascu on a special issue (forthcoming 2013) on cultural techniques – a continuation of German media theory that produces a different twist to that of Kittler's. In short, cultural techniques are, to use Thomas Macho's so often quoted passage, what **precede** our key cultural concepts (2003). Symbolic practices such as writing, reading and mathematics (counting), but

also embodied ones such as painting and music. The idea is not merely a revamping of Marcel Mauss' anthropological concept of body techniques, but continues it to emphasise how important a role media plays in the grounding of 'culture.' Hence, like Bernhard Siegert reminds his readers, the notion of medium relates to techniques of the body but more widely to 'ontological and aesthetic operations that process distinctions' (2011: 14).

We have really significant research to excavate from the German tradition – so much of it yet to be translated,– which I am sure will have significant effect on the international discussions. I cannot wait for the day when for instance Siegert's **Passage des Digitalen** (2003) is published in English – a huge book about the sign practices of digital culture, but from within 'pre-digital' contexts. It includes such great lines of connection, from practices of mapmaking, colonialism and bookkeeping, to the emergence of modern logic and electro-mechanical culture.

So at the moment I am interested to see if a crossbreeding of some of the media-centred methodologies from the German perspective with Italian post-Fordist political theory could produce something exciting. This is a crude generalisation, but one could say that whereas German media studies has not really been that interested in questions of capitalism and labour, Italian and related political theory has not always been able to ground its understanding of practices of labour and exploitation in sufficient media-specificity. Hence, notions such as cognitive capitalism could be historicised and read in more detailed media cultural terms to understand how media techniques indeed mobilize ontological and aesthetic operations so important to what we, a bit broadly nowadays, call 'cognitive capitalism,' Take, for instance, Yann Moulier Boutang's recently translated book **Cognitive Capitalism** (2012): could one mobilize that towards a really material media theory direction? Or, for that matter Bifo, or Lazzarato, all of who do write about media culture, but in a slightly more general manner than the German media scholar-style insists on. And to take into account the techno-mathematic operations, and indeed software and hardware, that contribute to sustaining such a phantasm of **cognitive**, cerebral capitalism. Let's see if this work comes out as a bigger project concerning the cultural techniques of cognitive and affective capitalism. If it does, I am sure to be more interested in the less brainy sides in cognitive capitalism, which means a focus on topics of exhaustion, repetition, hard work and stupidity.

Furthermore, about the crossbreeding of traditions: they are all hybrids anyway. German media theory was never just 'German.' It was filled with inspiration, insights

and parallel lines that resonated with a more global context: Canadian media studies, French philosophy, the Greeks, and more. Wolfgang Ernst has been interests in Russian traditions of computing and cybernetics. Siegfried Zielinski has been a forerunner in really expanding our media art history excavations to non-European directions - the South-American, Arab and, for instance, Chinese histories where media, art and sciences overlap.

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Biographies:

Jussi Parikka is a media theorist, writer and Reader in Media & Design at Winchester School of Art (University of Southampton). Parikka has a PhD in Cultural History from the University of Turku, Finland and in addition, he is Adjunct Professor ('docent') of Digital Culture Theory at the University of Turku, Finland. In addition, he is a Senior Fellow at the Winchester Centre for Global Futures in Art Design &Media.

Parikka's books include **Koneoppi**, (2004, in Finnish) and **Digital Contagions: A Media Archaeology of Computer Viruses** is published by Peter Lang, New York, Digital Formations-series (2007). The recently published **Insect Media: An Archaeology of Animals and Technology** (2010) focuses on the media theoretical and historical interconnections of biology and technology and was published in the University of Minnesota Press Posthumanities-series. The co-edited collection **The Spam Book: On Viruses, Porn, and Other Anomalies from the Dark Side of Digital Culture** is published by Hampton Press, and **Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications, Implications** came out with University of California Press (June 2011). In addition, the edited collection **Medianatures: The Materiality of Information Technology and Electronic Waste** is out in the new Living Books About Life-project (Open Humanities Press). His new book, **What is Media Archaeology?** (Polity), is just out.

His articles have been published e.g. in Theory, Culture & Society, CTheory, Leonardo, Media History, Parallax, Postmodern Culture, Game Studies and Fibreculture, as well as in several Finnish journals and books. In addition to English and Finnish, his texts have been published in Portuguese, Polish, and Indonesian. Currently Parikka is interested in the concept of the aesthetico-technical as well as materiality of e-waste.

Michael Dieter is a lecturer at University of Amsterdam in new media and associate researcher at Leuphana University of Lüneburg. His work is concerned with media theory, aesthetic philosophy and materialism.

The Techniques of Existence, Unforeseen

INTERVIEW WITH RICK DOLPHIJN BY MICHELLE KASPRZAK

Michelle Kasprzak (MK): First I'd like to consider the question itself that I'm asking through the exhibition: in which possible ways does OOO/SR intersect with art and aesthetics? I'm thinking in the first instance of Ian Bogost's discussion of the privilege of writing and his notion of 'carpentry' – 'making things that explain how 'things' make their world' (Bogost 2012: 93) – in **Alien Phenomenology**, and a concept already introduced by Graham Harman in 2005, as a possible jumping-off point.

Rick Dolphijn (RD): Regarding the relation between speculative thinking and the arts I feel very close to the work of Brian Massumi whose ideas on this relation might seem to come close to Bogost's, but in the end practice a very different politics in which the arts are given a much more prominent role. According to Massumi, art shows us the **techniques** of existence, or the **techniques** of relation, which is pretty much the same thing. Let me explain his ideas by means of an example, contemporary dance (which is always a nice intermingling of subject, object and change), and how Massumi considers dance in his last book. He quotes a personal conversation with choreographer William Forsythe who stated, 'a body is that which folds' (Massumi 2011: 140). Forsythe's particular conceptualization (in dance) of the body offered Massumi a starting point to differentiate between contemporary and modern dance. Warding off any emphasis on representation and on the use of metaphors (both of which, in my view, happen in the definition of Bogost), Forsythe's art offers Massumi a way to get rid of the idea that the dancer uses its body as a means to express an inner feeling. This notion of inner feeling is so prominent in conceptions of modern dance (Massumi gives the example of Martha Graham's symbolic use of gesture). Contemporary dance, in contrast, expresses **pure movement**, Massumi states. Thus, whereas in modern dance the body dances (bodily movements create the dance), the dancer in contemporary dance comes to be **in** the dance (movements create a dancing body). An epic example of the latter would be Pina Bausch's **Café Müller** where the chairs in the café did not surround the dancer creating the mise-en-scene in front of which the dancer danced: the chairs are involved in the dance no less than the dancer. The chairs, the bodies of the dancers and actually everything else somewhat complicit, make up for the raw material from which the dance is abstracted.

This is important (keeping in mind Massumi's definition of art as that which shows us the **techniques of existence**): Forsythe's definition shows us that contemporary dance overcomes the dualisms that gave form to modernity/modern dance. On the one hand, it has no interest anymore in the opposition between the dancer and the world (which it was supposed to re-present or dance-to). Contemporary dance does not consider the body 'already in existence,' filled with potentialities to be realized whenever the situation (the dance) asks it to. On the contrary, the body is actualized in the dance, which means that it is **only** through the act of folding (the dance) that it (the 'body', the fold) realizes itself. On the other hand, this means that the folding actualizing a bodily whole is not consequential to (Aristotelian) memory or another agency from which the body is organized in advance. Rather, the body (including the mind) happens in the fold, which is to say that it is only because of the folding that its unity appears.

MK: In Hal Foster's key text, **The Return of the Real** (1996), and his chapter on the artist as ethnographer, he described how 'the old artist envy among anthropologists has turned the other way: a new ethnographer envy consumes many artists and critics. If anthropologists wanted to exploit the textual model in cultural interpretation, these artists and critics aspire to fieldwork in which theory and practice seem to be reconciled' (Foster 1996: 181). The process of making, in this case, making art, is obviously very tied up in contemporary notions of what artists **do** and **how** they do it – so as it becomes acceptable to conduct art as research. Is there or will there be a similar drive to conduct philosophy in a different way, to present it in non-academi-cised forms, non-textual forms?

RD: The processes of making art are crucial, as I explained above. But also when you do philosophy, the processes are the **only** thing that matters. Philosophy is an equally creative process compared to making art, yet a different one. For whereas art is all about creating sensations, about **blocks** of sensations to follow Deleuze (and Guattari) more precisely, philosophy is all about creating concepts. Philosophers tend to create concepts through language, by breaking it open. In that, they act some-what similar to poets, yet poets are not interested in creating concepts. They aim at something entirely different (very particular blocks of sensation) which is not of our concern here. Philosophy has always had a very difficult relation to academia, which is in many ways its monstrous child. Especially in our days, to **do philosophy** is increasingly rare within academia. There are exceptions of course and I think that

Rotterdam should be very proud of its philosophy faculty. On average, however, philosophy does not happen too much within philosophy faculties. OOO, speculative realism and also new materialism are very strong new developments in philosophy yet they don't or hardly happen at philosophy faculties.

But let us return to the issue of language. There is no rule that says that philosophers should conceptualize by means of language. And I believe that there are many artists that, in doing their artistic work, practice some sort of philosophy (create some sort of concept). If we limit ourselves to the work of Deleuze – whose definitions we are now following – we cannot but agree with him that there is much philosophy going on in the paintings of Francis Bacon (he conceptualizes 'the figure' in that sense), in the novels of Kafka (who conceptualizes 'the state'), in the movies of Godard (who conceptualizes 'time'). Deleuze (a philosopher), when reading these three bright minds, treats their work no different from how he would treat more accepted metaphysicians, though this does not mean, of course, that the works themselves, are not works of art anymore. They are products of art, but there is philosophy going on in them.

Today we see an increasing number of creative people, sometimes following the ideas of Deleuze, producing work that is more and more both a work of art as well as a work of philosophy. The best example in this is probably Reza Negarestani (2008), by all means a central figure within contemporary thinking. His novel/philosophical treatise entitled **Cyclonopedia: complicity with anonymous materials** is about a fictive archaeologist Dr. Hamid Parsani. It constructs a philosophy of oil and perhaps it is also at the same time a political manifesto that proclaims the liberation of the Middle East. For those interested, this book is also about Ancient Persian mysticism (the Cult of the Druj) and Lovecraft's **Cthulhu**. Given Negarestani's current interest in mathematics I'd say that the long awaited sequal (**the Mortiloguist**) will also aim to write the exact sciences.

Nota Bene, I'm not saying that what Negarestani does is necessarily 'new' to our times. In a way Albert Camus, much more so than his contemporary Jean-Paul Sartre, performed something similar with **The Plague**, and there are many more moments in history (notably in the histories that find their fulcrum outside of the West) where research and art as you call it, happen together (in the same voice).

MK: In your recent book with Iris van der Tuin, you write: 'new materialism allows for the study of the two dimensions in their entanglement: the experience of a piece of art is made up of matter and meaning. The material dimension creates and gives form to the discursive, and vice versa' (Dolphijn and van der Tuin 2012: 91). Thinking of the **experience** of a piece of art, rather than the making of it for a moment, what do you think about how audiences read exhibitions as opposed to texts? In the case of this exhibition, OOO/SR was a point of departure, but it can easily be read as an exhibition about nature, given the legible forms contained within (mountains, tongues, fingers, gardens, clouds). Is it inevitable that we default to nature when attempting to get beyond the human?

RD: That depends entirely upon the definition of nature that you use. Being a Spinozist, I'd say that nature is not a set of Laws that we came up with (as in the Laws of Nature) that you seem to presume with your last remark, but rather signals the endless changes in which we 'happen' together with everything else. Our 'happening' or our actualization works according to **res cogitans** (thought) and **res extensa** (extension), which are the two dimensions we (Iris and me) talk about in the quote above. Interestingly enough, nature, Spinoza already tells us, is not limited to these two 'modi'; we are. And it is about time that we realize this. Actually, I believe that a 'wholly other' nature, or a definition of nature that goes way beyond how we ordinarily (including so many green activists) define it today, is crucial for today's materialist thinking. When Quentin Meillassoux, for instance, rejects the possibility of explaining or even predicting nature, noting (with Hume) that nature is radically contingent and that nature's 'metaphysical foundations' as they can only come into existence through consciousness and language, smartly cover up that nature is a concept that has hardly been reconceptualized since the reign of dualism, of Kant. Consequently (and in line with Kant's representationalism), **nature has been excluded from thought**. For Meillassoux as for many others then, the concept of nature, as it surfaces in public debates as well as in academia, **only** serves as a vehicle for an **ideology of ressentiment** that is filled with morals inviting us merely to 'conserve what exists' ('it' then being the **false and reductionist** idea we have constructed from nature). For these kinds of reasons, Timothy Morton even suggests to write an ecology that gets rid of the concept of nature altogether, claiming that it is too soft to target these days, it is too theological. Morton then writes an ecology **without** nature. In response to Morton, Slavoj Žižek went even further and searched for an ecology **against** nature; against the idea of a stable, unchangable, fragile equilibrium that is permanently being harmed by culture, by us-unable-to-know.

Now let me return to the first part of your question in which you stress the aspect of experience. What comes to my mind immediately is that because we are in the making, and this making takes place experimentally or in experience, I wouldn't make a distinction between the making of an artwork and the experience of it. In other words, both the artwork **and** the self come to be in the experiment. Lets take an example this time from the first of the arts (as Deleuze and Guattari call it), architecture. Recently, Lars Spuybroek wrote a beautiful book about the ecology of design which interestingly echoes my previous point concerning the monist definition of nature I adhere to (though Spuybroek himself, for some reason, has problems with 'monism'). Especially his reading of the Gothic deserves our attention. We see art-in-the-making/art-in-experience when his study shows us that Gothic (so-called) 'ornamentation' **happens-in-matter**. The Gothic is never idealist (like the neo-gothic or modernist movement), which is to say that the design always happens in experience, in moving with 'the forms at work' (which includes 'us'). Its two primary forces in architectural form, tessellation (from two to one dimension) and ribboning (from one to two dimensions), happen with the very particular spatiality in which the design and the event occur.

The resonances steer matter into J curves and S curves, into arches and ornaments. That is why the Gothic, unlike idealist architectures, happens all around us, travels in many different unforeseen directions and can realize itself anytime, any place. To map vital Gothic energy is to realise the omnipresence of the curved gable as John Ruskin already put it in the 19th century. To study the Gothic is, therefore, not about analysing individual dwellings, but about mapping the resonance of disparates, as Spuybroek claims: 'It is not only a changefulness of columns, vaults, or traceries in themselves, but also one in which **columns transform into vaults into traceries**' (2011, 25).

For Spuybroek, the Gothic played a crucial role in our history (giving form to it in many ways). It never ceases to haunt the Roman, Cartesian or Bauhausian lines that still organize urban life. The Gothic has always been at work at the margins of our built environment; and especially today, in the age of digital design, the Gothic proves to be more vital than ever before. Spuybroek's own designs are, of course, a wonderful example of how the Gothic is so imbricated with experimentation in contemporary digital design (which makes him actually speak of 'the digital nature of the Gothic'). Think, for instance, of his Water Pavilion at Neeltje Jans in which the ceilings transform into the floor, into the door, into the ornament, while one walks through it.

MK: Martha Buskirk in **The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art** says that 'the idea of the touch, traditionally focused on a specific region of the body in the search for evidence of the artist's hand, has been fractured and displaced into the multitude of ways artists use their bodies to act upon materials and also turn the process of representation back upon themselves to record traces of their physical presence' (Buskirk 2005: 256). Does this notion generally support the idea of new materialism (and to an extent, OOO/SR) asserting a fundamental link between the discursive and the material in art?

RD: I wouldn't know how to talk of 'the idea' of new materialism. In the book we were mapping a new materialism, and I continue to do that in my articles. I search for a monism that deals in particular with matter receiving form, with questions of plasticity as Catherine Malabou talks of it. But you are right that the mannerism (Deleuze talks a lot about this) or perhaps even general, the emphasis on feeling instead of on ratio as today even people in the cognitive sciences (think of Antonio Damasio) and in psycholinguistics (think of my colleague at Utrecht University Jos van Berkum) are in search for this, lies at the heart of my interests. Spuybroek too, talks of this when he conceptualizes how beauty gives form to life by means of the word 'sympathy'. His entire book can be read as a manifesto for this old and beautiful concept that stresses the non-cognitive intra-action by dint of which the individual objects are. Sympathy, in short, 'is what things feel when they shape each other' (2011, 9). Spuybroek shows us how 'sympathy' – revitalizing the way this concept was not yet 'humanized' at the end of the nineteenth century – gives form to us and to the world around us: sympathy might happen between us and a vase, between a wasp and an orchid, between the oceans and the moon. They feel each other… they give form to one another in the relation, in the making.

All of the philosophers and thinkers that I have mentioned here prefer to speak of feeling, of sympathy, of touch (think of Erin Manning) instead of consciousness. All of them agree upon the idea that the mind is a consequence of the body (and has the body as its object) which does not mean that they are against metaphysics per se (although Meillassoux is), but rather that they would never cut it loose from the physics, from the bodily movements and modifications that cause it.

MK: From your position as a philosopher, are there any other points and issues with the interrelation of OOO/SR and art and aesthetics that you think are key to consider?

RD: Well… I think it is very important to understand that OOO/SR/new materialism are very strong forces that cut across philosophy, the arts as well as the sciences today for a good reason: the times we live **demand** this kind of thinking. The various crises that hit us today are different from the ones that caused '68 to happen. Yet the call for a radical emancipation that was echoing all over the world for decades after '68 (in theory and in politics) somehow comes back to us today. Our times too ask for an emancipation that is removing us from hierarchies that involve race, class, gender and age but that also ask us to question our **humanity as such**, in other words the **anthropocentrism** so central to our thinking.

Even more so than after '68, the state of the earth draws us to rethink the dualisms so strongly conceptualized by Descartes and fortified by Kant, and they marked the way in which culture drifted away from nature, how the mind was cut loose from the body, how man has alienated **himself** from technique. From the early 1960s it was Foucault who most eloquently noted the anthropocentrism central to all dualisms. He named it simply 'man' (referring to Kant's **Anthropology**) foreseeing the 'end of man' or the way this 'recent invention' was dominating (and blurring) our thinking. He suggests that Kant's final question, '**Was ist der Mensch?**', posed in his **Logic** and his **Notes and Fragments** summarizes how the past two hundred years of modern thought got locked up in his Subject (the 'I think') concluding that '[The space of anthropology] is entirely taken over by the presence of a deaf, unbound, and often errant freedom which operates in the domain of originary passivity' (Foucault 2008: 39). In his later writings, Foucault showed how this political ecology slowly but steadily created objects (prisons, schools, barracks, factories) in order to install the Subject (the object of thought), to serve its existence. Foucault in the end is not pushing us to 'question authority' but rather to 'question reality', as reality had been created and molded according to systems of differentiations that we named, ordered and internalized in a thoroughly humanist way.

That was then. Foucault is still a very urgent thinker, don't get me wrong here, but 'differently'; the classes he gave at the end of his career (and that are now being published) offer us this Foucault that has yet to be discovered. At the start of the 21st century, however, we live in such a different political arena. We are confronted with such different threats, all of which asks us to think anew. The ecological crises of today, which by all means have a much more radical effect on how we will soon live compared to the economical crisis, make Quentin Meillassoux (2006) conclude that the end of man has yet to happen. Meillassoux claims that even post-critical theory (in some ways even including Foucault, is part of 'correlationalism' (as he con-

ceptualizes anthropocentrism) and that the time has come to get rid of the 'Kantian horreur' that still dominates us (which does not mean that he wants to get rid of Kant, rather he proposes to radicalize it from within). Meillassoux claims that post-critical theory still reduces the absolute reality of things to their possible appearance in consciousness and language: the 'two media of correlation' that define the unique and untouchable 'man.' Correlationalism (explicitly and implicitly) claims that only in consciousness things can happen, only by means of language they can be expressed.

Even Meillassoux, who seemed to be a rigorous, almost scholastic, philosopher in his **Après la Finitude** and his published and unpublished work on God and fideism, now turns to art as his last book in English **The Number and the Siren: the Decipherment of Mallarmé's Coup de Des**. As the title already tells us, the book is on Mallarmé, addressed in a very mathematical sense… coming close to numerology even. Beyond this, many contemporary scholars that are involved with new materialism feel an urge to study contemporary art. Bioart, think of Natalie Jeremijenko, is of course very popular for those interested in rethinking nature, but actually all performance art and installation art – art forms that are all about making and experiencing/experimenting matter – are more and more flowing into thought, while at the same time new materialist thought flows into these artforms, into the very way they reveal to us the techniques of existence: new life (and death) unforeseen.

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Biographies

Rick Dolphijn is a writer and a philosopher. He is an assistant professor at the Faculty of Humanities, and senior fellow of the Centre for the Humanities, both at Utrecht University, the Netherlands. He interested in what he calls 'new materialism' a fresh wind in philosophy closely linked to process thought and perhaps in some ways also to OOO and speculative realism. In his recently published book 'New Materialism: Interviews and Cartographies', coauthored with dr. Iris van der Tuin, the 'new tradition' called new materialism is situated in philosophy, in the sciences and in the arts. He is finishing a book which is more experimental and which deals with the urgency of this new form of thinking, entitled (for now) 'Matter of Life: earth culture health'.

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Art History's Objects

AN INTERVIEW WITH SVEN LÜTTICKEN BY RACHEL O'REILLY

Rachel O'Reilly (ROR): I was hoping we could look at the emergence of speculative real-ism (SR), new materialisms and object-oriented-ontology (OOO) and the kinds of aes-thetic theories they generate in relation to the passage of concepts of objects through 20th century art. I'm interested here also in taking into account the different specific historical ontological conditions of philosophy versus artistic practice and exhibition.

Your recent work emphasizes that it is not possible to conceive of materiality (includ-ing objects) apart from processes of dematerialization and abstraction (2008: 101). Such processes have very dense, inter-influencing, experimental conceptual edifices in the art of the 20th century. In your tracking of the object in art history, you draw on Adorno's reading of Lukacs' **History and Class Consciousness**, composed at the near exact same historical moment of Heidegger's depoliticized phenomenology. Adorno emphasizes that this trajectory of Marxist thought (however flawed) has been **impor-tantly** nervous about building up objectification, normative commodity relations and alienation together as inseparable and mutually reinforcing concepts and processes. You have suggested that objectivization is inevitable but that alienation isn't necessar-ily, yes?

I'm especially interested in this quote you pull out from Adorno, which argues that what is important is to combine 'tenacious opposition against that which exists: against its thingness, with a staunch rejection of attempts to identify thingness as evil' (Lüt-ticken 2010: 1). Can you elaborate on what is meant by the first and second parts of this quote? How does it link to the distinctions you are making (dialectically and histori-cally) in your recent work between art objects, 'things' and commodities? I suspect this is where the reader might comprehend how the critique of the commodity – the fact of art's commodity status – is not equivocal to utter disenchantment with art as category, nor with the reality of art making/appreciation in terms of material inquiry.

Sven Lütticken (SL): First off, I have to confess to becoming something of a bored teen-ager in the face of ontological discussions. For better or worse, I think historically, not ontologically. The being I deal with is historical being; you might say that, when dealing

with the historical transformations of the object in its various guises, you ultimately end up with a kind of historical ontology. So I'm interested in the very fabric of the object and/or the thing changing, and of course I'm looking at this from the vantage point of art – using the art object as my theoretical object. And it's a highly instable object, which is good. In the words of one Russian Constructivist critic, the modern artwork went from being an 'elephant' to being a 'butterfly.' That is a brilliantly succinct way of summarizing something about a transformation on which you could write an elephantine book.

Adorno's thinking was itself shaped by the development of modern art, by the transformations of the modern artwork. My interest in Adorno in this respect stems partly from the fact that if you read his work it is patently clear that Latour's attempt to ascribe to pretty much the whole of modern philosophy (and certainly to Hegelian and Marxian philosophy) a crude subject/object dichotomy needs to be questioned. Adorno constantly problematizes and historicized both terms. He notes that 'object' is 'the positive face of the non-identical;' in other words, 'a terminological mask' (1966: 193) As the other of the subject, the object would appear to be the unidentical, what cannot be assimilated by the triumphant subject and by a reason that is increasingly showing itself to be instrumental. However, precisely as the subject's neat polar opposite, the object is re-appropriated by reason; it is identified and made rational and productive. The object, in other words, is always already a commodity-in-waiting.

Now as for the thing, for thingness in Adorno, a crucial passage for me is: 'In thingness there is an intermingling of both the object's non-identical side and the subjection of people under the prevailing forms of production – their own functional relations, which are obscure to them' (192). So the object does have a non-identical side, which is to say: it cannot be completely assimilated by the subject. This is the thing: the object insofar as it is more than an object, or less than one. The thing is both lack and surplus. This is clearly highly suggestive in terms of modern art's appropriation of commodity-objects.

On the other hand, for Adorno, **Dinghaftigkeit** also stands for the reification of human relations. The German term for reification is **Verdinglichung**, which literally might be translated as thingification. This very term could cause one to lapse into an idealist disparagement of the thinglike, which is what Adorno cautions against. In any case, the reified thingness of social relations is itself a socially produced state. Adorno warns that 'the primacy of the object notwithstanding, the thingness of the

world is also illusory. It tempts the subjects to ascribe to the things themselves the social conditions of their production. This is elaborated in Marx's chapter on the fetish ...' (Adorno 190).

Verdinglichung, in other words, is part and parcel of commodity fetishism. Now, the commodity fetish according to Marx is a thing brimming with 'theological whims' (1867: 4). It appears to be endowed with autonomous life, as a kind of quasi-subject. In fact, its 'behavior' on the market can however be explained through the labor theory of value – this is Marx's contention. The commodity's value is rooted in labor – in abstract labor, which is to say in labor value sold by workers to capitalist entre-preneurs. The commodity that results from all of this is itself pseudo-concrete: we may be able to hold it, to touch it, but it is in fact shot through with economic (and technological) abstraction. You might say that this is the modern object par excel-lence: it has been assimilated and 'subjectivized' through instrumental reason. W.J.T. Mitchell speaks of the 'ordered ranks of objecthood' (2005: 112).

I want to argue that while contemporary 'thing theory' responds to a genuine shift in theory corresponding to a shift in the mode of production – of production in the widest sense, standing not just for industrial production but **social production** tout court – we are not dealing with an abstract break. On the contrary: the suggestion of such an abstract break with much-maligned 'modernity' can generate a fatal oblivion to continuities and to the ongoing entanglement in the dialectics of objectivity and subjectivity.

The one precursor who is most frequently acknowledged by contemporary theorists of thingness is Adorno's old arch nemesis, Heidegger, to whom the current use of the term thing can of course be traced back – the thing as third term that destabi-lizes the subject/object dichotomy and covers any number of hybrids. However, to me (but again, my interest is history rather than ontology), the work of thinkers like Adorno and Benjamin is actually more productive. In their work, too, we are dealing not with some essentialized subject/object dichotomy but rather with a question-ing of such a stable dichotomy; however, this questioning also acknowledges that the notions of object and subject cannot be wished away, since they are intrinsically bound up with modernity as not just a philosophical regime, but a social and eco-nomical one. And, of course, an aesthetic regime. For me, modern aesthetic practice is itself a crucial form of 'thing theory' – and the same can be said for contemporary art.

ROR: If 'speculative realism' is necessary, according to Gironi, it is because it 'cautiously moves (conforming to the Marxian-Engelsian lesson) between simplistic (and, today, plainly unscientific) reductionist excesses on the one hand and the yielding of precious terrain to the idealism that lurks in an excessively logico-rationalist understanding of 'matter' on the other' (2012: 380). Is it so easy to bring this problematic into art given the distinctness of art as category? I guess my question is, broadly, can art history shed light the 'caution' Gironi mentions?

SL: Art history as a discipline tends to be so cautious that it never makes it to the other side of the street! But yes, for me, art history is crucial in that is itself something of an illegitimate discipline, one tainted by the impurity and opaqueness of its object –art history is often treated with a kind of paternalistic benevolence (and this is already putting a positive spin on things) by 'master disciplines' such as philosophy and semiotics or literary theory. But in a strange way, even though the discipline is ever more marginalized, it is also triumphant – despite itself, one might say. After all, art history was always a discipline of unstable subject-objects, of visual and material facts that were also historical acts, of things that were actants.

Art history is one of three main manifestations of the 'aesthetic turn' around 1800. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, three interconnected disciplines came to constitute art as an essential object with which the modern bourgeois subject assured itself of its tenuous grasp of the world: philosophical aesthetics, art criticism and art history. All these forms of aesthetic discourse revolve around the obscure object of aesthetic desire that is the work of art – in its various medium-specific incarnations. Literature and music held the promise of a highly subjective art, and in that sense they were quintessentially modern; Taine phrased a commonplace thought when, in his philosophy of art, he stated that music 'convient mieux que tout autre art pur exprimer les pensées flottantes, les songes sans formes, les desires sans objet et sans limite...(better adapted than any other art to express floating thoughts, formless dreams, objectless limitless desires...)' (1875: 1)

However, if the aesthetic became a crucial sphere of modern bourgeois thought, promising – in Terry Eagleton's words – a 'residually common world' (1990) in the era of inhumane abstractions and divisions of labour, aesthetic thought needed to return time and again to visible and material objects: paintings and sculptures. Such works of visual art constituted objects that countered the transcendental subject of idealist philosophy not with blunt and dead materiality, but with a form of object-hood that seemed itself transformed through and in harmony with the subject. Art

history, as it was founded or re-founded around 1800, was the discipline that sought to realize the 'aesthetic project' formulated by thinkers from Kant and Schiller to Schelling and Hegel with an immersion in the minutiae of attribution and meaning – in the process sometimes losing sight of why art mattered in the first place.

As Georges Didi-Huberman has emphasized, the object of art history belongs to a world of senses and is therefore never quite rational. Indeed, art's status as exhibiting a form of mute reason that differs from conceptual thinking is what made it indispensable to the aesthetic theory that emerged on the threshold from the Enlightenment to Romanticism. Today, of course, art habitually employs media and technologies that are themselves products of technological reason (of purposive rationality, as Adorno would say), but in ways that are more or less unreasonable, or at least exhibit a somewhat obscure rationality.

ROR: Latour derides historical materialism as a hypocritical theology, while at the same time much of his reconsideration of the actual material practices and conceptual attachments of scientific labourers has seemed extremely ripe for interpellation and reworking by media or transmedial artists interested in, for example, media archaeologies (real or fantastic), naturalized software logics, post-human approaches to aesthetics and so on. It seems to me also that Latour's conceptions of 'actants' (which includes both 'things' and immaterial concepts) might at the same time be conducive to working through art's historical transformations at the scene of exhibition (and criticism), for example, and especially how artists make installations of objects, concepts and things 'work' as art. Where does Latour's work fit into all this for you?

SL: Latour's development of the notion of the actant seems to be to be one of the most productive aspects of his work, though I would say that there's a whole labor of differentiation ahead of us. I'm afraid this will have to amount to some form of historical materialism – or perhaps one should say dialectical materialism – which articulates the different forms of agency involved and their interrelations. Such a differentiation obviously must not result in some Borgesian encyclopedia, in an incoherent list; it must involve precise yet mutable relations, which also means that it must include antagonisms. And perhaps one has to reintroduce the terms 'subject' and 'object' in the process.

At the risk of making the good people shudder, I would like to suggest that there is

much to be learned here from Marx, who in the **Grundrisse** wrote on the 'production of consumption' – which could well be taken for a lesson in aesthetics. Indeed, in this as in other respects, Marx's political economy takes up tropes and problems from aesthetic theory: 'production thus not only creates an object for the subject, but also a subject for the object. [...] It thus produces the object of consumption, the manner of consumption and the motive of consumption. Consumption likewise produces the producer's **inclination** by beckoning to him as an aim-determining need' (1857). Marx, the aesthetic political economist who once read Rumohr's **Italienische Briefe** to write an (abandoned) essay on Christian art, here shows that the object-subject dichotomy was in fact a dialectic equation in which both parts forever destabilized each other – and this was never more clear than in relation to visual art, whose manifestly solid objects were also intangible bearers and **producers** of subjectivity.

I'm reminded here of the Book Sprint phenomenon, and of the email interview that we're doing right now – though 'right now' is, of course, the wrong term, since we're not in the same place or in the same time zone. A Book Sprint is a way of producing an object (a new-media object remediating a paper book) under certain economical and social conditions. This takes the form of a production process in which not only an object is created, but also 'subjects for the object' – first and foremost, the people directly involved, for here the producers are also the first consumers. The book-in-progress functions as an actant impacting the people producing it, who have set up the whole process in response to the exigencies and antinomies of contemporary cultural and intellectual practice. As someone who usually spends years on making a book, I find this vaguely threatening, but compelling. Perhaps we're dealing with a new kind of butterfly book, a new type of object that may also be an unruly thing. The nature of the interrelations between this media actant and the human agents remains to be investigated in much greater detail.

In some ways, the books thus produced will no doubt be symptomatic of the time constraints, but new qualities may be set free that make up for the imperfections. What we're doing now is not part of a book sprint strictly speaking, but I'm certainly feeling the pressure, and we don't have time to do things 'thoroughly' – or 'properly.' It certainly forces me to think on my feet, which is good, but it will remain a rather sketchy affair.

ROR: Thinking in terms of the economics of both art and philosophy's transformed discursive industries – global exhibitionary complexes, massively accelerated publishing cycles, networked distribution – the way in which art and philosophy negoti-

ate each other is changing. Or perhaps the industrial links between art and philoso-phy in the form of **publicity**, shall we say, have always been this same problematic, at least since the 60s.

Either way, it seems that curatorial and artistic industriousness can become some-what awkward when it assumes itself to be invested in contemporaneity by rework-ing (especially post-Deleuzian) philosophy within art works of exemplary 'reduced' scenes of non-linguistic thought. Liam Gillick has called this the 'singularity' prob-lem – the conjunction of curatorial-philosophical labour reduced to concepts and 'instances' of art, where each (philosophical concept, artistic object) invest in mak-ing the case for the other in a too-circular fashion. At its worst it assumes that the contemporaneity of art is only to be found in its symmetrical 'progressive' tracking of 'properly' philosophical labour. Sometimes this verges on sycophancy even.

While that is the risk, I wonder if we can think about how these issues are critically and knowingly negotiated by artists and curators. It's interesting, for example, that while the artists were curated into this V2 show for their already-displayed invest-ments (across an oeuvre) in experimentalist ecological inquiry and non-anthropo-centric materialisms, they were invited to create new works that specifically en-gaged with Levi Bryant and Graham Harman's work in the context of the larger 'turn' towards so-called anti-correlationism thought in OOO and SR. In other words, they were invited to remediate philosophical **material** (not necessarily to 'do' non-lin-guistic non-philosophy) for a strand of philosophy invested in thinking matter from outside the human. Whether this is even possible in institutionalized art that never goes without a spectator is a very good question – Smithson has experimented with this among others – but it is perfectly obvious to the artists that this problematic is there. Further, despite curatorial selection and oversight of the commission, it is also the case that the artists rework such material through whatever associations and relations of their choosing.

In this case we note that philosophical material has been perhaps unpredictably turned towards humour and profanation, and also dialectically towards failure, pos-sibly this being the lesson of conceptual art. I wonder (also in relation to the first question) if you can comment on the surplus value of specifically, comedy and profa-nation, regarding these kinds of dealings with the ontic in contemporary art. This sort of profane tinkering can seem like a great relief. Is there any radical philosophi-cal contribution that artists make by profaning their disinvestment in systematized and overly taxonomized ontologies, without reducing such to nihilism?

SL: In general I would say that artistic practice is tinkering, bricolage, even in 'constructivist' art, which Schwitters desublimated as collage and assemblage. 'Theory,' too, can be among the materials of artistic bricolage. But ultimately the work of bricolage is its own mode of doing theory; impure theory, articulated in the form of suggestions. As an art critic or art historian you effectively continue this work, de- and reassembling the assemblage.

Now, concerning anti-correlationist thought as 'a strand of philosophy invested in thinking matter from outside the human:' I'm not that well-versed in the literature in question (but the more I read Harman, the more I appreciate Latour). The main subject of anti-correlationist critique would seem to be Kant. Kant's 'correlationist' take on subject and object was subject to critique pretty much right off the bat, with Fichte, Schelling and Hegel. Idealist philosophy 'solved' the problems of Kant's philosophy by subsuming the world to thought; the ontic became a reflection of the **Ich** or the unfolding of **Geist**. And art was of such fundamental importance to Schelling and Hegel in particular because it showed the unfolding of Spirit in the form of artworks that were subject-objects.

But if art became crucial for philosophy – for the philosophy of the 'aesthetic turn' – because it showed matter to be imbued with spirit, modern art engaged in a flirtation with various forms of base materialism, with matter conceived to be outside the human. The shipwreck of spirit. The Bataille of the journal **Documents** is, of course, a prime example of such a project – which in this case was itself a truly aesthetic hybrid of the artistic and the philosophical, and which was in effect one episode in Bataille's critical long engagement with idealism, and with Hegel in particular. Today, in the collapsing Anthropocene, to think matter from outside the human obviously poses different challenges, as the material fabric of our planet has been inexorably altered by human intervention. This was something recognized by Smithson. On the one hand, he turned entropy into something of a fetish, seemingly subjugating history to a natural law (the second law of thermodynamics); on the other hand, he was well aware that human activity accelerated entropy, and that a cosmic given had thereby become a social and political problem – which became the basis of his aesthetic project.

By now, planet earth is itself the ultimate artwork, a subject-object out of control, an actant acting up in ways we cannot control. We may want to think matter from outside the human, but matter itself won't let us.

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