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# New Materialisms and Performance Studies

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This issue of *TDR* engages (and in some cases critiques) emergent clusters of thought known broadly as the “new materialism” in relationship to performance. Many of the essays explore, directly or indirectly, expanding ideas of what constitutes the live—the animate, the vibrant, the vital. If “liveness” and theatre’s relationship to death have been subjects of debate for decades (if not millennia), the new materialism has provoked a twist or turn to fully include the lives and deaths of entities formerly known as passive objects, inanimate things, inert matter—the onstage *and* offstage “life of props” (Sofer 2003). Contemporary questions about the agency of objects and the forces of materialization have increasingly blurred the borders modernity had built up between the animate and the inanimate. Brackets formerly demarcating the living from the nonliving, like the human from the nonhuman, have widened exponentially—with almost everything inside.

At base, the new materialism takes seriously the idea that all matter is agential and that agency is distributed across and among materials in relation. As such, matter engages with matter as well as with (or without) humans, who are also matter. The new materialism commits not only to acknowledging matter as agential but also to acknowledging matter as *discursive*, though not linguistic, unsettling the precedent prioritizing of “language” as the sole or primary means to think about meaning-making (Barad 2003). This latter, of course, is something the new materialism shares with dance studies and performance studies, which both have been working diligently on these issues across several generations of scholars.

If the new materialism has seemed to famously coalesce around a book on every art student’s shelf these days—Jane Bennett’s engaging *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2010)—the broader “ism” has been percolating for a long time and touches a number of post-linguistic “turns” in the academy. William Connolly has described the umbrella term as containing the following impulses:

The “new materialism” is the most common name given to a series of movements in several fields that criticise anthropocentrism, rethink subjectivity by playing up the role of inhuman forces within the human, emphasize the self-organizing powers of several nonhuman processes, explore dissonant relations between those processes and cultural

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practice, rethink the sources of ethics, and commend the need to fold a planetary dimension more actively and regularly into studies of global, interstate and state politics. [The new materialism] casts light on the dissonant relations between the drives of neoliberal capitalism and boomerang effects from nonhuman forces. (2013:399)

Most pronouncedly, the new materialism partners rather easily with the affective turn, the non-human turn, and the ecocritical turn (now also “eco-poco” or the postcolonial-ecocritical turn). All these turns can make you dizzy, and indeed Richard Grusin has recently written on a possible “turn fatigue” in the academy (2015:xiv–xxi). But, far from exhausting, the tendency toward turns may be more broadly significant.

It cannot be inconsequential that the number and frequency of academic turns—toward and away, around and through—appear to increase at a juncture that also troubles linear time in favor of folded, swerving, recursive, or queer times, and remobilizes largely indigenous ideas of nonstatic place (see Freeman 2010; Schneider 2011; Basso 1996; Tuck and McKenzie 2013).<sup>1</sup> It is also hardly inconsequential that the word “choreography” occurs very often in the new materialism. Though the word’s relationship to dance history is generally and unfortunately unremarked, it carries something of the body with it across its use. Diana Coole, for example, uses “choreography” as a term basically interchangeable with patterns of thought, suggesting that the border between linguistic and material or bodily sense-making has collapsed with the new materialism—it is now *all* material. If “choreography” might suggest embodied or otherwise materialized thought, in Coole’s case it signifies primarily thought on the “irreducible intermeshing of human and nonhuman” in “co-production” (2013:3–4). Interestingly, “coproduction” is also Kim Tallbear’s word, taken from science and technology studies and rearticulated through Stuart Hall (1986a, 1986b) and James Clifford (2001, 2003). Tallbear uses “coproduction” to describe the complete intermeshing of science (so-called natural) and the social (so-called cultural) in her powerful book tracing the problematic contemporary reduction of Native America to genetic molecular materiality (2013:11–13).

Tracking words to chart the new material turn prompts the question: Are expressions borrowed from or kin to “performance” necessary? And further, do words derived to describe embodied acts or movement qualities or modes of *collective* making in fact enable a twisting and turning away from or out of precedent linguistic subject/object divides? Do such words (choreographic, coproduction) in some way trouble human-centric ideas of unidirectional, nonrelational, or sovereign agencies (see Lepecki 2013b)?

In both new materialist writings and in works that critique the turn, language and matter still appear pitted against each other. For example, Sara Ahmed’s “Open Forum Imaginary Prohibitions: Some Preliminary Remarks on the Founding Gestures of the ‘New Materialism’” (2008) offers a scathing critique of the new materialism, accusing the work of an anticonstructivism that routinely “gestures” rather than critically and discursively engages. For Ahmed in this essay, “gesture” stands for all that is antithetical to discourse. “Gesture” is a word carrying the sense of material, embodied action that elsewhere Ahmed respects (2006), but in this essay gesture is implicitly opposed to discourse. Ahmed reserves critical engagement for the linguistic

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1. The “linguistic turn” against which the new materialist turn appears most pitted (see Barad 2003; Ahmed 2008), is also generally referred to as a turn, but note that “turn” was a phrase used in hindsight by Richard Rorty in 1967 to describe already established intellectual movements that invest in the notion that language constructs reality. It would be interesting to theorize whether it was the linguistic turn that set things a-spin, or the “performative turn,” which was already underway by the time of Rorty’s turn to the “turn” (see Schneider forthcoming). It is interesting to note as well, regarding the turn to turns, that 1967 is roughly coterminous with the beginnings of neoliberalism. Turns accelerate in tandem with the expanding economization of knowledge in universities that increasingly promote “open innovation” and “project based or ‘participatory’ inquiry” in which “the flexible individual moves through temporary networks” (Brouillette 2013; see also Brown 2015:196).

alone. The word "gesture" appears 26 times as a stand-in for everything that threatens critical discourse, a fact that might beg for performance analysis in return, preferably written by Susan Leigh Foster ([1986] 1988), Carrie Noland (2009), or Andre Lepecki (2013a)

Counting the academic turns that intersect under the umbrella of "the new materialism" may, like counting the word "gesture," not be enormously productive—especially in relation to a school of thought that favors a materiality imagined as distinct from language. But together these turns and these words *choreograph* or *coproduce* a dance of cross-species and cross-material affective engagements that have set old postures choreographed for subject/object relations spinning—often, though not always, in direct correspondence with feminisms, queer theories, and indigenous studies.<sup>2</sup> Over the past 10 years, collections of thought have spun into such anthologies as *The Affective Turn* (Clough and Halley 2007), *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics* (Coole and Frost 2010), and *The Nonhuman Turn* (Grusin 2015). Within performance studies, too, we have seen important contributions at the intersections of performance studies and ecocritical new materialism.<sup>3</sup> Of course the argument could be made that theatre, dance, and performance art have always troubled the borders of the so-called human and the so-called non. We can think, simply, of Dionysus, or non-Aristotelian "conjure ceremonies" (to quote Katherine Biers quoting Zora Neale Hurston in this *TDR* issue [Biers 2015]) for the suggestion that the expandable limits of "animacies" (Chen 2012) is a topic that has long interested performance studies.

So let's think about it again, if not anew. Performance appears to trade promiscuously in animacy. For many who think about performance, especially as a "live art," the "copresence" of living beings within the "here and now" of space and time remains *the* truism of theatre, dance, and other time-based arts (Fischer-Lichte 2008:32–33). Though many scholars, including myself, have argued that theatrical performance is a mode of haunting, ghosting, or inhabiting nonlinear time (and that some theatre may even be "dead" [Schneider 2012:159]), for most scholars performance is still commonly thought of as work made by living beings (including animals) who are present in and to time. For most, if living humans are not present to a performance themselves, then living humans must hide somewhere in the wings of actions, or be the ones to ultimately bear agential responsibility for the actions of objects or animals or plants or even, as we see in this *TDR* issue, algorithms (see Annie Dorsen and Ioana Jucan on *A Piece of Work* [Dorsen 2015; Jucan 2015]). Even if agency is granted to objects, onstage or in life, most assume (especially in the academy) that it is humans who "infuse life into lifeless but not agentless objects" (Bell, Orenstein, and Posner 2014:6). Few in the academy would say outright: "The costume made the performer dance." Or, "The dance made the person move." Or, "The dead returned to hold a ceremony." Or, "The skull headdress pushed her down the stairs"—despite traditions in many cultures of masks, drums, and the dead doing just that (Joseph 1998:33; Kelly 2005).

2. Some schools of thought loosely associated with new materialism have little or no engagement with feminism, postcolonial theory, queer theory, or modes of thought that investigate the historical tracks of human—modes that are interested in theatricality. Staunchly against "correlationism," object-oriented ontology (OOO) and some related speculative realisms offer stand-alone theories on the radical autonomy of matter, but others work (though not always successfully) for intersection (see O'Rourke 2011; Bryant 2013). In my opinion it is important for performance studies to engage perspectives invested in assemblage theory and new materialism that simultaneously engage the historical tracks of human identity that can "drag" (to use a theatrical term) cross-temporal material force. On such drag see Elizabeth Freeman (2010) and Rebecca Schneider (2011). See also the interview with Manuel DeLanda (in Dolphijn and van der Tuin 2012:39).

3. For a sample of recent performance studies work in kinship with some strands of the new materialism see Baz Kershaw ([2007] 2009); Laura Levin (2010); Margaret Werry (2010); Robin Bernstein (2011); Leo Cabranes-Grant (2011); Wendy Arons and Theresa J. May (2012); Christopher Braddock (2013); Erin Manning (2013); John Bell, Claudia Orenstein, Dasia N. Posner (2014); Birgit Däwes and Marc Maufort (2014); Marlis Schweitzer and Joanne Zerdy (2014).

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Most scholars consider humans to be the only agents with their fingers on the puppet strings of otherwise inanimate objects and otherwise inanimate people—not the other way around. Props, computers, projectors, pullies, dollies, light boards, costumes, cameras, and other paraphernalia of (co)production, curation, choreography, and display serve human artists, not the other way around. But the “other way around” perspective is at least in part what the new materialism is reevaluating, and this “turn” may become less uncommon as ideas such as Robin Bernstein’s “scriptive things” generatively take hold in our studies (2011:8–13). For most scholars, objects wait to be infused with “life,” whereas Bernstein looks at how things initiate and choreograph behavior. In terms of trance, many scholars trained in Western scientific methods would rather grant agency to the *human* molecular level (cognitive science) or the *human* unconscious level (psychoanalysis), than consider the agentic capacity of an (in)animate spirit that might, through possession or other engagement, treat the living as instrumental to *their* aims (see Kelly 2005:1–20). John Emigh writes that masks “wait” for animation from humans. However, when discussing the infusion of life in relation to a *practitioner* of *topeng* trained in Bali (where he himself trained), Emigh sets a scene in reverse:

When a Balinese *topeng* performer picks up a mask being considered for purchase, he [...] gazes upon the mask, turning it this way and that, making it move to a silent music, he is assessing its potential life. He searches for a meeting place between himself and whatever life is inherent in the mask’s otherness. If he is successful, then a bonding takes place that will allow him to let that potential life flow through his own body. (2009:87–88)

With a much more ominous narrative to tell, Robert Joseph, chief of the Kwakwaka’wakw Nation writes that Kwakwaka’wakw masks have “a life of their own”—one that, without waiting, can cause serious harm (1998:20, 34–35).

A shorthand critique of granting matter agency is that doing so might exonerate humans of responsibility. Granting inanimate objects agency might let human exploiters, who are responsible for the excesses of the anthropocene, off the hook (this would be the “the gun made me shoot it” defense, which might actually bear some analysis). Some new materialists, therefore, “hesitate” over the implications of fully agential inanimate actants (Coole 2013:9–10).<sup>4</sup> Still, the saying “What we make makes us who we are” is a common turn of phrase. In fact, this is the slogan of the 2011 Jeep Grand Cherokee campaign (speaking of exploiters of indigeneity): “The Things We Make Make Us” (carvenom 2010). The complexity in taking this point of view seriously, and not just as commodity hype, demands a continued close analysis through Marx’s “old” materialism—the “fetish” properties of the commodity, for example, by which humans and things interanimate or coproduce—as well as a rigorous look at, indeed, what *what* we make tells us about what it makes (of) us.

This is all to say that despite Dionysus, despite modes of performance contrary to colonial and settler-colonial habits of assigning agency exclusively to humans, and despite Marx’s call to take the fetish seriously, the agencies of objects, spirits, or (un)dead ancestors are still most often relegated to the irrational or “primitive” sidelines of inquiry.<sup>5</sup> The dominant (scholarly) Western imaginary still rigorously polices borders distinguishing live and nonlive, human and non. For example, a stone statue such as Rodin’s *The Kiss* is not commonly considered a live performance. But Tino Sehgal’s *The Kiss*, as a looping choreography between two dancers that passes Rodin’s *Kiss* across dancer’s bodies, *is* live when performed (Cotter 2010). By this model,

4. Critiquing Bruno Latour for the lengths he extends his agential actants, Diana Coole, for example, prefers something like partial (nonreflexive) agency (2013:9–10).

5. Some interesting recent texts that work to critique primitivism for its exclusions of the agencies of others, animate or inanimate, are W.J.T. Mitchell (2004), Mary Kelly (2005), and Alejandro F. Haber (2009). On exploitation, old materialism, “primitive accumulation,” and molecular new materialism see Jordana Rosenberg (2014).

biological liveness in the copresent time of participants (both viewer and viewed) operates as a standard differentiator between the mediums of live dance and stone sculpture. So, too, by settler-colonial registers, a rock outcropping in the forest or desert or on the moon is not living. But an actor, dancer, artist, or museum employee performing on, with, or as a rock in a forest or desert or gallery *is* live.

Granted: mediums such as sculpture and performance have been steadily blurring since at least the middle of the 20th century, with minimalist sculpture described as “theatrical” and performance art explained as *analogous* to sculpture (Schneider 2011:132–37). And though artists, like VALIE EXPORT, have long made work at the intimate intersections where stone and live might become undecidable, in most art criticism, live and nonlive have held relatively firm. Until recently, live art would have seemed to exclude something like stone sculpture, even if theatricality could be deployed as descriptor. That is, living/nonliving, like human/nonhuman, seemed reliable as mutually exclusive binaries, even if theatricality could tip to both sides. But the moment we step outside of modern, secular, settler-colonial empiric time, the great wall between animate and inanimate collapses. If “living beings” might include stone, and if time might be as vast as geologic time, what are the limits of copresence or of contemporaneity?

It is important to acknowledge at this juncture that we can also align the expansion of the category of “live” to the biocapitalization of life under neoliberalism that renders life primarily molecular (and patentable) (Cooper 2008). Perhaps ironically for theatre artists, in 1998 the geneticist Albert Jacquard described the expanded category of “life” as the basic propensity of all matter to mime. Life, and liveness, have essentially become the capacity to copy, and that capacity is exhibited in humans, animals, plants, and even rocks:

We have known for some forty-five years, thanks to the discovery of DNA, that the boundary between inanimate objects and animate beings was more the result of an optical illusion than objective reality. What appeared 3 billion years ago was not “life,” but a molecule that happened to be endowed with the capacity to make a copy of itself—to reproduce. This capacity is due to its double-helix structure and the process is not particularly mysterious; it is the result of the same interactions between atoms as those which are at work in all other molecules. The word “life,” therefore, does not define a specific capacity possessed by certain objects; it simply translates our wonder at the powers these objects have: those of reproduction, of reaction, of struggle against the environment. But these powers are the result of an interaction of the same natural forces as those in a pebble. Like everything around us, we human beings are “stardust.” On what then do we base our claim to be entitled to special rights? (1998:33–34)

Thus life is newly (or again) a capacity of all matter, and the category “live” (and its analogs “vital,” “animate”) opens to everything, but perhaps most especially to matter formerly understood as inert, passive, or lacking in agency. Life is now simply what molecules exhibit as they divide, copy, or otherwise swerve and bump into each other, making an event by forming relations.<sup>6</sup> And temporal duration? With the expansion of “life” to beings formerly known as inanimate, the scope of duration reaches well beyond the human register. Now duration can be composed of a digital nanosecond, imperceptible to humans, or move at the pace of geology, also imperceptible to mere mortals. Geologic time is the time in which rocks live, for example.

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6. This rings in fascinating ways with Louis Althusser’s late thought, such as his “The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter” which, in the form of the swerve, connects with the investment in “turns” discussed earlier in this essay (Althusser 2006). Such work, along with the process philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead ([1927–28] 1978), has been deeply influential for many new materialists such as Erin Manning (2013) and Isabelle Stengers ([2011] 2014).

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But please note, if not noted already, these times outside of modern human time are not just the “discovery” of science and technology, as Jacquard suggests. For rocks also live, and have long lived, in indigenous time, making problematic (and often unexamined) bedfellows of those who claim molecular “discovery” and those who engage with animisms formerly known as “primitive.”<sup>7</sup> As Nicole Boivin put it succinctly: “For many people around the world, minerals are alive” (2013:4). This is a perception—or experience—trenchantly underscored by Mel Y. Chen’s description in *Animacies* (2012) of living, precariously, with mercury-contaminated blood. And it is an intimacy Chen claims as, precisely, queer. Above all, writes Chen, “animacy is political, shaped by what or who counts as human and what or who does not” (2012:30).

In theatre, dance, and performance studies, perhaps it is the rapid growth of time-based, performance-based, and participatory arts in museums and arts venues generally that makes “animacy” a hot topic today. Even some libraries are getting into the act, allowing patrons to check out “human books” in curated events where one “borrows” a person for conversation.<sup>8</sup> The distinction between human and book is quietly disappeared without even the word “orature” to take its place. At an astounding pace, that is, everything formerly known as object-based becomes, in two words, live performance. Performance, that is, becomes materialization. And the archive/library/museum imagines itself capable of housing (though the word *du jour* is “curating”) it all.

If you will permit me a fanciful, imaginary sideline... Let’s imagine a wide-reaching human-book borrowing program at my university library. Borrowing a humanbook, I imagine checking out Jane Bennett for an afternoon. She and I might stand on the street corner outside the library (affectionately known at Brown University as “The Rock”). She might invite me to call her Jane.<sup>9</sup> She might tell me in oral form a story she narrates in writing in her book *Vibrant Matter* about some trash she encounters on the street that seems to her full of force, vitality, and agency independent of the human. As we talk, the story comes alive. She points out stray bits of trash at our feet, electric lights overhead, and the properties of weather that all swirl about us in a great, animate dance. Every single thing is participant in a grand live opera performed by the tiniest, singing particulants! It’s a living drama with the life of the planet at stake, she tells me, composed in scenes of exquisite mundanity spun out across vast casts of molecules. Everything is vibrant!

Look, a dead rat!

There on the sewer drain Jane spots a dead rat, a black plastic glove, a stick of wood, a bottle cap, and some oak pollen. It all strikes her as a vibrant “contingent tableaux.” Yet the trash she saw in her book was in another there: “on 4 June over the storm drain to the Chesapeake Bay in front of Sam’s Bagels on Cold Spring Lane in Baltimore” (2010:4). In fact, there is no trash

7. For a critical text on the neoprimitivism of molecular thought see Rosenberg (2014). On indigeneity and science, as well as traditional and contemporary animism see Haber (2009) and Graham Harvey (2005). For an essay on the medieval sentence of rocks and a brief history of how the inanimate become “walled off from the animate” see Kellie Robertson (2012). On intersections between indigenous studies, new materialism, and environmental studies see Eve Tuck and Marcia McKenzie (2014).

8. See <http://humanlibrary.org/about-the-human-library.html>. This may not be as odd or even as “modern” as it at first appears. The John Hay Library at Brown University, for example, owns books literally bound in human skin, including a rare copy of *De Humani Corporis Fabrica* (1543) by Vesalius, the so-called father of modern human anatomy.

9. In “real life,” whatever that means, I have met Jane Bennett “live” when Brown University invited her to campus to deliver a lecture, which is, I suppose, a humanbook program of sorts. It is my hope that the imaginary narrative in this essay be taken as playful and teasing, but not mocking or derogatory—either of the innovative and exciting human book project or of the excellent interlocutor Jane Bennett, whose shelf life, in any case, will surely exceed my own.

at our feet at the Rock in Providence today, over five years later. Does this differential historical bit matter? Or is the arrangement of molecules into vibrant patterns entirely autonomous of the flows of *human* history that arguably pile more detritus and waste in some places than in others? Perhaps this is to ask: When does a trajectory of human or nonhuman agency begin and end, and whom does it sweep along with it, where? What part rat, what part human, and where do we account for difference? Does the Baltimore trash carried by the storm, then further carried by Bennett's book, wash into my hands in book form where it can ask of me the same questions it asked Bennett? Does it matter who (or what) is speaking? What kind of shape-shifting—rat and glove to book and hand—is this? And where does the agency lie if it is now, somehow, *in my hands* (or, more truthfully, yours)? To what extent, as Bennett writes, do “the us and the it slip-slide into each other” (4)? To what avail? And across what forms of time?

If we checked two humanbooks out of the library, we might ask Michel Foucault to join us and he might bring along Samuel Beckett to remind us that it was the playwright's question: “Does it *matter* who is speaking” (Foucault 1984:101)?<sup>10</sup> Does it matter where they speak, what they speak, how they speak, or when? The question I am reaching toward is this: Dead or alive or some interinanimate coproduction, does it matter for *whom, when, and where* trash, or dirt, or debris (human or non) may have the luxury (if it is that) of Bennett's vibrancy and “surprise” (2010:5)?

For the moment, among the “shuddering, muttering, and swarming” actants of words on paper pages or electric light from digital screens, Bennett's expansive optimism makes everything feel vibrant (Coole 2013:10). But some thinkers, like Lauren Berlant in “Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency),” have been keen to note that romantically expanded liveness for some comes at the expense of others' “slow death”—those within capitalism who are “marked for wearing out” (2007:762n20). For some people, in some neighborhoods, dead rats may be no surprise. Because this difference matters, scholars like Chen are not eager to romantically expand the category of liveness so much as to show up the colonial, sexual, racial, and financial politics that lie in every direction. Writes Chen:

My purpose is not to reinvest certain materialities with life, but to remap live and dead zones away from those very terms, leveraging animacy toward a consideration of affect in its queered and raced formations [...] I suggest that queering is immanent to animate transgressions, violating proper intimacies (including between humans and nonhuman things). (2012:11)

With Chen, we would be wise to remember that the “life as surplus” model described by Cooper (2008) is the flipside of an equally virulent necropolitics (Mbembe 2003). Some people's and some things' lives *count* more than others, and whose lives count as *live* matters. Some people—the precariat—experience lives that are uncertain as flexibility, speculation, risk, and mandatory mobility become the bywords for “living labor” in late late capitalism (Schneider 2011). They are also the bywords for the nonhuman. There is an increased fragility palpable at the planetary level. Environmental precarity adds, as Bennett herself repeatedly notes, an urgent highlight to her otherwise happy musings on everything's vibrant animacy.

This *TDR* issue casts a wide net and seeks to explore the ways performance theorists, historians, and practitioners are engaging with the shifting terrain of what constitutes animacy. The questions that went out in the form of a call were expansive: How do performance, dance, and

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10. At the end of his essay “What Is an Author?” Foucault changes Beckett's question. Where Beckett asked “What does it *matter* who is speaking?” Foucault asks “What *difference* does it make who is speaking?” (Foucault 1984). If we are not careful to attend to intersectional histories of how matter has materialized differently or unevenly for different people and things in different places and times, the new materialism threatens to ignore the important difference between Beckett's and Foucault's modes of posing the question.

theatre theories, histories, and practices deploy or extend or critique the new materialism and the extension of agentic capacities to objects and things? Does new materialism challenge or resolidify narrowly anthropocentric narratives and human/nonhuman binaries? Does new materialism vacate human responsibility or expand our understanding of relationality in ecological perspective? Can new materialist questions open doors for theatre historiography, and can theatre and dance histories suggest ways of thinking for new materialists? Even as we are now expanding the realm of liveness beyond actors to theatre's materials—props, sets, lights, sound, makeup, and all the backstage machinery supporting the fretting and strutting about—haven't theatre practitioners long recognized their objects and affects as actants? If “dematerialization” as an idea was crucial to the evolution of media studies as well as to the rise of performance-based art in visual culture (Lippard [1973] 1997), and if “immateriality” in affect studies and analyses of neoliberal labor has been recently prevalent (Lazzarato 1996), what is at stake in reorienting ourselves anew to matter? How far can we extend the agency of “scriptive things” (Bernstein 2011:8–13)? When the borders of liveness expand to all “persons, not all of whom are human” (Harvey 2005:xi), how might we redefine “live art”?

As these questions may suggest, performance studies can have a lot to offer current discussions. Theatricality has long rummaged at the habitual borders erected between subject and object, and troubled any hard line on what constitutes the animate and what the inanimate. Via mimesis (which is not the same as representation), matter regularly *becomes other matter* that may not completely nor singularly *be* itself. Here we might go to the Rock and check out Roger Callois for his 1935 exegesis of the stick insect and the stick. Callois tells of the insect and the stick mutually becoming each other in a world alive with mimetic cross-species, cross-material citationality (1984). Perhaps mimesis, hardly the sole property of humans (despite Aristotle), has always troubled easy answers to questions like “Who has the agency?” and “What is real?” Matter that mimetically becomes other matter, à la Jacquard, cannot be countenanced by ideas that rely solely on J.L. Austin's performativity (1962), such as Karen Barad's “agential real” (2003:810). Theatricality, unlike performativity, makes sure we remember that not everything in the world is real—or not *only* real. The matter of mimesis, in both becoming and unbecoming, might rather (or also) be posited as agential theatricality: becoming unreal. And as many have said, theatre—the playground of whores and dandies—is *really unbecoming*.

Essays in this issue engage live digital broadcasts of opera (Christopher Morris), the complex temporality of recorded sound (Jane Blocker), the witty repartee of algorithmic actants (Annie Dorsen, Ioana Jucan), the agencies of burnt cork (Tina Post), of Bolton twill and 15 amp adaptors (Paul Rae), of clay (Amelia Jones), of “voodoo” (Katherine Biers) and “virtuosity” (Ariel Osterweis). There are Faust's bargains, Frankenstein's creations, Krapp's ploys, Hamlet's rat traps, Crow's dance, and Narcissus's watery dissolve of the subject/object distinction read through masking, dancing, opera, theatre, “ceremonies of conjure,” algorithms, and even through performance art's objects. That animate and inanimate come undone into each other, yet again, is arguably a given of mimesis, here bent through the lens of a “new” twist on old interests: the old new animisms of the new old materialism.

What can performance studies offer again?

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