



Editorial

Feminist New Materialisms: Activating Ethico-Politics through Genealogies in Social Sciences

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The idea to create a Special Issue journal around the topic of feminist new materialisms emerged out of the editors' collaboration in the frames of European project *New Materialism: Networking European Scholarship on 'How Matter Comes to Matter'* (European Cooperation in Science and Technology), and more specifically it was born at the 9th Annual Conference on the New Materialisms, held at Utrecht University in June 2018. The editors were then able to trace the discussions within new materialism, but also on the margins of it, and in dialogues with researchers with different academic backgrounds or coming from other theoretical standpoints. Those dialogues all have different affective modalities, raised various theoretical (counter) arguments, and imagined heterogeneous practices. As editors of this issue of "Social Sciences," we recognized the need to rethink feminist new materialisms, yet again accentuating and activating its ethico-political dimensions and stakes. We are undertaking this endeavour together with scholars, who have been composing the cartography of feminist new materialist research for some time now (among them: [Alaimo and Hekman 2008](#); [Coole and Frost 2010](#); [Dolphijn and van der Tuin 2012](#); [Van der Tuin 2015](#); [Cielemecka and Rogowska-Stangret 2018](#)), and we aim at grasping specifically its ethico-political practices.

For us, new materialisms have always been the entanglement of epistemology, ontology, ethics, and politics. Looking back to the notion of "situated knowledges" by [Haraway \(1988\)](#) who—among others—"planted the seed for feminist new materialism" ([Van der Tuin 2015](#), p. 26)—one sees how those (at least) four planes are entangled ([Rogowska-Stangret 2018](#)), in order to bring forth "response-able" ([Haraway 2008](#)) research. New materialism is thus an ethico-onto-epistemological framework ([Barad 2007](#); [Revelles-Benavente 2018](#)), that by activating its ethico-politics helps to diagnose, infer, and transform gendered, environmental, anthropocentric, and social injustices from a multidimensional angle. Social injustices are a driving motivation to pursue research, and are the reason why the editors and authors of this special issue cannot understand new materialism without feminism ([Hinton and Treusch 2015](#); [Ernst 2016](#)). Contemporary feminist researchers are providing new materialisms with a transversal approach ([Yuval-Davis 1997](#)) that comes from many different disciplines, without canonizing back again knowledge creation and production, and in hope that they will not enter back into classifications ([Van der Tuin 2015](#)). It is a "situated" ([Haraway 1988](#)) research "response-able" ([Haraway 2008](#)) to material-discursive practices that iterate in a dynamic conceptualization of matter.

The authors of this issue aim at adding to the body of research which relates with methodologies and empirical work in new materialism (e.g., [Fox and Allred 2015](#); [Tamboukou 2015](#); [De Freitas and Palmer 2016](#)). Following [Fox and Allred \(2015\)](#) guidelines, the authors reflect upon the differences that

using this methodology has provided to the research itself. We believe in a relational conceptualization of bodies and objects, and the importance of affect in this relation; while instead of territorializing and deterritorializing the performed research, we focus on the processes that iterate the research through “queering linearity” (Barad 2010).

We argue that methodology necessarily needs to engage within the relation between acting and thinking (Tamboukou 2015), so that it can transform itself into a political practice embodied and embedded. Experimenting with the linearity of the process provides the actualization of future becomings and because of that, the materialization of agential practices while they are occurring. As a conclusion, we will focus on the necessity to think of methodology, ontology, ethics, politics, and epistemology as a processual relation, and the need to focus on processes instead of results (Grosz 2005) for a feminist politics of affinities instead of identities.

1. Putting the Ethico-Political Back to Research

New materialisms refer to a specific ethico-political and onto-epistemological turn that is deeply committed to de-centralizing knowledge production, cutting across pre-established dichotomies, and focusing on processes transversing hierarchies of power relations that organize diverse forms of life. In particular, it is a methodology of situating material-discursive practices that form specific socio-cultural phenomena via a relational ontology. Here, different elements come to being through intra-actions. Agency materializes and redefines itself as a more than isolated human agency. New materialist approaches to the creation and dissemination of scientific knowledge are proliferating across diverse disciplines such as arts (e.g., Kontturi et al. 2018; Barrett et al. 2017; Barrett and Bolt 2013), science and technology (e.g., Ernst et al. 2017), contemporary philosophy (e.g., Cielemecka and Rogowska-Stangret 2018; Bühlmann et al. 2017; Revelles-Benavente et al. 2014; Dolphijn and van der Tuin 2012; Coole and Frost 2010), cultural and media studies (e.g., Tiainen et al. 2015), and social sciences (e.g., Juelskjær et al.; Bath et al. 2017; Fox and Allred 2017; Alaimo and Hekman 2008). Although in the mentioned publications the ethico-political frames are strongly present, this is not the case for how new materialisms are recognized and represented in academia in general. Often, the more recognition new materialisms get in academia, the less space and time is devoted to their ethico-political frames. As a result, the feminist, queer, postcolonial, and ecological stakes are given less attention and importance; and the ethico-political frames of feminist new materialisms are amputated from the onto-epistemological turn. In this present issue of “Social Sciences,” the authors and editors are committed to stressing the importance of ethico-political frames to feminist new materialisms.

According to Dolphijn and van der Tuin (2012), new materialisms are about putting them to work, which means that it is not to be described, but performed. The authors and editors of this issue add yet another loop that has to do with situating new materialisms as ethico-politics. We would like to put new materialisms to work for feminist, queer, postcolonial, and ecological practices. The papers invite us to understand feminism with new materialisms and vice-versa. Our approach to this field of research is strongly marked by the concepts of genealogies (Van der Tuin 2015), femininity (Colman 2014), diffracting diffraction (Barad 2014), and the processes of becoming and sense-making of our own flexible and multiple identities (Braidotti 2013). That is, our approach has to do with how we build, contemporaneously, our epistemological genealogies effectively to produce points of activation for feminist, queer, postcolonial, and ecological practices. We present examples which investigate new social bondings and community building beyond identity politics, and contributions dealing with specific instances of realities that engage with the world with an entanglement between feminist ethics, politics, and methodologies.

2. Putting New Materialisms to Work

This special issue assembles perspectives from a wide range of disciplinary fields such as film studies, sound and noise art, arts-based community research and education, feminist environmentalism and ecology, as well as diffractive design and human-machine interaction. The six research papers allow

insight into diverse areas such as feminist documentary cinema, participatory practices in performance artwork, feminist and intra-religious collaborative art practices and Instagram-based art communities, creative workshops addressing sexual harassment in pre-teen peer cultures, feminist ecological practices and activist environmental work in Brazil, as well as the vision of robot sex beyond fixed human-centered heteronormalizations. The authors come not only from different academic disciplines but also from different national and transnational positionings such as Spain, Australia, Germany, Finland, and the UK. These investigations are connected in a very systematic, yet colorful way, through their theoretical and methodological foundation in feminist new materialism which proves, on this way, to be traveling in many parts of the intellectual world. The papers are also connected via an ethico-onto-epistemological commitment to not only scrutinize oppression and conflict, but also work for transforming our social and cultural imaginations through enacting or putting to work ideas, materialities, and lived realities that are founded in feminist, queer, postcolonial, and ecological practices. The papers show how it is possible to analyze these practices as becoming real, and as moments or processes of materialization.

The article “Feminist Documentary Cinema as Diffraction Apparatus: A Diffracting Reading of the Spanish Films, *Cuidado, Resbala* and *Yes, We Fuck!*” by Orianna Calderon-Sandoval and Adelina Sánchez-Espinosa, use “materiality, emotionality, and performativity” (p. 205) as analytical tools to render visible the potential of feminist documentary cinema for building alliances from and against precarity. It is done through close-watching of two Spanish films *Cuidado, Resbala* and *Yes, We Fuck!* on domestic workers, and sexually and functionally diverse communities. The authors show how the films operate as feminist countervisuality devices that reframe realities, and open up possibilities for being, becoming, and imagining the worlds otherwise—outside of androcentric paradigms. (Calderon-Sandoval and Sanchez-Espinosa 2019).

Juliana España Keller in her “The Sonic Intra-Face of a Noisy Feminist Social Kitchen,” shows how the reframing of the kitchen table into a platform for “exploring, repositioning and amplifying kitchen tools as material phenomena through electronic and manual manipulation into an immersive sonic performance installation” (p. 244) can contribute to “forming daring dissonant narratives that feed post-human ethical practices and feminist genealogies” (p. 244). By using and analyzing participatory practices in performance art, the kitchen becomes a noisy, social kitchen through collaborative engagements of more than human contributors. The author argues for a noisy culture of social reimagining of the kitchen through somatic learning in performative art practices. (España Keller 2019).

Anna Hickey-Moody and Marissa Willcox, in the article “Entanglements of Difference as Community Togetherness: Faith, Art and Feminism,” are also exploring collaborative art practices, here in creative workshops with children in intra-religious communities, with different ethnic backgrounds, and in presenting and analyzing a broadcasted live-interview in an Instagram-based feminist art community. However here, the focus lies on enacting new ways of feelings of belonging, and building community beyond sameness. The authors offer a diffraction of differences, that through research understood as being-with, results in the emerging of “togetherness” as “collections of difference” (Hickey-Moody and Willcox 2019, p. 264).

The article, “Moving with Touch: Entanglements of a Child, Valentine’s Day Cards, and Research-Activism against Sexual Harassment in Pre-Teen Peer Cultures,” by Suvi Pihkala, Tuija Huuki, and Vappu Sunnari, undertakes the question of sexual violence in pre-teen peer cultures as a response to discussions around the “#MeToo” movement, in which sexual harassment in children’s environments was neglected to a great extent. Through exploring “microprocesses of change within the more-than-human, child-card entanglements” (p. 226), the authors present and analyze the “affective charge in moments and movements of response and resistance” (p. 226) in workshops with children. In particular, they concentrate on touch and its different affective, sensing, and material effects, in hope to bring forth ways to enable “recognition, response, and resistance” (p. 226). (Suvi Pihkala and Sunnari 2019).

Miranda Imperial in “New Materialist Feminist Ecological Practices: La Via Campesina and Activist Environmental Work,” presents a relocation of the grassroots activism of the women’s section of the famous Brazilian self-organization of peasants, La Via Campesina, within the genealogies of ecological feminism and new materialist environmentalisms. The author delves into three examples of how in the recent past, feminist Indigenous activists successfully opposed multinational agrobusinesses, genetically modified crops, and land-grabbing practices. Imperial calls for collective action, and transnational community building for “re-distributing, re-thinking, and responding to the planet.” (Imperial 2019, p. 235).

The article, “New Materialist Perspectives on Sex Robots. A Feminist Dystopia/Utopia?” by Tanja Kubes, presents sex robots as potential agencies in the becoming of human-machine-entanglements which serve to redefine robot sex as “refutation of normative definitions of sex” (Kubes 2019, p. 224). The author discusses the status quo of the development of the so-called sex robots, as well as arguments which turn against this endeavor because of the fact that “prototypes of sex robots aiming to hit the market in the near future are definitely hinting towards a questionable understanding of ideals of female beauty, and the nature of gender relations” (Kubes 2019, p. 1). The paper explores the potential of sex robotics for “leaving the beaten track of pornographic mimicry and sexist hyperfeminization” (Kubes 2019, p. 10), and contributing instead to “new forms of sexual pleasure beyond fixed heteronormative normalizations” (Kubes 2019, p. 10).

3. Actualizing Future Becomings

The articles gathered in this issue of “Social Sciences” are putting new materialisms to work through diverse methodologies, mobilizing a variety of research backgrounds, contexts, and topics. They offer affective relational conceptualizations of bodies as they co-emerge together with films, sounds, creative workshops, live-interviews, experiences of touch (in its ambiguity), environmental and feminist activism and sex technologies, and try to grasp the specificities and effects of these relationalities. They are acting and thinking, doing and conceptualizing, providing at the same time joy, energy, concern, and care, to experiment, imagine, and design ways of doing and thinking. They activate ethico-political dimensions of feminist new materialisms through research, and activist efforts to transform social, environmental, gendered, and anthropocentric injustices, and to think of recognition of those injustices, resistance, and responses to them. By doing that, they also struggle to bring forth the future dimension of the research undertaken, to actualize future becomings, bodies, communities, responses, affinities, ways of sensing-feeling, bringing together, and experiencing. They prove the fact that feminist new materialist research is an open-ended process that directs us to yet new questions, horizons, and conceptualizations; enlivens our imagination and the desire to experiment with concepts and practices; and re-imagine and re-design oppressive and unjust paradigms.

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