



## Editorial

**Beatriz Revelles-Benavente**

University of Granada

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1344/jnmr.v2i2.35886>

## Abstract

Present conditions of living for human and more-than-human lives are presenting difficult scenarios for an adequate development of the world's own becoming. We are living in a permanent state of pandemic waved by a series of periods that fluctuate past, present and future in order to establish a new regime of power based upon the fiercest biopolitical power that Foucault (1978) could have had envisioned back in the seventies. If January 2021 started with an en fleshed materialization of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* with the assault of the United States Capitol, June 2021, the international pride month, is manifested in Spain with a brutal homophobic assassination of Samuel, a young gay man who was in a videocall with a friend and the one year and five months detention of Patrick Zake (a postgraduate master student in the Erasmus Mundus GEMMA program) in Egypt for defending human rights internationally. This permanent state of alarm is focusing global attention to a particular health condition, which is COVID-19 but, at the same time, it is disregarding many other affections that humans and more-than-humans are suffering from. Not only the many other health diseases that keep on infecting and pandeming non-Western countries, but also the diseases that are affecting our environment as the Australian fires claimed on their own in 2019, or diseases that have to do with communicative practices as the spreading of fake news.

What all of this shows us is the need to keep on diagnosing how a dynamic entanglement of biopolitical powers is introducing new hierarchical power structures that reconfigure pedagogies, arts, discursive-material cultures, and the organization of life in general. The need to look for new political figurations is becoming even more

evident and looking for modalities (Colman, 2019) able to respond (Haraway, 2008) to certain risk conditions is brought to the forefront. As an ethical “wonder” (Stengers, 2011), we need to start reconfiguring the questions that are going to make the powerful uncomfortable (Schostack & Schostack, 2008). New materialisms need to provide an aesthetical imagination able to map contemporary genealogies (van der Tuin, 2015) that articulate new narratives (Tamboukou, 2015) in order to encounter “differences that matter” (Ahmed, 1998). All in all, we need to find “vibrant textualities” (Moslund, Marcussen & Pedersen, 2020) able to engage with configurations of the world as singularities, and not as mirroring cause and effect, processes that aim at dismantling matter in favor of a global representationalist move towards the hegemony of an abstract global citizen, or in words of two the contributors of this issue, we need to “view difference as an essential aspect of a functioning ecosystem” (Kronberger & Krall, p. 44).

One of the vibrant textualities that this special issue introduces is, at the same time, the introduction of one section of the journal that is “Sciento-metrics” by one of its co-editors, Elizabeth de Freitas. The section “sciento-metrics” is co-edited by Dagmar Lorenz-Meyer and the author of the first article and, according to their own definition, it looks for “innovative and methodologically creative new materialist scholarship engaging the potentialities of mattering/measuring that open up different histories and futures of phenomena of concern” (Matter: Journal of New Materialist Research, n.d) One of these innovative methodologies that the section and the article provides is the relationship between mathematics and matter. Combining the disciplines of philosophy (via Quentin Meillassoux), mathematics (Fernando Zalamea and Giuseppe Longo) and computer science (with Gregory Chaitin), de Freitas establishes the main objective of the section that is reconfiguring the relationships between mathematics and matter in order to provide new methodological processes. The article, and the section launched in this fourth issue, has as its primordial aim to “seek ways of studying human mathematical habits, often conceptualized in sociological, philosophical, and psychological theories, as part of an earthly, worldly, and even cosmic mathematical ontology” (p. 4). Speculation in mathematics provides certain processes of linear cause and effect that determine one type of androcentric methodology able to produce hierarchies between different living conditions, as well

as socio-cultural material practices that engage with determined networks of power. Coming back to our prior example, a modality (Colman, 2019) based on a mathematical speculation of necropolitics is reigning global and local politics contemporarily through COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, what de Freitas' paper proposes and establishes for the section as well is a very important debate engaging with agential practices and human responsibilities in the world we are living, that is situating ethically the human in the phenomenon under research. In her words, "[t]he capacity to mathematize does not belong to humans, although it is uniquely expressed in human habits of making models, simulations, measurements and other engagements with metamorphic mixtures" (p. 20).

As it was stated at the beginning of this editorial, another important fact in the assessment of contemporary phenomena is the role of aesthetic practices in configuring ethical methodological approaches. If the role of the human as part of the methodological entanglement is important, so are the material configurations that specific engagements produce. This is one of the issues that Alisa Kronberger and Lisa Krall bring up in their article. Pursuing a transdisciplinary approach as the one presented by de Freitas above, they combine Karen Barad's quantum physics with contemporary feminist approaches to art. They bring in the importance of touch as a non-androcentric approach in the encounter between different disciplinary backgrounds. Their objective is to illustrate Barad's diffractive reading and agential realism through the artistic practice of patchwork. Dividing their article into different patches, they introduce the work of three different artists: Katherine Behar, Morehshin Allahyari and A.K. Burns and the encounters they find with Baradian theory. Likewise, they question themselves "how can diffractive thinking be expressed in artistic works and what strategies do artists pursue to do justice to a Baradian form of critique?" (p. 34), to which they answer with a very common practice in new materialist thinking, that is affirmation (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012; Braidotti, 2014; Revelles-Benavente, 2017).

A different way to think about artistic practices is presented by David Ben Shannon and his proposal to engage with research-creation through Whitehead's concept of propositions. Shannon explains how "proposition" is often used in this methodological approach without considering one of the ontological concerns of the concept itself,

that is the binary opposition between truth and false. In order to break through this dichotomy, he proposes to look at truth in terms of modality, as a speculative propositional truth. Introducing as an example the Walking Scoring Device, Shannon (p. 63) explains how this methodological approximation "creates a space for the possibility of restricting certain potentials (sounds) to a particular encounter (the walk with the device)." Again, we are queering measurements (as in de Freitas' article) by opening potentials while, at the same time, restricting them, or in Shannon's words, finding strategies to do justice to non-androcentric ways of thinking, ways to prevent "nostalgic fantasies" (p. 71).

Along the lines of configuring this new materialist practice of doing theory and situating human practices is the article brought in by Chris Julien. Bringing the genealogy of the Baradian conceptualization of the apparatus through Foucault's *dispositif*, Julien introduces theory-making within the world, by situating the concept within ecological studies. Julien (p. 77) defines the apparatus "as both a writing -and a living practice; not in opposition to, or separateness from the world, but as a generative mode of habitation" to be "both accountable and response-able in terms of its environment." (p. 77). Detailing the distinction between Baradian "agential cuts" and "cartesian cuts", Julien elaborates on the problems of representationalism and the exclusion of the environment in Foucault's definition of "dispositif". Perhaps, at the core of new materialist theory in general, and Barad's agential realism in particular is knowing the outside of a particular phenomenon in order to limit a very specific object of research. Julien's article sheds light precisely on this point through the concept of "ecologising" that "secure[s] the modern author function, collapsing the premise of non-accountability and irresponse-ability that is arguably prevalent among modern patriarchal, colonial and capitalist machines." (p. 97).

The last two articles of this special issue take another detour in theory making and focus a bit more on the methodological practices that illustrate how new materialist theory is put into practice (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012). Mónica Cano's article focuses on our pedagogical practices, which have suffered a radical change during the last year because of the pandemic. Maria Tamboukou, co-editor of the section "quantum mapping", focuses on how narratology theorizes women's experiences.

Mónica Cano uses as a point of departure a course that she is teaching “Vulnerability, Gender and Justice” in order to show how the concept of “vulnerability” and “diffractive methodology” can help students to move away from normativity. Drawing upon “affective pedagogy” (Hickey-Moody, 2016; de Riba, 2020), she embraces vulnerability as “the condition of possibility of being affected.” (p. 103). The genealogy that Cano offers in order to understand how these pedagogical practices work in the classroom draws upon a feminist philosopher who has been, at times, neglected in new materialist theories that is Judith Butler. Offering the distinction between a universal vulnerability, understood as a necessary interrelation between human beings, and a situated precarity, which is understood “as the lived body experiences [...] through its exposure to others and the world” (p. 111), she configures a rhizomatic experience of her own interaction with the students at a university in Vienna. The process of being affected involves a self-opening that positions our feelings in the front of our own subjectivity. Thus, if we want to establish an affective relation with our students, we necessarily need to position our vulnerabilities up front, opening the door to unpredictability. In other words, she applies a rhizomatic pedagogy without “try[ing] to assimilate systems of thought but is rather attentive to open-ended and constant conceptual transformations.” (p. 117) Voicing vulnerability and precarity helps us to create “safe spaces” (Colman & Stapleton, 2017) in which social transformation can take place.

Last, but not least, Maria Tamboukou offers an illustration on how particular methodologies en flesh theory making taking as an example Gwen John’s letters and her relationship with her many cats, invoking Deleuze and Guattari’s “becoming-animal”. These letters are important because they are able to “offer rich insights in the minutiae of a young woman artist in the urban spaces of modernity” (p. 132). Tamboukou analyzes the correspondence between John and her lover (Rodin) and one of her friends in order to illustrate difference “as an ontological condition between humans and non-humans” (p. 134). Doing so, she is not only following one of the premises of new materialisms, that is to put theory into practice as aforementioned, but also illustrating the importance of enfleshing data and treating it as a dynamic component of the research process. Additionally, she departs from everyday experience, as some other articles in this issue use, manifesting the need to depart

from the embodiment of subjectivities as Deluzian and Guattarian “assemblages”. This will help to construct an ethical and responsible world, as Cano’s article demands.

The almanac section introduces three different concepts in the toolbox of new materialist vocabularies: “synaesthesia” (by Helen Palmer, co-editor of the section “Creating Language and Theorizing literature”), “phenomena” (by Sofie Sauzet) and “slime” (by Esther Leslie). The issue exemplifies how “phenomena” has been part of the new materialist thinking almost from its beginning, and for the reader, considering phenomena as an introduction to new materialist vocabularies might be surprising (in an ironic way). Nevertheless, what is innovative in Sauzet’s entry is the genealogy that she offers for the conceptualization of phenomena (drawing upon rationalism, phenomenology and finally post-humanism) and the three different scenarios that she offers to show how it works. Leslie’s “slime” is used as a fictional metaphor (Haraway, 1991) in order to understand how matter can perform with multiple surfaces and effects. Using the “triviality” that this object has, she analyzes contemporary society and the unequal hierarchies that are structuring it. To conclude with this section, Palmer puts in the toolbox that this issue offers the term “synaesthesia” as a portal to define sensory modalities (Colman, 2019), following up the transversal definition that Shannon offers of modalities in his article. Synaesthesia is a catalyst for experiencing modality as the multiplicity of connecting fields of perception.

The intra-view section comes with a very up-to-date topic that is “touching”. As it has been demonstrated, in this pandemic times “touch” is one of the most important actions as a matter of (dis)connecting more-than-human elements (spreading the virus, (dis)connecting human care, problematizing digital realities and also bringing together different disciplines). One way or another, all the articles have indirectly provided a very particular definition of touch. For instance, Julien’s article describes “Touching oneself—in a flash [...] as connect[ing] the apparatus to itself while simultaneously constituting it as part of a particular, living environment (p. 94). An artistic project based on the “glove” is the spinal bone of the dialogue between Swantje Martasch and Felipe Duque, members of the project “New Dawn”. According to them, the globe “enables an attitude” (p. 180), it even marks different social classes as the

example they offer of working in a fast-food franchise. As Cano explains in this issue, the glove materializes our own vulnerability and not only “to one another but also [to] institutions and economic, social, and cultural relations.” (p. 112)

Finally, the issue closes with three affirmative reviews that touch upon the three pillars that are transversal to all the articles presented in this issue: that are theory making, embodied knowledges and methodological practices. The first one is the review offered by Mar Sureda of the book *New Directions of Philosophy and Literature*, an edited monograph by David Rudrum, Ridvan Aeskin and Frida Beckman. Following the importance of aesthetics (as de Freitas explains in her article), Sureda invites us to think how the intersections between philosophy and literature re-configure the very definition of both disciplines, thinking through the transversality that is implicit in new materialisms. The second review is offered by Shiva Zarabadi of the book *Placemaking: A new Materialist Theory of Pedagogy*, written by Tara Page and included in the Edinburgh book series in *New Materialisms* edited by Iris van der Tuin and Rosi Braidotti. Zarabadi focuses on the importance of place, positioning the author (as Shannon explains in this issue), and embracing our vulnerability (as Cano does in her contribution to this issue). Engaging with the environment (as Julien claims in this issue) becomes crucial in order to perform a new materialist pedagogy sensitive to difference and multiplicity. The third, and last, one is written by Rocco Monti: *Derrida after the end of writing: Political Theology and New Materialism* by Clayton Crockett. This innovative insight introduces Jacques Derrida within the genealogy of new materialisms by analyzing his late writings. Using a diffractive methodology (as the majority of the articles in this issue do), the author of the book puts together Derrida’s theory of writing with Barad’s philosophy of science.

Alice Walker showed the importance of patch work in her short story “Everyday Use”. Using the artistic metaphor provided by two of the contributors of this issue, the team of *Matter* would like to invite the reader to see this fourth issue as a patchwork that symbolizes theory for “everyday use”. Walker (1973) explained to her readers the importance of performing history in our quotidian practices in order to intra-act past and present to provide for different futures. In this issue, the articles, almanac entries, intra-views and affirmative readings predicate on the need to theorize from within situated phenomena in order to achieve tools able to reconfigure the agentiality of

matter. This issue shows how matter is mathematical, artistic, propositional, an ethical apparatus, affective pedagogy and, above all, everyday experiences. The combination of these elements can help to create innovative methodologies based upon affirmative practices able to undo the global state of pandemic in which human, and more-than-human beings, suffer from their own precarity.

## Bibliography

Ahmed, Sara (1998). *Differences that Matter: Feminist Theory and Postmodernism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9780511489389

Braidotti, Rosi (2014). "Conclusion: The Residual Spirituality in Critical Theory: A Case for Affirmative Postsecular Politics." In *Transformations of Religion and the Public Sphere*, edited by Rosi Braidotti, Bolette Blaagaard, Tobijn de Graauw, Eva Midden, and Tobijn de Graauw, 655 249–272. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Colman, Felicity (2019;). Modality. "New Concepts for Materialism" special issue. I. Van der Tuin & A. Nocek (Eds.) *Philosophy Today*.

Colman, Felicity and Stapleton, Erin (2017) 'Screening feminisms: approaches for teaching sex and gender in film' in Beatriz Revelles-Benavente and Ana M. González Ramos (eds.), *Teaching Gender: Feminist Pedagogy and Responsibility in Times of Political Crisis*, London: Routledge, pp. 99-116.

De Riba, Silvia (2020) (Seguir) Teorizando los afectos y las emociones en la investigación educativa desde enfoques feministas. *Feminismo/s.*, 35, pp. 321-338. <https://doi.org/10.14198/fem.2020.35.12>

Dolphijn, Rick & Van der Tuin, Iris (2012). *New Materialism: Interviews & Cartographies*. Open Humanities Press, Ann Arbor.

Foucault, Michel (2008). *The Birth of Biopolitics*, Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan

Haraway, Donna (2008). *When the Species Meet*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press



Hickey-Moody, Anna (2016). A femifesta for Posthuman Art Education: Visions and Becomings. C.A. Taylor et al (eds.) *Posthuman Research Practices in Education* (pp. 258-266)

Matter: Journal of New Materialist Research (n.d). *Sciento-Metrics*.

<https://revistes.ub.edu/index.php/matter/about/submissions>

Moslund, Sten; Marcussen, Marlene and Pedersen, Martin (2020). *How Literature Comes to Matter. Post-Anthropocentric Approaches to Fiction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Revelles-Benavente, Beatriz (2017). Affecting feminist pedagogies: performing critical thinking in between social networking sites and contemporary literature. En Just, E. y Wraggen, W. (Eds.), *Adventurous Encounters* (131-155). Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars University Press.

Schostack, John & Schostack, Jill (2008). *Radical Research: Designing, developing and writing research to make a difference*. London: Routledge.

Stengers, Isabelle (2011). "Wondering about Materialism". In L. Bryant, N. Srnicek, G. Harman, (eds.), *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism*. Melbourne: Re.press, 268–380.

Tamboukou, Maria (2015). Becomings: Narrative entanglements and microsociology. *Forum Qualitative Social Research*, 16 (1). Art. 19.

van der Tuin, Iris (2015). *Generational Feminism: New Materialist Introduction to a Generative Approach*. Maryland: Lexington Books.