

Introduction: New Materialism(s) and the Question of the Non-human

Subro Saha

Over the last decade, new materialism and its diverse approaches to the question of the non-human have simultaneously been welcomed and applied in newer and more urgent contexts. While the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic can be cited as one such urgent bio-geo-political site of human-nonhuman intra-actions that calls for new materialist (re-)engagements, there have been many other sites where new materialisms have been used to highlight the planetary necessities of a posthumanist outlook that respects a multispecies habitat beyond the centrality of the anthropos. Such contexts and encounters remind us continuously of the ethics of response-ability that we as a species share with other organisms and things within a co-constitutive habitat, and alert us to the urgency of realizing the need of learning from and acknowledging co-dependence with matters beyond the human species. This issue too turns towards such diverse contexts and encounters where we are forced to reconsider the same question haunting philosophical conceptualizations for many generations, however, with an awareness to engage from multispecies, posthumanist, planetary perspectives: *how matter comes to matter?* Such examinations of the *mattering* of matter emphasize on the essentially pluralistic nature of material becomings as well as our ways of engaging with such dispersed forms of matter and mattering, the irreducible complexity and dynamism of which gets reflected in the following words Birgit Kaiser and Kathrin Thiele use from Donna Haraway to begin their introduction on diffractive reading:

It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories. (Kaiser and Thiele ix)

This issue too attempts to address such complex and volatile entanglements of matter and meaning from diverse contexts and conceptual standpoints, and to rethink what can the *doing* of new materialisms offers us today.

One such interesting site of a new materialist engagement I encountered recently is the Archaeological Park of Neapolis, Siracusa where the discipline of archaeology and concerns of heritage conservation were fused with new materialist philosophical orientations in their official descriptions of the ancient Greek and Roman ruins. The cover image of this issue is also taken from a remote part of that archaeological site, in which we see the thick mesh of human-nonhuman intra-actions happening even within a desolate site otherwise ‘restricted’ from the human visitor’s entry: the ancient rocks telling the stories of the rise and fall of many human civilizations, the co-survival of different species within those rocks, sites of anthropocentric biopolitical control and regulation of human bodies, vibrant agency of mountains, rocks and pebbles, agents of environmental and climate change (for example, the presence of plastic bottle in the image), the reminder of the coexistence of microorganisms and their intra-actions with human civilization (the presence of a surgical mask in the image), and so on. One such official bringing together of archaeological concerns and new materialistic philosophical outlook in a historical site like this can be seen in the extract taken below from the description of the Ear of Dionysius, the name of which was given by the painter Caravaggio. Mythologically the grotto was associated as a site where slaves were kept, which was later changed into a prison for political dissidents and was known for its acoustic potential using which eavesdropping and surveillance on the captives were maintained, and interestingly the same site is now transformed as hearing the multispecies echoes of capitalocene and climate change, thereby renamed again as “The Ear of Filosseno”:

Today, in Sicily, at the door of Europe, new material and immaterial prisons multiply. We are in the midst of processes of “othering,” of drawing boundaries and enforcing borders between humans

and between species. While communities are displaced by climate change, infrastructures of containment are enforced. Surveillance capitalism is now an Ear of Dionysius, as are drones patrolling the Mediterranean Sea in search of humans to reject. If, as Ruth Wilson Gilmore said, “abolition is about abolishing the conditions under which prison became the solution to problems, rather than abolishing the buildings we call prisons”, which chants could be sung to overcome the carceral condition of the Capitalocene? What forms of oppressive authority would Filosseno stand against today?

Acting as a vibrating web, ...stories of metamorphosis, arachno-acting and post-humanist proposals, resounding and moving throughout the park. In this nomadic storytelling, non-hierarchical and non-linear dimensions of time emerge, deconstructing phobias and logics of extraction and exploitation, and acting as an invitation to cultivate interspecies relationships. The cave is thus renamed The ear of Filosseno, speculating that the poet, who left just a few fragments of his work behind, would encourage us today to hear the multitude of lifeforms and elements populating the Grotta, as a gesture of revolt against power. (Extracted from the website piece “The Ear of Filosseno”, np)

While the site of the Archaeological Park of Neapolis reminds us of some of the essential concerns of our present generation that new materialist scholarship helps re-connect from multispecies and planetary ethics, it also reminds us of the necessity of the coming together of disciplines to realize the shared points of concerns. Such coming together for a shared future— of not only realizing the shared existence of multispecies habitat but also of bringing together diverse disciplines— essentially calls for the necessity to realize planetary ethics and the practice of transversalizing. As Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin remind us, the question of introducing new materialism into any discipline essentially involves realizing immanent potentials within a field without following the transcendentalist or dualist framework that haunted the conceptualization of matter for many generations, something that affirms the generative potential of a discipline instead of being

generated (Dolphijn and Tuin 101). Such an approach therefore essentially calls for realizing the transversalizing potential of matter beyond the frameworks of dualism; and therefore, instead of focusing on the interaction of disciplinary matters, their intra-actions are asserted. However, introducing new materialism also points at not following any definite normative framework of thinking/doing new materialism, and therefore, essentially calls for the necessity of keeping alive the generative principle of new materialism, something that Braidotti calls the continuous necessity of *generating* a new materialism instead of relying on a pre-generated new materialism (Braidotti, “Teratologies”, 159-160). Similarly, in one of her recent works, Barad too emphasizes the necessity of diffracting ‘diffractive reading’ (Barad, *Diffracting Diffraction*, 4). Barad reminds that any re-turning to new materialism needs to essentially keep alive the generative and intra-acting potential, which includes the necessity of realizing re-turning not as an already pre-generated reflection but as acts of turning over and over again: “iteratively intra-acting, re-diffracting, diffracting anew, in the making of new temporalities (spacetime-matterings), new diffraction patterns” (Ibid 4). This issue too aims to re-turn towards new materialism and the question of the non-human with a similar approach: demonstrating the workings of new materialism in different (non-western) contexts, realizing new materialist concerns within otherwise unrelated areas, or questioning new materialism from newer conceptual lenses. However, before moving forward with the discussions on what the essays in this issue deal with, it is essential to briefly re-connect with some of the major concerns of new materialism and their dispersed engagements with the question of the non-human.

Tracing the cartographies of the epistemological orientations of new materialism, Dolphijn and Tuin note that from the second half of the 1990s Manuel Delanda and Rosi Braidotti in their own ways started using the term “neo-materialism” or “new materialism” to assert a type of

epistemological approach that attempts to address the entangled mesh of human-nonhuman coexistence (addressing what Haraway called “naturecultures”, or Latour referred to as “collectives”) without remaining centred on the dualisms of cultural theory (Dolphijn and Tuin 93). Their approach was, therefore, to address the same old question of matter and materiality yet with a vitalist, non-dualistic, agential approach to matter, and that is where their materialism acquires a new thrust, which Dolphijn and Tuin note, using Latour, is a rereading of the history of becoming – not simply by focusing on the history of the material becoming of human species but also a history of the material becomings of natural things (Ibid 94). With such an approach Delanda and Braidotti had been attempting to remap the existing philosophical traditions to show how a new materialist tradition could be carved out of the existing ones, and therefore apart from Deleuze, they turned towards Spinoza, Beauvoir, Bergson, Whitehead, Massumi, among others, to show how a vitalist approach had always been there within the existing traditions but had remained ignored; in so doing, their approach was to bring forward an “other” history that Latour had proposed (Ibid 94). Deleuze was important for them for this reason since Deleuze attempted to address such vitalist, non-dualistic materialism in a systematic fashion that is not centered on the transcendental ethos of humanism. The vitality of matter within new materialism is seen as a generative potential of matter that presents matter as an active agential entity that, in Bennett’s words, has the capacity to “inflect the direction of events and to make a difference to outcomes... wherein non-human bodies and processes were more sharply experienced as entering into, and enabling and constraining, *human* action” [emphasis in original] (Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 447). The “newness” of new materialism, one needs to understand, functions within such vitalist, agential approach to matter, and to assert such an approach as a “new” way of doing the humanities and realizing the disciplinary entanglements and intra-actions that the first new-materialist

conference organized by the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign in February 2007 which proposed “new-materialism” as a “new” approach. The first epistemologically centered book on new materialism, *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency and Politics* (2010) edited by Diana Coole & Samantha Frost, was modelled after the views proposed in the first conference and brought together for the first-time thinkers like Rosi Braidotti, Jane Bennett, Pheng Cheah, Elizabeth Grosz, Rey Chow, and Sara Ahmed, among other. In their “Introduction”, Coole and Frost introduced new materialism as a ‘new’ epistemology and methodology in the following way:

Everywhere we look, it seems to us, we are witnessing scattered but insistent demands for more materialist modes of analysis and for new ways of thinking about matter and processes of materialization ... the more textual approaches associated with the so-called cultural turn are increasingly being deemed inadequate for understanding contemporary society, particularly in light of some of its most urgent challenges regarding environmental, demographic, geopolitical, and economic change ... While this turn has encouraged a de facto neglect of more obviously material phenomena and processes, it has also problematized any straightforward overture toward matter or material experience as naively representational or naturalistic ... we believe it is now timely to reopen the issue of matter and once again to give material factors their due in shaping society and circumscribing human prospects. The essays we have commissioned for the current volume are exemplary of some of the new and innovative ways of conceptualizing and responding to this reorientation. (Coole and Frost 2-3)

They remind, therefore, that their renewed materialisms are not immediately new but remain in deep dialogue with the earlier materialist traditions:

In labeling these essays collectively as new materialisms, we do not wish to deny their rich materialist heritage. Many of our contributors indeed draw inspiration from materialist traditions developed prior to modernity or from philosophies that have until recently remained neglected or

marginalized currents within modern thinking. From this perspective their interventions might be categorized as renewed materialisms. (Ibid 04)

Coole and Frost assert repeatedly on the necessity to realize the genealogy of the (ignored) materialist traditions from where they draw their directions towards a newer investigation of the matter as generative, agential, and non-dualistic; however, it also requires a simultaneous awareness of not generalizing the diversity of approaches operating within the collective umbrella of new materialism. That is why they use the term in the plural (as ‘new materialisms’) to assert the essential plurality within their approach and to resist any oversimplified, generalized conflation. Their approach is an essentially posthumanist one, but that too has many different yet intra-acting epistemological orientations, some of which Coole and Frost identify in the following way:

(A)n orientation that is posthumanist in the sense that it conceives of matter itself as lively or as exhibiting agency... consideration of a raft of biopolitical and bioethical issues concerning the status of life and of the human... a critical and nondogmatic reengagement with political economy, where the nature of, and relationship between, the material details of everyday life and broader geopolitical and socioeconomic structures is being explored afresh. An important characteristic shared by all three components is their emphasis on materialization as a complex, pluralistic, relatively open process and their insistence that humans, including theorists themselves, be recognized as thoroughly immersed within materiality’s productive contingencies. (Ibid 6-7)

They argue that materiality is not a passive receptacle of the thinking (human) mind nor a product of its intentionalism, but rather an active, agential, generative, potentiality of which the human species is only a part and not the sole determinant— “materiality is always something more than ‘mere’ matter: an excess, force, vitality, relationality, or difference that renders matter active, self-creative, productive, unpredictable” (Ibid 9) — and that is why the New Materialist interventions

prefer a “more” phenomenological approach not only to the question of materiality but also to the concerns of embodiment and subjectivity that always haunt the thinking of materiality:

(P)henomenological studies emphasize the active, self-transformative, practical aspects of corporeality as it participates in relationships of power. They find bodies exhibiting agentic capacities in the way they structure or stylize their perceptual milieu, where they discover, organize, and respond to patterns that are corporeally significant... In other words, they complement ontologies of immanently productive matter by describing how living matter structures natural and social world (Ibid 19-20).

According to their view, such emphasis on corporeality as a practical and efficacious series of emergent capacities dislocates “agency” as the property of a discrete, self-knowing human subject and enables to understand it rather as inherent in nature itself (all bodies, including animals and other organisms, as exhibiting certain capacities for agency) and thus to look for a conceptual reorientation of “agency” towards a post-human realm. Besides, they claim that the more the scientists succeed in bridging species, artificially creating and extending human and animal life, and manipulating and synthesizing genes to create new life forms, they more muddle the concepts and boundaries between the very categories of man and nature, human and machine, natural and artificial which are taken as the “ground” for much ethical and political thinking. Thus, the need according to them is to move beyond the conceptual limits of anthropocentrism, for the concept of “agency” itself remains operative in “other” dimensions as well, be it primates, animals, micro-organisms or the artificially created cyborgs. These new ways of thinking about matter, according to them, had been radically and rapidly re-configuring our material world—both empirically and conceptually— not only transforming our most basic conceptions of life and the human but also intervening in the very building blocks of life and altering the environment in which the human species persist as only a shared part among others (Ibid 24). Thus, the question of materiality

becomes a key dimension for re-considering the concept of political analysis and intervention, and according to them, calls for a “new” approach to address it in these changing times where ‘matter’ itself has repeatedly re-appeared in new lights. As one such instance Braidotti reminds how “the politics of life itself” had for many generations regulated biopolitical controls through the proliferation of certain hegemonic discourses regarding the notion of human life and body, and which in the present age of biogenetic and cybernetic technologies are radically challenged. In this age of the “cybersubject” therefore not only newer concepts of life and death have shifted the humanistic constructivisms of human life, but newer ways of dying too are shifting the paradigms of what is to be taken as living. Braidotti therefore asserts,

This affects the question of death and makes possible new ways of dying. A rather complex relationship has emerged in the cyber universe we inhabit: one in which the link between the flesh and the machine is symbiotic and therefore can best be described as a bond of mutual dependence. This engenders some significant paradoxes when it comes to the human body. The corporeal site of subjectivity is simultaneously denied, in a fantasy of escape, and strengthened or reinforced. Anne Balsamo stresses the paradoxical concomitance of effects surrounding the new posthuman bodies as enabling a fantastic dream of immortality and control over life and death. “And yet, such beliefs about the technological future ‘life’ of the body are complemented by a palpable fear of death and annihilation from uncontrollable and spectacular body-threats: antibiotic-resistant viruses, random contamination, flesh-eating bacteria”. In other words, the new practices of ‘life’ mobilize not only generative forces but also new and subtler degrees of extinction. This type of vitality, unconcerned by clear-cut distinctions between living and dying, composes the notion of zoe as a nonhuman yet affirmative life-force. (Braidotti, *The Politics of ‘Life Itself’*, 203)

Such new worlds of cyborg species and biogenetics, as Braidotti argues, dislocate the traditional humanistic unity of the embodied human, and marks “a shift away from anthropocentrism, in favour of a new emphasis on the mutual interdependence of material, biocultural, and symbolic

forces in the making of social and political practices” (203-204). Such opening up of newer forms of interactions also forces for reconsiderations of the concept of subject and subjectivity beyond the Anthropocene and for more symbiotic coexistence of multiple life forces, while simultaneously redefining the relationship between the self and other beyond binary oppositions in favour of more complex yet less oppositional forms of interaction (204).

Similarly, when Jane Bennett turns towards exploring the “thing-power” or what she terms “vibrancy” of matter, it is such enmeshed intra-actions of the human-nonhuman entanglements that are asserted to overcome the binary divide separating passive matter (it) and vibrant life (us) and to assert on the agential power of matter. This agential potential of matter Bennett decides to call “vibrancy” of matter and shows how the early philosophical roots of viewing matter as agential can be traced back to a long continuing yet ignored tradition ranging from Spinoza, Kant, Bergson, Thoreau, Darwin, Deleuze, Latour, among others. Such an approach views human agency as essentially an assemblage of human-nonhuman intra-actions, and as such any human action is not seen as an exclusive human potential but rather as coexisting and enabling itself within a thick mesh of multiple *actants*:

Actants collaborate, divert, vitalize, gum up, twist or turn the groupings in which they participate; or, as archaeologists Chris Gosden or Lambros Malafouris argue, tools actively constitute the styles and powers of human cognition and memory. (Bennett, “Vibrant Matter”, 447)

She states it clearly that the “vibrant matter” she is emphasizing upon is not the raw material for the creative activity of humans or God, rather it is her body as well as the actants surrounding, shaping, acting with her human body which can be any matter ranging from bodies of Baltimore litter, Prometheus's chains, Darwin's worms, as well as the not-quite-bodies of electricity, ingested food, stem cells, and so on (xiii). Such assertion towards the vibrancy of matter and non-human agency therefore directs us towards the practicing of a materialistic approach that is not pre-

generated but rather remains continuously generative of itself: an approach that Pheng Cheah decides to call non-dialectical materialism that attempts to overcome the dialectical separation that had haunted the philosophical engagements with (human) being and (nonhuman) thing. Therefore, ranging from Jane Bennett's emphasis on the vibrant materialism of things to Grosz's assertions on volatile bodies, new materialists emphasize the vitalist, generative, non-dualistic agency of nonhuman matters and their relational ontologies. However, following their arguments on the generativity of matter, they too do not claim to bring forth a messianic radical "newness" that had not existed earlier, rather within and through their methodologies they generate such views from the already existing traditions, and that is why one needs to be aware that what is so important for new materialist methodologies is realizing the generative potential of the thick "mesh": where human and nonhuman, animate and inanimate, old and new forms of materialism are in continuous dynamic intra-actions with each other, and to acknowledge that and accept one's dependent existence within a multiverse generate a critique of Anthropocene while continuing to dwell within the fluid zones of becoming human.

However, the question still arises concerning the epistemological concerns (both the possibilities and limits) of addressing the non-human (or thinking) life and agency, *beyond* the human, and that is where Barad reminds of the entanglement of matter and meaning within our every attempt to think the non-human. What Barad attempts to highlight is that our acts of thinking/knowing the entity and the presence of the entity do not share a hierarchical system whereby one precedes the other but rather a co-constitutive dimension of relational ontology where matter and meaning get intertwined at every level of conceptualization. That is where Barad insists that thinking of such relationality essentially requires examining the various "diffracting" patterns, instead of focusing on the reflection of identical representations. Turning towards the double-slit

experiment of quantum physics and drawing specifically on the works of Niels Bohr and the Copenhagen interpretations of quantum mechanics, Barad emphasizes the inseparability of the observer's point of view and the results drawn from an experience, which highlight not only the concerns of embodied knowledge formations but also the entwining of matter and meaning at every level of observation. By showing the quantum entanglements—specifically the fact that “*the nature of the observed phenomenon changes with corresponding changes in the apparatus*” (Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 106) [emphasis in original]—Barad emphasizes three crucial aspects of meaning-making: (i) within any act of conceptualization, ontology and epistemology cannot be separated and therefore requires an examination of the relationalities of onto-epistemology, (ii) matter is not a self-enclosed entity but a phenomena that do not pre-exist its relationality, and (iii) every single act of conceptualizing such phenomenon involve an onto-epistemological entanglement that creates dispersed patterns of differences and relationality every time an act of conceptualizing such relationality is attempted. Therefore, diffraction, and not reflection or refraction, is so crucial for Barad. To use Kaiser and Thiele's words,

While reflection and refraction describe a displacement or alteration of the 'Same', diffraction maps differences as they interfere and as they are produced as effects of these interferences. If we remain with its classical use in physics for a moment, which is what Haraway draws on, diffractions occur when (light, sound or water) waves overlap, because they encounter an obstacle or other waves. Whereas refraction is the increase or decrease of wavelength when a light or sound wave passes from one medium to another, and reflection is the (optical) transposition of an object elsewhere, leaving it unaltered except for its repetition elsewhere (as in a mirror reflection), diffractions are the patterns effected in-and-by encounters of differences. It is in this sense that Haraway draws on the term for broader critical scholarship and practices. (Kaiser and Thiele xii)

For Barad, these diffracting patterns, however different they may be from each other emerge from the same phenomenon and yet they remain far removed from the same phenomenon, and that is why they also keep intra-acting (not interacting) with each other, and it is within such diffractive patterns of intra-action that alterity and agency lie in an ever shifting and volatile state:

Believing something is true doesn't make it true. But phenomena—whether lizards, electrons, or humans—exist only as a result of, and as part of, the world's ongoing intra-activity, its dynamic and contingent differentiation into specific relationalities. “We humans” don't make it so, not by dint of our own will, and not on our own. But through our advances, we participate in bringing forth the world in its specificity, including ourselves. We have to meet the universe halfway, to move toward what may come to be in ways that are accountable for our part in the world's differential becoming.

All real living is meeting. And each meeting matters. (2007, 353)

It is within the intra-actions of these meeting points—of the observer and observed, ontology and epistemology, human and nonhuman—that the “agential cuts” are constituted *within* the observing/thinking “apparatuses”:

Apparatuses enact agential cuts that produce determinate boundaries and properties of “entities” within phenomena, where “phenomena” are the ontological inseparability of agentially intra-acting components ... It is only through specific agential intra-actions that the boundaries and properties of “components” of phenomena become determinate and that particular articulations become meaningful. (Ibid 148)

Regarding the question of nonhuman or thinking a life beyond the human species, these concerns of a relational ontology and onto-epistemological intra-actions acquire significance in realizing newer futures while simultaneously remaining critical of the embodied concerns that haunt our acts of engaging with any phenomena. This is where Kaiser and Thiele remind us about Viki Kirby

assertions on the necessity of realizing the relationalities without completely surrendering to an uncritical messianism of alternative futurity:

As Vicki Kirby notes in *Quantum Anthropologies: Life at Large*, the full implications of the insight that ‘the very ontology of the entities emerges through relationality: the entities do not preexist their involvement’ still need to be fathomed. Diffraction expresses these ‘entangled relationalities’, which includes the entanglement of the observers within any process of meaning-making. Interlacing the nature of matter with knowledge of/in it, diffraction ties the ontology of ‘things’ to measurement and to the epistemological practices used to determine them. It takes seriously the intra-actions and ‘agential cuts’ that co-constitute subjects and objects, as well as the ongoingness of pattern formations in which they/we participate. This is neither an accelerated subjective constructivism nor an object-oriented rejection of human agency or responsibility. Instead, what is possible with diffraction and/as quantum entanglement is the departure from presupposing discrete units as given basic entities of analysis and the consideration of entities (be these selves, cultures, objects, nations, etc.) as processually, relationally and asymmetrically produced. Cuts matter, and they do so asymmetrically - they bring forth who and what ‘we’ are within/as power. (Kaiser and Thiele xiii)

To speak so does not mean new materialisms are unwelcoming of such futurity, rather they emphasize how the existing relations themselves can produce patterns of differences from within themselves, and that is where lies the necessity of realizing its messianicity without essentially resorting to any singular normative messiah-function. That is where, I submit, Barad’s “diffraction” and “intra-action” come to a meeting point with the generativity of matter Braidotti had emphasized upon (as was discussed in the earlier sections). Such patterns of diffraction therefore cannot have any singular normative onto-epistemological route or trajectory, even the concept of ‘diffractive reading’ too needs to be continuously questioned and pushed into newer

trajectories, turned again and again, and that's why Barad insists on the necessity of continuously *diffracting* "diffractive reading":

Diffraction is not a set pattern, but rather an iterative (re)configuring of patterns of differentiating-entangling. As such, there is no moving beyond, no leaving the 'old' behind. There is no absolute boundary between here-now and there-then. There is nothing that is new; there is nothing that is not new. Matter itself is diffracted, dispersed, threaded through with materializing and sedimented effects of iterative reconfigurings of spacetime-mattering, traces of what might yet (have) happen(ed). Matter is a sedimented intra-acting, an open field. Sedimenting does not entail closure. (Barad, *Diffracting Diffraction*, 3)

It is with such an approach that this issue re-turns towards new materialism(s) and its (their) diverse engagements with the question of the non-human without reducing neither its (their) openness nor its (their) critical potential. Ranging from epidemiologies and bio-politico-medical concerns, post/colonial (de)territorializations, resignifications of death and death-bodies, bio-semiotic matterings, the essays in this issue attempt in their diverse ways to rethink the onto-epistemological matterings of new materialism in newer contexts and from newer conceptual concerns.

Arnab Dasgupta's paper "Viral Entanglements: Pandemic, Planetary and New Materialist Response" attempts a new materialist reading of the ongoing covid pandemic and argues why such epidemics/pandemics remind of the urgency of realizing planetary and multi-species concerns. While such instances point us to the always ongoing thick mesh of human-nonhuman intra-actions they simultaneously activate the anthropocentric biopolitical concerns through which such epidemics/pandemics get signified within certain hegemonic constructivist models of framing life and livability. The essay, therefore, attempts a diffractive reading of the symbiotic relations and co-existence of viruses and human species to assert why such instances of epidemics/pandemics

call for an urgency to cultivate an ethics of planetarity that realizes the necessity of thinking life beyond the domains of anthropos and as shared phenomena.

Following Braidotti's views of thinking life beyond self and new ways of dying, Paromita Mukherjee's paper "The Non-human, Haunting, and the Question of 'Excess' in Elizabeth Bowen's "The Demon Lover" attempts a diffractive reading of some of the textual ambiguities of Bowen's short story to problematize the existing anthropocentric constructivisms concerning the concepts of self and subjectivity. The essay makes a close reading of the text to show how the onto-semiotic mattering within literary language pushes one to reconsider the boundaries separating life and death, subject and object, self and other. Showing the intra-action between such two poles of the binary, the essay makes a detailed textual examination of the phantasmagoric concerns that refuse to be fitted into any of the established narratives of the living or the dead. By generating new materialist concerns from *within* Bowen's style and use of literary language, it challenges our anthropocentric normative imaginations of what is to be taken as living, and thus also forces for a reconsideration of our imaginations of the nonhuman.

Kusumita Datta's "Actants in the 'Object Donor List': New Materialities of Martyr Ephemera Archives in the Liberation War Museum of Bangladesh", on the other hand, turns towards exploring the vibrant materiality of objects and the vitalist role they play in the signification of life and death. Her paper examines the concerns of object-agency and object-oriented ontology by focusing on the role of "object donor list" and ephemera in shaping the narratives of martyrdom in the context of Bangladesh Liberation War. The paper shows how narratives of life and death and the identification and meaning-making process of the martyr are onto-epistemologically shaped through the donated objects. By engaging with the history of martyrdom of the Bangladesh Liberation War through various donated objects, the essay not only

reorients the history of the Liberation War from newer posthumanist perspectives but also attempts a vibrant materialism of objects. The essay, thus, notes how the bringing together of new materialism and ephemera can offer newer perspectives of investigation within not only the scholarship of new materialism or ephemera but also re-approach existing historical concerns from newer light.

“Materiality, Agency, and the “Revised Sublime” in Northeast Indian Anglophone Poetry” by Amrita Bhattacharyya attempts to bring together the concept of the “revised sublime” and new materialist concerns of planetary ethics and nonhuman agency in the corpus of ecocritical Anglophone poems from India’s Northeastern states. While showing how the geography of the northeast involves an active human-nonhuman network reflecting in the poetry of the region, the essay also deconstructs the concept of waste and its active relations within bio-geo-political concerns. It makes two crucial intra-acting interventions in challenging the biopolitical constructivisms of the Anthropocene: rethinking waste and its relations with bio-geo-politics and asserting the role of the environment and nonhuman matters in shaping the lives of humans within a shared multiverse.

Sanmit Chatterjee’s essay, “New Materialism and the Question of Anthropos” makes a detailed conceptual investigation of some of the major theoretical concerns within new materialism. It works its argument through a two-part structure: in the first part, an examination of the conceptual contradictions and ambiguities concerning the radical claims of nonhumanist engagements are explored, while the second part shows despite certain internal contradictions new materialism holds a possibility of generating newer routes of (re-)connecting with the question of the nonhuman. In other words, the essay attempts to show how new materialism works its conceptual arguments through negotiations between a latent “ultrahumanism” and a “radical

nonhumanism.” As such, their revivalist take (return to matter) though does not remain free from contradictions, such a return to matter also acquires an ethico-political necessity of regenerating newer forms of materialism beyond the anthropocentric models of inquiry.

The issue therefore not only re-turns to new materialism and the question of the nonhuman but does so from non-western contexts and conceptual questions. As Barad insists on the necessity of thinking re-turning as an onto-epistemological necessity to keep alive the possibilities of the multiple and the different open, holding to the same spirit the essays in this issue too re-turn towards a fresh engagement with new materialism and the question of the nonhuman: to quote Barad one last time, “turning the soil over and over— ingesting and excreting it, tunnelling through it, burrowing, all means of aerating the soil, allowing oxygen in, opening it up and breathing new life into it.” (2018, 4)

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Subro Saha
PhD Fellow, Institute for Cultural Inquiry
Utrecht University, Netherlands
s.saha@uu.nl
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