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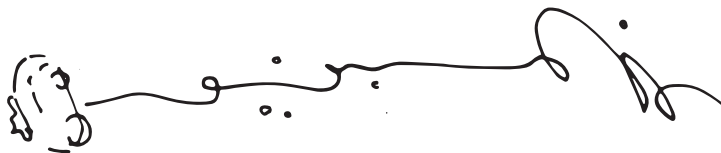
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A Lecture on Curtains and Other Things







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Jewellery - Linking Bodies

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curtain

ring

up

One *thing* leads to another, they say. As I sit alone, attempting to write, I am constantly distracted by the physical world of *things*. I see a bright green slipper made from plush. I imagine feeling its soft texture on my hands and on my forehead. The solitary slipper is without its counterpart and I feel the need to unite the pair again. As it sits there, daringly, it prompts me to recall upon our unique bond.

One wielded in memories. The slipper and me. The human, the non-human and everything in between. It is a complicated and layered relationship that I wish to dive into and investigate from as many angles as possible.

Part of the aim of the following investigation is to unveil the relations of power rooted in our everyday assumptions surrounding the way *objects* and subjects relate to one another. The way the terms 'object' and 'subject' are viewed and put into practice play a crucial role in how an entity is perceived and treated. These (collective) perceptions have political and economical repercussions, as for instance in how humans are *objectified* and how *objects*, in turn, are mastered by humans. An example of mastery of *objects* is the way vegetables are genetically modified to a tee in order to meet human preferences, to therefore increase production.

Exploring these intricate interconnections might allow me to come closer to the slipper, the human, or, in the best-case scenario, both. In the following text I hope to present a lively account of my research, full of contingent leaps, in order to demonstrate the endless possibilities of re-discovering relationships that are, on one hand, tangible and on the other, elusive.

In this conquest I explore the intellectual legacy of some well-known thinkers. Alongside this I draw on some quotes derived from three interviews I conducted. I selected the interviewees<sup>1</sup> based on their contrasting views and experiences in relation to the world of *objects* and *things*.

1 Annemarie de Wildt, a curator at the Amsterdam museum; Fuji Rademaker, a musician/dj/illustrator a part of the squatter community based in Amsterdam; Gersande Schellinx, an artist, collector, and student in TXT (Textiel) dept. at the Gerrit Rietveld Academie.



For many, the shower is a place for reflection. My shower is no different. The hot humid air and soothing sound of droplets have a calming effect on me. Lately, though, the look of my shower curtain has been bugging me. It has a semi-geometrical print that is made up of bold colours. Every time I shower, I analyse again and again why I cannot seem to get myself to like them. At this point I am starting to think as if it might even have implications on my well-being. With my sanity potentially being at stake, I seek to take a better look at the *mundane* curtain.

A curtain fulfils multiple functions. Next to adornment, it separates and unites: people, rooms, *things*, interiors, exteriors and so on. Time and light play a pivotal role in deciding whether to open the curtain or close it; as does privacy. Another factor of significance – relating to privacy – is the cultural aspect of it. This means that the use of the curtain is prone to be subject to social norms and preferences depending on its location. The Dutch are, for instance, known for keeping their curtains open because ‘they have nothing to hide’. Dutch curtains are often modest and perhaps even a bit dull in colour and design, also depending on what is currently in vogue. I took it upon myself to enquire which colours are the ‘hot trend’ in Amsterdam right now. As it turns out – according to the vendors at the Albert Cuypstraat market – taupe and ochre are all the rage.

What really made me rethink the idea of the curtain and sparked a newfound love for it was an essay called *Thing Theory* by Bill Brown. Brown uses an example taken from *The Biographers Tale* by A.S. Byatt to explain different ways in which we engage with *objects* as opposed to the ways we engage with *things*.<sup>2</sup> Brown explains how, normally, there is a tendency to simply look through a window, whereas once the window is filthy, we suddenly notice it as a window. In this particular case the window shifts from *object* to *thing*. Another example could be a plate that we mindlessly use until it chips, drawing more attention to the plate itself and looking past its function.

2 Here ‘we’ is the subject.



“As they circulate through our lives, we look through objects (to see what they disclose about history, society, nature, or culture – above all, what they disclose about us), but we only catch a glimpse of things. We look through objects because there are codes by which our interpretive attention makes them meaningful, because there is a discourse of objectivity that allows us to use them as facts. A thing, in contrast, can hardly function as a window.”<sup>3</sup>

Brown goes on to say that the entity reveals itself as a *thing* – in contrast to the *object* it used to be at the moment it stops working for the subject. This changes the relationship between the entity and the subject, hence the term *thing* is a signifier of this converted relationship.

I am stating the obvious here when I note that a curtain is no window, but there is something beautifully ambiguous about the curtain. It has been created to both obscure and reveal, yet we do not really pay much attention to the curtain itself ... When I realised this I felt an odd sense of guilt.

Lots of curtains are selected with great care based on their visual allure, but soon after they just seem to hang about.<sup>4</sup> An interesting quality of a curtain is that it seems to be both passive and active. It hangs there passively but, regardless of its position, remains functional. The curtain still functions as a curtain when open, halfway open or closed. Unlike a power drill that you need to activate for it to function.

3 Bill Brown, “Thing Theory,” *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 28, No. 1, *Things* (Autumn, 2001): 4.

4 With the exception of that ever-taunting shower curtain that is visually forcing itself upon me daily.



the

curtain

effect

My notorious shower curtain does not only force itself upon me visually. It also has the audacity to literally cling to me for dear life, as if it is begging me for a second chance. This readiness to stick to my body might be the most antagonising characteristic of a shower curtain at large. Anyone who has ever interacted with one (shower curtain, that is) must know what I am talking about. As you shower, the curtain keeps waving inwards towards the water. This leaves about half of the stall inaccessible to those who do not particularly enjoy the sensation of a chilly wet sheet sticking to their body.

Luckily, I have proof that there are others who share this frustration. There have even been attempts to find the scientific explanation behind this phenomenon. Some state the Bernoulli effect, others point to the buoyancy effects or even their combination as being the cause.<sup>5</sup>

David Schmidt, assistant professor at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, decoded the effect using software and by adding in so-called 'advanced spray models'. This resulted in creating a simulation of 30 seconds of shower time. It became apparent that the spray creates a vortex.

"The center of this vortex, much like the center of a cyclone, is a low-pressure region. This low pressure region is what pulls the shower curtain in."<sup>6</sup>

To paint a picture, Schmidt compares it to a continuous sideways 'dust devil'. It must be mentioned that the thickness of the shower curtain is of importance, since this principle only applies to the thinner and lighter kinds of curtains. But, to be fair, I reckon most shower curtains do fall into the 'flimsy' category.

5 Schmidt explains that the Bernoulli effect is the observation that static pressure drops when a fluid increases in speed. Causing the air along the accelerated fluid to drop in pressure, it creates a vertical lower pressure inside the stall. The higher pressure on the outside of the curtain pushes it inwards. Yet, Schmidt rejects this theory as long as it does not take account of the existence of the droplets.

According to Schmidt the buoyancy effects cause the heat in the shower generates an increase in heat of the air, lowering the density in the stall. On the same height, the pressure on the outside of the curtain is higher, creating the inward movement, towards the lower pressure air inside. He also states that this is unlikely since the same effect applies when taking a cold shower.

6 Author unknown, "Why Does the Shower Curtain Move Toward The Water," Scientific American online. July 11, 2001, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/why-does-the-shower-curtain/>

near not far °  
c

This shower curtain sticking to me, emphasising its existence, is a very literal way of the entity<sup>7</sup> triggering a re-evaluation of our relationship in terms of distance. The shower is an intimate place to begin with. The vulnerability that comes with being nude adds to the experience of clinginess as especially rude. Physically, the curtain is about as close to me as ever, but what is the distance between me and the curtain in terms of emotions or intimacy? Heidegger used the concept of metaphysical nearness and remoteness in order to approach the difference between a *thing* and an *object*.

“For Martin Heidegger, perhaps the best known philosopher to have tackled the thing (Ding), it differs from the object in that it is autonomous. Self-supporting. Taking the jug as an example, Heidegger describes the thing as assertive of its independence, its presence as well as nearness. Objects on the other hand, are everywhere in equal measure, neither near nor far.”<sup>8</sup>

Would Heidegger consider my curtain an *object*? Since I have treated that curtain as the subject of this research, I have given it a sort of independence. Through my use of language I have implied the curtain has will or agency just like an autonomous entity would. I can hold it accountable for its actions. In that sense you might say it fits in the category of *things*.

However, Heidegger also states that a *thing* resists appropriation and representation. By making the shower curtain the subject of this text, I may very well have been appropriating and representing the original physical curtain. I represent all shower curtains in the world when I ask you to remember the feeling of the ‘universal soggy sheet’. The fact that I am able to do so proves that it is indeed not a *thing* but rather an *object*.

The shower curtain fits Heidegger’s description of an *object* as it is everywhere in equal measure, neither near nor far, out of reach, yet a commodity – much like a coca-cola can. After careful deliberation, I therefore land on the shower curtain to be an *object*.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> I think Brown would say it is a *thing* here since it was momentarily dysfunctional.

<sup>8</sup> Anthony Hudek, Introduction to Documents of Contemporary Art: The Object, ed. by Anthony Hudek (London; Cambridge, Massachusetts: Whitechapel Gallery and The MIT Press, 2014): 14.

<sup>9</sup> Nonetheless, as I touch upon my shower curtain here, in thought and writing, I cannot help but generate an additional curtain standing outside of the original material curtain. This additional curtain of words strung together, that represents the shower curtain in itself, is perhaps autonomous and self-supporting. I dare even say, it is a *thing*.

stuck

it to the

man



Considering these definitions, it is easy to get drawn into an endless loop. Possibilities seem endless if our relationship is at the core of how we name an entity. Gersande Schellinx – a collector of things, and a fellow student graduating in the TXT (Textiel) department – found herself in a similar position when studying vases. She describes how she first looked into definitions of the vase and then disarticulated them, and in doing so allowed them to basically be anything. She demonstrates how far into abstraction a concept can be stretched.

“For example, at some point I ended up, when I went too far in my opinion, in what I was trying to do. I would give you *this* (hands me a flower) and now you have become a vase because you are holding a flower.”<sup>10</sup>

I asked her whether she had *objectified* or *thingified* me as I was holding the flower. She responds that I had been *objectified*, since I was a vase, but not *her* vase.

Beneath the activating and naming of entities lies an apparent power relation. Who/what is the authority here? What are the motives of the dominant party?



10 Gersande Schellinx, interview by author, Amsterdam, September 30, 2020.

# esteemed everyday object



Annemarie de Wildt, curator at the Amsterdam Museum, acknowledges a relation of power being at play when naming and activating – in her case selecting or curating – *objects*.

“It is true that the assigned value often is allocated based on authority, like an art historian who says: ‘This is important, and this is of lesser importance.’”<sup>11</sup>

Throughout her practice as a curator, Annemarie argues she has been expanding the notion of what particular *objects* are regarded as having a (historical) value. She tells me that she was one of the first to pick up everyday *objects* off the streets or markets, to then be installed in exhibitions. At the time this was quite extraordinary, even frowned upon by her predecessors. From her position as a curator, she has had the possibility to emphasise the narrational values buried within the (at that time) contested *objects*.

11 Annemarie de Wildt, interview by author, Amsterdam, November 9, 2020.





# detach it from the man



I recall the sense of guilt provoked by the idea of me neglecting my shower curtain by not consciously noticing it. Am I solely responsible for my lack of attention to the material world around me? Did an authority, other than my own, render this shower curtain negligible beyond its obvious use? Does anyone benefit from this detachment?

Dieter Roelstraete stipulates that *things* have been reduced to *objects* in order to be mastered by humans. In interpreting Roelstraete's theory, I determined that in order for us to freely make use of *things*, a distance from the entity has to be created. Empathy almost has to be abolished in order to fully transform a *thing* into a commodity, tool, or even a servant. Tearing down the self supporting aura that surrounds the mystery of what we call a *thing*. However, it is possible to imagine it the other way around; the reduction of *thing* to *object* taking place as soon as it is being used, sold, or appropriated.

In fact, the monstrous shower curtain is probably obstructing joyous showers all over the world. Cheap, mass-produced and made of crude oil, it is the ultimate modern day commodity. For all I know Roelstraete's bathroom could be sporting the exact same curtain as mine.

If I were to be too intimately connected to the non-human entities in my life, it would make perfect sense to not bother buying new ones. The time spent with them would make up a much bigger part of my life. Yet, in reality, I have no time. I need to earn money to buy another shower curtain. Mine was out of style as soon as it was made.<sup>12</sup>

12 Maybe if we stopped and bonded with our inanimate *objects* we would have more time to handle them with care, thus strengthening the existing bond. To start with, we could have more time to consider that we don't need more money to constantly renew everything because of the imposed and artificial need for newness.

# the antidote



9

How can I win in this ruthless (admittedly one-sided) fight with the curtain and what it stands for? Fittingly, Roelstraete proposes art as an antidote to the reduction of *things* to *objects*.

"A world more total and whole, and richer in depth – 'thickness,' as phenomenology lingua franca would have it – and meaning, riddled with things we don't understand. In this, the work of art regains its status as a material fact of critique – it is a critique of reduction."<sup>13</sup>



13 Dieter Roelstraete, "Art as Object Attachments: Thoughts on Thingness//2008" in Documents of Contemporary Art: The Object, ed. Anthony Hudek, (London: Cambridge, Massachusetts: Whitechapel Gallery and The MIT Press, 2014): 67.

# beyond the curtain

The definitions assigned to entities bring about huge ramifications politically, economically and in many other realms. This is why being aware and potentially changing these underlying notions is so crucial.

In *Animacies*, Mel Y. Chen writes about animacy. It is a term most commonly understood as relating to liveliness or life.<sup>14</sup> The understanding of different entities as being more or less animate certainly relates to whether they are considered an *object/subject/thing*. For one, the usage of language presents the possibility to underscore, change and reinforce the entity's given position in the world. Shedding light on deeply wired preconceptions, Chen analyses how perceived animacy plays a role within linguistics, media and politics.

Chen brings forth the intriguing example of how the element lead was racialized during the lead scare in America in 2007. Around America lead was found in the paint on toys fabricated in China. In the absence of actual people lead became the symbol for the Chinese 'threat', therefore racializing lead.

"Lead is animated to become simultaneously an instrument of heightened domestic panic, drawing from and recycling language of 'terror', and a rhetorical weapon in the rehearsal of the economic sovereignty of the United States."<sup>15</sup>

This example is especially interesting because it seems like what would initially be identified as an *object*, takes on the role of the racialized subject. Whereas a more obvious case of an allocated amount of animacy being harmful would be the *objectification* of a subject.

14 This description is a bit skimpy since animacy is a word that is virtually impossible to pin down, as it bears many definitions, Chen elaborates on this in the aforementioned book.

15 Mel Y. Chen, "Lead's Racial Matters", in *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect*, *Perverse Modernities*, ed. Judith Halberstam and Lisa Lowe (London; Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2012): 173.

the

things

is

“Could you hand me the *thing*?”

He was eyeing the jar stuffed with kitchen utensils, insinuating it was the ladle. I was supposed to immediately understand that. My roommate does this often. After living with each other for some months, it's become easier. Now I tend to know what he means when he uses that interchangeable word, *thing*. Not only is it used in the context of interchanging the word for an *object*, he also uses *thingy* frequently, referring to a person. I guess this common behaviour arises whenever some word slips our mind, or even when we are apprehensive to actually point out what the *thing* is.

“Did you talk to him about that *thing*?”

It is a code word as well, inaccessible to others who were not involved in previous discussions regarding the *thing*. Within this framework the word *thing* acts as a metaphor, replacing another term or concept. A magical power of the term *thing* is that it can be used to describe something that is hard to put into words, thus calling for mutual understanding above and beyond language. In this case, *thing* refers to a metaphysical phenomenon. That *thing* in art and music, that *thing* we all intrinsically know. According to Lacan, “What one finds in das Ding is the true secret.”<sup>16</sup> Anthony Hudek explains that Lacan's Ding “stands outside of language and consciousness.”<sup>17</sup>

Perhaps, instead of analysing the recurring theme of defining a difference between *thing* and *object*, we can take a look at the everyday use of these words. In the conducted interviews, Fuji Rademaker, a musician part of the squatter-community in Amsterdam and the aforementioned collector/artist Gersande Schellinx provided the following examples.

Rademaker:

“You could, if we were not talking about an object, say: ‘This is my thing.’ So that indicates a relationship. And I wouldn't say about rap-music: ‘That's really my object.’ Because in that case it does concern something that has a shape, a literal shape.”<sup>18</sup>

Schellinx:

“You never say: ‘This is my object,’ or ‘This is my thing,’ because it's an object with property. You already stamped your ownership on it so it became your thing, it's not your object, it's your thing.”<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Jacques Lacan, “Das Ding” in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960* (Seminar of Jacques Lacan), ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (London, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1992): 46.

<sup>17</sup> Anthony Hudek, introduction to *Documents of Contemporary Art: The Object*, ed. Anthony Hudek (London; Cambridge, Massachusetts: Whitechapel Gallery and The MIT Press, 2014): 14.

<sup>18</sup> Fuji Rademaker, interview by author, Amsterdam, October 8, 2020.

<sup>19</sup> Gersande Schellinx, interview by author, Amsterdam, September 30, 2020.



# the esteemed object

9

One *thing* that kept phasing me is that art is often referred to as an *object*. While, in fact, based on views of the thinkers I mentioned, it would intuitively be named a *thing*.<sup>20</sup> Fortunately, Schellinx partially solved this inconsistency for me, explaining that in French the word *objet* is used to refer to a topic/theme:

“So in that sense an artwork can be an object but then the object is more what the artwork revolves around. It’s not so much about material then. So the artwork physically is a thing because it goes beyond practicality most of the time, if you go into a more traditional sense. But the object of the artwork is what it revolves around, so it actually has metaphysical physicality.”<sup>21</sup>

This, however, is not the case in my mother tongue, Dutch. Why is it so common to talk about an art *object* in Dutch? I have a hunch that the word *object* in art insinuates a stance of admiration, thus confirming the importance and even the existence of the given artworks.

I spoke to De Wildt about the terminology used in the context of the museum. She explains that the term *object* is commonly used as an *object*-list made for exhibitions. On occasion, the terms ‘replica’ and ‘prop’ also apply. Furthermore, she elaborates on the word *object* as creating a distance and having an exclusionary character:

“Most people do not talk about things as objects. So when you give a museum tour and you keep referring to objects, you generate a vast distance. So in a tour, I prefer to refer to entities as things, or I name them. I call them; utensils, gifts, pieces of clothing, means of action, or I name them according to their function or the way they functioned for their previous owner or user, and so on. I would do this, rather than call them objects. Because I realise that it is a museum-term and due to that it is an exclusionary way to talk about things.”<sup>22</sup>

20 When especially thinking with Roelstraete, naming art as the *thing* is to critique the reduction of *things* to *objects*.

21 Gersande Schellinx, interview by author, Amsterdam, September 30, 2020.

22 Annemarie de Wildt, interview by author, Amsterdam, November 9, 2020.

matter

of

fact



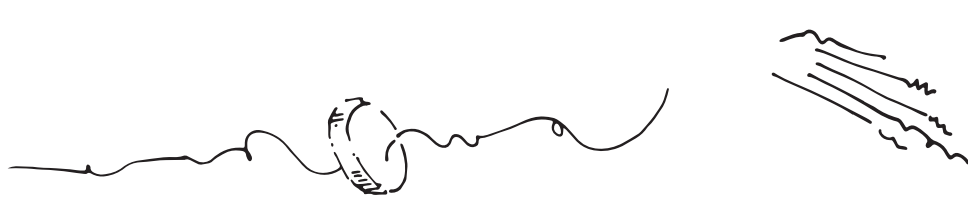
I can conceive the curtain to be active whilst simultaneously passive, with its only prerequisite being its ability to hang around. Whichever way the sheet is hanging, it is still functioning as a curtain. Its assumed passivity renders it an *object*, seemingly submissive to whoever/whatever has the ability to set it in motion. Yet, untouched, it is still actively fulfilling its curtain duties. In addition to fulfilling an assigned purpose, could the curtain be active in other ways?

I always got really bad grades in chemistry class. As soon as I was introduced to the idea of moving molecules and atoms, I lost my grasp. In thinking about everything in motion, I was propelled into the deepest daydream state that I've ever known. It is a problem concerning scale that my brain simply cannot work out. I kept trying to imagine all the tables around me shaking their legs. There was something so innocent and to the point about *things* just standing. Though, it's a path of no return. If I allow myself to return back to that state, everything is still wonky and wobbly.

Bear with me here, while we tune our focus to an even smaller scale ...

*New Materialism* builds upon the idea that our thoughts about matter are, in fact, outdated. Despite new scientific findings that challenge anterior findings,<sup>23</sup> our understanding of matter is still built upon the concept of the quantifiable environment. One wherein a mechanical force is responsible for moving an inert mass, e.g. opening the shower curtain by using muscular force. A linear and causal way of thinking is still at the core of how we relate to the exterior world. Nevertheless quantum physics now suggests that there are other unpredictable processes at work which are difficult to be measured in conventional methods.

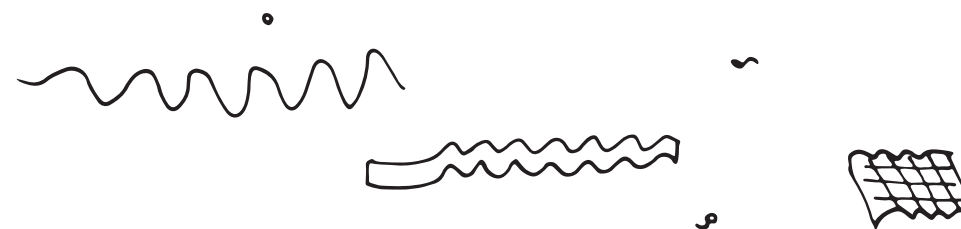
"For materiality is always something more than 'mere' matter: an excess, force, vitality, relationality, or difference that renders matter active, self-reactive, productive, unpredictable."<sup>24</sup>



23 New findings on a subatomic level.

24 Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, *Introduction to New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*, ed. Diana Coole and Samantha Frost (London; Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2010): 9.

On a subatomic scale, the void is ever present and matter 'jumps'. The electrons are not physical but are abstract mathematical waves; they only become particles once measured. With these waves, only the probability of position and momentum of the electrons can be predicted, and even these predictions are uncertain. Short wavelengths jump to longer wavelengths and emit light. Different wavelengths can mix up, becoming inextricably linked, even if they are very far apart. These wavelengths can go through walls, plush slippers and even shower curtains.



It all appears to be contradictory, and ... perplexing.

If you experience trouble in attempting to understand quantum physics, then you are no different to me. To my relief, Richard Feynman, a theoretical physicist, started off a lecture on quantum mechanics by saying that you should not try to understand it.<sup>25</sup>

"Don't keep saying to yourself, if you can possibly avoid it, 'Well, how could it be like that?' Cause you will get down a drain. You will get down a blind alley, from which nobody has yet escaped. Nobody knows how it can be like that."<sup>26</sup>

He conveys it is rather a matter of admitting that nature behaves in a certain way. If you allow yourself to do that, then "you will find her a delightful, entrenching thing."<sup>27</sup> Take on the role of the spectator.

©

25 Messenger Lecture at Cornell University, 1964.

26 Mohammed Alqedra, "Feynman - Nobody understands Quantum Mechanics," September 26, 2013, video, 1:18, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w3ZRLlWgHI&feature=youtu.be&ab\\_channel=MohammedAlqedra](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w3ZRLlWgHI&feature=youtu.be&ab_channel=MohammedAlqedra).

27 Ibid.

# (insane) in the membrane

Now imagine the curtain as a dynamic membrane instead of an inert separator. Stop separating your understanding of *object* and subject, and rather think of them as being an inherent part of a whole. What would this entail in ways of restructuring our interactions with the exterior world? If the inert is not inert, would that not invoke some serious structural rethinking? According to this theory it is time to radically reassess the current state of the global economy, bio-politics and socio-politics.

Jane Bennett, a key thinker in the field of *New Materialism* explains how this new sensitivity to matter does not solve problems of oppression and exploitation but might add to a sense of kinship amongst bodies.<sup>28</sup>

“And in a knotted world of vibrant matter, to harm one section of the web may very well be to harm oneself. Such an enlightened or expanded notion of self-interest is good for humans.”<sup>29</sup>

As noble and unifying this theory is intended to be, I cannot help but wonder to what extent it is an idealist and romantic approach that is really hard to implement into practice. One problem lies in the fact that the notion of vibrant matter remains abstract and humans would actively need to remind themselves of this so-called ‘kinship amongst bodies’. In everyday life, to ‘function’, we must use these mechanical forces in order to move entities. Whether the entities subject to these forces are inert or not, they still appear to function in the same old way as human senses do.

Another hiccup in accepting this theory – for me – is that we jump from scale to scale in a linear way. If we imagine a piece of soap on the smallest scale being vibrant – a vibrancy characterised by contingent motion and non-linear processes – then this could jump to a much bigger scale and not (ironically) be very linear in assuming that similar processes are at work on different scales. If the soap could fall upwards on the smallest scale this does not mean it would on a bigger scale. That would be mind boggling. This might not be what new materialists are arguing but it is my way of illustrating why this sense of kinship is partially lost in scale to me. If the soap were to fly upwards, my empathy levels would go through the roof alongside it.

28 Bodies in the broadest sense.

29 Jane Bennett, “Vibrant Matter//2010” in *Documents of Contemporary Art: The Object*, ed. Anthony Hudek, (London; Cambridge, Massachusetts: Whitechapel Gallery and The MIT Press, 2014): 41.

# the ouroboros

Of course, new materialist theories do not stand undisputed. Paul Rekret writes a compelling critique on new materialism social theory.

In short, he brings forth how new materialism disavows discussion on the condition of thought on the grounds of this mode of thinking being too anthropocentric. New materialism calls for a post-humanist, near spiritual harmonisation of the world. The way it disregards contemplation of these fundamental realities (on the basis of these being too human-centric), and appeals to an ‘omni-centric’ ethical ‘attunement’ to the world, creates a binary division which in itself does not seem too attuned.<sup>30</sup>

As I fumble about with this new materialist stance I do realise these perspectives are enriching, as they for one are appealing to the imagination.<sup>31</sup>

*Rademaker:*

“Let’s say the idea that everything is alive is an annoying thought, that you’d have to take all objects into account. But, yes, I think if you take better care of stuff and use stuff more often as well, then maybe it will be happier like a plant or remain more beautiful. I think something you don’t use will break down in the end as well. I am playing with the thought, it’s not something I accept in its entirety. But it is fun to play around with the thought, mess about with it.”<sup>32</sup>

30 Paul Rekret, “A critique of new materialism: ethics and ontology,” *Subjectivity*, 9 (3), (London: Macmillan publishers Ltd., 2016): 225-245.

31 One must imagine the rock smiling.

32 Fuji Rademaker, interview by author, Amsterdam, October 8, 2020.

the

fog

curtain



Hot damp air rises; drops run down the tiles and the plastic curtain. They run, they stop, and run again. Shampoo, soap, you know the drill. Soapy water runs down the drain. All the makings of a self-sufficient cleaning machine. Cleaning itself on a daily basis. How very convenient.

Boy, was I wrong...

In between the tiles was a hue of orange, black, and brown. Fungus sneakily crept up on me, slowly but steadily increasing from one shower to the next. Slippery when wet.<sup>33</sup>

Fact dictates that showers do need cleaning. This is common knowledge but it nonetheless seems illogical to me, simply because the accumulation of fungus is not visible. It is the difficulty of imagining something on another scale and/or timeline that obstructs me from accepting it as a reality. If you don't see it, it doesn't exist.

I put forth this foggy concept of some ungraspable process in an attempt to illustrate a point Timothy Morton makes when he talks about the 'hyperobject'.<sup>34</sup> He coined this term to describe *objects* that are gigantic in size, unimaginably big while still being finite, a prime example being global warming. They are *objects* that are spread out in time and space and are in constant movement and thus hard to visualise.

"An idea as large and amorphous as global warming blurs the distinction between object and process: to look at the moving object we have to pause it, which renders it inert, allowing us to contemplate it passively."<sup>35</sup>



Why not call it a process then, instead of an object?

Is a thought that popped up. But likely, the *objective* here is to demonstrate that we are in the end talking about processes that deal with matter and have real material consequences.

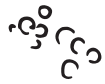
As a child I was not allowed to take long showers; 5 minutes tops. Due to which showering never really became a pleasurable experience for me. Reflecting on a vague notion of global warming, washing up became somewhat of a spartan duty. Limiting your shower time does however allow you to see your own reflection in the mirror; the absence of mist ensuring a clear reflection.

33 The shower literally is a slippery slope, and should be met with reverence. On the face of it the pointy kitchen poses the biggest threat but in reality most domestic accidents happen in the bathroom.

34 Timothy Morton, "A Quake in Being" in *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology After the End of the World*, ed. Cary Wolfe, (London, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013): 1.

35 Elisa Gabbert, "Big and Slow: How can we represent the threats that are too vast to see? What if civilization itself is one of them?," *Real Life Magazine* online. June 25, 2018, <https://reallifemag.com/big-and-slow/>

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curtains

The other plush slipper, the one I was missing, had found its way to the hollows under my bed. It pleases me to say that the two plush slippers have now been united. I wear them as I run around the house. But, more importantly, did I manage to come closer to bringing subject and *object/thing* together?

For the sake of this investigation, the shower curtain separated notions of subject and *object/thing*.

I asked Rademaker if one should even separate the terms, to which he replied:

“Yes, but more within the realms of philosophy and maths. I think that in daily life it’s more of a melting pot. Not with those. Mostly due to those influences, and on the one side marketing but also the poetic potency of stuff. It keeps intertwining all the time. But also within yourself the conscious and subconscious keep on intermingling ... All kinds of things are happening at once, all the time. I don’t think you can separate them in daily life. But, of course when you have to talk about it there is a separation, absolutely.”<sup>36</sup>

Something is lost in separating.

I tried to resolve this by transforming the shower curtain into a ‘porous membrane’ that allows for cross ‘contamination’. But, ironically, the case of the permeable curtain proved to be less than watertight. Might it all be a problem of being incapable to shift from scale to scale? From theory to theory? Are we held back by linguistics?

My plush slippers absorb the water from a puddle as I step into the bathroom. Without a doubt, one of the worst feelings. The shower curtain is still hanging there. Evidently, it did not manage to hold back all the shower water.

36 Fuji Rademaker, interview by author, Amsterdam, October 8, 2020.





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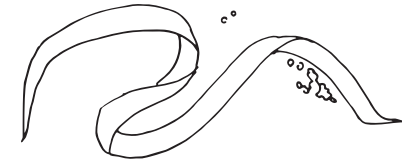
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