History and Materiality

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Abstract

Studies of the newly emerging field of materiality examine the various ways in which physical objects that populate the environments we inhabit affect us socially, psychologically, and culturally. Scholars across the humanities and social sciences are actively engaged in such studies of what they term *the new materialism*. It examines how "things" shape tour worlds in decisive ways. This essay reviews the development of this exciting new area of investigation and outlines promising directions for study going forward.

Things surround us everyday. We use them without thinking about it, once we have passed the stage of childhood learning where each thing appears to us as new and challenging. Things can be fleeting, but they can also outlive any person, and pass from hand to hand, from generation to generation. Things can be of pragmatic use, tools to an end, but the same things can overflow with other values: memory, tradition, and identity all depend on often silent things.

Social theory has had a sometimes difficult time with things, often approaching them and then substituting thing-concepts for thing-experiences. How can we understand the way a pitcher, a table, a chair, work? A classic approach in social theory has been to begin by separating things and the people who make, use, and break them: things become the objects of people's intentions, subordinated to what the human subject intends or thinks or wants. In the process, people look through things, not attending to their material nature, overlooking the degree to which they resist or exceed human intentions.

Some materialist analyses have troubled the separation of objects and subjects that results in things disappearing from view. In anthropology, Marcel Mauss advanced his concept of the gift, suggesting that as things circulated between people they created and recreated social relations, distributing the

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capacity to act across a network of humans and nonhuman things. In philosophy, Martin Heidegger strove to see a ceramic pitcher as a thing independent of its maker, finding its identity in the space it enclosed, ready to be filled and emptied, rather than in the walls self-consciously shaped by the potter. From this emerged an idea of "affordances": that things have unintended properties resulting from their histories, capacities that lie in wait for human subjects to perceive and use.

In the last decades of the twentieth century, the latent potential of things to do more than their makers intended became central to a new concern with materiality going beyond established approaches such as Marxian historical materialism. Across anthropology and art history, the claim was made that agency, the power to act, was shared by human subjects and nonhuman objects. Things could facilitate human intentions, but they could also impede them. Things made for one purpose could act in ways unimagined by their makers, often at scales of time and space much greater than the experience and imagination of the people who made them. Classrooms created for professors who lectured to nineteenth-century students enforce hierarchy and block collaboration in twenty-first century universities where research has shown discussion works better than lecturing to promote learning. Federal highways created to facilitate defense in times of war changed the character of North American cities by lowering the commute time between city center businesses and former countryside converted to residential suburbs.

If objects had the capacity to act independently of the intentions of their makers and users, some social theorists argued, then the traditional hierarchy of subjects over objects needed to be replaced by a new "symmetry" in which humans and nonhumans were on a level footing as sources of sociality, historicity, and change. What counted could no longer be simply subjects and objects, people and things. Instead of these preconceived categories, materiality itself became the focus of analysis.

Emerging in social analysis in the 1990s, the concept of materiality found purchase at a time when scholars of new digital media were looking for ways to talk about how virtual worlds and digital code were changing people's experiences of their selves, space, time, and the tangibility or intangibility of phenomena. What time is it when online interaction allows all time zones to be in simultaneous contact? What difference does it make to be in one place while participating in an event in another location? Is the logon and profile we access part of our identity, or an alternative identity that we play with? As all digital culture depends on increasingly complex things—chips, input and output devices, networks of fiber, wire, or wireless signals emitted by transmitters—how can we maintain the claim that there is a boundary between virtuality and materiality?

The word "materiality" was pressed into service in understanding the continuity of identity of a subject, and of a social network, through embodiment and memory, both social and personal. Social theorists pressed the boundaries of what materiality might register, separating it firmly from any conflation with mere physicality by considering sound, smell, and touch as materialities. How does a church bell shape the bodies of those called to worship? How does the taste of chocolate incite the global spread of plantations that change local ecology and work lives around the globe? Materiality, once lurking as background, emerged as actively abetting, impeding, and transforming the lives of humans, and exceeding their intentions, shaping the places and spaces where humans and nonhuman animals and things were assembled.

Today, scholars across the humanities and social sciences are actively engaged in what has come to be called *new materialism*. New materialism is distinguished by its rejection of any assumed duality that separates humans (as subjects) from other kinds of beings (as objects). New materialism recognizes that things actively shape the world in ways that far exceed any intentions humans may have had for them. It sees materialities as entangled rather than separate. It explores how matter runs through humans and nonhumans alike, calling attention to the minerality of the human body and the way emotional states are sparked by the chemical compounds we ingest (Bennett, 2010).

While new materialism is opening exciting vistas, it has remained tethered in the present, even while questioning the linearity of time. Materiality has always been a key dimension in the practice of archaeology, an interdiscipline that is a basis for knowledge creation in anthropology, Classics, Medieval Studies, and Near Eastern Studies—to name just the most obvious locations where practitioners of material histories are to be found. Writing from the disciplinary standpoint of archaeology, we can argue that new materialism needs to attend more to temporalities and their production, to historicity and memory. Archaeology is a good place from which to consider the emergent domain of new materialism. It straddles the academic divisions that new materialist theorist Karen Barad notes were charged with a "division of labor" in which "the natural sciences are assigned matters of fact and the humanities matters of concern," which she argues "elides the resonances and dissonances that … make entanglements visible" (in Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012, p. 50). Most archaeologists already explore what Donna Haraway (1997, p. 273), whose work has been taken up by new materialists, calls "heterogeneous history": "the history of interaction, interference, reinforcement, difference." Too often, archaeologists have been forced into addressing questions of origins like those Haraway was disclaiming in this passage. Coming to new materialism with an archaeological sensibility can free archaeology from

the imperative of origin stories, while providing new materialism a way to talk about the coming into being and dissolution of materialities.

MATERIAL CULTURE AND MATERIALITY

Initial moves toward what has emerged as new materialism were made in the 1990s. Scholars of digital culture questioned the contribution information technology and theory made to supporting the assertion that the body was primarily a product of language (Hayles, 1993). Philosophical arguments for the materiality of meaning, the embodiment of perception, and the "affordances" of the material world questioned traditional divisions between the mental and the material, and between things and human persons (Sanders, 1993). At times under the banner of Actor-Network Theory and at other times disclaiming it, scholars of science and technology described the materiality and sociality as produced through assemblages of humans and nonhumans, displacing the human subject as the only active agent and moving toward a "symmetry" in which things and people were treated theoretically as equally capable of making things happen (Latour, 2005; Law & Hassard, 1999; Law & Mol, 1995).

The concept of materiality replaced an older one, material culture. Originating in anthropology, material culture described objects produced through human artifice as the externalization of shared concepts and commitments that contributed to a sense of identity for particular human populations (Knappett, 2005; Schiffer, 1999). A first move in the direction of renewing the concept of material culture came with discussions of the capacity of objects to promote actions, a topic that has come to be called *object agency* (Gosden, 2005). The use of the word object for artifacts of human crafting was questioned by thing theory, which called attention to the lack of congruence between things as such and objects, always part of subject–object relations: "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" (Brown, 2001, p. 4). Thus, a move to materiality promised greater fluidity in understanding how assemblages of humans and nonhumans emerged, when things were central and active, and how we might see things rather than see extensions of human intentions.

Materiality, however, proved slippery to define (Miller, 2005). Sometimes it was equated with concrete physicality. Materiality in this sense exceeded material culture because it often, if not always, included aspects of the world that were seen as not produced by human action: nonhuman animals, plants, geologies, and more. Yet equating materiality with nature was not possible, either, as it effectively would orphan what the concept of material

culture once privileged: human made things, artifacts, or objects (Schatzki, 2010, pp. 125–127).

By the end of the first decade of the new millennium, the blurring of boundaries separating subjects and objects, people and things, that is the hallmark of materiality studies had become so extensive that it reached far into applied fields such as industrial design (Niedderer, 2007). Consumer research drew explicitly on the concepts of materiality advanced by anthropologist Daniel Miller (Borgerson, 2005). Understandings of materiality as concretized in things and places to which human subjects could choose to attach themselves were central to studies of homelessness emerging from fields as disparate as social psychology and anthropological archaeology (Hodgetts *et al.*, 2010; Zimmerman, Singleton, & Welch, 2010).

A significant aspect of studies of materiality replacing studies of material culture was the renewal of interest within the humanities and social sciences in understanding human beings as physical beings. In line with an emphasis that would be central to the emergence of new materialism, this involved a rejection of mind-body dualism that was understood as part of a European scholarly lineage beginning in the eighteenth century. People were to be understood phenomenologically, as experiencing the world through the body and coming to understandings as a result of being embodied. Embodiment was singled out as the means through which sense was made of music, through phenomenological experience mediated by specific materialities (Downey, 2002). Art historians were asked to consider that, while "a work of art's material properties never suffice to make it art," this does not mean that "its material properties are not necessary to make it the work that it is" (Costello, 2007, p. 83). Historians were challenged to move beyond seeing objects as adjuncts of identity formation and communication, to consider them as pragmatically employed things, active in "material politics" as "integral parts of relationships and subjectivities rather than as instruments of meaning appropriated by a prior subject" (Trentmann, 2009, p. 306). This formulation captures precisely the new understanding of materiality that is called for in what now is called the *new materialism*.

For those invested in new materialism, a touchstone has been the redefinition of matter as something beyond any bounded physical stuff, as active, in Jane Bennett's (2010) felicitous term, as *Vibrant Matter*. This shared perspective is exemplified by a gloss provided by Karen Barad, who in an early contribution to the development of new materialism wrote that matter does not refer to a fixed substance; rather, *matter is substance in its intra-active becoming—not a thing, but a doing, a congealing of agency. Matter is a stabilizing and destabilizing process of iterative intra-activity* (Barad, 2003, p. 822; emphasis original).

Writing in a slightly more concrete mode, Jussi Parikka (2012, p. 95) describes the focus of contemporary new materialism as including studies of "bodies and their capacities such as voice or dance, of movement and relationality, of fleshyness, of ontological monism and alternative epistemologies of generative matter, and active meaning-making of objects themselves non-reducible to signification." Parikka's examples of Barad's "matter" mix entities that analysis of material culture would have kept rigidly separated as concepts and things, and that even modern studies of materiality often tended to treat as different.

"Ontological monism" appears in many works explicitly identified as new materialism. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ontology) defines ontology as "a particular theory about the nature of being or the kinds of things that have existence." Where subject–object dualism has reserved for humans a special kind of being, a "human nature," new materialism calls for a theory of being that includes humans and nonhumans in one (monist) framework. Many, if not all, new materialists employ a "relational ontology" that sees beings defined by the relations they enter into, rather than by some sort of inherent being, nature, or essence. Karen Barad (2003), a leading new materialist figure, provided a strong argument for relational ontology in a discussion of performativity, or doing, as central to being.

This combination of monism and relationality facilitates the most original aspect of new materialism: examining how matter flows through humans and nonhumans alike, opening up social theory beyond things and people, objects and subjects, recognizing that matter relates all beings and that beings differ by what they do, not what they are. Coole and Frost (2010, p. 8) say that new materialism insists "on describing active processes of materialization of which embodied humans are an integral part, rather than the monotonous repetitions of dead matter from which human subjects are apart." Or as Bennett (2010, p. 117) puts it, materialities comprise "all forces and flows" including the human body and nonhumans, differentiated but too protean and diverse to coincide exclusively with philosophical categories of life, matter, mental, environmental. The consistency of the field is more uneven than that: portions congeal into bodies, but not in a way that makes any one type the privileged site of agency. The source of effects is, rather, always an ontologically diverse assemblage of energies and bodies, of simple and complex bodies, of the physical and the physiological.

All these statements share a few core commitments: a refusal of separate ontologies for nature and culture; a concern with emergence or immanence, materialities in action rather than inert; and relations among elements replacing any presumed hierarchy of elements.

MATERIALISM AND NEW MATERIALISM

Against what background is this new materialism new? For some participants in these debates, new materialism is a way to recuperate significant points of Marxian thought while acknowledging that in the late twentieth century, the nineteenth century analysis of capitalism was no longer sufficient. In commenting on the relationship between new materialism, for example, Manuel de Landa (in Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012, p. 41) criticizes Marx's theory of labor for its anthropocentrism, accusing him of leaving out nonhuman sources of value (including machines, materials, and organizational structures). This is not intended to set aside political and economic analysis, but to improve political analysis so that it no longer assumes humans should be the center of analyses, and encompasses forces not previously considered. A great deal of new materialist thought emerged from political science (Bennett, 2010; Coole & Frost, 2010). One of the threads running through this work is a concern for how human social and political relations can be understood in broader ecological frameworks that do not privilege a human perspective, allowing critical analysis of such things as destruction of the planet from human use of energy without accountability to long term effects.

New materialism also is positioned as a response to poststructuralist social and cultural theories that emphasized language: "'neo-materialism' emerges as a method, a conceptual frame and a political stand, which refuses the linguistic paradigm, stressing instead the concrete yet complex materiality of bodies immersed in social relations of power" (Rosi Braidotti in Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012, p. 21).

In their 2012 contribution to this emergent field, Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin built on interviews with feminist scholars Rosi Braidotti and Karen Barad, and with philosophers Manuel DeLanda and Quentin Meillassoux, to create "cartographies" of the terrain opening up as neo- or new materialism. The coauthors themselves are situated in new media studies and gender studies, emblematic of the varied directions from which the impetus for new materialism has come.

This boundary crossing is not just evident in the range of disciplinary positions occupied by scholars of new materialism. In this work, entanglement between entities previously held apart, such as nature and culture, is central. Interrogation of boundaries between humans, other animals, and other things in the world is fundamental to new materialism, along with a persistent concern with the nature of agential possibility, how different beings are capable of producing effects not intended by other beings.

This often culminates in a search to establish new ontologies, especially nondualistic (monist) and relational ontologies. In 2010, for example,

Theodore Schatzki called for a new ontology treating materiality as part of social life, asserting that this ontology erases any assumed boundary between society and materiality. He argued that "social phenomena consist in nexuses of human practices and material arrangements" to be understood relationally, as "constellations of practices, technology, and materiality" (Schatzki, 2010, pp. 123, 124). Practices, in this sense, implies attention to the kind of active doing that Barad (2003) called for in her examination of performativity, and that she calls "intra-activity" to emphasize relationality among rather than distinctions between beings. In keeping with new materialism's rejection of an ontological separation between nature and humankind, Schatzki (2010, p. 129) maintains that "in arguing that materiality is part of society, I am arguing … that nonhuman organisms … are part of society." His new ontology still defined "material arrangements" as made up of predetermined kinds of entities: "humans, artifacts, organisms, and things of nature" (Schatzki, 2010, p. 129), suggesting that there is a range of variation in the commitment to fully dismantling older divisions among kinds of beings, even in new ontologies.

Site ontology is another example of a relational or "flat" ontology emerging in new materialist research. It shares a commitment to not beginning with a dualism dividing humans and other beings, not reserving all the potential for doing to humans, and in seeing the development of beings as a product of their relations, rather than of any inherent substance. Site ontology seeks to give spatial locations a degree of autonomy in making things happen. It argues that "a site exists by virtue of its specific hangings together, its variations and its congealments … while these processes signal a tendency toward convergence on the part of loosely defined bodies, these need neither 'touch' nor abut one another in any extensive sense" (Woodward, Jones, & Marston, 2012, p. 210).

Site ontology raises another question that is treated very originally in new materialism: subjectivity. In dualist ontologies, subjectivity is understood as a product of a unique capacity for reflexivity on the part of (some) humans, an essence absent from other beings (and objects). Relational ontology insists that subjectivity is a product of relations, like other aspects of being. Site ontology does not presume a separation between site and subject, so that a site is not dependent on a human subject entering or otherwise interacting with it to exist. The subject (not necessarily human) is instead "suspended":

> suspension suggests not simply the interruption of the subject as a structuring principle of the understanding, but something more complex, where the subject, if not still present to itself, nevertheless continues to lurk residually *somewhere* … one implication of this is that a theory of subjectivity, according to site ontology, is not a theory of presence per se … subjectivity is not something

> that is either there or not there. (The subject does not exist as such, and certainly does not exist prior to experience.) (Woodward *et al*., 2012, p. 220).

Similarly, for Dolphijn and van der Tuin (2012, p. 162) "the subject according to a monist metaphysics is a consequence rather than the full-fledged starting point of an epistemic experience." New materialisms do not so much do away with subjectivity as insist that subjectivity is produced in the same way as the rest of the world. It is here that temporalities can be seen breaking into new materialism.

TEMPORALITIES: SUBJECTIVITY, MEMORY, HISTORY

Feminist scholars have been an integral part of the emergence of new materialism, in part because they have a long commitment to exploring how to think about relationships between bodily difference and self-consciousness. Dolphijn and van der Tuin (2012, p. 19) credit Rosi Braidotti (2000, p. 159) with coining the term *neo-materialism* to describe "a definition of the subject, the 'I think' as the body of which it is an idea, which we see as the emblem of the new materialism." In that early work, Braidotti described the subject as "an embodied memory." Braidotti is asked to comment on a later exposition of subjectivity in which she related it to temporality:

> To be in process or transition does not place the thinking subject outside history or time … A location is an embedded and embodied memory … A location is a materialist temporal and spatial site of co-production of the subject (Braidotti, 2006, p. 199).

Braidoitt's new materialist, embodied, thinking person was shaped by temporalities from the personal scale of memory to the transpersonal scale of history. As she explicates her ideas, Braidotti argues that "complexity is the key term for understanding the multiple affective layers, *the complex temporal variables* and the internally contradictory time- and memory-lines that frame our embodied existence" (Braidotti in Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012, pp. 33–34; emphasis added). Just what those "complex temporal variables" are is not pursued.

Manuel De Landa's contribution to neo-materialism provides a way to extend thinking about time relationally to even broader scales. Starting from the proposition that "any materialist philosophy must take as its point of departure the existence of a material world that is independent of our minds," De Landa (in Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012, p. 39) goes on to say

> But then it confronts the problem of the origin of the enduring identity of the inhabitants of that world … all objective entities are products of a historical process, that is, their identity is synthesized or produced as part of a cosmological, geological, biological, or social history.

Where Braidotti is concerned with subjectivity, a self-consciousness, De Landa writes about identity. Both are arguing that the sense people have of themselves is an outcome of their historical relations, which move beyond personal memory and social history to processes at scales beyond human lives and most human thought.

In response to other questions, De Landa endorses the usefulness of the concept of "double articulation" developed by Deleuze and Guattari, which is an inherently temporal process: "first, the raw materials that will make up a new entity must be selected and pre-processed; second, they must be consolidated into a whole with properties of its own" (in Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012, p. 39). What is produced, he argues, are "individual entities," "singular or unique," "not a particular member of a general category, but a unique entity that may compose larger individual entities through a relation of part-to-whole" (in Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012, p. 40). This is where he bases his "materialist ontology of individual entities," which he argues each have "a date of birth and (potentially) a date of death" (in Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012, pp. 40, 44).

For both Braidotti and De Landa—and for many others working within new materialism—concerns such as these lead to an insistence on understanding subjectivity as a concrete product of experiences over time. However, in new materiality, time must also be understood as emergent, as a product of the process, as made. Barad (in Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012, pp. 66–67) argues that "time is not given … time is articulated and re-synchronized through various material practices....its sedimenting effects, its trace, can not be erased. The memory of its materializing effects is written into the world."

One of the ways that memory is written in the world is through the relationality of materiality. In an essay written independently of the emergent body of work self-identifying as new materialism, philosophers of science Michael Arnold and Christopher Shepherd, along with Martin Gibbs, a specialist in information systems, make a related antirepresentational argument for immanence of memory in a world of things (Arnold, Shepherd, & Gibbs, 2008). They insist that relations among things, the ability of things to act in ways that transcend semiotics (which would turn things into signs of meaning located elsewhere), and what they term the *obduracy* of things, their capacity to endure, enlist things in memory in relation to time, place, and identity.

From a new materialist perspective, the making of temporalities that is the stock in trade of archaeology may thus be imagined as a re-tracing of sedimented effects, the "memory" of materializing effects that are "written into the world." Archaeologists have attuned themselves to see the traces of such materializing effects. Yet archaeological work, even that engaging new materialism, has yet to be recognized for the unique contributions it can make.

ARCHAEOLOGY AND NEW MATERIALISM

New materialism developed in parallel with a number of efforts within archaeology that in retrospect can be seen as responses to the same concerns. Per Cornell and Fredrik Fahlander (2002, p. 21) called for what they called *microarchaeology* in which the object was "not a closed and homogeneous social totality, but rather the *structuring practices*, the regulative actions operating in a field of humans and things" (emphasis original). They suggested viewing connections (new materialism's relations) among phenomena over time as series connected by doing, rather than as defining categories of things that shared the same essential identity, implicating a temporal dimension that connects things. They also argued for a spatial dimension, the locale, with a degree of organizational and political autonomy, like the site proposed as event-space in site ontology (Woodward *et al.*, 2012, p. 204). Yet their locale seems to maintain greater dependence on the presence of humans for its existence: "*locale* simply stands for a certain area with some relevance to the individuals situated within its frames. It does not necessarily have to be limited by natural elements or social/political borders; a locale is a locale because it is used by a series (or group) of people" (Cornell & Fahlander, 2002, p. 31).

While they never quite define what they mean by the word, Cornell and Fahlander (2002) also advocate shifting attention to traces rather than to preconstituted categories of things. I have argued that archaeology is in fact based on techniques through which we recognize an accumulation of traces as materialities. These materialities are situated in spatial and temporal relations that Hodder (2011) calls *entanglement*. In my own formulation, "archaeological traces and the things whose histories they point to form part of assemblages that are distributed across space and time, connecting persons and things in networks across which the ability to act is distributed. These networks are both pragmatic and signifying" (Joyce, 2012, p. 128). Thinking about how archaeologists relate to materialities as traces leads to questioning any residual privileging of the presence of things.

While traces are already part of new materialism, "the archaeological trace consists not just of what was found, but what was not found" (Joyce, 2012,

p. 126). As a result, archaeologists are uniquely attentive to the ways that absent things act. While acknowledging the positive contribution of correcting social theories that reduced things to meanings, and the undeniable fact that what happens in the world happens through the collective work of humans and nonhumans, archaeologist Severin Fowles (2010) cautions against overstating the centrality of things in social life, and in particular about being blind to that which is unseen—or rather, that which is absent but nevertheless experienced as a presence precisely because its absence is marked or emphatic … packed between the multitudes of self-evident things, are crowds of non-things, negative spaces, lost or forsaken objects, voids or gaps—absences, in other words, that also stand before us as entity-like presences with which we must contend (Fowles, 2010, p. 25).

Fowles offers the example of keys in a pocket, amenable to construal as active or (in Jane Bennett's terms) vibrant matter, engaging humans through a substantive "steely quality." When lost, the same keys may still have material effects (leaving a person locked out in the rain, for example).

Fowles here, despite his invocation of the term *new materialism*, is specifically critiquing archaeological developments based on the work of Bruno Latour, which call for archaeologists to maintain "symmetry" between humans and nonhumans in their accounts. Symmetry here means treating nonhumans (animals and things) as equally capable of having effects, and particularly, not privileging humans as especially effective actors, even when they are present. Symmetrical archaeology maintains a focus on an assemblage in action, resisting the singling out of any part of the assemblage.

One of the key contributors to new materialist ontologies that reject the dualism of nature and culture, Philippe Descola, firmly suggests that symmetry perhaps needs to be rethought: symmetrical anthropology still lacks a general theory of the stabilization of human and nonhuman collectives … it would require giving more credit to the instituted devices that organize the manner by which hybrids are produced, and which make certain configurations of humans and nonhumans possible or impossible … to capture the diversity of structures by means of which humans themselves effect the triage and the recomposition of reality … Latour is not oblivious to this point when he defines *anthropos* as "a changer or blender of morphisms" … these forms are neither random nor contingent … they outline a combinatory upon which humanity has at all times had to draw in order to give order and meaning to the relations that it weaves with the world and with itself … An attempt to eliminate the duality of the subject and of the world when describing collective life should not lead to neglecting research on the framing structures that account for the coherence and the regularity in the behavior of members of a community (Descola, 2013, pp. 72–73).

Pursuing his example of things that were once there but are now gone, Fowles (Fowles, 2010, p. 26) first considers the possibility that these absent things act solely as ideas, nonmaterial entities that are products of dualist ontologies. Fowles rejects any such introduction of a bifurcation between the world of action and materiality and a world of ideas, placing his work fully in alignment with contemporary new materialism. “Object-like absences … become full participants in the social characterized by their own particular politics and, at times, their own particular emotional and semiotic charge” (Fowles, 2010, p. 27). The series of archaeological examples he gives of such “quasi-presences” run from bodies subject to exhumation by forensic anthropologists, whose political power as *desaparecidos* was seen by some as threatened by recovery of their human remains, to fired clay figurines of Neolithic Europe, whose unfinished (absent) faces were arguably foci for engagement by the human persons who made and circulated them, just as they are for archaeologists and others today. Absences, in other words, have a materiality of their own, that transcends physical presence.

Fowles (Fowles, 2010, p. 36) ends by calling for exploring the material effects of “the missing things of society.” Arguing for seeing precolonial societies of the US Southwest as not simply passively lacking such things as plant cultivation, he proposes that we understand histories of materiality as including active rejection of things as well as such well-worn concepts as their enlistment in collectives.

Fowles is uneasy about the disclaiming of the human that he sees in contemporary theory. He suggests that keys misplaced resist description as active because the lost key “only appears to exist when acknowledged by a human subject” (Fowles, 2010, p. 26). While the Latourian project of symmetrical archaeology does persistently banish the human, new materialism does not. As William Connolly (Connolly, 2013, p. 400) argues in a recent summary of the central tenets of new materialism, a “tendency neither to erase the human subject nor to restrict it entirely to human beings and/or God is accepted,” resulting in attention to “variable *degrees* of subjectivity and agency well beyond the human estate, far into the biosphere.” Not anthropocentric, in his view, new materialism recognizes the specificities of humans rather than seeking any artificial equation between humans and nonhumans.

In her contribution to one of the foundational volumes of new materialism, feminist theorist Sara Ahmed (2010) turns to classic philosophical discussions of materiality that took as their focus an everyday thing, a table. She argues that

> if we were simply to “look at” the object we face, then we would be erasing the “signs” of history. We would apprehend the object as simply there, as given in

> its sensuous certainty, rather than as "having got here", *an arrival which is how objects are binding*, and how they assume a social form (Ahmed, 2010, p. 241; emphasis added).

Or, as I have argued, "the trace we recognize is a sign of history, not a thing recaptured from a past lived experience and revived in our present circumstances" (Joyce, 2012, p. 122). Ahmed (Ahmed, 2010, p. 241) adds "what passes through history is not only the work done by generations but the 'sedimentation' of that work as the condition of arrival for future generations."

That iterative connection, created through the forming, movement, and dissolution of materialities, leaves traces. What archaeologists have to offer to new materialism is precisely a long experience thinking about the iteration that is sedimented in materialities even as they are transformed or even displaced. When Ahmed (2010, p. 243) describes the histories of tables as "spectral" because they are "not simply available *on* the surface of the object, apart from the scratches that might be left behind," an archaeological response is to say that those scratches are in a very real sense histories. Perhaps not the kind of narratives of owning and writing on the table that might be desired in an anthropocentric materiality, these material histories remain for the most part to be engaged as part of new materialism, but the convergence with contemporary archaeologies of traces are there as spaces from which to build.

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Rosemary A. Joyce received the PhD in anthropology from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, in 1985. Subsequently, she was Assistant Curator of Precolumbian Archaeology (1985–1994) and Assistant Director (1986–1989) of the Peabody Museum at Harvard University, and Director of the Phoebe Hearst Museum of Anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley (1994–1999). As Assistant and Associate Professor of Anthropology at Harvard from 1989 to 1994, she taught courses on Mesoamerican archaeology, the analysis of ceramic materials, and museum studies. Coming to Berkeley in 1994 as Associate Professor, she continued teaching in these areas while expanding her research on sex and gender in the past. Through archaeological fieldwork in Honduras from 1977 to 2009, she has explored long-term histories of dwelling from before 1500 BC to the early twentieth century AD. In addition to more academic books including *Material Relations*, *The Languages of Archaeology*, and *Gender in Power in Prehispanic Mesoamerica*, she engages in writing for a broader public through her blogs *What Makes Us Human* and *Ancient Bodies, Ancient Lives*, and through museum publications, most recently editing *Revealing Ancestral Central America* for the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of the American Indian and Latino Center.

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