Attending to Early Modern Women

Workshop title: *Ubi Sunt?*: Gender and the New Materialisms

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This workshop honors the temporal themes of this conference by directly addressing the *timeliness* of gender studies in current critical theory. We wish to investigate and discuss with participants how the “materialist” turn has re-shaped the practices of attending to women in early modern literary and visual cultural studies. On one hand, recent interest in the “world of things” has noted the role of objects in defining or delimiting male and female spheres. On the other hand, accounts of the material encounter of audiences (readers, viewers) with the world of representations have often posited “the body” in phenomenological or neurological terms in which gender has no salience.

While the *Ubi Sunt?* of the workshop title might be seen to suggest a retrospective or even nostalgic rhetoric of distance and loss for the kind of feminist work that gave rise to *Attending to Women*, we intend to look forward to addressing the future of early modern gender studies and considering how our work can offer both supplement to and critique of the post-gender premises that have attended the death of the subject. Our key question for this panel is: How might current materialist work engage gender more fully as a useful category of analysis?

The primary objects for analysis are two *kunstkammer* paintings by Frans Francken the Younger, which feature the female form prominently among a world of things; Aemilia Lanyer’s country house poem, *The Description of Cooke-ham*, which details the vibrant agency of things; and, finally, the “Preface to the Reader” and first two letters from Margaret Cavendish’s *Philosophical Letters*, in which she works out her own rigorously materialist philosophy. Taken together these images and texts give us a foundation for understanding gender as a primary heuristic for understanding early modern materialisms and material culture.

We include also two very short polemical interventions in the form of a lecture by Bruno Latour and a feminist manifesto by Elizabeth Grosz. Latour, whose rethinking of subject/object relations through Science Technologies Studies has been very influential in the materialist turn offers a point of entry. His lecture, “Waiting for Gaia,” addresses the contemporary global calamity of climate change; nonetheless 17th-century history, painting, and rhetoric are all featured in his discussion in ways that are well worth examining closely, as is his use of *Gaia* as...
the new feminine figure for Nature. Elizabeth Grosz’s “The Untimeliness of Feminist Theory,” directly addresses the challenge of her title to embrace the new materialism for feminist analysis.

**Primary Texts & Paintings (attached below):**

1. Frans Francken the Younger, The Painter’s Cabinet, c.1627, oil on panel, private collection.
3. Aemilia Lanyer’s, “A Description of Cooke-ham” (2 pages)
4. Margaret Cavendish’s *Philosophical Letters* (1665) (excerpt) (6 pages)

**Required Reading, Secondary (attached below):**


**Additional Suggested Reading:**


Two kunstkammer paintings:

Frans Francken the Younger, The Painter’s Cabinet c. 1627
oil on panel, private collection, Getxo
Frans Francken the Younger, Achilles Among the Daughters of Lycomedes, c. 1620-30, oil on panel, Louvre, Paris
Farewell (sweet Cooke-ham) where I first obtained
Grace from that grace where perfect grace
remained;
And where the muses gave their full consent,
I should have power the virtuous to content;
Where princely palace willed me to indite,
The sacred story of the soul’s delight.
Farewell (sweet place) where virtue then did rest,
And all delights did harbor in her breast;
Never shall my sad eyes again behold
Those pleasures which my thoughts did then unfold.
Yet you (great Lady) Mistress of that place,
From whose desires did spring this work of grace;
Vouchsafe to think upon those pleasures past,
As fleeting worldly joys that could not last,
Or, as dim shadows of celestial pleasures,
Which are desired above all earthly treasures.
Oh how (methought) against you thither came,
Each part did seem some new delight to frame!
The house received all orname
nts to grace it,
And would endure no foulness to deface it.
And walks put on their summer liveries,
And all things else did hold like similes.
The trees with leaves, with fruits, with flowers clad,
Embraced each other, seeming to be glad,
Turning the
mselves to beauteous Canopies,
To shade the bright sun from your brighter eyes;
The crystal streams with silver spangles graced,
While by the glorious sun they were embraced;
The little birds in chirping notes did sing,
To entertain both you and that sweet spring.
And Philomela with her sundry lays,
Both you and that delightful place did praise.
Oh how me thought each plant, each flower, each
tree
Set forth their beauties then to welcome thee!
The very hills right humbly did descend,
When you to tread on them did intend.
And as you set your feet, they still did rise,
Glad that they could receive so rich a prize.
The gentle winds did take delight to be
Among those woods that were so graced by thee,
And in sad murmur uttered pleasing sound,
That pleasure in that place might more abound.
The swelling banks delivered all their pride
When such a Phoenix once they had espied.
Each arbor, bank, each seat, each stately tree,
Thought themselves honored in supporting thee;
The pretty birds would oft come to attend thee,
Yet fly away for fear they should offend thee;
The little creatures in the burrough by
Would come abroad to sport them in your eye,
Yet fearful of the bow in your fair hand.
Would run away when you did make a stand.
Now let me come unto that stately tree,
Wherein such goodly prospects you did see;
That oak that did in height his fellows pass,
As much as lofty trees, low growing grass,
Much like a comely cedar straight and tall,
Whose beauteous stature far exceeded all.
How often did you visit this fair tree,
Which seeming joyful in receiving thee,
Would like a palm tree spread his arms abroad,
Desirous that you there should make abode;
Whose fair green leaves much like a comely veil,
Defended Phoebus when he would assail;
Whose pleasing boughs did yield a cool fresh air,
Joying his happiness when you were there.
Where being seated, you might plainly see
Hills, vales, and woods, as if on bended knee
They had appeared, your honor to salute,
Or to prefer some strange unlooked-for suit;
All interlaced with brooks and crystal springs,
A prospect fit to please the eyes of kings.
And thirteen shires appeared all in your sight,
Europe could not afford much more delight.
What was there then but gave you all content,
While you the time in meditation spent
Of their Creator’s power, which there you saw,
In all his creatures held a perfect law;
And in their beauties did you plain descry
His beauty, wisdom, grace, love, majesty.
In these sweet woods how often did you walk,
With Christ and his Apostles there to talk;
Placing his holy Writ in some fair tree
To meditate what you therein did see.
With Moses you did mount his holy hill
To know his pleasure, and perform his will.
With lowly David you did often sing
His holy hymns to Heaven’s eternal King.
And in sweet music did your soul delight
To sound his praises, morning, noon, and night.
With blessed Joseph you did often feed
Your pined brethren, when they stood in need.
And that sweet Lady sprung from Clifford’s race,
Of noble Bedford’s blood, fair stem of grace,
To honorable Dorset now espoused,
In whose fair breast true virtue then was housed,
Oh what delight did my weak spirits find
In those pure parts of her well framèd mind.
And yet it grieves me that I cannot be
Near unto her, whose virtues did agree
With those fair ornaments of outward beauty,
Which did enforce from all both love and duty.
Unconstant Fortune, thou art most to blame,
Who casts us down into so low a frame
Where our great friends we cannot daily see,
So great a difference is there in degree.
Many are placed in those orbs of state,
Partners in honor, so ordained by Fate,
Nearer in show, yet farther off in love,
In which, the lowest always are above.
But whither am I carried in conceit,
My wit too weak to conster of the great.
Why not? although we are but born of earth,
We may behold the heavens, despising death;
And loving heaven that is so far above,
May in the end vouchsafe us ent
there love.
Therefore sweet memory do thou retain
Those pleasures past, which will not turn again:
Remember beauteous Dorset's former sports,
So far from being touched by ill reports,
Wherein myself did always bear a part,
While reverend love presented my true heart.
Those recreations let me bear in mind,
Which her sweet youth and noble thoughts did find,
Whereof deprived, I evermore must grieve,
Hating blind Fortune, careless to relieve,
And you sweet Cooke-
ham, whom these ladies
left,
I now must tell the grief you did conceive
At their departure, when they went away,
How everything retained a sad dismay.
Nay long before, when once an inkling came,
Methought each thing did unto sorrow frame:
The trees that were so glorious in our view,
Forsook both flowers and fruit, when once they
knew
Of your depart, their very leaves did wither,
Changing their colors as they grew together.
But when they saw this had no power to stay you,
They often wept, though, speechless, could not pray you,
Letting their tears in your fair bosoms fall,
As if they said, Why will ye leave us all?
This being vain, they cast their leaves away
Hoping that pity would have made you stay:
Their frozen tops, like age’s hoary hairs,
Shows their disasters, languishing in fears.
A swarthy rived rind all over spread,
Their dying bodies half alive, half dead.
But your occasions called you so away
That nothing there had power to make you stay.
Yet did I see a noble grateful mind
Requiting each according to their kind,
Forgetting not to turn and take your leave
Of these sad creatures, powerless to receive
Your favor, when with grief you did depart,
Placing their former pleasures in your heart,
Giving great charge to noble memory
There to preserve their love continually.
But specially the love of that fair tree,
That first and last you vouchsafed to see,
In which it pleased you oft to take the air
With noble Dorset, then a virgin fair,
Where many a learned book was read and scanned,
To this fair tree, taking me by the hand,
You did repeat the pleasures which had passed,
Seeming to grieve they could no longer last.
And with a chaste, yet loving kiss took leave,
Of which sweet kiss I did it soon bereave,
Scorning a senseless creature should possess
So rare a favor, so great happiness.
No other kiss it could receive from me,
For fear to give back what it took of thee,
So I ungrateful creature did deceive it
Of that which you in love vouchsafed to leave it.
And though it oft had given me much content,
Yet this great wrong I never could repent;
But of the happiest made it most forlorn,
To show that nothing’s free from Fortune’s scorne,
While all the rest with this most beauteous tree
Made their sad consort sorrow’s harmony.
The flowers that on the banks and walks did grow,
Crept in the ground, the grass did weep for woe.
The winds and waters seemed to chide together
Because you went away they knew not whither;
And those sweet brooks that ran so fair a
and clear,
With grief and trouble wrinkled did appear.
Those pretty birds that wonted were to sing,
Now neither sing, nor chirp, nor use their wing,
But with their tender feet on some bare spray,
Warble forth sorrow, and their own dismay.
Fair Philomela leaves her mournful ditty,
Drowned in deep sleep, yet can procure no pity.
Each arbor, bank, each seat, each stately tree
Looks bare and desolate now for want of thee,
Turning green tresses into frosty gray,
While in cold grief they wither all away.
The sun grew weak, his beams no comfort gave,
While all green things did make the earth their
grave.
Each brier, each bramble, when you went away
Caught fast your clothes, thinking to make you stay;
Delightful Echo wonted to reply
To our last words, did now for sorrow die;
The house cast off each garment that might grace it,
Putting on dust and cobwebs to deface it.
All desolation then there did appear,
When you were going whom they held so dear.
This last farewell to Cooke-ham here I give,
When I am dead thy name in this may live,
Wherein I have performed her noble hest
Whose virtues lodge in my unworthy breast,
And ever shall, so long as life remains,
Tying my life to her by those rich chains.
Excerpt from Margaret Cavendish’s *Philosophical Letters*:  
“A Preface to the Reader,” and Letters 1 & 2  
Downloaded from Women’s Writer’s Online, wwo.wwp.northeastern.edu

Philosophical Letters:  

or,  
Modest  
Reflections  
Upon some Opinions in  
Natural Philosophy,  
maintained  
By several Famous and Learned Authors of  
this Age,  
Expressed by way of Letters:  

By the Thrice Noble, Illustrious, and Excellent  
Prince,  
The Lady Marchioness of Newcastle.  

London, Printed in the Year, 1664.  

A Preface to the Reader.  

Worthy Readers,  

I Did not write this Book out of delight, love or humour to contradiction; for I would rather praisé, then contradict any Person or Persons that are ingenious; but by reason Opinion is free, and may pass without a pafs-port, I took the liberty to declare my own opinions as other Philosophers do, and to that purpose I have here set down severall famous and learned Authors opinions, and my answers to them in the form of Letters, which was the easiest way for me to write; and by so doing, I have done that, which I would have done unto me; for I am as willing to have my opinions contradicted, as I do contradict others: for I love Reasón so well, that whooever can bring most rational and probable arguments, shall have my vote, although [b1v] against my own opinion. But you may say, If contradictions were frequent, there would be no agreement amongt Mankind. I answer; It is very true: Wherefore Contradictions are better in general Books, then in particular Families, and in Schools better then in Publick States, and better in Philosophy then in Divinity. All which considered, I flun, as much as I can, not to discoursse or write of either Church or State. But I desire so much favour, or rather Justice of you, Worthy Readers, as not to interpret my objections or answers any other ways then against severall opinions in Philosophy; for I am confident there is not any body, that doth esteem, respect and honour learned and ingenious Persons more then I do: Wherefore judge me neither to be of a contradicting humor, nor of a vain-glorious mind for differencing from other mens opinions, but rather that it is done out of love to Truth, and to make my own opinions the more intelligible, which cannot be done then by arguing and comparing other mens opinions with them. The Authors whose opinions I mention, I have read, as I found them printed, in my native Language, except Des Cartes, who being in Latine, I had some few places transplanted to me out of his works; and I must confesse, that since I have read the works of thefe learned men, I understand the names and terms of Art a little better then I did before; but it is not so much as to make me a Schollar, nor yet so little, but that, had I read more before I did begin to write my other Book called Philosophical Opinions, they would have been more intelligible; for my error was, I began to write so early, that I had not live’d [b2v] so long as to be able to read many Authors; I cannot say, I divulged my opinions as soon as I had conceiv’d them, but yet I divulged them too soon to have them artificial and methodical, But since what is past, cannot be recalled, I must desirfe you to
excuse those faults, which were committed for want of experience and learning. As for School-learning, had I applied my self to it, yet I am confident I should never have arrived to any; for I am so uncapable of Learning, that I could never attain to the knowledge of any other Language but my native, especially by the Rules of Art: wherefore I do not repent that I spent not my time in Learning, for I consider, it is better to write wittily then learnedly; nevertheless, I love and esteem Learning, although I am not capable of it. But you may say, I have expressed neither Wit nor Learning in my Writings: Truly, if not, I am the more forry for it; but I myself, which is natural to mankind, especially to our Sex, did flatter and secretly perfwode me that my Writings had Senfe and Reafon, Wit and Variety; but Judgment being not called to Counsel, I yielded to Selfconceits flattery, and fo put out my Writings to be Printed as faft as I could, without being reviewed or corrected: Neither did I fear any cenfure, for Selfconceit had perfwaded me, I should be highly applauded; wherefore I made such hafte, that I had three or four Books printed presently after each other.

But to return to this present Work, I must defire you, worthy Readers, to read firft my Book called Philosophical and Phyletical Opinions, before you cenfure this, for this Book is but an explanation of the former, wherein is contained the Ground of my Opinions, and those [b2v] that will judge well of a Building, must firft confider the Foundation; to which purpose I will repeat some few Heads and Principles of my Opinions, which are these following: Firft, That Nature is Infinite, and the Eternal Servant of God: Next, That he is Corporeal, and partly self-moving, dividable and compofable; that all and every particular Creature, as also all perception and variety in Nature, is made by corporeal self-motion, which I name senitive and rational matter, which is life and knowldge, senfe and reafon. Again, That these senitive and rational parts of matter are the purest and subtilest parts of Nature, as the active parts, the knowing, understanding and prudent parts, the deligning, architectonical and working parts, nay, the Life and Soul of Nature, and that there is not any Creature or part of nature without this Life and Soul; and that not only Animals, but also Vegetables, Minerals and Elements, and what more is in Nature, are endued with this Life and Soul, Senfe and Reafon: and because this Life and Soul is a corporeal Substance, it is both dividable and compofable; for it divides and removes parts from parts, as also compofoes and joynts parts to parts, and works in a perpetual motion without rest; by which actions not any Creature can challenge a particular Life and Soul to it self, but every Creature may have by the dividing and compofoing nature of this self-moving matter more or fewer natural souls and lives.

These and the like actions of corporeal Nature or natural Matter you may find more at large described in my afore-mentioned Book of Philosophical Opinions, and more clearly repeated and explained in this present. [c1r] Tis true, the way of arguing I use, is common, but the Principles, Heads and Grounds of my Opinions are my own, not borrowed or stolen in the least from any; and the firft time I divulged them, was in the year 1653. since which time I have reviewed, reformed and reprinted them twice; for at firft, as my Conceptions were new and my own, fo my Judgment was young, and my Experience little, fo that I had not so much knowledge as to declare them artificially and methodically; for as I mentioned before, I was always unapt to learn by the Rules of Art. But although they may be defective for want of Terms of Art, and artificial expressions, yet I am sure they are not defective for want of Senfe and Reafon: And if any one can bring more Senfe and Reafon to disprove these my opinions, I shall not repine or grieve, but either acknowledge my error, if I find my self in any, or defend them as rationally as I can, if it be but done justly and honestly, without deceit, fpight, or malice; for I cannot chufe but acquaint you, Noble Readers, I have been informed, that if I should be answer'd in my Writings, it would be done rather under the name and cover of a Woman, then of a Man, the reafon is, because no man dare or will fet his name to the contradiction of a Lady; and to confirm you the better herein, there has one Chapter of my Book called The Worlds Olio, treating of a Monafical Life, been answer'd already in a little Pamphlet, under the name of a woman, although she did little towards it; wherefore it being a Hermaphroditical Book, I judged it not worthy taking notice of. The like shall I do to any other that will answer this present Work of mine, or contradict my opinions indirectly with fraud and deceit. [c1v] But I cannot conceive why it should be disgrace to any man to maintain his own or others opinions against a woman, fo it be done with respect and civility; but to become a cheat by diffembling, and quit the Breeches for a Petticoat, meerly out of fpight and malice, is base, and not fit for the honour of a man, or the masculine sex. Besides, it will easily be known; for a Philofopher or Philofopheres is not produced on a sudden. Wherefore, although I do not care, nor fear contradiction, yet I defire it may be done without fraud or deceit, fpight and malice; and then I shall be ready to defend my opinions the best I can, whilest I live, and after I am dead, I hope thofe that are just and
honorable will also defend me from all sophistry, malice, spite and envy, for which Heaven will bless them.

In the mean time, Worthy Readers, I should rejoice to see that my Works are acceptable to you, for if you be not partial, you will easily pardon those faults you find, when you do consider both my sex and breeding; for which favour and justice, I shall always remain,

Your most obliged Servant, M. N.

Philosophical Letters.

Sect. I.

I

Madam,

You have been pleased to send me the Works of four Famous and Learned Authors, to wit, of two most Famous Philosophers of our Age, Des Cartes, and Hobbs, and of that Learned Philosopher and Divine Dr. More, as also of that Famous Physician and Chymist Van Helmont. Which Works you have sent me not only to peruse, but also to give my judgment of them, and to send you word by the usual way of our Correspondence, which is by Letters, how far, and wherein I do differ from these Famous Authors, their Opinions in Natural Philosophy. To tell you truly, Madam, your Commands did at first much affright me, for it did appear, as if you had commanded me to get upon a high Rock, and fling my self into the Sea, [B1r] where neither a Ship, nor a Plank, nor any kind of help was near to rescue me, and save my life; but that I was forced to sink, by reason I cannot swim: So I having no Learning nor Art to assist me in this dangerous undertaking, thought, I must of necessity perish under the rough censures of my Readers, and be not only accounted a fool for my labour, but a vain and preposterous person, to undertake things surpassing the ability of my performance; but on the other side I considered first, that those Worthy Authors, were they my censurers, would not deny me the fame liberty they take themselves; which is, that I may differ from their Opinions, as well as they differ from others, and from amongst themselves: And if I should express more Vanity than Wit, more Ignorance than Knowledge, more Folly than Discretion, it being according to the Nature of our Sex, I hoped that my Masculine Readers would civilly excuse me, and my Female Readers could not justly condemn me. Next I considered with my self, that it would be a great advantage for my Book called Philosophical Opinions, as to make it more peripatetic and intelligible by the opposition of other Opinions, since two opposite things placed near each other, are the better discerned; for I must confess, that when I did put forth my Philosophical Work at first, I was not so well skilled in the Terms of Expressions usual in Natural Philosophy; and therefore for want of their knowledge, I could not declare my meaning so plainly and clearly as I ought to have done, which may be a sufficient argument to my Readers, that I have not read heretofore any Natural Philosophers, and taken some Light from them; but that my Opinions did meerly [B2r] issue from the Fountain of my own Brain, without any other help or assistance. Wherefore since for want of proper Expressions, my named Book of Philosophy was accursed of obscurity and intricacy, I thought your Commands would be a means to explain and clear it the better, although not by an Artificial way, as by Logical Arguments or Mathematical Demonstrations, yet by expressing my Sense and Meaning more properly and clearly than I have done heretofore: But the chief reason of all was, the Authority of your Command, which did work so powerfully with me, that I could not resist, although it were to the disgrace of my own judgment and wit; and therefore I am fully resolved now to go on as far, and as well as the natural strength of my Reason will reach: But since neither the strength of my Body, nor of my understanding, or wit, is able to mark every line, or every word of their works, and to argue upon them, I shall only pick out the ground Opinions of the aforementioned Authors, and those which do directly differ from mine, upon which I intend to make a few Reflections, according to the ability of my Reason; and I shall merely go upon the bare Ground of Natural Philosophy, and not mix Divinity with it, as many Philosophers use to do, except it be in those places, where I am forced by the Authors Arguments to reflect upon it, which yet I shall be rather with an expression of my ignorance, then a
positive declaration of my opinion or judgment thereof; for I think it not onely an abfurcity, but an injury to
the holy Professor of Divinity to draw her to the Proofs in Natural Philosophy; wherefore I shall strictly
follow the Guidance of Natural Reason, and keep to my own ground and Principles as much as I can; [B2v]
which that I may perform the better, I humbly desire the help and asistance of your Favour, that according
to that real and entire Affection you bear to me, you would be pleased to tell me unfeignedly, if I should
chance to err or contradict but the least probability of truth in any thing; for I honor Truth so much, as I bow
down to its shadow with the greatest respect and reverence; and I esteem those persons moft, that love and
honor Truth with the fame zeal and fervor, whether they be Ancient or Modern Writers.

Thus, Madam, although I am destitute of the help of Arts, yet being supported by your Favour and wife
Directions, I shall not fear any fmlies of fcorn, or words of reproach; for I am confident you will defend me
againft all the milchivious and poifonous Teeth of malicious detractors. I shall besides, implore the
asistance of the Sacred Church, and the Learned Schools, to take me into their Protection, and felter my
weak endeavours: For though I am but an ignorant and fimple Woman, yet I am their devoted and honest
Servant, who fhall never quit the refpect and honor due to them, but live and die theirs, as alfo,

Madam

Your Ladies humble and faithful Servant

[C1r]

II

Madam,

Before I begin my Reflections upon the Opinions of those Authors you fent me, I will anfwer firft your
Objection concerning the Ground of my Philosophy, which is Infinite Matter: For you were poflefed to
mention, That you could not well apprehend, how it was poifible, that many Infinites could be contained in
one Infinite, fince one Infinite takes up all Place Imaginary, leaving no room for any other; Alfo, if one
Infinite fhould be contained in an other Infinite, that which contains, muft of necefity be bigger then that
which is contained, whereby the Na of Infinite would be loft; as having no bigger nor lefs, but being of an
Infinite quantity.

First of all, Madam, there is no fuch thing as All in Infinite, nor any fuch thing as All the Place, for Infinite
is not circumfcribed nor limited: Next, as for that one Infinite cannot be in an other Infinite, I anfwer, as
well as one Finite can be in another Finite; for one Creature is not onely compofed of Parts, but one Part
lies within another, and one Figure within another, and one Motion within another. As for example, Animal
Kind, have they not Internal and External Parts, and fo Internal and External Mofions? And are not
Animals, Vegetables and Minerals inclofed in the Elements? But as for Infinites, you must know, Madam,
that there are feveral kinds of Infinites. For there is firft Infinite in quantity [C1v] or bulk, that is fuch a
big and great Corporeal Subfance, which exceeds all bounds and limits of measure, and may be called
Infinite in Magnitude. Next there is Infinite in Number, which exceeds all numeration and account, and
may be termed Infinite in Multitude; Again there is Infinite in Quality: as for example, Infinite degrees of
oftnifs, hardnifs, thinnifs, heat and cold, &c. alfo Infinite degrees of Motion, and fo Infinite
Creations, Infinite Compositions, Diffolutions, Contractions, Dilations, Digestions, Expulfions; alfo Infinite
degrees of Strength, Knowledg, Power, &c. Befides there is Infinite in Time, which is properly named
Eternal. Now, when I fay, that there is but one Infinite, and that Infinite is the Onely Matter, I mean infinite
in bulk and quantity. And this Onely matter, becaufe it is Infinite in bulk, muft of neceflity be divifible into
infinite Parts, that is, infinite in number, not in bulk or quantity; for though Infinite Parts in number make
up one infinite in quantity, yet they confidered in themfelves, cannot be faid Infinite, becaufe every Part is
of a certain limited and circumfcribed Figure, Quantity and Proportion, whereas Infinite hath no limits nor
bounds: befides it is againft the nature of a fingle Part to be Infinite, or elfe there would be no difference
between the Part and the whole, the nature of a Part requiring that it muft be lefs then its whole, but all
what is left hath a determined quantity, and so becomes finite. Therefore it is no absurdity to say, that an
Infinite may have both Finite and Infinite Parts, Finite in Quantity, Infinite in Number. But though that say, if
there were an Infinite Body, that each of its Parts must of necessity be Infinite too, are much mistaken; for it
is a contradiction [C2r] in the same Terms to say One Infinite Part, for the very Name of a Part includes a
Finiteness, but take all parts of an Infinite Body together, then you may rightly say they are infinite. Nay
Reafore will inform you plainly, for example: Imagine an Infinite number of grains of Corn in one heap,
fully if the number of Grains be Infinite, you must grant of necessity the bulk or body, which contains this
infinite number of grains, to be Infinite too; to wit, Infinite in quantity, and yet you will find each Grain in
it fell to be Finite. But you will say, an Infinite Body cannot have parts, for if it be Infinite, it must be
Infinite in Quantity, and therefore of one bulk, and one continued quantity, but Infinite parts in number
make a discrete quantity. I answer it is all one; for a Body of a continued quantity may be divided and
fevered into so many Parts either actually, or mentally in our Conceptions or thoughts; besides nature is one
continued Body, for there is no such Vacuum in Nature, as if her Parts did hang together like a linked
Chain; nor can any of her Parts subserve single and by it self, but all the Parts of Infinite Nature, although they
are in one continued Piece, yet are they severall and discerned from each other by their severall Figures. And
by this, I hope, you will understand my meaning, when I say, that severall Infinities may be included or
comprehended in one Infinite; for by the one Infinite, I understand Infinite in Quantity, which includes
Infinite in Number, that is Infinite Parts; then Infinite in Quality, as Infinite degrees of Rarity, Denity,
Swiftness, Slowness, Hardness, Softness, &c. Infinite degrees of Motions, Infinite Creations, Diffusions,
Contractions, Dillations, Alterations, &c. Infinite [C2v] degrees of Wildom, Strength, Power, &c. and lastly
Infinite in Time or Duration, which is Eternity, for Infinite and Eternal are insepable; All which Infinities
are contained in the Onely Matter as many Letters are contained in one Word, many Words in one Line,
you will say, if an infinite number of .

But you will say perhaps, if I attribute an Infinite Wildom, Strength, Power, Knowledg, &c. to Nature; then Nature is in all coequal with God, for God has the same Attributes: I answer, Not at all; for I define you to understand me rightly, when I speak of Infinite Nature, and when I
Ipeak of the Infinite Deity, for there is great difference between them, for it is one thing a Deitical or
Divine Infinite, and another a Natural Infinite; You know, that God is a Spirit, and not a bodily
Appearance; Not at all; for I do
not understand a Divine, but a Natural Infinite Wildom and
Power, that is, such as properly belongs to Nature, and not a supernatural, as is in God; For Nature having
Infinite parts of Infinite degrees, must also have an Infinite natural wildom to order her natural Infinite parts
and actions and consequently an Infinite natural power to put her wildom D1r into act; and fo of the rest of
her attributes, which are all natural: But Gods Attributes being supernatural, transcend much thefe natural
infinite attributes; for God, being the God of Nature, has not only Natures Infinite Wildom and Power, but
besides, a Supernatural and Incomprehensible Infinite Wildom and Power; which in no wayes do hinder
each other, but may very well subsist together. Neither doth Gods Infinite Jutice and his Infinite Mercy
hinder each other; for Gods Attributes, though they be all several Infinities, yet they make but one Infinite.

But you will say, If Nature’s Wildom and Power extends no further then to natural things, it is not Infinite,
but limited and restrained. I answer, That doth not take away the Finiteness of Nature; for there may be
several kinds of Infinities, as I related before, and one may be as perfect an Infinite as the other in its kind.
For example: Suppose a Line to be extended infinitely in length, you will call this Line Infinite, although it
have not an infinite breadth: Alfo, if an infinite length and breadth joyn together, you will call it, an Infinite
Superficies, although it wants an infinite depth; and yet every Infinite, in its kind, is a Perfect Infinite, if I
may call it so: Why then shall not Nature also be said to have an Infinite Natural Wildom and Power,
although she has not a Divine Wildom and Power? Can we say, Man hath not a free Will, because he hath
not an absolute free Will, as God hath? Wherefore, a Natural Infinite, and the Infinite God, may well stand
together, without any opposition or hinderance, or without any detracting or derogating from the
Omnipotency and Glory of God; for God remains still the God of [D1v] Nature, and is an Infinite
Immaterial Purity, when as Nature is an Infinite Corporeal Substance; and Immaterial and Material cannot
obstruct each other. And though an Infinite Corporeal cannot make an Infinite Immaterial, yet an Infinite
Immaterial can make an Infinite Corporeal, by reaon there is as much difference in the Power in as the Purity: And the diifiracy between the Natural and Divine Infinite is fuch, as they cannot joyn, mix, and work together, unlefs you do believe that Divine Actions can have allay.

But you may fay, Purity belongs onely to natural things, and none but natural bodies can be faid purified, but God exceeds all Purity. 'Tis true: But if there were infinite degrees of Purity in Matter, Matter might at laft become Immaterial, and fo from an Infinite Material turn to an Infinite Immaterial, and from Na to be God: A great, but an impofsible Change. For I do verily believe, that there can be but one Omnipotent God, and he cannot admit of addition, or diminution; and that which is Material cannot be Immaterial, and what is Immaterial cannot become Material, I mean, fo, as to change their natures; for Nature is what God was pleafed he fhould be; and will be what he was, until God be pleaseed to make her otherwife. Wherefore there can be no new Creation of matter, motion, or figure; nor any annihilation of any matter, motion, or figure in Nature, unlefs God do create a new Nature: For the changing of Matter into several particular Figures, doth not prove an annihilation of particular Figures; nor the ceffation of particular Motions an annihilation of them: Neither doth the variation of the Onely Matter produce an annihilation of any part of Matter, nor the variation of figures and motions of Matter caufe an alteration in the nature of Onely Matter: Wherefore there cannot be new Lives, Souls or Bodies in Nature; for, could there be any thing new in Nature, or any thing annihilated, there would not be any ftability in Nature, as a continuance of every kind and fort of Creatures, but there would be a confufion between the new and old matter, motions, and figures, as between old and new Nature; In truth, it would be like new Wine in old Veffels, by which all would break into diforder. Neither can fupernatural and natural effects be mixt together, no more then material and immaterial things or beings: Therefore it is probable, God has ordained Nature to work in her felf by his Leave, Will, and Free Gift. But there have been, and are till flrange and erroneous Opinions, and great differences amongst Natural Philosophers, concerning the Principles of Natural things; fome will have them Atoms, others will have the firft Principles to be Salt, Sulphur and Mercury; fome will have them to be the four Elements as Fire, Air, Water, and Earth; and others will have but one of thefe Elements; alfo fome will have Gas and Blas, Ferments, Idea’s and the like; but what they believe to be Principles and Caufes of natural things, are onely Effects; for in all Probability it appears to humane fenfe and reaon, that the caufe of every particular material Creature is the onely and Infinite Matter, which has Motions and Figures inefeparably united; for Matter, Motion and Figure, are but one thing, individable in its Nature. And as for Inmaterial Spirits, there is furely no fuch thing in Infinite Nature, to wit, fo as to be Parts of Nature; for [D2v] Nature is altogether Material, but this opinion proceeds from the feparation or abftaction of Motion from Matter, viz. that man thinks matter and motion to be divifible from each other, and believes motion to be a thing by it felf, naming it an Imaterial thing, which has a being, but not a bodily fubftance: But various and different effects do not prove a different Matter or Caufe, neither do they prove an unfetled Caufe, onely the variety of Effects hath obfured the Caufe from the feveral parts, which makes Particular Creatures partly Ignorant, and partly knowing. But in my opinion, Nature is material, and not any thing in Nature, what belongs to her, is immaterial; but whatfoever is Immaterial, is Supernatural, Therefore Motions, Forms, Thoughts, Ideas, Conceptions, Sympathies, Antipathies, Accidents, Qualities, as alfo Natural Life, and Soul, are all Material: And as for Colours, Sents, Light, Sound, Heat, Cold, and the like, thofe that believe them not to be fubftances or material things, furely their brain or heart (take what place you will for the forming of Conceptions) moves very Irregularly, and they might as well fay, Our fenfitive Organs are not material; for what Objects foever, that are fubject to our fenfes, cannot in fenfe be denided to be Corporeal, when as thofe things that are not fubject to our fenfes, can be conceived in reaon to be Immaterial? But fome Philosophers striving to exprrefs their wit, obform reaon; and drawing Divinity to prove Senfe and Reafon, weaken Faith fo, as their mixted Divine Philosophy becomes meer Poetical Fictions, and Romantical exprrefsions, making material Bodies immaterial Spirits, and immaterial Spirits material Bodies; and fome have conceived fome [E1r] things neither to be Material nor Immaterial, but between both. Truly, Madam, I with their Wits had been lefs, and their Judgments more, as not to jumble Natural and Supernatural things together, but to diftinguifh either clearly, for fuch Mixtures are neither Naturalnor Divine; But as I faid, the Confufion comes from their too nice abftactions, and from the feparation of Figure and Motion from Matter, as not conceiving them individable; but if God, and his fervant Nature were as Intricate and Confufe in their Works, as Men in their Understandings and Words, the Univerfe and Production of all Creatures would foone be without Order and Government, fo as there
would be a horrid and Eternal War both in Heaven, and in the World, and fo pittyng their troubled Brains, and wiſhing them the Light of Reaſon, that they may clearly perceive the Truth, I reſt

Madam

Your real Friend and faithful Servant
Waiting for Gaia. Composing the common world through arts and politics*

A lecture at the French Institute, London, November 2011 for the launching of SPEAP (the Sciences Po program in arts & politics)
Bruno Latour, Science Po.

Abstract: There is no single institution able to cover, oversee, dominate, manage, handle, or simply trace ecological issues of large shape and scope. Many issues are too intractable and too enmeshed in contradictory interests. We have problems, but we don't have the publics that go with them. How could we imagine agreements amid so many entangled interests? We will review several attempts to tackle ecological problems by connecting the tools of scientific representation with those of arts and politics and present the program of Experimentation on Arts and Politics which has been running at Sciences Po since September 2010.

What are we supposed to do when faced with an ecological crisis that does not resemble any of the crises of war and economies, the scale of which is formidable, to be sure, but to which we are in a way habituated since it is of human, all too human, origin? What to do when told, day after day, and in increasingly strident ways, that our present civilization is doomed; that the Earth itself has been so tampered with that there is no way it will ever come back to any of the various steady states of the past? What do you do when reading, for instance, a book such as Clive Hamilton titled *Requiem for a species: Why We Resist the Truth about Climate Change*—and that the species is not the dodo or the whale but *us*, that is, you and me? Or Harald Welzer’s *Climate Wars: What People Will Be Killed For in the 21st Century*, a book that is nicely divided in three parts: how to kill yesterday, how to kill today, and how to kill tomorrow! In every chapter, to tally the dead, you have to add several orders of magnitude to your calculator!

The time of great narratives has past, I know, and it could seem ridiculous to tackle a question so big from so small a point of entry. But that's just the reason

* I thank Michael Flower for many suggestions and for kindly correcting my English.
I wish to do so: what do we do when questions are too big for everybody, and especially when they are much too grand for the writer, that is, for myself?

One of the reasons why we feel so powerless when asked to be concerned by ecological crisis, the reason why I, to begin with, feel so powerless, is because of the total disconnect between the range, nature, and scale of the phenomena and the set of emotions, habits of thoughts, and feelings that would be necessary to handle those crises—not even to act in response to them, but simply to give them more than a passing ear. So this essay will largely be about this disconnect and what to do about it.

Is there a way to bridge the distance between the scale of the phenomena we hear about and the tiny *Umwelt* inside which we witness, as if we were a fish inside its bowl, an ocean of catastrophes that are supposed to unfold? How are we to behave sensibly when there is no ground control station anywhere to which we could send the help message, “Houston, we have a problem”?

What is so strange about this abysmal distance between our little selfish human worries and the great questions of ecology is that it’s exactly what has been so valorised for so long in so many poems, sermons and edifying lectures about the wonders of nature. If those displays were so wonderful, it was just because of this disconnect: to feel powerless, overwhelmed, and totally dominated by the spectacle of “nature” is a large part of what we have come to appreciate, since at least the 19th century, as the sublime.

Remember Shelley:

“In the wild woods, among the mountains lone,
Where waterfalls around it leap forever,
Where woods and winds contend, and a vast river
Over its rocks ceaselessly bursts and raves.”

How we loved to feel small when encompassed by the magnificent forces of the Niagara Falls or the stunning immensity of the Arctic glaciers or the desolate and desiccated landscape of the Sahara. What a delicious thrill to set our size alongside that of galaxies! Small compared to Nature but, as far as morality is concerned, so much bigger than even Her grandest display of power! So many poems, so many meditations about the lack of commensurability between the everlasting forces of nature and the puny little humans claiming to know or to dominate Her.

So one could say, after all, that the disconnect has always been there and that it is the inner spring of the feeling for the sublime.

“The everlasting universe of things
Flows through the mind, and rolls its rapid waves,
Now dark--now glittering--now, reflecting gloom--
Now lending splendor, where from secret springs
The source of human thought its tribute brings”

But what has become of the sublime lately, now that we are invited to consider another disconnect, this time between, on one side, our gigantic actions as humans, I mean as collected humans, and, on the other side, our complete lack of a grasp on what we have collectively done?
Let us ponder a minute what is meant by the notion of “anthropocene”, this amazing lexical invention proposed by geologists to put a label on our present period. We realise that the sublime has evaporated as soon as we are no longer taken as those puny humans overpowered by “nature” but, on the contrary, as a collective giant that, in terms of terawatts, has scaled up so much that it has become the main geological force shaping the Earth.

What is so ironic with this anthropocene argument is that it comes just when vanguard philosophers were speaking of our time as that of the “posthuman”; and just at the time when other thinkers were proposing to call this same moment the “end of history”. It seems that history as well as nature have more than one trick in their bag, since we are now witnessing the speeding up and scaling up of history not with a posthuman but rather with what should be called a post-natural twist! If it is true that the “anthropos” is able to shape the Earth literally (and not only metaphorically through its symbols), what we are now witnessing is anthropomorphism on steroids.

In his magnificent book *Eating the Sun* Oliver Morton provides us with an interesting energy scale. Our global civilization is powered by around thirteen terawatts (TW) while the flux of energy from the centre of the Earth is around forty TW. Yes, we now measure up with plate tectonics. Of course this energy expenditure is nothing compared to the 170,000 TW we receive from the sun, but it is already quite immense when compared with the primary production of the biosphere (130 TW). And if all humans were to be powered at the level of North Americans, we would operate at a hundred TW, that is, with twice the muscle of plate tectonics. That’s quite a feat.

“We have become Superman without even noticing that inside the telephone booth we have not only changed clothes but grown enormously! Can we be proud of it? Well, not quite, and that’s the problem.

The disconnect has shifted so completely that it no longer generates any feeling of the sublime any more since we are now summoned to feel responsible for the quick and irreversible changes of the Earth’s face occasioned in part as a result of the tremendous power we are expending: we are asked to look again at the same Niagara Falls but now with the nagging feeling that they might stop falling (too bad for Shelley’ Shelley’s *waterfalls around it leap forever*); we are asked to look again at the same everlasting ice, except that we are led to the sinking feeling that they might not last long after all; we are mobilized to look again at the same parched desert, except that we come to feel that it expands inexorably because of our disastrous use of the soil! Only galaxies and the Milky Way might still be available for the old humbling game of wonder, because they are beyond the Earth (and thus beyond our reach since they reside in the part of nature that the Ancients called supralunar (more of this later).

How to feel the sublime when guilt is gnawing at your guts? And gnawing in a new unexpected way because of course I am not responsible, and neither are you, you, nor you. No one in isolation is responsible.

Everything happens as if the old balance between the contemplation of the moral law in us and that of the innocent forces of nature outside of us has been entirely subverted. It is as if all the feelings of wonder, together with morality, have
changed sides. The real wonder today is how I could be accused of being so guilty without feeling any guilt, without having done anything bad? The human collective actor who is said to have committed the deed is not a character that can be thought, sized up, or measured. You never meet him or her. It is not even the human race taken in toto, since the perpetrator is only a part of the human race, the rich and the wealthy, a group that have no definite shape, nor limit and certainly no political representation. How could it be “us” who did “all this” since there is no political, no moral, no thinking, no feeling body able to say “we”—and no one to proudly say “the buck stops here”? Remember the rather pitiful meetings in Copenhagen 2009 of all the heads of state negotiating in secret a non-binding treaty, calling names and haggling like kids around a bag of marbles.

But the other reason why the sublime has disappeared, why we feel so guilty about having committed crimes for which we feel no responsibility, is the added complication brought about by the climate “sceptics” or rather, to avoid using this positive and venerable term, the climate deniers.

Should we give those characters equal time to balance the position of the climatologists—in which case we risk rejecting our responsibility and associating ourselves with creationists fighting Darwin and the whole of biology? Or do we take sides and refuse to offer to deniers a platform to pollute what is probably the best certainty we will ever have as to how we wreaked havoc on our own ecosystem—in which case we risk having been enlisted in an ideological crusade to once again moralize our connections with nature and to replay the Galileo trial as though we were ignoring the lone voice of reason fighting against the crowd of experts?

No wonder that, facing this new disconnect, so many of us move from admiration in front of the innocent forces of nature to complete despondency—and even lend an ear to the climate deniers.

As Clive Hamilton argued in Requiem for a Species, in a sense we are all climate deniers, since we have no grasp of the collective character—the anthropos of the anthropocene, the “human” of the “human made” catastrophe. It is through our own built-in indifference that we come to deny the knowledge of our science. Think of it: it would be so nice to return to the past when nature could be sublime and us, the puny little humans, simply irrelevant, delighting in the inner feeling of our moral superiority over the pure violence of nature. In a way, the disconnect is the real source of the denial itself.

What does it mean to be morally responsible in the time of the anthropocene, when the Earth is shaped by us, by our lack of morality—except there is no acceptably recognizable “we” to be burdened by the weight of such a responsibility—and that even the loop connecting our collective action to its consequence is thrown into doubt?

To sum up my first point, how could you still want to feel the sublime while watching the “everlasting” waterfalls sung by Shelley when, one, you simultaneously feel that they might disappear; when, two, you might be responsible for their disappearance; while, three, you feel doubly guilty for not feeling responsible; and given that you sense a fourth level of responsibility for not
having dug deeply enough into what is called the “climate controversy”. Not read enough, not thought enough, not felt enough.

Apparently, there is no solution except to explore the disconnect and expect that human consciousness will raise our sense of moral commitment to the level required by this globe of all globes, the Earth. But if we judge by recent news, to bet on consciousness-raising is a bit risky since the number of American and Chinese and even British citizens denying the anthropic origin of climate change is actually waxing instead of waning (even in “rationalistic” France, a former minister of research, with a nice uplifting name, Professor Cheerful, has managed to convince a large part of our most enlightened publics that there is so much controversy about the climate that we don’t have to worry about it after all).

It seems that, as in Lars von Trier’s movie Melancholia, we might rather all be quietly enjoying the solitary spectacle of the planet crashing into our Earth from the derisory protection of a children’s hut made out of a few branches by Aunt Steelbreaker. As if the West, just when the cultural activity of giving a shape to the Earth is finally taking a literal and not a symbolic meaning, resorted to a totally outmoded idea of magic as a way to forget the world entirely. In the amazing final scene of a most amazing film the hyper-rational people fall back onto what old primitive rituals are supposed to do—protecting childish minds against the impact of reality. Von Triers might have grasped just what happens after the sublime has disappeared. Did you think Doomsday would bring the dead to life? Not at all. When the trumpets of judgment resonate in your ear, you fall into melancholia! No new ritual will save you. Let’s just sit in a magic hut, and keep denying, denying, denying, until the bitter end.

So what do we do when we are tackling a question that is simply too big for us? If not denial, then what? One of the solutions is to become attentive to the techniques through which scale is obtained and to the instruments that make commensurability possible. After all, the very notion of anthropocene implies such a common measure. If it is true that “man is a measure of all things” it could work also at this juncture.

It is a tenet of science studies and actor network theory that one should never suppose that differences of scale already exist but instead always look for how scale is produced. Fortunately, this tenet is ideally suited to ecological crisis: there is nothing about the Earth as Earth that we don’t know through the disciplines, instruments, mediations, and expansion of scientific networks: its size, its composition, its long history and so on. Even farmers depend on the special knowledge of agronomists, soil scientists and others. And this is even truer of the global climate: the globe by definition is not global but is, quite literally, a scale model that is connected through reliably safe networks to stations where data points are collected and sent back to the modellers. This is not a relativist point that could throw doubt on such science but a relationist tenet that explains the sturdiness of the disciplines that are to establish, multiply and do the upkeep of those connections.

I am sorry to insist on what looks like splitting hairs, but there is no way to explore a way out of the disconnect if we don't clarify the scaling instrument that
generates the global locally. My argument (actually science studies’ argument) is that there is no zoom effect: things are not ordered by size as if they were boxes inside boxes. Rather they are ordered by connectedness as if they were nodes connected to other nodes.

Nobody has shown this better than Paul Edwards in his beautiful book on climate science, *A Vast Machine*. If meteorologists and later climate scientists have been able to obtain a “global” view, it is because they managed to build more and more powerful models able to recalibrate data points elicited from more and more stations or documents—satellites, tree rings, logbooks of navigators dead long ago, ice cores, and so on.

Interestingly enough, this is exactly what leads the climate-deniers to their denials: they find this knowledge too indirect, too mediated, too far from immediate access (yes, those epistemological doubting Thomases apparently believe only in *unmediated* knowledge). They are incensed to see that no data point in itself has any sense, that those data all need to be recalculated and reformatted. Exactly as the negationists do about the crimes of the past, climate deniers use, for future crimes, a positivistic touchstone to poke holes into what is an extraordinary puzzle of crisscrossing interpretations of data. Not a house of cards, but a *tapestry*, probably one of the most beautiful, sturdy and complex ever assembled. Of course there are a lot of holes in it, having holes is what weaving knots and nodes is about. But this tapestry is amazingly resilient because of the way it is woven—allowing data to be recalibrated by models and vice versa. It appears that the history of the anthropocene (climate sciences are by definition a set of historical disciplines) is the best documented event we have ever had. Paul Edwards even argues at the end of his book that we will never know more about the present global warming trend since our action modifies the baseline so much, year after year, that we will no longer have any baseline to calculate the deviation from the mean... What a perversity: to witness the human race erasing its deeds by deviating so much that its further deviations can no longer be traced.

The reason it is so important to stress this slow, tapestry-weaving process of calibration, modelling and reinterpretation is because it shows that even for the climate scientists there is no way to measure up *directly* with the Earth. Thanks to the slow calibrating processes of many standardizing institutions, what they do is to carefully watch a local model from the tiny locus of a laboratory. So there is one disconnect we don't have to share: we don't have on one side the scientists benefitting from a globally *complete* view of the globe and, on the other, the poor ordinary citizen with a “limited local” view. There are only *local* views. However, some of us look at *connected* scale models based on data that has been reformatted by more and more powerful programs run through more and more respected institutions.

For those who wish to bridge the gap and fathom the new disconnect, this foregrounding of the instruments of measurement may offer a crucial resource — this time for politics. It is useless for the ecologically motivated activist to try shaming the ordinary citizen for *not* thinking globally enough, for not having a feel for the Earth as such. No one sees the Earth globally and no one sees an ecological system from Nowhere, the scientist no more than the citizen, the farmer or the
ecologist—or, lest we forget, the earthworm. Nature is no longer what is embraced from a far away point of view where the observer could ideally jump to see things “as a whole”, but the assemblage of contradictory entities that have to be composed together.

This work of assembly is especially necessary if we now are to imagine the “we” that humans are supposed to feel part of in taking responsibility for the Anthropocene. Right now there is no path leading from my changing the light bulbs in my home straight to the Earth’s destiny: such a stair has no step; such a ladder has no rung. I would have to jump, and this would be quite a salto mortale! All assemblages need intermediaries: satellites, sensors, mathematical formulae, and climate models, to be sure, but also nation states, NGOs, consciousness, morality and responsibility. Can this lesson of assembly be followed?

One tiny way toward such an assemblage is provided by the work done by several scholars of my persuasion around what we call “the mapping of scientific controversies”. Controversies are not what we should escape from but what should be composed, actor after actor, exactly as those who model the climate ad, actor after actor—the role of air turbulences, then the clouds, then the role of agriculture, then the role of plankton, every time gaining a more and more realistic rendering of this true theatre of the globe.

Such an attempt at mapping controversies is one example of the instruments that bridge in part the disconnect between the size of the problems we face and our limited grasp and attention span. Especially if we seize the opportunity offered by digital information to bring together in the same optical space documents coming from science and documents coming from public arenas.

At first, the confusion is horrible as if facts and opinions were mixed up. But that’s just the point: facts and opinions are already mixed up and they will be even more mixed up in the future. What we need is not to try isolating once again the world of science and the world of politics—how can we even imagine keeping such a program in operation in the time of the Anthropocene, that mix up of all mix ups?—but deciphering with a new metrology the relative weight of the entangled cosmologies. Since it is now the worlds that are in question, let’s compare cosmologies with one another. Instead of trying to distinguish what can no longer be distinguished, ask these key questions: what world is it that you are assembling, with which people do you align yourselves, with what entities are you proposing to live?

After all, this is just what has recently allowed scholars to follow how the anthropic origin of “climate weirding”, a fact which was taken as well established fifteen or twenty years ago, and that has been reduced in the eyes of millions of people to the level of a mere opinion. Very quickly it became possible for scholars to follow with the same instruments that allow us to trace the production of science (search engines, scientometrics and bibliometric tools, maps of the blogospheres), the people, lobbies, credentials, and money flows of those who insisted on making it a controversy. I am thinking here of the work of Naomi Oreskes or of James Hoggan. How interesting to see the connections made between big oil, cigarette manufacturing, antiabortionists, creationists,
Republicans and a worldview made of very few humans and very few natural entities. If it is cosmograms against cosmograms, then let’s compare cosmograms with one another. That’s what politics has become. Let’s pit the worlds against one another since it is a war of worlds.

I tried to introduce in philosophy the word composition and “compositionism” just for that reason. Not only because it has a nice connection with compost, but also because it describes exactly what sort of politics could follow the path of climate science. The task might not be to “liberate climatology” from the undue weight of political influence (this is what Texas governor Rick Perry claims: scientists are in it for grant money and the opportunity to advance a socialist agenda that even Lenin failed to impose on the courageous Yankees). On the contrary, the task is to follow the threads with which climatologists have built the models needed to bring the whole Earth on stage. With this lesson in hand we begin to imagine how to do the same in our efforts to assemble a political body able to claim its part of responsibility for the Earth’s changing state.

After all, this mix up of science and politics is exactly what is embodied in the very notion of anthropocene: why would we go on trying to separate what geologists, earnest people if any, have themselves intermingled? Actually, the spirit of our tongue has said that all along, having already connected humus, humane and humanity. We the Earthlings are born from the soil and from the dust to which we will return, and this is why what we used to call “the humanities” are also, from now on, our sciences.

So far I have insisted on one side of the disconnect, the one that led us toward the helpless human race unwillingly changing its clothes into those of Superman. It is time now to turn our attention toward the other side, what used to be called “nature”. The tricky notion of the anthropocene modifies both sides of what has to be bridged: the human side for sure, as we are deprived of the possibility of any longer feeling the sublime, but also the side of the geological forces to which we humans are now aligned and compared. At the same moment when humans have been changing the shape of the Earth without being used to their new Gargantuan clothes, the Earth has metamorphosed of late into something that James Lovelock has proposed to name Gaia. Gaia is the great Trickster of our present history.

In the remainder of this essay, I’d like to explore how different Gaia is from Nature of olden days. When we put together the two mutations, the one on the side of the Earthlings and the one of the side of the Earth, we might find ourselves in a slightly better position to bridge the gap.

First, Gaia is not a synonym of Nature because it is highly and terribly local. During the period studied by Peter Sloterdijk as the time of the Globe, that is, from the 17th to the end of the 20th century, there was some continuity between all elements of what could be called the “universe” because it was indeed unified — but unified too fast. As Alexandre Koyré had said, we were supposed to have moved once and for all from a restricted cosmos to an infinite universe. Once we crossed the narrow boundary of the human polity, everything else was made of same material stuff: the land, the air, the moon, the planets, the Milky Way and all
the way to the Big Bang. Such has been the revolution implied by the adjectives “Copernican” or “Galilean”: no longer any difference between the sublunar and the supralunar world.

How surprising then to be told, quite suddenly, that there is after all a difference between the sublunar and the supralunar world. Also to be told that only robots and maybe a handful of cyborgian astronauts might go further and beyond but that the rest of the race, nine billion of us, will remain stuck down here in what has become once again, just as in the old cosmos, a “cesspool of corruption and decay”, or at least, a crowded place of risk and unwanted consequences. No beyond. No away. No escape. As I said earlier, we can still feel the sublime, but only for what is left of nature beyond the Moon and only when we occupy the View from Nowhere. Down below, no longer any sublime. Here is a rough periodization: after the cosmos, the universe, but after the universe, the cosmos once again. We are not postmodern but, yes, we are postnatural.

Second, Gaia is not like Nature, indifferent to our plight. Not exactly that She “cares for us” like a Goddess or like Mother Nature of so much ecological New Age pamphlets; not even like the Pachacama of Inca mythology recently resurrected as a new object of Latin America politics. Although James Lovelock has often flirted with metaphors of the divine, I find his exploration of Gaia’s indifference much more troubling: because She is at once extraordinarily sensitive to our action and at the same time She follows goals which do not aim for our well-being in the least. If Gaia is a goddess, She is one that we can easily put out of whack while She in turn may exact the strangest sort of “revenge” (to borrow from the title of Lovelock’s most strident book) by getting rid of us, “shivering us” out of existence, so to speak. So in the end, She is too fragile to play the calming role of old nature, too unconcerned by our destiny to be a Mother, too unable to be propitiated by deals and sacrifices to be a Goddess.

Remember the energy spent in the past by so many scholars to weed out the difference between “nature” and “nurture”? What happens now when we turn to “nature” and realize that we are the ones that should be “nurturing” Her so as not to be reduced to irrelevance by Her sudden change of steady state. She will last. Don’t worry about Her. We are the ones who are in trouble. Or rather with this enigma of the anthropocene there is some sort of Moebius strip at work here, as if we were simultaneously what encompasses Her —since we are able to threaten Her— while She is encompassing us —since we have nowhere else to go. Quite a trickster, this Gaia.

Although in this essay I cannot go through all the features that make up the originality of Gaia, I nonetheless need to conclude with two more.

The third trait and probably the most important is that Gaia is a scientific concept. It would be of no interest if it were associated in your mind with some vague mystical entity such as Aywa, the networky Gaia of the planet Pandora in Cameron’s Avatar. Even though Lovelock has long been a heterodox scientist and remains largely a maverick, the real interest of the concept he assembled from bits and pieces, is that it is assembled from bits and pieces, most of them coming from scientific disciplines —apart from the name suggested to him by William Golding. Developing a concept that was not made mainly of scientific content would be a
waste of time since the requirement of our period is to pursue the anthropocene along lines dictated by its hybrid character. What we mean by spirituality has been too weakened by wrong ideas of science to offer any alternative. The supernatural, in that sense, is much worse than the natural from which it comes. So, in spite of the name, as far as we know from the comparative study of religion, Gaia does not really play the older role of a goddess. As far as I can figure, Gaia is just a set of contingent positive and negative cybernetic loops—as demonstrated in the wellknown “Daisy world” model. It just happens that those loops have had the completely unexpected effect, one after the other, of furthering the conditions for new positive and negative loops of ever more entangled complexity. There is no teleology, no Providence, in such an argument.

Of course, we should be careful with the label: when I say that Gaia is a “scientific” concept, I don't use the adjective in the epistemological sense of what introduces a radical and traceable difference between true and false, rational and irrational, natural and political. I take it in the new, and in a way much older sense of “scientific”, as a cosmological (or rather a cosmopolitical) term designating the search for, as well as the domestication and accommodation of new entities that try to find their place in the collective in addition to those of humans, most often by displacing the latter. The great thing about Lovelock's Gaia is that it reacts, feels and might get rid of us, without being ontologically unified. It is not a superorganism endowed with any sort of unified agency.

It is actually this total lack of unity that makes Gaia politically interesting. She is not a sovereign power lording it over us. Actually, in keeping with what I see as a healthy anthropocene philosophy, She is no more unified an agency than is the human race that is supposed to occupy the other side of the bridge. The symmetry is perfect since we don't know more what She is made of than we know what we are made of. This is why Gaia-in-us or us-in-Gaia, that is, this strange Moebius strip, is so well suited to the task of composition. It has to be composed piece by piece, and so do we. What has disappeared from the universe—at least the sublunar portion of it—is continuity. Yes, She is the perfect trickster.

The fourth and last trick I want to review is of course quite depressing. The whole disconnect I have reviewed here is built upon the very idea of an immense threat to which we would be slow to react and unable to adjust. Such is the spring with which the trap has been set. Of course, confronted with such a threatening trap, the most reasonable of us react with the perfectly plausible argument that apocalyptic pronouncements are just as ancient as humans. And it is true, for instance, that my generation has lived through the nuclear holocaust threat, beautifully analysed by Gunther Anders in terms very similar to those used today by doomsday prophets—and yet we are still here. In the same way, historians of environment could argue that the warning against the dying Earth is as old as the so-called Industrial Revolution. Indeed, a further dose of healthy scepticism seems warranted when reading, for instance, that Durer, the great Durer himself, was simultaneously preparing his soul for the end of the world expected for the year 1500 while investing a bundle of hard money on printing his beautiful and expensive prints of the Apocalypse in the hope of a hefty profit. So with these
comforting thoughts, we could reassure ourselves about the folly of prophesying Doomsday.

Yes, yes, yes. Unless, that is, it's just the other way around and that we are now witnessing another case of having cried wolf too long. What if we had shifted from a symbolic and metaphorical definition of human action to a literal one? After all, this is just what is meant by the anthropocene concept: everything that was symbolic is now to be taken literally. Cultures used to “shape the Earth” symbolically; now they do it for good. Furthermore, the very notion of culture went away along with that of nature. Post natural, yes, but also post cultural.

Referring to the famous study at the origin of the very notion of “cognitive dissonance (Festinger, Riecken and Schachter’s Why Prophecy Fails), Clive Hamilton argues that we should heed again the study of Mrs. Keech and her prediction of the end of the world. Our disconnect might not reside in expecting the end and then having to reorganize our belief system to account for why it’s not coming (as the early Christians had to do when they realized that the End was not that of Christ crashing through the sky in a display of Apocalyptic pyrotechnics but rather the slow earthly expansion of Constantine’s empire). But for us today the disconnect could be in believing that Doomsday is not coming once and for all. It would be a nice and terrifying case of When Prophecy Succeeds! And denial, this time, would mean that we are rearranging our belief system so as not to see the Great Coming.

It is for this reason that Clive Hamilton offers the strange and terrifying assertion that it’s hope that we should abandon if we wish to enter into any transaction with Gaia. Hope, unremitting hope, is for him the source of our melancholia and the cause of our cognitive dissonance.

I hope (ah, hope again!) to have shown why it might be important, even urgent, to bring together all the possible resources to close the gap between the size and scale of the problems we have to face and the set of emotional and cognitive states that we associate with the tasks of answering the call to responsibility without falling into melancholia or denial. It is largely for this reason that we have resurrected this rather out of fashion term of “political arts” for the new program we created in Sciences Po to train professional artists and scientists —social and natural— to the triple task of scientific, political and artistic representation.
The idea, at once daring and modest, is that we might convince Gaia that since we now weigh so much upon Her shoulders—and Her on ours—we might entertain some sort of a deal—or a ritual. Like the megabanks we too might have become “too big to fail”. Our destinies are so connected that there might be an issue in the end as illustrated by this fascinating print by the Master of Messkirke in Basel where you see St Christopher holding the young Christ himself embedded into a closed cosmos. St Christopher seems to me a slightly more hopeful icon than that of the overburdened Atlas—only, that is, if hope could still be a blessing.
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The Untimeliness of Feminist Theory

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TAKING TURNS

A new format for NORA, Taking Turns is an open forum for brief and rapid assessments of changes emerging in the field, and its discontents. In this series, we invite Nordic as well as non-Nordic scholars to present their take on contemporary challenges for feminist scholarship and gender research. The first contribution is written by a well known feminist theorist, Professor Elizabeth Grosz. An Australian philosopher, living and working in the USA, Professor Grosz has published a wide range of work on, for instance, sexual difference and corporeality, space and time, Charles Darwin and Gilles Deleuze. Here she provides us with perspectives on the practice of feminist theorizing and on the necessity for us to return to materiality once more, to material forces, and to the issues of the biological.

The Untimeliness of Feminist Theory

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Feminist theory has an auspicious future. It is a future bound up with change. It is no doubt linked in various ways to feminist struggles and feminist knowledges produced by previous struggles and knowledges; but it also involves a continual reassessment of what constitutes feminism and what effects feminism can hope to produce. One of the central questions of contemporary feminist theory as it faces a changing future, as it directs itself to the question of change, should be about what is untimely, what is out of its time. Something is untimely, out of its own time, either through its being anachronistic, which is another way of saying that it is not yet used up in its pastness, it still has something to offer that remains untapped, its virtuality remains alluring and filled with potential for the present and future (this is precisely what a good deal of feminist theory has directed itself to: re-reading the past for what is elided, repressed, unutilized, or unconscious in it). Or something is untimely not only to the extent that exerts forms of the past in the present, but perhaps more interestingly and
in less secure and predictable mode than an exploration and revivification of the past is the Nietzschean and Bergsonian leap into the future without adequate preparation in the present, through becoming, a movement of becoming-more and becoming-other, which involves the orientation to the creation of the new, to an unknown future, what is no longer recognizable in terms of the present. Nietzsche proclaimed that he was modern only because he was Greek: his modernism consisted in his untimeliness, in the ways in which he reactivates a past in the present to bring about a new future. Feminist theory too is able to undertake this reviving activity: it too is able to leap into a future it does not control through finding something untimely in the patriarchal present and past.

While there is a tremendous amount of fascinating research in the broad area of feminist theory, it is almost entirely (with some exceptions) devoted to an analysis of the past and the present. Feminist theory began as an analysis of the ways in which knowledges discriminated against women and helped to develop and perpetuate harms done to women, both conceptually and materially; it emerged through a recognition of the inadequacy of existing models to explain women’s positions in the past and their potential for change in the present and future. Its primary focus has always been empirical and concrete, theorizing about how and why events, practices, knowledges, texts are forms of expression of patriarchal power relations. As someone trained in a discipline that radically departs from the empirical and the concrete—philosophy—my own interest has always been in the abstract and the non-determinable, not in what has been and is, but in what could be but does not yet exist. My own research focus is conceptual rather than empirical, not because the empirical has no place, but because, without a conceptual frame, the empirical has no value, no context, no power, it simply is. The empirical is given without some understanding of how it comes to be, without some assessment of its historicity and its potential to be otherwise. Only a framework, a context, which explains the forces that produce its givenness, can also show how it may be undone, or made differently. Although the value of the abstract and the non-determinable has diminished dramatically over the last decade or more in feminist studies, since the heady days of French feminism’s ascendancy in the 1980s and 1990s, its conceptual and political tasks are not yet accomplished. In spite of the celebration of the end of theory, the end of postmodernism, the end of abstraction, this death is prematurely announced and may have to be delayed further.

Given that theory is not dead, not dead yet, feminism must direct itself to change, to changing itself as much as to changing the world. It must direct itself to that most untimely and abstract of all domains—the future, and those forces which can bring it into existence. There are a series of central questions that have yet to be adequately asked, questions that do not have a clear-cut answer or solution but continue to be posed and require some feminist mode of address. These are not questions for all of feminism: for those concerned with solutions, with pressing empirical problems, these are no doubt an idle luxury. Nevertheless, they need to be posed somewhere, in some feminist conceptual space, if feminist theory is to develop into a discipline, a body of theory, a movement able to adequately address the real in all its surprising complexity.
I will contain myself here to three such questions, beginning with the most general and abstract.

1. We need to return to the question of materiality one more time. Materialism has infused feminism for the last thirty to forty years, largely through the influence of Marxism and psychoanalytic theory. We need to return to the question of matter, its forms, nature, and capacity, in order to address the direct objects of feminist investigation—the differences between men and women, for men and women, all subjects, are material objects. While materialism has directed our focus to questions of the body, the body still remains elided and covered by representation. Feminist theory has allowed the body to enter discourse, but only, ironically, through its reduction to discourse. The materiality of the body and of discourse only recedes further into the background without being adequately explained. If we take materialism and its forms and varieties, including its infusion with the incorporeal and the immaterial, as the object of feminist investigation, there are at least two other questions that emerge as central:

2. If the living body is the object of feminist investigation, then materialism entails something like a return to questions of biology and of biological existence that have been so carefully bracketed out of most feminist research. Even if feminism remains committed to constructionism, a project I no longer believe is viable, it is nonetheless bound to rethink biological questions. This does not mean, of course, that feminists must have a non-critical or outside relation to those disciplines devoted to the study of biology, to accept as truth that which biology in its theoretical naivety takes as the truth; rather, it means that biological discourses have not yet had adequate feminist intervention, have not yet been strongly enough disturbed by the questioning of feminist theory. And feminist theory has protected and insulated itself from any incursions into biology through the fear indeed paranoia surrounding the question of essentialism, though biology is one of the few disciplines able to adequately contest essentialism. The field of biology, opened up through the dramatic eruption of Darwin’s writings as psychology was opened up through Freud’s, is now ready for feminist re-readings, for feminist interventions from within, rather than critiques from without. Biological forces of evolution, the later, unpredictable emergence of higher-order complexity through the elaboration of an earlier, lower-order potential, is a resource that feminist theory can no longer afford to ignore. There are of course a number of feminists, some of whom were trained in the natural sciences, and many of whom were not, who have begun just such research (not only the more well known feminist theorists of science, Evelyn Fox Keller, Anne Fausto-Sterling, Patricia Gowaty, and Sarah Hrdy, but also feminist cultural theorists, such as Elizabeth A Wilson, N. Katherine Hayles, Catherine Waldby, and Greit Vandermassen), but the material bases of the body’s development (as male, as female, as raced, sexed, and historically encultured) need to be more urgently and directly addressed.

And 3. If we take materialism seriously, we are interested not only in material objects, but also in material forces, which, while they may be imperceptible in themselves, are discernable through their effects on objects. While I am not suggesting, for example, a feminist interrogation of the theory of gravity, I do think that it is necessary for feminist theory to look at certain forces, universal forces, that it has ignored for some time, for these are the unspoken assumptions of feminist
politics and struggle. Primarily I am thinking of the force of temporality, which, while it has been assumed in most feminist discourses, and especially those oriented to history, is rarely addressed or the object of direct analysis. To the extent that our work relies on and makes assumptions about the nature of the past and present, and to the extent that all radical politics is implicitly directed towards bringing into existence a future somehow dislocated from the present, our very object and milieu is time. We need to address these assumptions about the nature of time and its role in political (and biological) struggle, but to some extent this is itself only possible if we also address the cosmological and ontological elements that temporality entails.

These questions clearly do not address or solve any concrete, real, down-to-earth struggles; yet while they seem to by-pass or side-step feminists’ most direct concerns, they cannot be ignored either, because it is partly by being irrelevant, untimely, and dislocated, by being abstract, that the new is brought into existence, that creation and invention insert their surprise into the everyday and the concrete, that change is adequately understood. While it is important for many of us to have our eyes clearly focused on the real crises women face every day, it is equally important that some feminist theorists address what is most abstract and useless, what is most speculative and cosmological, in order that transformation, upheaval, and change become conceivable. We allow this freedom (from concrete usefulness, from timeliness) to feminist artists; we now need to grant it to feminist theorists as well.